

‘Scottish people can’t rap’: the local and global in Scottish hip-hop

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Abstract

*Hip-hop is a global culture, where local representation is a core tenet of its ideology. It therefore provides opportunities to observe how a global cultural structure is interpreted, realigned and expressed in local cultural forms. This article combines autoethnography and rap lyric analysis to consider the complex relationship between the local and global in relation to cultural articulation and authenticity. Through a study of the poetics of Scottish hip-hop, a series of patterns and connections appear relating to interpretation, negotiation and hybridisation of local and global culture, presenting a demonstration of how the local, global and individual intersect to ‘devise unique ways of communicating thoughts, emotions and everyday realities’ (Alim 2003, *Journal of English Linguistics*, March, 31/1, pp. 60–84, p. 62). Furthermore, this article presents a framework for autoethnographic study of hip-hop, signposting bridging points between scholarship and practice.*

Introduction

Scottish hip-hop is, for some, a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron (with emphasis on the ‘moron’), a laughing stock, an impossibility, at best a novelty. Those that do chronicle its output have regularly observed the tendency of commentators and the general public to condescend and ridicule, while making assumptions about its creators’ social, economic and cultural backgrounds (Gallogly-Swan 2016). Concurrently, Scottish hip-hop has seen an increase in visibility and credibility in recent years that disproves these assumptions, while challenging lazy stereotypes regarding its content and cultural worth (Rimmer 2016). During this process, what becomes apparent are the unique ways in which hip-hop artists in Scotland interpret and adapt global hip-hop culture, making it compatible with Scottish culture, while still representing global hip-hop values. Hip-hop exists within a set of contradictions and dualities (Rose 1994). It operates as mass culture that critiques and parodies mass culture. It is a mainstream, global culture that also allows for stories to be told from the margins. In Scotland, it is simultaneously a mainstream musical genre (US hip-hop) and a marginalised subculture (Scottish hip-hop).

Reflecting on my own practice as a rapper, combined with poetic analysis and cultural commentary, this paper considers how I and my Scottish hip-hop peers

interpret global hip-hop and filter it through local culture to create something original and authentic. Focused on rap lyricism, identity and performance, this is a study of the poetics of Scottish hip-hop; of how the local, global and individual intersect to 'devise unique ways of communicating thoughts, emotions and everyday realities' (Alim 2003, p. 62). Furthermore, I also reflect on how Scottish cultural attributes create alternative strategies in expressing established hip-hop formats, contributing to new remixes and hybrids of cultural interpretation.

I will carry out lyric analysis on a number of Scottish rap verses, in order to reveal the relationship and interaction between the local and the global. From this analysis, a series of themes and strategies emerge relating to translation, mediation and cultural cross-pollination. These examples are a useful case study in a wider context of how the local and global can interface and mutate into new hybridised perspectives and identities. Combining autoethnography alongside critical analysis provides an academic framework that allows input from an artist perspective. This presents a methodology that bridges the gap between academy and practice, suggesting a schema for autoethnographic study of hip-hop and of popular music more broadly. My focus here is rap lyrics and, as per Rose (1994), Krims (2000) and others, for the majority of the document 'rap' and 'hip-hop' can be considered synonyms. At any point where their meanings diverge, this will be clearly stated.

Me, myself and I: rap identity and cultural commentary

Regarding my own background and experience, I have been making, performing, and releasing music since the early 2000s. Winner of Best Hip-Hop at the Scottish Alternative Music Awards 2018, I have toured extensively throughout the UK and around the globe as the lyricist and principal songwriter with alternative hip-hop group Stanley Odd, and as a solo artist, Solareye. My debut solo album, *All These People Are Me* (2018), was described as: 'a stunning album . . . The great contemporary Scottish novel in rap form' (Rankin 2018). Stanley Odd's second studio album, *Reject*, was shortlisted for Scottish Album of the Year 2013 and third album, *A Thing Brand New*, was placed at No. 2 in the Herald's Best Scottish Albums of 2015. My written poetry has been published in a range of publications including *Gutter Magazine*, Neu! Reekie!'s *#UntitledTwo* anthology, and *Forty Voices Strong: An Anthology of Contemporary Scottish Poetry*.

Much of my work attempts to engage with the multilayered interactions between local and global culture and, as such, the opening lines of my piece, 'Scottish People Can't Rap', serve as a useful introduction to this notion. The song was written specifically for performing in prisons, schools, community projects, and with young people. It is effective at the beginning of workshops, masterclasses and performances, functioning as an introduction to both myself as a practitioner and the topic of local/global negotiations. The song is designed to open up discussions about preconceptions regarding hip-hop and Scottish culture and how stereotypes can be limiting, and raise the idea of conflicts in the global and local.

