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'FEATURING THE SYSTEM': HIP HOP PEDAGOGY AND DANISH INTEGRATION POLICIES

ABSTRACT

During the past decades rap and hip hop culture have been utilized and institutionalized in public programs combating the radicalization and criminalization of marginalized ethnic minority youths in Denmark. Such a use of rap music, in particular, in institutionalized social work and political matters has created what I refer to as a 'rap as resource industry' that operates within the social sector, parallel to the 'regular' music industry. This article analyses personal and political inferences in policies of *the system* among rappers who engage with this industry as social workers and educators. Such engagements are examined by way of the metaphor of the *feature*: a musical practice distinct to hip hop, based on reciprocity and mutual gain. This article examines how their precarious position as mediators between youths and the system affects the individual rappers and how they handle the implicit or explicit demands and expectations placed upon them. Many of such social, rap-based projects are considered by funding bodies and users alike as great successes. Yet the articles argues that the utilization of rap and hip hop culture as social technologies can be problematic, highlighting how neo-liberal policies of outsourcing public responsibility seem to invade and affect hip hop's ideals of social responsibility and authenticity.

Keywords: Denmark, hip hop, integration, rap pedagogy, welfare state, social work

INTRODUCTION: WHEN FEATURING THE SYSTEM

Tactically I have articulated my musical projects to meet the Danish welfare model. (…) Totally deliberately, you know, in order to be able to make projects. (Ali, May 27, 2014)[1]

If you look in the Cambridge Dictionary of English, the verb *feature* is defined as an act 'to include someone or something as an important part', and, within hip hop culture, the metaphor of *the feature* works as a musical practice based on support, reciprocity, and mutual gain for both parties of a musical collaboration. Based on material collected through my doctoral field research,[2] this article examines and discusses

how rappers—primarily rappers of visible minority background[3]—within a Danish context *feature the system* and vice versa. In this case *the system* is a Scandinavian welfare state, or 'the Danish welfare model', as the rapper Ali puts it in the opening quote—a model that gives subsidies to, for instance, associations, youth clubs, and projects of societal interest that are based on the idea that citizens should have equal rights to social security and education.

During my field research, several of the rappers I spoke with pointed out that the public social service sector working to advance citizenship and integration during the 2000s increasingly became a 'business', where rappers could be employed as 'important parts' mediating between the system and marginalized visible minority youths in Danish society. These new avenues of employment for rappers emerged in a post-9/11 context, where securitization was layered onto pre-existing concerns about integration, joining together parallel concerns about immigration, crime, and associations between Muslims and violence wherein visible minority youth were considered a problematic target group for interventions (Rytter and Pedersen 2013). Such use of rap and hip hop culture[4] in political matters has created a kind of 'rap as resource industry' that operates within the social sector, in parallel to the 'regular' music industry.

This article analyses personal and political inferences drawn from the policies of *the system* by rappers who engage with this industry, either by working within official integration and citizenship programs or by making their own musical practices, political ideologies, and social work align with these. In this article, I see the welfare state's engagement with rappers as *features*, opening the analytical space to focus on the processes, negotiations, and at times awkward alliances between rap artists, their

ideas about hip hop culture, and *the system.* These *features* come out in different versions—from the artistic work of writing and producing theatre shows generating inter-cultural dialogue, through campaign songs communicating official messages and moralities, to educational, rap-based social work with marginalized youths. When *featuring* rappers to do artistic work, *the system* often explicitly requests 'their own words in your voice, written by you' (Babak, February 4, 2014), as the rapper Babak has put it. Contrary to this, the *features* around educational work with marginalized minority youths often encompass complex positions and blurred power relations between *the system*, the rappers and the young target group. These *features* between *the system* and rappers engaging as rap coaches in social educational programs targeting marginalized visible minority youths— most often young men (teenagers) living in socially disadvantaged urban areas—are the empirical focus in this article. Such *features* give rise to particular constellations of hip hop culture as a social technology, where rap music, in particular, works as an expedient resource to achieve the particular goal of making well-behaved Danish citizens out of problematic visible minority youths. Furthermore, the *features* exemplify the moral ambiguity of the field of youth development in general—and the internal moral conflicts within hip hop culture in particular.

In the following pages I expand upon these *features*: first, by elaborating the increasing blending of Danish integration policies and hip hop pedagogy post-9/11; second, by describing how *features* between rappers and the system can be understood within a theoretical frame of social technologies; third, by illustrating how rap coaches in their everyday lives negotiate their often difficult, fuzzy, and peculiar positions between the young target group and the

system, where they have to navigate between implicit or explicit (often differing) demands and expectations; and finally, by addressing the impact of rap as a social technology in relation to the young target group and in broader contexts of inclusion, integration, and citizenship within Danish society.

HIP HOP PEDAGOGY IN A POST-9/11 WORLD

When in spring 2009 I was coincidentally engaged as a singing teacher in a (now closed) non-profit organization working with rap music production in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area in the Danish capital of Copenhagen, I was pretty green about hip hop culture. Besides giving singing lessons, I hung out with some of the engaged rap coaches, social workers, and with the young teenage boys (and the few girls) attending the programs. Here I was often met with stories about how engaging in the rap programs kept the young participants out of a criminal career, inspired them to read, to write, to express and articulate themselves, to engage in school work, to meet schedules, and to adapt to and cope with different social situations and people in their everyday lives. Many of the participants further explained to me how their parents urged them to go to the studio, to hang out with the coaches and to write and produce rap music—because, as a boy caricaturing his father expressed it: 'It's good you've found something you like doing, because otherwise you could have gotten into criminality' (Underage rapper, February 1, 2013).[5] This stirred my curiosity. How could a musical form like rap, where dissent and violent imagery is a common part of the expressive repertoire, at the same time work as a means to prevent a criminal career and as a means of educating youths on 'the edge of society'? And

how did the rap coaches negotiate this moral ambiguity within hip hop culture in their educational work with the young participants?

