LIFE STORIES OF A MONTREAL HIP HOP GROUP:

Culture, Community and Critical Pedagogy

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to understand how Hip Hop has contributed to an understanding of oppression and become a vehicle for social change, by examining the individual life stories and collective experiences of members of an internationally recognized Hip Hop crew called Nomadic Massive. Acknowledging Hip Hop as a culture, I employ critical ethnography in my examination of it. Respecting that Hip Hop can also act an instrument of critical pedagogy, I connect it to the theoretical framework outlined in Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of The Oppressed*. Particular attention is given to the Canadian Hip Hop context because of its role in fostering a multicultural and multilingual movement. The study is based on interviews, observational data as well as lyrical analysis. Using narrative inquiry for data gathering, critical ethnography for data analysis, and critical pedagogy as theoretical framework, I address the following questions: How can Hip Hop be considered an educational tool? How has Hip Hop shaped the identity of the participants? What does leadership in the Hip Hop community look like? How has Nomadic Massive helped build a global youth movement through Hip Hop culture? What does this culture look like in Canada?

The major findings of this dissertation suggest that experiences of systemic oppression and discrimination based on ethno-cultural, racial, and linguistic difference during childhood can be catalysts for leading people to Hip Hop culture. Furthermore, Hip Hop can be an important common language and culture for fighting oppression and discrimination. Since there is a legacy of colonization in educational systems, which defines social hierarchy, Hip Hop has become a powerful tool used to challenge and resist continued colonization and oppression in education. The Hip Hop community in Montreal is a particular space that supports and reflects complex multicultural and hybrid identities. This community helps foster cultural exchange, which can be employed as a tool of cultural demystification. These findings, applied to the context of formal education, can be a means of reaching students from different backgrounds. In other settings, such as community centres and organisations, the findings may serve as a way of finding common ground within multicultural contexts.

Résumé

Le but de cette recherche est de comprendre comment la culture Hip Hop a contribué à une meilleure compréhension de l'oppression et est devenu un véhicule pour le changement social. Cela se réalise en examinant les histoires de vie individuelles et les expériences collectives des membres d'un groupe de Hip Hop. Le groupe en question est reconnu mondialement et porte le nom Nomadic Massive. Considérant le Hip Hop comme culture, j'emploie l'ethnographie critique dans mon analyse de celui-ci. En respectant que le Hip Hop peut être également employé comme outil pédagogique, je lie l'analyse au cadre théorique décrit dans Pedagogy of the Oppressed de Paulo Freire (1970). Une attention particulière est accordée au contexte du Hip Hop canadien, en raison de son rôle dans la promotion du mouvement multiculturel et multilingue. L'étude est basée sur des entrevues, des rapports d'observation ainsi que l'analyse lyrique. En utilisant l'enquête narrative pour la collecte de données, l'ethnographie critique pour l'analyse de données et la pédagogie critique comme cadre théorique, je répondre aux questions suivantes : Comment la culture Hip Hop devient-il un outil pédagogique ? Comment le Hip Hop peut-il influencer la construction d'identité ? A quoi ressemble le leadership dans la communauté Hip Hop ? Comment le Hip Hop as-t-il contribué à l'édification d'un mouvement mondial de la jeunesse, et as quoi ressemble-t-il au Canada ?

Ces recherches nous permettent de voir que les expériences d'oppression systémique et de discrimination ; fondées sur la différence ethnoculturelle, raciale et linguistique, pendant l'enfance, peuvent conduire les gens à la culture Hip Hop. De plus, le Hip Hop peut être un langage commun important et la culture pour lutter contre l'oppression et de la discrimination. Comme il existe un héritage colonial dans les systèmes éducatifs, qui définit la hiérarchie sociale, le Hip Hop est devenu un outil de communication, facilement adopté pour résister à la colonisation et à l'oppression institutionnelle. La communauté Hip Hop à Montréal est un espace particulier qui soutient et reflète les identités multiculturelles et hybrides. Cette communauté contribue à l'échange culturel de son peuple, et cela peut servir d'outil de démystification culturelle. Les recherches, appliquées dans le contexte de l'éducation formelle, peuvent aider à rejoindre les étudiants qui parviennent d'autres réalités. Dans d'autres contextes, tels que les centres et les organismes communautaires, les résultats des recherches peuvent servir comme moyen de trouver un terrain d'entente dans des contextes multiculturels.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Study

Montreal's Nomadic Massive are probably one of the most aptly named bands around. Boasting 12 members and vocalists that rap and sing in five different languages (English, French, Spanish, Creole and Arabic), Nomadic Massive provide a truly multicultural listening experience. (Cowie, 2007, p.1).