Scottish people can't rap, they just cannae mate
 You'd have tae be half daft where I'm comin' fae
 Weans are more concerned wi getting beved underage
 Summer rain, half jaked, chappin' doors and run away
 They've got the gold watch, gold teeth, gin and juice
 I've got the holey socks, cold feet, missing tooth

No diamonds, no swimming pools
Just an endless list of things that I can never do¹

An analysis of the content from these lines reveals a constant provocation, comparison and contrast between perceptions of global hip-hop culture and of local Scottish culture. The initial statement – ‘Scottish people can’t rap’ – is a challenge, loaded with the irony of the statement itself being rapped and also a direct quote from personal experience of how rap is often seen in wider Scottish culture. The significant amount of Scots language and dialect in the verse deepens the local authenticity of its content, describing a scene of youth drinking culture and misbehaviour set against a backdrop of local language.

Hip-hop stereotypes of affluence and excess, including gold watches, gold teeth, diamonds, swimming pools and Californian ‘gin and juice’ are contrasted with the parochial, low-income imagery of threadbare socks, cold feet, missing teeth and an ‘endless list of things that I can never do’, indicating restrictions and boundaries imposed by society and culture. As such, the opening statement attempts to say the opposite of its literal meaning through the verse’s delivery and content, proving the statement to be false in the process. There is a degree of dual meaning throughout, where, although written in the first person, the statements form a list of stereotypes about global culture and Scottish culture. In this way, they are used to contest preconceptions both about hip-hop culture and about boundaries of authentic expression within Scottish culture. The second and third verses address issues relating to gender, social status and upbringing, using a combination of local and global reference points, Scots language and dialect, while also constructed in a global hip-hop poetic form: 16 bars, multisyllabics, internal rhyme schemes.

This example begins an arc, introducing the concepts to be discussed before returning to the song at the end of the article. Through analysing a number of Scottish rap verses, I will consider cultural conflicts, negotiations, and hybridity, suggest how the local and the global intersect in Scottish hip-hop, and introduce these pieces to a global hip-hop conversation.

Global and local

To emphasise the significance of locality to hip-hop, it is useful to view hip-hop culture through a range of different academic perspectives. Jeff Chang’s *Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-hop Generation* (2005) chronicles the origins and evolution of hip-hop from its beginnings in 1970s New York to its current worldwide form and status. In doing so, he acknowledges its representative movement to ‘first all-city and then all-global.’ From a musicological perspective, Krims asserts that ‘locality intersects with history in the poetics of rap’ (2000, p. 16), while from a sociological perspective, Bennett observes the significance of locality to Turkish and Moroccan rap artists in Frankfurt (1999a) and white British youth in Newcastle (1999b), and from a linguistic perspective, Pennycook describes hip-hop’s focus on authenticity as ‘a discursively and culturally mediated mode of representing and producing the local’ (2007, p. 112). From these studies alone, each academic discipline observes that local, marginal and ‘other’ voices are central to hip-hop’s

¹ Solareye, ‘Scottish People Can’t Rap’. Self-released. 2018

authenticity. Hip-hop's export, practice, appropriation and repurposing can be found in cultures around the globe from Indigenous peoples in Australia to Palestinian hip-hop in the Middle East. This raises obvious questions about whether local incarnations of hip-hop culture become examples of global cultural homogenisation, or whether they provide opportunities for local culture to be expressed in new ways. Pennycook and Mitchell's (2009) work on global linguistic flows is particularly useful as a means to consider the messier, bi- or multidirectional flow of culture between global and local points.

So far we have an established youth culture that is focused on representing where you are from, your place and space, local representation. From its local genesis, hip-hop bloomed into a global culture with a global set of rules. One question to pose here is how a global culture with a global set of rules, that is only truly authentic when it is localised, re-localises at every place that it gestates and grows. Is there always going to be a friction between the global and the local? One means of developing an understanding of this is to look at how the global is filtered through the local and subsequently interpreted by the idiosyncratic – the individual who writes or creates it.

Global and local, a direct translation: technical skills

The ill somniloquist, spill infinite quips
I skilfully spit split infinitives that kill lyricists
(Solareye, 'The Ill Somniloquist' 2018)

At the core of the relationship between the global and local in hip-hop is the issue of cultural authenticity. What ingredients are required to ensure that a cultural practice is considered authentic? Who is the activity authentic to? As Auslander notes, 'to be a musician is to perform an identity in a social realm' (2006, p. 101). This highlights the dialogic nature of identity and authenticity between a range of different groups, including other practitioners, the listening audience, cultural commentators and the local culture that it represents. Speers (2017) addresses conflicting authenticities for hip-hop artists as 'rapper authenticity' *vs.* 'hip-hop authenticity', where 'rapper authenticity' essentially means being authentic to yourself as an individual, and 'hip-hop authenticity' means being authentic to your genre. It is possible to master all of the technical skills required to be a rapper and still lack authenticity or, conversely, tell authentic, true stories in rap and still lack technical ability. I would argue that the perception of authenticity (both perceived within hip-hop culture and in the wider cultural sphere) comes from the marrying of the technical ability (including representation of global values) with a person's ability to relate the culture that they live in. If either one of these two areas are lacking, then the output does not ring true for the audience listening to and engaging with it. This paper is focused on instances where global hip-hop and local Scottish culture react *interestingly*, but first it is useful to consider an example of what could be called a 'direct translation' from the global to the local.