On this specific organization's now closed website, you could read that the purpose of the organization was 'to create positive successful experiences and support the musical development' and how it would 'work as an important mouthpiece and a diplomatic representative of the messages of the youths' (Purpose and Vision, my translation). Furthermore, the organization described itself as:

> a music association, a music school, a culture factory, a record company, an inclusion and multiplicity project in one. (…) a non-profit organization primarily working to make positive successful experiences for youths as well as initiating and conducting culture activities for people living in exposed areas (…) giving youths the opportunity to develop themselves musically, regardless of residence, economy and background. (…) one of the very first agents in the strong, growing hip hop movement in the past few years—a movement, which is especially seen among youths with ethnic minority background in the Nordic capitals. (About Us, my translation)

This organization, which was initiated in 2006 (and closed down in 2012), exemplifies how rap music and hip hop culture within Danish society has, since the 2000s, been utilized in social work for integration and citizenship-building, addressing marginalized and vulnerable visible minority youths, with the economic support of public authorities as well as private funding. Managed by well-educated and socioeconomically advantaged rappers or producers—sometimes in cooperation with people working on multicultural issues—this

kind of educational work varies between individual work in small studios, sometimes connected to local youth clubs, and larger associations with their own facilities and many employees. Generally speaking, *empowerment* emerges as the dominant discourse. But where some projects link empowerment to issues of self-esteem and individualized optimism, others align it with more established practices of political communication and principles of community organizing (see also Ringsager 2015a).

This use of rap as a social means revolving around educational and pro-social messages for marginalized youths can be understood in terms of mobilized activism and community organizing, which have been key elements of hip hop culture since it was placed on the map in the streets of New York City in the 1970s (see, e.g., Forman 2013). Since then it has often been argued within educational hip hop research that rap lyric production and analysis might comprise the basis for a 'critical pedagogical' framework for giving agency to marginalized cultural, ethnic, and racial minority youths all around the world. Inspired by Paulo Freire's problem-posing method, (e.g., Freire 1990; 1994) this so-called Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (e.g., Hill 2009; Parmar 2009; Porfilio and Viola 2012; Runell and Diaz 2007) has a deliberate emphasis on developing youths' critical thinking skills through active exchange and discussion, making young people able to critique and question ('deconstruct') the veracity of dominant texts within society (Gosa and Fields 2012). Besides the pedagogical potential of motivating, creating and developing learning possibilities for youngsters, hip hop culture's potential to engage youths around a 'common third' is emphasized, creating a kind of 'belonging' that aims to transcend marginalization and increase the social sense of self (Elkjær et al. 2015).

In Denmark, this Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy has, since the 2000s, been played out in the context of global securitization in a post 9/11-world, where the presence of young, male, visible minority youths in society has been problematized in new ways. The Danish state's so-called 'security / integration response' (Bleich 2009: 355) to the internationally significant events of 9/11 (and to increasing instances of riots in Europe by marginalized minority urban youths) has led to policies including administrative expulsion, temporarily legalizing body searches without probable cause in certain urban areas, the repeal of compulsory mother tongue education in schools, and the introduction of a new citizenship examination (see Gad 2011; Rytter and Pedersen 2011). Such restricting political initiatives have had huge effects on the everyday lives of people from Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East or North Africa, and their descendants, who as a consequence of the securitization have become hyper-visible and subjected to scrutiny as problematic, stereotyped Others (Khawaja 2011).

Furthermore, various pre-emptive measures and plans of action have been implemented. These include anti-radicalization programs in which, for example, so-called 'front-line personnel of the welfare state' (such as teachers and social workers) are trained to prevent and take action against processes of religious radicalization and other potential threats (Kühle 2011: 91–93). The *featuring* of socially engaged rappers and hip hop activists as a kind of 'musical front-line personnel of the welfare state' can thus be related to this process of securitization—a process that has contributed to professionalizing rap and hip hop culture in what Amir, the manager of the social project where I was engaged as a singing teacher, has referred to as 'the integration business' (Amir, June 7, 2012).

Rappers *featuring the system* as rap coaches in educational work within this 'integration business' often join critics in noting that rap music, due to commodification, has become a site of contestation with a corporate music industry incredibly adept at redirecting hip hop's social energies away from critical expressions of struggle, protest, and resistance—and towards messages of materialism, greed, individualism, and the depiction of stereotypical racial and sexual identities, tacitly accepting misogyny and male sexism as well as masculine aggression and violence (see also Forman 2013). According to such critique, this not only devalues the ideals of hip hop culture but also negatively affects the young people listening to rap music. Amir exemplifies this worry when describing how the young people (most of them teenage boys) attending the workshop the first years looked up to the gangsta-rapper Marwan, who released his Danish-language debut album *P.E.R.K.E.R.*[6] the same year as Amir started his work:

> The only thing they talked about was shooting: 'We're going to shoot, we gotta get some weapons'. And then they had Marwan in one ear: 'We're going to be [rapping] '*perker, perker, perker*', 'self-made well-made', '*perker, perker*'. It was really an ugly picture. Suddenly, Marwan had become a role model for a generation of confused youngsters who didn't know, what to do. (Amir, June 7, 2012)

Concerns about how Marwan's stereotypical representation of the criminal *perker* influences the youths, illustrating the moral conflict within hip hop culture in general, are also presented by the rap coach Babak. He describes how the youngsters attending his workshops often identify as 'gangsters' through the music they listen to and by referring to themselves and friends with a 'G' after their names:

> No matter which ghetto you enter, the kids will put G after their names. Ahmed G, Muhammed G, Abdi G—everybody G. G for 'gangster'. It says a lot when, for instance, a six-year-old says 'G' about himself, right? (…) Their identities are developed around the so-called hip hop culture stressing topics like 'I'm tough', 'We shoot in the ghettos'. 50 Cent lyrics and that stuff. Not that they'll do it because 50 Cent says it, but the music you listen to and what you identify with create a kind of frame for your life. (Babak, July 8, 2010)

For most of the rappers and producers engaging in rap-based educational work, therefore, their main purpose is less to make the young participants successful rappers, than to produce values, ideals, and identities that can provide alternatives to commercially produced identities such as criminal gangsters, 'niggas' or '*perkere*'. As, for instance, rap coach Erkan, working at a youth club in a disadvantaged urban area, has put it:

> Musically speaking, there are plenty of things you could work on getting better. And I present these things for them regularly, but it's not my main focus. My main focus is the things they are writing. That they become more mature. (Erkan, June 27, 2013)

Furthermore, for several of the rap coaches and program managers I have spoken with, the motivation for engaging in this kind of educational work is based on personal experiences from their own childhood and

youth, and personal narratives of how music production had 'saved' them from ending up in a criminal career. In that sense, much of the work is based on identification and common experiences between the young participants and the rap coaches. As Babak has explained:

> The most important thing—and the reason why you should support such projects economically—is because it gives empowerment. Not because it makes good musicians or rappers. It might spit out a couple of groups, but more importantly, it gives people a feeling of success, right? In life. It gives people an identity. Instead of being the psycho with the hardest blow, you become the guy who can blow it hard in the mike, or the guy who writes good rhymes, or the guy who is good at beatboxing, or making beats or singing or (…) whatever, right? It gives people, who one way or the other are nothing but some fucking *perkere* another approach to life, where they can say, 'I'm also a rapper', and 'I'm the one being good at that'. That's also why I began to rap. (Babak, July 8, 2010)

Thus, rappers engaging in social work are often driven by philanthropic motivations, and a belief that the use of the right tools and techniques can allow the participants to be heard and understood within majority society and get them to behave in ways that will keep them on 'the right track'. It is, as Ali puts it, most often '*perkere* helping *perkere*' (Fieldnotes, July 7, 2010). As described however, this hip hop pedagogical activism has been adopted by the Danish welfare state as part of the securitization process implemented post-9/11. Besides bringing an increase in public funding to the area, this has also placed rap-based educational work within complex political negotiations and processes.

RAP COACHING AS A SOCIAL TECHNOLOGY

> There is this discourse saying that the reason why so many youngsters are hanging on the street, making trouble, is because they don't have anything to do. So that's the identification of the problem. And the available solutions: They don't have anything to do and they don't use the existing offers, so let's offer some new. And because rap is part of their culture, and the people practicing hip hop—which are the people wanting to make the projects— argue that that's how it is, this became a solution. (Ali, December 21, 2010)

Ali was conscious of the complex political negotiations and processes behind his work, as were most of his rap coach colleagues. This awareness has made Ali position himself as a provider of solutions by designing structured rap music production programs and courses specifically targeting marginalized visible minority youths living in disadvantaged urban areas. In this way, as Ali pointed out, rap coaches and project managers like himself also appear to uphold the very idea that rap *is* the solution— and thus something that the integration and citizenship-oriented part of the social sector should support. Rap coach Erkan has made a similar reflection:

> The local communities and administrations are realizing that it [rap education] works. They hear from the institutions that, for instance, it attracts a lot of teenage boys and it keeps them off the streets. There is something anti-crime in it—because that is what they are told by, for instance, people like me: 'It's good they come here [to the youth club], because then they

can vent their frustrations in another and much better way than setting fire to cars.' But you know, it's not because we know that for sure. It's the theory. (Erkan, June 27, 2013)

As shown in Ali's and Erkan's statements, rap coaches and project managers are themselves involved in demonstrating that rap is 'the solution', when rappers *feature the system* in doing youth development work. The question remains, however, how this self-reinforcing process is best understood.

The Swedish music education researcher, Johan Söderman (2011), has argued that there are apparent pedagogical continuities between traditional forms of Scandinavian non-formal education, *Folkeoplysning* (People's Enlightenment),[7] and the contemporary voluntary education of marginalized visible minority youths through rap and hip hop. According to Söderman, from its very beginning *Folkeoplysning* had had two sides to it. On the one hand, it has promoted the belief that people can achieve emancipation and empowerment through education. In this sense *Folkeoplysning* is a radical educational ideal empowering people through their own engagement and investment in education and social critique, with the ultimate aim of changing society. On the other hand it has also been—and still is— used to discipline people, ideally replacing the 'old habits' and 'bad taste' of the poorly educated lower classes with more refined habits and tastes. In this sense, it can be regarded as an elitist educational ideal, where people are seen as objects to be 'empowered' and 'helped' to enlightenment, and where the overall aim is about taming and disciplining the 'wild' (working class). Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, Söderman claims that a certain degree of symbolic violence must be present, even when

democratic ideals and intentions precondition educational concerns (Söderman 2011: 215; see also Ringsager 2015a).

This entangling of (musical) education and (social) enlightenment, of agency and regulation, of emancipation and disciplining was intensely present in the everyday lives of the rappers I followed in their social work, as coaches, project leaders, studio owners or consultants. However, in order to understand the statements of Ali and Erkan quoted above, the educational enlightenment taking place within social, rap-based work might to a greater extent be regarded in terms of the Foucauldian notion of social technologies. Within this analytical approach, the production of rap music taking place within social institutionalized work is regarded as instrumentalized—as engineered, mobilized, and acted upon—and 'integrated into a larger management technology that is structured to manifest particular kinds of citizenship' (Forman 2013: 254). According to Foucault, all technologies are by default social (Foucault 1988: 18; see also Jöncke, Svendsen and Whyte 2004: 403; Rose, O'Malley and Valverde 2006: 85). Traffic lights are, for instance, a (scientific) technique that becomes a social technology when it is used to regulate the behavior of road users (see Jensen 2005: 43; Moos 2007: 9). Using the same terminology, rapping and writing rap lyrics is a technique that becomes a social technology when it is used in social work to achieve particular goals, like making well-behaved Danish citizens out of problematic visible minority youths.