What started as a Montreal band grew into an organisation that reaches out to international communities through Hip Hop. I have been a member of Nomadic Massive since its inception in 2004. At the same time that the group came together, I was starting a career in education as a high school English teacher. I never imagined that the two worlds would eventually intersect, and that the experiences in the group would inform my practice as a teacher. During the first few years in the group, I completed a Master's degree, during which I explored the role of music in education. I employed auto-ethnography to examine how music had shaped my worldview, my cultural identity, and my teaching practice. In auto-ethnography, the researcher is at the center of the study. According to Russel (1999), "Autoethnography produces a subjective space that combines anthropologist and informant, subject and object of the gaze, under the sign of one identity" (p.17). Music represented an outlet for self-discovery, but also served as a tool for critical thinking as I incorporated it into my classroom. I was experiencing the transformative power of music and education, and I was observing their influence on my own cultural identity.

Meanwhile, Nomadic Massive was expanding into new territory, using Hip Hop as a vehicle for cultural exchange, and I was a participant and an observer of this exchange. I decided to expand the PhD thesis into the area of critical ethnography as it was an extension of the auto-

ethnography I had employed for my MA thesis. I am observing a cultural group and its practices, but I have not had to gain access or become an insider of the group because I am already a member. At the same time, being a member of a multicultural movement implies that the members of this particular group have different cultural experiences, which influence their understanding of Hip Hop culture. I am not an insider in all of these cultures.

Although I grew up listening to Hip Hop, I never realized the power that this medium had until I became more deeply involved with Nomadic Massive. As the group grew in popularity and began extending its reach across the global Hip Hop communities, it became clear that Hip Hop had pushed beyond linguistic and cultural boundaries to become an international mechanism for social change. This happened with the help of the Internet, which allowed diffusion across the globe almost instantaneously. Before long, Nomadic was participating in global events, and I was beginning to witness what KRS-One once called *edutainement*. The term was first used to describe postwar Disney movies and their influence on American pop culture (Van Riper 2011)[1]. In Hip Hop, this concept recognises the social responsibility that artists have to use their platforms to educate youth through their craft. As a member of Nomadic Massive, I have travelled to many different countries to perform and engage youth in the Hip Hop culture. I began to see that Hip Hop was a comprehensive tool, used in marginalized communities to create a cohesive culture that encompassed many different art forms, and this broadened the possibility that one could feel included.

The more we travelled, the more I understood that this was a social and educational movement that transcended cultural barriers. I cannot deny that as an academic, I was initially cynical about the possibility that Hip Hop could be used as a teaching tool. I worked in an institution with

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[1] Learning from Mickey, Donald and Walt: Essays on Disney's Edutainment Films

strict rules and competencies that I followed in order to bring out the best in my students. Yet, as I explored these other realities in Cuba, Brazil, and Haiti, I realized that prescriptive education worked in certain contexts, but in others it was frequently irrelevant. With Nomadic Massive, I participated in youth summits, symposiums, and cultural exchanges, and I noticed a common denominator among all of them. These events served the community in a much more direct way than I was accustomed to in Canada. The events included conversations about controversial topics and allowed young and old alike to share in dialogues about their communities. Hip Hop culture provided a means of creative expression, but it was never void of the socio-political context in which we found ourselves wherever we went. I was interested in this new way of addressing issues – at once creative, dialogic, and politicized. I felt stimulated by the debates about real issues, by the very people that were being affected.