Technical skillset is one of these instances where the global hip-hop rulebook is directly applicable and translatable at a local level. In 'On Some Serious Next Millennium Rap Ishhh', Alim (2003) argues that rap is the evolution and expansion of American poetic tradition, and offers a manifesto for the complex linguistics, intertextuality, innovation, and myriad literary techniques employed by hip-hop emcees.

His approach makes a case for a new set of hybridised techniques and terminology to study 'Hip Hop poetics' (Alim 2003, p. 81). It follows then that standard tools and terminology of poetic analysis can be employed in its study – compound rhyme, mosaic rhyme, caesura, etc. Where Alim argues that rap is an evolution of American poetic form, is in the 'rhyme matrices' that rappers create from a complex network of intricate rhyme schemes and tactics. With its embedded culture of competition, elaborate multi-syllable rhyme matrices and intertextual wordplay, rap could essentially be labelled 'extreme-sports poetry'. Alim's work provides both an insightful lyric analysis, and a road map for how to carry that analysis out. Similarly, this article aims to analyse the global and local in Scottish hip-hop, while also presenting a hybrid, mixed-method approach to autoethnography as an alternative means to engage with hip-hop and wider popular music studies.

In his discussion of 'flow' – how a rapper delivers their words over a beat – Adam Bradley argues that 'the beat in rap is poetic meter rendered audible' (2009, p. xv). Thus, he argues that the stability that an audible beat gives to the metre allows for wide and varied movement away from the metre lyrically, providing the opportunity for a vast range of unusual and exciting rhythmical components within the lyrics. In rap, there is a dual rhythmic relationship between the words and the beat because the anchoring of the meter comes from the beat and not the words.

Alim's and Bradley's analyses are important to this discussion as they set out global hip-hop rules – technical skills – that are equally applicable in Scotland and anywhere else that the culture takes root. For example, this couplet from CRPNTR (2017) retells the ancient Greek legend of *Orpheus and Eurydice*: 'Eurydice your odyssey is mirrored in the forestry/Like what if I can walk but can't feel you follow me?'

In terms of technical construction, the first line begins with a four-syllable word, 'Eurydice', that is rhymed with the next four-syllable phrase, 'your odyssey', substituting the second syllable in the phrase from the phonetic *i* to *ɔ*. This substitution is actually mirrored in the second half of the line with the *i* and *ɔ* of 'mirrored', before the *ɔ*-sound reappears in the three-syllable end-rhyme of 'forestry'. That makes at least 13 of the 16 syllables in this line rhyme, complete with playful phonetic substitution and interchange. The content of this rhyming couplet might not be considered stereotypically 'hip-hop', but this example shows that the rules of technicality, rhyme construction, euphony, and poetic form are applicable to rhyme schemes regardless of geographic location or cultural background.

Global to local conflict: braggadocio

An example of a global hip-hop concept that can seem at odds with Scottish culture is that of braggadocio. Boastful, 'braggadocious' content in hip-hop is often cited by critics as evidence of its vacuous one-dimensional nature; as a core cultural element, and a consistently recurring trope, however, it becomes a necessary component when represented within local cultural incarnations. As such, if this is problematic, it is interesting to observe how these difficulties are negotiated.

Derived from the African-American cultural activity, 'playing the dozens', this practice of braggadocio has been around for a long time. Not only does it pre-date hip-hop, but the tradition can be traced back at least as far as the 1920s in African-American communities (Lefever 1981). Therefore, it is not just an element of hip-hop culture but an example of the music reflecting the wider culture that it represents. Before hip-hop existed, Muhammad Ali (1974) said:

I have wrassled with an alligator
 I done tussled with a whale
 I done handcuffed lightening
 Throw thunder in jail
 That's bad
 Only last week I murdered a rock
 Injured a stone, hospitalised a brick
 I'm so mean I make medicine sick

This feels like hip-hop but was, in fact, Ali carrying out the linguistic practices of the community he grew up in. The activity becomes more culturally complex when considered more deeply. The aim is to talk oneself up in more and more surreal ways while putting one's opponent down. It is competitive; it is about a ludic engagement with language, showing mental ability and agility, linguistic innovation and fun. From the viewpoint of a group of people – African Americans – that are an ethnic minority within a dominant culture, it is about new perspectives – about accomplishment against the odds and a cultural repositioning in society, however temporary. In this context, boastful wordplay takes on a much more significant cultural purpose.

Kautny describes braggadocio as 'aesthetic forms of duelling' (2015, p. 101). This practice has now existed within hip-hop for over 40 years. People are still finding new, creative ways of saying, 'I'm the best'. That, to me, is a beautiful thing. Like any other literary trope, it becomes about the fresh and innovative ways that people play with language to express a familiar or established concept or emotion. Consider KRS-One's 'Step into A World (Raptures Delight)' (1997): 'I'm not saying I'm number one ... uh I'm sorry I lied/I'm number one, two, three, four and five'. This is a great example of braggadocio as it is a simple construction, based around a rhyming couplet that stands on its own outside of the wider verse, it makes an outlandish boast, and it is humorous.