According to Jöncke, Svendsen and Whyte (2004: 391) social technologies can be defined by three characteristics: first, social technologies contain languages of power enabling and promoting certain actions and understandings, while regarding others as irrelevant and impossible; second, social technologies embed

possibilities and ideas about social interaction; and third, social technologies are 'morally fixed,' exercising power through their applicability to central values rather than through their actual efficiency. A particular social technology thus defines the very problem at the same time as defining the problem's subjects and solutions. Moreover, it always contains an implicit moral rationale about what is the 'right' thing to do, as well as promises about what can be achieved if the problem subjects choose to act according to the outlined solution (Jöncke, Svendsen and Whyte 2004: 394; Rose 2010: 52). Relatedly, Leif Moos (2009: 87) has noted how social technologies that are brought into a given social space are often described as 'natural' and 'neutral' tools that are readily available to practitioners. This conception of the 'natural' contributes to making social technologies 'powerful but silenced forms of power'.

Further to the continuum encompassing Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy and People's Enlightenment, social technologies can be understood as solutions to be implemented through institutional effort in light of particular social and cultural definitions of the problem. Looking at rap as a social technology helps us to understand Ali's and Erkan's analyses of their work in the wider context of the welfare state. The relationship between rappers, working as rap coaches, and youths, receiving help to write and produce rap music, always involves modes and languages of power, making it possible to promote certain actions and understandings. This also means that the positions occupied by the rap coaches are essential for the success of rap as the solution. They are in a position wherein they are supposed to act as role models to a group of young people that most often regards *the system* as intervening and regulating, while at the same time implementing the very regulation imposed by the supporting

authorities. Thus, the implementation of power taking place within rap-based social work has to appear efficient to *the system* and the supporting authority, while at the same time appear 'natural' to the young participants.

It remains to be seen how rap coaches, deliberately articulating their work as outlined solutions to social worries about the criminalization and radicalization of marginalized youths, negotiate their position as enactors of social technologies in everyday life. What kinds of strategies do they put into play? And how do they practically impose particular moralities onto the participants and enact 'silenced forms of power'?

MAINSTREAMING THE POSITIVE LIFE STORY

Shortly after I ended my work as a singing teacher in the social non-profit organization in Copenhagen in the summer of 2009, a similar rap-based project was abruptly (albeit temporarily) closed in the Danish city of Aarhus, and the rapper hired to coach the young participants was dismissed. The dismissal of the coach and the closure of the project were publically justified with these words by the responsible manager:

> A song, which we can't vouch for, has come out in public. The lyrics, which I am very sorry about, do not reflect the work we do on a daily basis. (Justesen in Mikkelsen and Agger 2009, my translation)

The song referred to was titled 'Messerschmidt Diss' and was composed by one of the underage participants under the guidance of the now-dismissed rap coach. It was a *diss*[8] of several politicians, including the right-wing nationalist politician Morten Messerschmidt, a member

of The Danish People's Party.[9] In the rap, Messerschmidt was referred to through the following lines: 'I've got a single bullet for Morten Messerschmidt / 'cause he talks a lot of shit / he should come and suck my dick.'[10] When the lyrics of the song were printed as part of a local newspaper article about the project, they quickly made it into national media, igniting a heated debate and raising a series of critical questions regarding the use of rap as a resource in social work with marginalized youths before eventually leading to the closure of the rap program and dismissal of the rap coach.[11]

The closure of the project, the dismissal of the rap coach and the huge media attention surrounding this one song demonstrates how the use of rap as a tool in social technologies imposes particular moralities, not only onto the young participants but also onto the rap coaches *featuring the system* who constantly have to negotiate the moral ambiguity associated with rap and hip hop culture. Although the case was an isolated incident, it resonated among the many project managers and rap coaches engaged in social work all over Denmark and created a heightened awareness of the power relations taking place within these projects. In particular, it highlighted the precarious position of rap coaches implementing the social technology of rap: on the one hand, controlling and regulating young people and, on the other, treating them with respect and giving them a voice within a music culture where dissent and violent imagery is a common part of the expressive repertoire. Moreover, the rap coaches are often faced with the participants' expectations of becoming good and successful rappers within the rap scene—and not necessarily good and successful citizens. As the rap coach and project manager Joseph has told me, 'the youngsters are product-oriented, so it can't just be about

the process and the hippie pedagogy' (Joseph, June 14, 2012). All this leave the rap coaches in complex positions where they, in their day-to-day work, have to balance and navigate between differing expectations and moral values.

In enacting this balancing act, rap coach Joseph has, for instance, described how he always tries to make participants focus on what he refers to as the 'narrative, positive life story'—a story where the participants put their thoughts and feelings into words, describing their past in order to find their way forward (Joseph, June 14, 2012). Through discussions with the youths, he tries to give them a sense of belonging by 'branding the identity of being Danish and branding the values of democracy' (Joseph June 14, 2012), as he puts it. Furthermore, the funding authorities often explicitly demand that the rap coaches, in their work, improve the Danish language skills of the participating youths (Fieldnotes, e.g. Ali, May 20, 2014). Thus, as the Danish sociolinguists Andreas Stæhr and Lian M. Madsen also have shown (Stæhr and Madsen 2014), rap coaches often urge the young rappers to express themselves in a more standardized Danish when writing rap lyrics, using majority language terms rather than multi-ethnolectal terms that further emphasize their minority position in Danish society.