The issue that arises with braggadocio in Scotland is that it is directly at odds with some elements of Scottish culture. Francesconi (2011) describes Scottish culture's 'stereotyping, self-stereotyping, mocking and self-mocking', observing that 'Scottish humour and self-derogation are widely recognised as peculiar ethnic traits'. To put this in context, the idea of boasting or 'bigging yourself up', is at complete odds with the cultural norms of the community. This means that rappers in Scotland engaging in hip-hop culture need to find new, innovative and alternative ways of bragging while not appearing to be overly boastful, to engage with the global culture, while existing within the boundaries of the local culture. This is not to state that straightforward boastful braggadocio is absent in Scottish hip-hop; rather that other approaches can also be found that stem from its cultural hybridisation – a mutation born of the fusion of global and local practices.

A good example of this approach is found in the following lines by Glasgow rapper and Orwell Prize winning author, Darren 'Loki' McGarvey: 'I was the best-looking guy in school, just ask Ashley/She was the burd wi super vision that could see through acne'.²

This couplet is a perfect example of self-derogatory braggadocio, where he sets himself up, then immediately puts himself down before anyone else can. Scottish rap is littered with examples of this approach. It is humorous and boastful, satisfying the braggadocious element of hip-hop cultural authenticity; its double-syllable rhyme

² Loki, 'Genetically Prone', *Between Worlds* (Self-released: 2006)

and couplet form satisfies technical requirements; and the put-down, self-mocking operates within Scottish cultural boundaries. As such, this is an example of how a global-to-local conflict is resolved through adaptation.

Genre/ culture negotiations: hypermasculinity

Look lively mate, I'm tryin' tae be alive again
Hi, I'm Dave, I'm the hardest guy in the library
(Stanley Odd, 'It's All Gone To Fuck' 2016)

Hip-hop is often, quite rightly, criticised as being a hyper-masculine genre. The majority of mainstream rap artists are male and the same can be said for its underground counterparts. This scenario is equally true in Scotland. While there are some very exciting, innovative and skilled female Scottish rappers, they are in the extreme minority. Significantly, the same accusations of misogyny, hyper-masculinity and female derogation that are levelled at hip-hop culture can equally be placed more broadly across all of society. In the context of American culture, Dyson (2012, p. 367) describes these prejudices in hip-hop as 'the ugly exaggeration of viewpoints that are taken for granted in many conservative circles across the nation'. Subcultures can challenge mainstream views – as evidenced by hip-hop culture's signifying practices and cultural pastiche that empower minorities through repurposing mainstream cultural signifiers – but they can also amplify mainstream characteristics. Hip-hop has a long lineage of cultural 'outsiderdom', of representing the 'other'. Very often hip-hop serves that very purpose – it uses mainstream culture against itself, to point out its failings. However, it can also *amplify* elements of mainstream culture rather than criticise or satirise, and these are just as likely to be negative traits as positive.

These same ideas and issues can be found in Scottish culture. Recent studies have shown that images of masculinity in Scottish society are consistently tied to drinking culture and to violence (O'Brien *et al.* 2009; Deuchar and Holligan 2014). Taking the concept of a hyper-masculine society, combined with the idea of self-derogation as communication practice, it is interesting to see how rappers in Scotland navigate this cultural landscape in order to address emotional topics. It becomes a case of sustaining the delicate equilibrium between trying to say something that has depth and personal significance and counter-balancing that with self-derogatory humour, in order to maintain a position between honesty and integrity, cultural authenticity and personal expression.

One example of this negotiation in practice can be found in the following verse by rapper Ciaran Mac:

I've grown up a bit, still a funny rubbered kid
Ciaran Mac's receding bad and needs a hat to cover it
Grievings pass I'm feeling sad but being a man is tough I guess
And in the end we lost a friend at least we're glad he's one we hid
(Ciaran Mac, 'Late Night' 2017)

As established in previous examples, this verse stays global-authentic, in part, through its technical dexterity. The density and interconnectivity of rhyme in these four lines is clear: three-syllable rhymes are passed internally from 'rubbered kid' to end-rhyme 'up a bit'. In the second line, there are three, three-syllable internal

chain rhymes: 'Ciaran Mac', '(re)ceding bad', 'needs a hat'. This is then followed by a three-syllable end-rhyme that matches the last line and rhyme scheme, with 'cover it' completing the couplet of 'rubbered kid' from the first line. Twelve of the 15 syllables in the second line therefore rhyme. There are three more three-syllable internal chain rhymes in the third line that match those of the second, with the last three syllables continuing the end-rhyme of the previous two lines. The fourth line combines a new internal rhyme ('end' and 'friend') with a continuation of the previous internal scheme ('least we're glad'), before completing the end-rhyme scheme, 'one we hid'. This is clearly an extremely complex construction in terms of its rhyme structure. Ciaran Mac creates a 'rhyme matrix', as Alim (2003) describes in his analysis of Pharoahe Monch; but what is particularly noteworthy here is that while constructing such a complex rhyme structure, Ciaran also maintains a coherent narrative and injects emotion, humour, and cultural observations into his content, while never allowing the complexity of the rhymes to overburden the meaning or musicality of the verse.