The guidance and supervision of lyrical productions in the context of social rap programs thus expose a pre-existing ideological framework as well as parameters of language and content promoting respect, non-antagonism, a positive life style, and an absence of (at least very strong) profanity. In doing so, the rap coaches do not only establish alternatives to prevailing gangsta themes in commercial and underground rap music, for as Forman (2013: 253–4) points out from an American context, rap coaches—working as role models—also clearly advocate

what is often referred to as 'conscious rap', thereby imposing certain moral genre rules for the youngsters wishing to participate in the projects. That these rules often regulate access for individual young rappers is demonstrated in the way the rap coach Asem handles young rappers who wish to record in the studio he manages, which is affiliated with a local youth club. He told me how he always asked the young rappers to send him their lyrics before they got access to the studio. When I asked him how this process of regulation actually worked, he explained by referring to a Facebook-correspondence he had had with a young rapper:

> He [the young rapper] can't get access to the studio before he has changed this [the lyrics]. That's how I get him to think about it. ... The first thing I do is to ask why he makes a song like this with so many nasty words. I pass it on slowly. Then he tries again, sends me a revised text where he has removed some of the nasty words, but there are still many left. Then I tell him to remove this and that and send me a revised version of the song as soon as possible. And the third time, I directly change it all, and tell him, 'That's the way to do it. That's what I mean. The other stuff doesn't work.' (Asem, February 1, 2013)

As Asem emphasized, this regulating process was his way (as a rap coach and role model) to take responsibility, and to say, 'Well, it's not cool at all, you know, when you wanna shoot people and kill them and smash empty bottles on their heads' (Asem, February 1, 2013).

Similarly, the rap coach Ali explained that when he interacts socially with the young participants, guiding them in picking a theme for a rap song and assisting in the actual writing and recording process, he conducts

what he refers to as a 'mainstreaming process' (Ali, December 21, 2010), where he gradually introduces certain values and ideas that the youths slowly internalize. He emphasizes that his own status as a recognized rapper and musician is crucial in conducting this mainstreaming of certain moralities, because it gives 'respect and justification. (…) It makes it possible to push the boys forward and still make demands and such things' (Ali, December 21, 2010). It is therefore the particular rap coach's ability to balance his position as a mediator of different politically defined moralities, while maintaining his position as a recognized rapper, musician, and role model, that finally decides whether the social technology's silenced forms of power can be successfully implemented as a 'natural' regulation of the musical and social behavior of the participating youths. The awareness of this often induces quite a few considerations for the individual rap coach. Rap coach Erkan, for instance, has often considered whether it is actually a disadvantage that the local youths know that he does not allow recordings of gangsta rap or songs with violent content—since this probably entails that some young people do not attend his rap workshops and studio sessions (Erkan June 27, 2013). Furthermore, the project manager Amir has explained how he is very aware of the fact that he:

> can't just censor ... but you can say, 'I really think it's stupid, when you write that you want to stick a knife in his head. That's not cool at all.' You can say that to people. That's the way to guide and supervise, until they understand what it means ... Tell them how things are done in the music business, what it is that makes one rap song a hit and not another—and in this sense use the music business and the music

as the pedagogical common denominator. Instead of just saying, 'You just can't do that.' (Amir, June 7, 2012)

If one should talk of a general pedagogical inclination it would be *realness*: 'I've always been taught that I can't lie in my songs,' as an underage rapper has put it (June 18, 2012). In order to implement moralities of being *real*, the rap coaches often urge the young rappers to adopt a position as an 'everyday politician' (Ali, December 21, 2010) representing other youths in their local 'hood. However, according to my research, the regulations and the limitations of what are acceptable musical expressions in the context of rap programs is very much dependent on the rap coach's personal estimation of the individual youths. As Asem explains: 'If I know you're a good and decent person, you can scream and shout what ever you like. But if I sense you're some kind of psycho, we should definitely have a talk' (Asem, February 1, 2013). Furthermore, what is regarded as acceptable musical expression depends on the specific situation and context of the particular performance. Several of the rap coaches with whom I have spoken seem to distinguish between what is accepted within internal workshops and studio sessions and what is accepted in public concerts or on albums released in the name of the projects or youth clubs. For example, an underage rapper, who has written and performed several songs for albums released by the rap project he attended, has explained how he and the rest of the participants were told that they could not contribute with songs that incited others to do something stupid—at least not, as he stressed, on the albums released in the name of the project (June 20, 2012).

There can be several motives for the exclusion of deviant expressions from albums publicly released by social projects. Joseph, the manager of a project that has released several albums with nationwide distribution, explained why he finds a curatorial approach to the lyrical content appropriate:

> If we make an album financed by the municipality or something, it has to be within the scope of certain things. I explain that to them [the participants]. And then I try to make them understand, that there is no need to depict something that is not *real*. If it's true that for instance you have seen a robbery or something, then it's permitted to tell that story. But you have a responsibility towards those listening to your music and towards your little brothers and the next generation, who don't know and who can't distinguish between whether the story is a lie, or bragging, or something real. (Joseph, June 14, 2012)

For Joseph the choice to exclude deviant or radical expressions from the albums is supported by moral arguments about responsibility towards the younger generation. Here, he emphasizes that an important strategy in the use of rap music production as a social technology is also the musical mediation of the positive life story to a broader audience of youths.

Besides these pedagogical and moral intentions, the regulation of lyrical content should also be understood in an economic context. Within this context, the regulation of lyrics is important for obtaining (further) funding to continue the rap-based educational work—as well as to maintain the jobs of the rap coaches and project managers themselves. It is therefore worth noting that, even though the rap coaches I have met in my field research are driven by philanthropic values, they hold positions they are paid to perform.[12] Hence, as the musical output of the projects might

be regarded as a parameter of the individual project's success, the participants are not only mouthpieces for their local 'hood or the people with whom they identify, they also represent the projects (or youth clubs) to which they are affiliated, and thus the rap coaches employed there. This is something that provides another dimension to the complex position of rappers *featuring the system* as well as to the desired success of the particular rap program.