Having assessed its technical construction, it is illuminating to consider the meaning and content of the lyrics. The passage starts by introducing the idea of growing up and moving from childhood (or youth) to adulthood. In Scottish culture, 'rubbered' means drunk, so Ciaran's first line addresses his maturing and his staying the same, while establishing his cultural authenticity, in part, by his continued inclusion in Scottish drinking culture. The second line combines humour, self-derogation and euphonious effect. 'Ciaran Mac's receding bad and needs a hat to cover it', makes fun of his own appearance, injects a humorous anecdote, maintains the concept of growing up. Furthermore, it is euphonious, that is to say the complex construction of the rhyme scheme is musical and rhythmically pleasing to hear; it makes you smile aesthetically and semantically. Having set up the idea of growing up, and used humour and self-deprecation to set the tone, the following lines are all the more hard-hitting: 'Grievings pass, I'm feeling sad but being a man is tough I guess' grapples with bereavement, loss and depression, and asks what manhood means, acknowledging both the deeper responsibilities of adulthood and the life experiences that contribute to that transition, completed in the fourth line: 'And in the end we lost a friend at least we're glad he's one we hid'. In this case 'hid' is the colloquial pronunciation of 'had'. Together, these four lines demonstrate high-level technical construction, social referencing, wordplay, meaningful content, self-discovery, and philosophical observations. The writer is intentionally navigating the places between technical ability, self-derogatory humour, and emotional weight, balancing on the knife-edge of self-reflection and self-deprecation – dancing along fault lines on the outskirts of social, cultural and generic boundaries.

Scots accent and language in music

I've been doing this since back when
 And back then, people couldnae see past the accent
 (Asthmatic Astronaut ft. Solareye, 'The Bleakest Blues' 2016)

Before considering the Scottish accent in rap it is useful first to consider the Scottish accent in a wider musical context. Over the last 30 years, Scottish popular music has gone through a process of transition in terms of the acceptability of the Scottish accent. This can be traced from the Proclaimers in the 1980s being virtually alone

in displaying overtly Scottish accents in popular music, through the 1990s, when the rise of Glasgow indie bands such as Arab Strap and Belle and Sebastian led to the popularity of subcultural artists, to the present day, where nationally and internationally renowned artists like Paulo Nutini, Frightened Rabbit and Twin Atlantic all sing in clearly recognisable Scottish accents. This transition can be linked to a broader cultural shift in Scottish culture away from 'the cringe' associated with overtly Scottish identifiers that existed in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (Krusenstjerna 1989). It has been argued that the move to Scots being more comfortable in a Scottish national identity could be related to a gradual shift in self-image and self-determination, linked to the reinstatement of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and a stronger sense of capable national identity (McIllvanney 2013).

The established focus on authenticity, the need to represent the local, and the narratives of reality that permeate hip-hop culture mean that for Scottish rappers, speaking in their own accents is the only option. The long-standing habit of singing in a mid-Atlantic, location-free accent is not possible for a genre that demands authenticity, and for thematic content that centres around the local. As such, the increased recognition of Scottish hip-hop over the last decade could be seen to bear some relation to a more accepting outlook in Scottish (and British) culture towards Scottish accent in music.

Much of this issue, I would argue, is about the listener's ear acclimatising to alternative accents. As I have said elsewhere:

Around 1999 I actually got Roots Manuva *Brand New Second Hand* from HMV in Buchanan Street, listened to it then took it back the shop like 'nah this isn't for me', then a pal burned me a copy again six months later and I realised that it was amazing. It took me that wee period of time to adjust my ear to hearing English voices instead of American voices in rap. (Sutcliffe 2017)

This highlights a recognition that any accent deviating from the established norm can take some personal reconfiguration to accept, as can be seen in the following social media exchange, taken from a post by a Stanley Odd fan in southern England about the song 'It's All Gone To Fuck' (2016) on Facebook in December 2016:

Original Poster (OP): Pretty much sums it up. Great tune from a great band from north of the border

Reply: I hate it when the singer tries to be overly Scottish, it just sounds fake.

OP: damn these bloody scots trying too hard to be scots

Reply: I only got upto (sic) when the male started singing, then it became to (sic) cringeworthy for my tastes. (McCarty and Johnson 2016)

In this exchange, it becomes clear that performing in my own accent is perceived by some as unnecessary overemphasis, and encapsulates a key issue around accent in Scottish hip-hop: it would be impossible to be authentic or maintain a credible rap identity using anything other than your own accent, but conversely, having a Scottish accent apparently creates some degree of discomfort or aversion in a listening audience otherwise unfamiliar with it.

The same could be said for Scots dialect writing, itself necessary and deeply authentic, but also potentially limited in its reach, owing to its unintelligibility beyond the Scottish demographic, as well as continued issues with 'the cringe' within it. The opening lines from the visceral, dark, beautiful and raw street poetry of rapper Mog's 'Roon Here' (2009) are a clear example:

All I'm seein's flowers and scarfs covering where I used tae staun
 Tears dripping on the paths I used tae walk
 30 odd teenagers hingin' roon the corner ae ma street
 Schemin', scammin', dreamin', laughin' at the polis on the beat
 It's deep, I understaun aw ae the bitterness and envy
 The place is a frenzy, kids waving machetes
 Pretty sure the coppers' got the phone box bugged
 And underneath the 'Jesus loves you' someone's wrote 'so fuck'.³

Written in broad, contemporary Scots, Mog's lyrical content describes 21st century life in a Glasgow housing scheme (the Scots term for a local-authority housing area). The dense, descriptive imagery paints a vivid picture of life for young people experiencing social deprivation in the city. The verse still displays highly competent technical construction, but the focus is on imagery, observation, scene-setting and storytelling. It opens on a vision of a young death – 'flowers and scarfs covering where I used tae staun' – with flowers and football scarves suggesting an informal memorial appearing at the location of a person's death. The scene widens to include large gangs of youths gathering in the street amid the constant threat of violence, conflict with police, hustling, dreaming, joking. The last two lines of these bars highlight the discord between residents and police, in a place where police presence is seen as an intrusion: menacing rather than reassuring. The final line, 'underneath the "Jesus loves you" someone's wrote "so fuck"', underlines the sense of despair and abandonment. 'So fuck' is a Scottish slang phrase, the shortening of 'so fucking what?', so this line – written by someone in the community – represents an active observation that the phrase 'Jesus loves you' doesn't seem to make any difference or provide any solution to the inherent problems faced by people living there. It is a dark, brooding punchline.

This imagery is continued and developed in the chorus:

The wy they walk roon here, they wy they talk roon here
 I've seen the lot roon here, release a pin I hear it drop roon here
 They wy they fought here, when they go pop roon here
 Loved up when she was hot roon here
 Been roon the block roon here, nuttin' shocks roon here
 They're fleein' shots roon here, they're deid in cots roon here
 Sometimes the tots are hard tae watch roon here
 So they get lost roon here, we don't hear a lot fae God roon here.⁴

The repetition of 'roon here', meaning 'round here', helps to add to the building tension of the experiences being described. The phrase reflects the repetition of life, cycle of deprivation, the feeling of being stuck. He chronicles and records his environment by representing the way (wy) people communicate, move and interact. The chorus becomes increasingly hard-hitting as it addresses infant mortality (deid in cots) and child neglect (the tots are hard tae watch ... so they get lost). The final line reasserts the image of godless abandonment, with the sarcastic, understated 'we don't hear a lot fae God roon here'.

Mog's writing is full of Scottish slang and dialect and as such, some of its content would perhaps get lost on a global audience. However, it is this concentration of

³ Reproduced by permission from Mog, 'Roon Here', *The Grey Area* (self-released: 2009)

⁴ Reproduced by permission from Mog, 'Roon Here', *The Grey Area* (self-released: 2009)

colloquialism – written exactly as spoken – that demonstrates its authenticity to the community that it represents. The content and the word choices are representing the place and space where the story originates, and that is both its purpose and its audience. On personal reflection, as simultaneously a hip-hop fan and a hip-hop artist, I have never been to Compton but I learned the meaning of many initially impenetrable local phrases originating there by listening to rap in the early 1990s. Similarly, I have a significant New York-rap-based lexicon built up through many years of listening to hip-hop from there. It is my feeling that local language, phrases and dialects are not a barrier to a wider audience but rather a gateway into another world through listening, engaging, and deciphering their meaning.

Signifying in Scots language

As Henry Louis Gates has shown (1988), African American literary criticism is based on ‘signifyin(g)’ practices whereby the explicit and figurative meaning of language is intentionally displaced. This practice, of wordplay subverting dominant rhetoric to create hidden meaning within subcultures or minorities, can be found in Scottish cultural practice of Scots English. An example of wordplay in everyday Scots language can be found in the very simple joke: ‘Did yi hear about the lonely prisoner? He was in his sel’ (anon). Here the play on Scottish west-coast pronunciation of ‘self’ being identical to the word ‘cell’ allows a pun. Examples of duality abound in Scots humour, where local dialect allows for double-meaning by subverting the dominant (‘proper’ English) meaning of words. Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, recognised as the first scholar to interject African American women’s signifying practices into broader linguistic discourses, recorded the following example (1999, p. 317):

Grace is pregnant and beginning to show, but has not informed her sister yet. Her sister, seemingly unaware of the situation, comments on her weight gain:

Grace (noncommittally): Yes, I guess I am putting on a little weight.