RAP AS RESOURCE: EXPEDIENCY AND 'FORCED MEANS OF INTEGRATION'

As mentioned earlier in this article, I have been told many stories about how individual youths attending rap-based programs have gained self-confidence, have learned to reflect upon themselves as individuals and social agents within society, and thus have been 'civilized' (Gilliam and Gulløv 2012). I have also listened to stories—told by rap coaches as well as by the youths themselves—about how youths have gone from making what a rap coach called 'thug-life-2pac-outlaw stuff' (Fieldnotes, December 9, 2013) to rapping about experiences of being a teenager in the local 'hood, about how they felt about the political situation, about girls, or about schoolwork and parents—and how this change in attitude had a positive effect on their everyday life.

Such stories seem to indicate that youths, adapting to the rules of the rap programs, are conscious of the objectives of these programs and self-consciously seek to meet them when asked about their learning outcomes. However, it also indicates that the social technologies carried out by the rap coaches, and the silent power practiced through the mainstreaming processes in many ways have the potential to educate the youths in adapting to the rules, to

make them 'behave', and to help those who want to be helped to get on the 'right track' in life. The very music produced within the programs is, furthermore, often a result of many hours of hard work and (at least in the best productions) is often highly valued not only by the participants themselves but also by other youths in the local community. Moreover, competitions like Rapkings,[13] where young rappers from all around Denmark vie for the position of Rapking of the year, not only work as motivators for the youths but also create a network between young rappers from very different (geographical as well as socio-economical) local communities around Denmark. Several participants in the projects I have followed have additionally performed in television talent shows like *MGP* (the Danish Junior Song Contest hosted by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation) or *X Factor*. In this sense, some of the youths attending rap-based programs actually manage to reach a broader audience, thereby musically mediating the 'positive life stories' to the local network and the surrounding society.

Finally, the many local rap programs and workshops in disadvantaged housing areas which have been established during the past 10–15 years have contributed to making visible minority youths active, not only in their local communities (through concerts, studios, album releases, rap music educational workshops etc.) but also in the commercial rap scene in Denmark. As Ali has argued, many of the more talented local young rappers, though not participating in the rap programs, have used facilities and studios and performed at gigs and on compilation albums released by social projects (Ali, June 8, 2012). For this reason, the very presence of publicly funded rap programs and studios in certain neighborhoods has, according to Ali, contributed to bringing visible minority rappers from a marginal position

within the commercial rap scene to a more dominant one (see Ringsager 2016).

However, in order to get a broader and more complex understanding of the effect of rap as a social technology working to promote inclusion and integration of marginalized visible minority youths within Danish society, it is worth dwelling a bit on the articulated conceptions underlying precisely why rap music and hip hop culture are articulated as the solutions to such societal problems. George Yúdice (2003: 38) defines the concept 'expediency' as a performative understanding of 'the strategies implied in any invocation of culture, any invention of tradition, in relation to some purpose or goal'. When culture contains the opportunity to reach a goal, you can, according to Yúdice, speak of culture as a resource (ibid.). Applying this to my subject field, the general understanding of the expediency of rap as a resource in social technologies targeting marginalized visible minority youths is closely connected to the idea that 'rap is part of their culture', as Ali said: 'They all wear the clothes; they all listen to the music. And when you are part of a culture, there will always be a lot of people dreaming about being a performer' (Ali, December 21, 2010). It has often been suggested that rap and hip hop culture have evolved as a kind of *lingua franca* or a 'resistance vernacular' (Potter 1995: 68) among urban youths on a global scale, encompassing the mobility of immigrants and refugee youths (Forman 2013: 249). The origin of the aesthetic expressions of hip hop culture among marginalized African-Americans in the cities of the USA, and a persistent image of rap as the political mouthpiece of 'the ghetto', seem to have led the way for the use of rap among groups feeling marginalized in other contexts. The conception that 'rap is part of their culture' is thus based on the idea that the rap

scene and hip hop culture constitute a diasporic community, creating a space of identification for youths who experience being marginalized and alienated in the national space of identification. In this sense, the choice of rap appears 'natural', but it also allows for a simplified reproduction of the public image of visible minority youths, establishing hip hop as *the* youth culture, providing the grounds for its appropriation and reproduction both by the youths themselves and by policy makers and social workers.

Where the idea that 'rap is part of their culture' is appropriated in all *features* between *the system* and rappers, the expediency of rap's relating to musical and lyrical production processes in social and educational programs is also closely attached to the conception of rap as being 'easy to learn' (compared with other forms of music). This conception has been a recurring statement by the rap coaches and project managers whom I have spoken with: 'It's much easier to sit with pen and paper compared with learning to play music. Then you need an instrument and everything, you know,' as the rap coach Joseph has explained (June 14, 2012). Likewise, Erkan has described how he finds that, 'It's much easier to express yourself through rap than through singing in a blues or rock band. This is much more difficult to set up, because you need a band and so on' (June 27, 2013). Sometimes the rap coaches I have spoken with have underpinned this notion of rap as an 'easy to learn kind of music' with arguments that rap for this reason is more 'democratic' than other kinds of music (see. e.g.. Ali, December 21, 2010; Deniz, September 2, 2014).