Rochelle: Now look here, girl, we both standing here soaking wet and you still trying to tell me it ain’t raining?

This example of signifyin(g) calls to mind another West-of-Scotland-specific phrase: ‘If you fell in the Clyde you’d come oot wi a fish’ (anon). The phrase here, implying that a person is predisposed to good luck, has a similar semantic construct in that it uses metaphor and is linguistically built around an incident and outcome, i.e. falling in the river (incident), catching a fish (outcome); being soaking wet (incident), claiming it is not raining (outcome).

Scottish poet and author Tom Leonard’s series of poems *Unrelated Incidents* (1976) similarly play on the dual meaning of ‘unrelated’, meaning either unconnected or untold. Delivered in the form of a news broadcast in broad Scots, his poem ‘Six O’Clock News’ draws attention to the messages that are conveyed by language and culture in the way they are presented as well as by their overt meaning, and the effect that different circumstances have on how these messages are received and interpreted. Leonard’s poem highlights how issues of nationality, regionality and class affect the perception of truth, in this case from a national broadcaster (the BBC). This process can be directly linked to the observation by UK hip-hop artist Ty, who notes in the documentary *Rodney P Presents ... the Hip-Hop World News*

(2016, 11.30) that hip-hop culture taught him to look for ‘what I’m not being told as well as what I am being told’. This speaks to the idea of implied narrative and underlying truth.

Cultural hybridity: global, local and idiosyncratic combine

As a final destination along the trajectory of local/global mediation, consider cultural hybridity. The following example presents a fusion of all of the ideas discussed thus far, where local referencing and vernacular, cultural conflicts, negotiations and signifying combine into a hybridised global/ local hip-hop verse. This example is by an artist called mISTAh bOhzE, active since 1991 as part of the hugely influential II Tone Committee and the wider Britcore scene.

Feathers flying like a tiger has stepped in the sanctuary
 And sadly, the new school don’t understand me
 Part western jihadi, part festival party
 Dabbing a gram a mandy, half a lager shandy and I’m dressed for kabaddi
 Still mildly obsessed wi yir auntie
 That’ll go doon well when I bum rush the family barby
 I cannae remember exactly what was the start of the taps aff or the rammy
 That had me laughin’ and draggin’ her carcass back tae the afterparty.⁵

The above section is in constant flux between Scottish, UK, and global referencing and imagery: ‘new school’ and ‘bum rush’ make direct connections with global hip-hop culture, with both long-established phrases indicating bOhzE’s own career longevity. In other areas, his cultural references draw from wide global ranges. The phrase ‘part western jihadi, part festival party’ describe his self-image as being in conflict between the image of western hedonism and being diametrically opposed to western excess. The next lines make similar use of contrast, combining drug and alcohol consumption with the Indian sport of kabaddi. There is a further cultural reference here as kabaddi was first aired on British TV in 1990, so this reference reflects the previous line in terms of western and Middle Eastern images, but also has an embedded reference to UK-wide culture in a post-colonial context. The line ‘still mildly obsessed with yir auntie’ is hilarious and outlandish, and perhaps in line with my earlier discussion of self-deprecating humour. It also continues the complex five-syllable rhyme scheme that scaffolds the entire verse (festival party, dressed for kabaddi, (ob)essed wi yir auntie). This humour continues with the image of ‘bum rush(ing)’ the family barby – ‘bum rush’ being an older hip-hop term for a stage invasion. This section of verse concludes with Scots phrases ‘taps aff’, a common Scottish term referring to the removing of one’s shirt or other upper body garments in celebration of something, and ‘rammy’, originally meaning an uproarious row or quarrel, but now equally referring to any sort of commotion, including a raucous party.

This verse serves as an uncompromisingly local-language depiction of outsider identity, highlighting contrasts and commonalities between global culture

⁵ Reproduced by permission from mISTAh bOhzE. ‘Vampire Jumpsuit (The Bridge)’, *The Top Left: Skeleton Staff*. (Southside Deluxe. 2018)

and area-specific culture. The remaining lines continue to build on cultural stereotypes and counter perspectives. As such, it is an example of tiered global and local hybridisation: containing elements of global hip-hop form (bum rush, new school), global referencing (jihadi, kabaddi), and local culture and vernacular. The verse is hip-hop-authentic in terms of its complex technical construction; it is also hip-hop-authentic owing to its multilayered meanings and references. At the same time, it is local-culture-authentic through its use of dialect, terminology, and referencing. Thus, there are significant levels of translation, duality, metaphor, and signifying. The song ends with the line 'then again, my whole life is a euphemism', directly signposting the need to look for substitution and layered meaning in the story.

'Vampire Jumpsuit (The Bridge)' functions on a macro global level, on a medium level for the whole UK, and a micro level locally. It encompasses global hip-hop stylistics in the rhythms, patterns, delivery, format, it links to UK vernacular, and it represents Scottish language and culture in a way that subverts 'proper' English. It works on all of these levels – macro, medium, micro – without needing to be understood on any one level individually.

Mog's and bOhzE's writing approaches demonstrate an alternative to the situation Speers (2017) describes in *The Great Hip Hop Hoax* (2013), where two Scottish rappers pretended to be American and got signed to Sony in London, until the truth came out and their plan fell apart. In the documentary, one of the two rappers explains that adopting fake American accents and American personas was their response to being laughed at as rappers with Scottish accents, and that 'if you want to get signed you have to be marketable'. In contrast, the approaches in these verses demonstrate an attempt to engage with hip-hop culture, display a skill-set and knowledge of the genre, while also challenging geographic or cultural boundaries, and representing their own background.

All of these observations about Scottish linguistic and cultural practices feed into the practice of rapping in Scotland. Perhaps the parallels of having a language and correct way of speaking imposed always results in the ludic subversion of what is 'correct'.⁶ Certainly, in Scottish culture the misuse and redefinition of words abound. This rhetorical playfulness bears strong similarities to the African American acts of signifying(g). Phrases as diverse as the metaphor for a refundable bottle of juice being called 'a glass cheque' owing to it being exchanged for cash, to the phrase 'there's yir dinner' being used to mean 'how about that', and the simile 'as wide as the Clyde' to imply a person's cheeky nature, all exemplify the creative nature of local language play. From a rapper's perspective, these phrases are the fertile ground that provides interesting and original phrases, while embedding locality into lyrical content.

Summary and conclusion

This article has been concerned with the spaces and places where boundaries and intersections in society meet boundaries and intersections of genre and culture.

⁶ From an autoethnographic stance, my mother relays how when she was growing up she was repeatedly told that many Scots words or phrases were 'slovenly'. Thus, Scots becomes associated with negative connotations of being untidy and dirty.

Close inspection of Scottish rap reveals a framework of lyrical techniques, signifying practices, social interactions, and outsider narratives that speak to (re)imagining, (re)creating and (re)constructing local culture by expressing it through hip-hop, and vice versa. Returning to 'Scottish People Can't Rap' in this context reveals a typical hip-hop response to negative criticism. The title is a signal, arguing the antithesis of its literal meaning. It uses that criticism against itself; it is a challenge to its own supposition. This follows in the established hip-hop lineage of subversion, cultural repackaging and protest, signifying a meaning opposite to that which its words imply. The whole song continues to contradict the title through its technical construction of multisyllabic rhyme matrices, its local references, and contrasting imagery. It creates a sociocultural painting through the bricolage of references and images from hydraulic cars to break-dancing lino and boom boxes; from anoraks and empty fridges to ill-fitting clothes and bad haircuts. Thematically and semantically, it sets out to disprove the statement while challenging stereotypes. It also presupposes, hyper-confidently, that the opposing meaning can be proven in its construction and delivery. In that respect, the entire song and its title is also self-deprecating braggadocio by another approach: the entire premise is that I can prove the statement wrong by being good. The verse exemplifies many of the elements discussed here, in that it works on a macro level, globally, on a medium level by shifting between US cultural stereotypes, UK-wide vernacular and local colloquialisms, and on a micro level through its wordplay and signifying. Through the application and manipulation of these tensions, the verse aims to authenticate itself to the various different culture groups.

The artists discussed in this paper – Loki, Ciaran Mac, CRPNTR, Mog, bOhzE and myself – display critical engagement with hip-hop culture, melding it with the local and the individual to create something new, something other. This is the hybridised, cross-pollinated, upward growth of a local culture being expressed in a new way, as much as it is the manifestation of a global culture being subsumed and filtered through local cultural sensibilities. These examples support and add to the conversation from Pennycook and Mitchell regarding global linguistic flows. From this perspective, numerous local and global sensibilities are multiplexed along a complex interchange of bidirectional cultural pathways. Thus, through the consideration of local cultural identity, global cultural rules, and the ebb and flow of cultural hybridity, a more profound understanding of local and global relations can emerge reflecting 'multiple, copresent, global origins' (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009, p. 40).

Through analysing the work of these Scottish hip-hop artists, this article presents a model for how to combine autoethnography, critical analysis, and artist-researcher perspectives. Both the academic method and the focus of this article are hybrid: a hybridised academic framework to study hybridised musical practice that is created and consumed by hybridised culture(s). As with the awakening that I felt reading Alim's (2003) work on applying linguistic and poetic analysis to rap lyricism, I hope that this mixed-method, hybrid essay form will encourage artists to reflect critically in an academic context, and equally encourage scholars of popular music to attend to the value of autoethnographic accounts of creative practice. Through this process, new detail emerges in the simultaneous, multilayered, polyphonic relationships between global, local, and individual creative expression. The artists in this study demonstrate the authenticity and urgency of contemporary local culture being expressed through a new medium, as well as the unique and

creative ways that hip-hop is interpreted and adapted through that cultural lens. Analysis of these works reveals a fluid, constantly mutating process of negotiation and translation between artist identities and cultural identities, constructing and conjoining, blending, and hybridising as it flows.

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