Furthermore, Amir relates the conception of rap being easier to learn than other kinds of music to the fact that rap can provide a quick feeling of success, and thus is suited to engage particular visible minority youths from underprivileged urban areas:

As I see it, the reason why so many Muslim boys are rapping is because it's easier than spending time and energy on learning to play the guitar, for instance. Because it's definitely harder to become a good guitarist than a rapper. Becoming a lyrical rapper is the easiest thing in the world. And it's also a shortcut to get recognition, and it's a shortcut to get in the spotlight, it's a shortcut to get some girls, it's a shortcut to get more friends, it's a shortcut to get social acquaintances. Or at least they think so! That's how I see it. Because, if you go to a local youth club in, for instance, North Zealand [a well-off area north of Copenhagen], then the girls and boys are practicing day after day: 'We're going to get the perfect singing voice, and we'll spend ten years on it'. Whereas here [a disadvantaged area in Copenhagen] nobody wants to spent ten years on that! Because their dad's standing right in front of them telling them: 'Go out and make some money. Money is the most important thing.' (Amir, June 7, 2012)

In this view, it is essential that rap is easily accessible if you wish to target what Amir calls 'Muslim boys' living in disadvantaged urban areas. The key question, according to Amir, is the upbringing of the boys, where money precludes the time you should spend on becoming a good musician / artist.[14] Although several rap coaches have stressed that of course it requires both talent and exercise to become a *good* rapper, the recurring conception of rap music as 'much easier' (or 'easier to learn than for instance singing or playing the guitar') is a strong premise for the expediency of rap as a social technology—and is not without problems.

First, rap programs, courses, and workshops are rarely affiliated to public music schools

(i.e., music training institutions for children and young people which are very common in Denmark), but are most often associated with youth clubs (*ungdomsskoler*) or the work of independent social organizations with their own facilities, which are often placed in the center of a disadvantaged area with a high percentage of inhabitants with an ethnic minority background. The argument for doing so is most often that it is in order to meet the target group on their own terms. Obviously, the lack of rap classes in music schools can be explained in terms of history, traditions, employment policies, and the scope of activities carried out in this particular educational environment that often focuses on technical skills and individual musical excellence. However, the choice of not supplying rap music at the more established music schools also underlines the idea that rap is a particular kind of resource, a particular social technology, targeting a particular group of primarily male, visible minority youths in order to keep them 'off the street' and shape them into 'good citizens'. Citizenship-building rather than music education, production, and the shaping of good musicians is the objective, something also illustrated by the rap coaches' statements presented in this article. However, this difference in rap education and other kinds of music education contributes to creating a distinction between young people rapping, and young people singing, playing the guitar, and so forth, just like it *might* attribute to rap a lower aesthetic status in generalized perceptions of musical genre hierarchies. Contrary to music schools, which are very expensive to attend, it is, furthermore, much cheaper—sometimes totally free—to attend rap classes or workshops affiliated to youth clubs or social projects. If the young participants' socio-economic capacities are taken into account, the distinction is almost self-reinforcing, thereby also reproducing the

social distinctions and categorizations that are connected with the execution of different kinds of music and genres.

Second, as argued above, a vital point relating to social technologies is that they not only 'solve' a defined problem, they also ascribe certain understandings, perspectives, and values to the problem—and in doing so, they also constitute the problem (Jöncke, Svendsen and Whyte 2004). Social technologies are thus not only implemented with a view to solve a specific problem, they also create a particular social reality. Philosopher Ian Hacking describes such a process by using the notion of 'dynamic nominalism' (Hacking 1999 [1986]), which indicates that a thing does not become a named, categorized phenomenon until it is recognized as such. Consequently, dynamic nominalism describes an anti-essentialist philosophy of becoming-something (Hacking 1999: 165). One of the consequences of positioning rap and hip hop culture as the most expedient music culture for engaging visible minority youths—thereby generating subsidies to people designing and implementing rap-based projects and programs in the field of integration and citizenship-building—is a high concentration of rap programs and studios in underprivileged urban areas (compared with other kinds of cultural offerings in the locales). This concentration might induce young people living there to think that this is the type of music they *can* make and thus *do* make.

This institutionalization of rap in social technologies, and the economic support of rap workshops, programs, and studios in certain areas (where engaged rap coaches are waiting to help marginalized youth) also contributes to reproducing the idea of rap as 'part of their culture'—both internally, in the local communities and externally, in the surrounding society. As visible minority youths to a greater

extent *do* begin to rap, it gets even easier to draw the conclusion that this is because rap *is* 'part of their culture'—and, as a consequence, that if something could latch onto 'their culture' it would have to be 'easy to learn'. With a self-reinforcing effect, this once again makes it easier for rappers wishing to engage in social work to obtain the means to do it, because they can easily convince public and private authorities that rap *is* the best way to reach out to visible minority youths. The idea of the expediency of rap as a resource in social technologies targeting marginalized visible minority youths thus becomes manifest—and the category gets 'real' (Hacking 1999: 168).

This self-reinforcing process creates the 'danger' that rap and hip hop culture increasingly become related to this group of young people which, in light of ideals of inclusion, may well be problematic. Echoing anthropologist Inger Sjørslev (2011), this raises the question of whether the efforts to include marginalized visible minority youths in rap-based educational programs might have the consequence of actually excluding them. Several of the rap coaches and social workers I have spoken with are aware of this paradoxical question. They have described how, despite the best of intentions of promoting agency, self-awareness, and inclusion through rap, to their frustration they see in their daily work that this sometimes contributes to an isolation of the participants from other young people in the neighborhood or from other musicians and the music industry. Hence, as the social worker, Birgitte, has argued, the use of rap to integrate specifically marginalized visible minority youths in society actually risks having the opposite effect:

> The reality is that when you give the migrant boys the majority in rap communities, you're helping them without

actually helping them. Because, if you're going to make rap projects, ethnicity should not be the main factor. But that's what's happening. Rap is used as a forced means of integration. (Birgitte, December 16, 2010)

As clarified by Birgitte, *features* between *the system* and socially and politically engaged rappers might risk using rap as a 'forced means of integration'. Working with the best of intentions and with what is established as the 'right' tools and techniques for integration and inclusion of the target group in Danish society, the particular constellation of rap as an expedient resource in social technologies entails the danger of reproducing and reinforcing the very societal problems it works to solve.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: BEYOND 'PERKERE HELPING PERKERE'

Utilizing rap music as an expedient tool in social technologies targeting marginalized minority youths 'on the edge of society' has, as illustrated throughout this article, also utilized rappers as agents in what Amir referred to as the 'integration business' (Amir, June 7, 2012). In many ways this has professionalized social work with rap music production and it has created a kind of 'rap as resource industry' engaging rappers as rap coaches, social workers, and project managers. Based on Yúdice's idea of the expediency of culture it is obvious that, in the Danish context of integration of visible minority youths, rap music and hip hop culture have been 'invoked to solve problems that previously were the province of economy and politics' (Yúdice 2003: 25). Furthermore, rap and hip hop culture have become doubly expedient: first and foremost,

as a social technological resource mobilized to solve problems related to social integration and the turning of marginalized youths into 'good citizens'; but the particular constellation of rap as a resource has *also* established a niche in the formal labor market between the music industry and the social sector: creating jobs for rappers.

James Hay has suggested that because:

> a neoliberal form of governance assumes that social subjects are not and should not be subject to direct forms of state control, it relies upon mechanisms for governing 'through society', through programs that shape, guide, channel—and upon *responsible*, self-disciplining social subjects. (Hay 2003: 166)

When *featuring the system*, rap coaches potentially constitute just such an institutional mechanism, capable of adjusting particular forms of outsourcing. In this sense the rap coaches are positioned in ungrateful yet powerful positions working to cure societal illnesses and 'civilize' youths marginalized and alienated from society. As shown in this article, rap coaches are often aware of this position, negotiating not only the moral ambiguity within hip hop culture but also the moral values imposed by supporting the authorities in their daily work with the youths. As is evident from the statements of the participants, many of them do this successfully as they internalize narratives of integration and citizenship building and causally relate this to the act of rap music production. However, in designing rap-based programs specifically targeting marginalized visible minority youths on the basis of conceptions of rap as 'part of their culture' and 'easy to learn', there are risks that the projects might actually exacerbate the excluded and subordinate position of the young participants

in Danish society. By professionalizing rap within the 'integration business' the social engagement of the rap coaches has moved beyond '*perkere* helping *perkere*' (Ali, Fieldnotes, July 7, 2010). It has been placed within a complex network of institutionalized authorities and integration policies where the rap coaches act as institutional mechanisms of the same authorities and policies that, in their own music, they often call into question.

NOTES

1   All the interviews quoted in this article were conducted in Danish and translated into English by the author.

2   Between 2010–2014 I conducted field research among visible minority rappers (see note 3), focusing on the role of commercial rap as well as social rap-based work in the tension between inclusion and exclusion of visible minorities in Denmark. Spread across this period, among other things, I regularly participated in social projects involving rap music production (some of which are now closed) and interviewed rap coaches, project managers, and participants affiliated to these. In total, I conducted 42 interviews with 33 rappers, producers, and other persons affiliated the rap scene. (Ringsager 2015b; see also Ringsager 2013; Ringsager 2015a; Ringsager 2016).

3   I use 'visible minorities' as a generic term to refer to people who are refugees, immigrants, or descendants of people from Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East or Northern Africa.

4   It is not the aim of this article to discuss whether rap has become an independent genre or musical form without a necessary connection to hip hop culture (see also Krogh 2006). Nor is it the aim to define or draw boundaries between *real* and *unreal* or between underground and commercial hip hop. Rather than drawing up categories, I am interested in conceptualizing the musical and cultural practices that lie behind individual orientations towards certain ideals, for instance *real* or *unreal*.

5   It should be mentioned that I have also experienced the opposite: a young teenage boy

attending rap workshops without his parents' acceptance and awareness, because his father (due to religious belief) objected to his son rapping (Fieldnotes, April 20, 2010).

6   *Perker* is originally an ethnic slur in the Danish language, which (like 'nigga' in the USA) has been reappropriated by visible minority youngsters as an identification used to mark a distance from Danish identification and Danish society. To identify as *perker* is a strategy most often used in order to deal with feelings of exclusion and in trying to sustain a sense of agency in life (see also Jensen 2011).

7   *Folkeoplysning* (or People's Enlightenment) was a movement established in the 19th century, under the guidance of the Danish preacher and poet N. F. S. Grundtvig, working to develop knowledge and self-consciousness among the peasants. The movement of *Folkeoplysning*, whose ideas and methods were later taken up by the Workers' movement, created a number of institutions of education and cooperation with a lasting effect on the development of the Scandinavian countries into modern democratic welfare societies.

8   *Diss* is a shortened version of 'disrespect', and a diss track or a diss song is, in hip hop slang, a song primarily intended to disrespect a person or group.

9   Messerschmidt was at the time a household name partly because of his radical political views, partly because of his frequent appearances in glossy tabloid magazines with his girlfriend who is a cabaret singer.

10 My translation of the original Danish lyrics: '*Jeg har en enkelt patron for Morten Messerschmidt / for han snakker masser shit / han sku' kom' og sut min pik.*'

11 See Ringsager 2015a or Ringsager 2015b for a closer description of the debate.

12 People engaged in temporary positions in self-financed projects or organizations dependent on private or public economical support are, of course, in much more exposed positions—and have much more at risk—than people engaged in permanent positions in, for instance, youth clubs. In the context of this article, this is something I have chosen not to take into consideration. However, in an economical perspective, this distinction is of course important.

13 The annual competition, Rapkings, was initiated by the rapper Adonis Gomez from the rap

group KNA in cooperation with the council of Copenhagen and youth clubs around Denmark.

14 Several rappers (both young teenagers and more established rappers on the commercial hip hop scene) have substantiated this argument, pointing to how their parents always have expected them to prioritize their work or studies over their music.

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