Growing up, I always felt that Hip Hop was full of contradictions. It was supposed to be the voice of the people, a continuation of the oral tradition, this generation's jazz or blues. At the same time, it was a culture that glorified violence and misogyny, and this was confusing to me as an adolescent. It was not until my adult years that I started to explore these contradictions, and working with Nomadic Massive really expanded my view on the whole culture. My narrow view of Hip Hop culture was challenged every time we visited a new community or school. I was forced to redefine it on an ongoing basis. As I continued my studies in education, I eventually came to the teachings of Paulo Freire, and this started to shape the way I looked at Hip Hop culture. Through Freire's work about oppression, I began to understand that there was a connection between Hip Hop culture and the emancipation of marginalized communities.

 Hip Hop was a new "language" that allowed youth to express themselves coherently against oppression, even though it also displayed oppressive traits. I came to the conclusion that the

members of Nomadic Massive were carrying unwritten knowledge that would help academics and educators understand the role that Hip Hop played in non-formal education and critical thinking. Hip Hop shaped the lives of the individuals in the group. It informed their world views, their cultural identities, and their approach to working with youth. I wanted to expand on my previous work, which was primarily based on my personal experiences, and delve into the experiences of the other members of Nomadic Massive.

The purpose of this research is to examine the individual life stories and collective experiences of members of an internationally recognized Hip Hop crew. In this dissertation, I examine how Hip Hop became a fundamental part of each member of Nomadic Massive's life, how it shaped members' cultural identities, and how it became a means of changing the community in which they lived. Many sub-topics have emerged as a result of this research, adding to the depth of the discussion. As members of different cultural and community organisations, the members of the group have been able to address important questions surrounding the role of Hip Hop in building a cultural identity. With the help of all members, we addressed the following questions as they emerged in our discussions: How can Hip Hop be considered an educational tool? How has Hip Hop shaped the identity of the participants? What does leadership in the Hip Hop community look like? How has Nomadic Massive helped build a global youth movement through Hip Hop culture? What does this culture look like in Canada?

Hip Hop music has been a vehicle for many different messages over its forty-year lifespan. The true roots of Hip Hop are difficult to pinpoint, but radio airplay of the genre goes back as far as the 1970s. In the documentary Beef, rapper KRS ONE specifies the Bronx as the original birthplace of Hip Hop music (Suchan & Hennelley, 2003). Regardless of where it was born, Hip Hop experienced its adolescent period in the United States during the 1980s. By the 1990s, it

grew branches and subdivided into broader categories such as commercial, underground and 'gangsta' rap. It became a nationwide phenomenon when rivalries emerged out of East and West coast Hip Hop traditions (Robertson, 2007). This culminated in the assassinations of rap rivals Tupac Shakur and Christopher Wallace, each representing a different coast. One thing that unifies all the elements of Hip Hop is the notion of "battling" (Au, 2005).   In Hip Hop battles, artists compete by trying to outshine each other in front of the crowd. This element of competition has caused Hip Hop skills to evolve through creative expression. For many years, as the music of marginalized American youth, the Hip Hop demographic was predominantly African American but also included Latinos who lived alongside Black Americans. Originally, the music industry regarded rap music as a passing phase, and most artists made a living by selling mix tapes out of the trunk of a car.

Nowadays, Hip Hop culture has extended far beyond the borders of North America.   Hip Hop has been adapted and changed to accommodate other languages and cultures across the globe. According to Pennycook (2003), "An ongoing controversy in discussions of globalization, concerns whether we view it as just another phase of capitalist expansion or whether it represents a fundamentally new moment in global relations." (p.522). In Hip Hop's case, I think both are true. The culture expanded with the commodification of cultural emblems and this enabled its marriage with corporate American ideals. Arguably, however, this facilitated the spread of the culture across the globe, making it accessible to other communities that interpreted it in their own way. In terms of international relations, Hip Hop has been a significant factor in uniting the voices of marginalised people who have become part of this global phenomenon. Furthermore, the international community has contributed significantly to the evolution of the culture by using Hip Hop to denounce injustice in their respective communities.

As Hip Hop grew in popularity, the markets followed the new demand. Today, there are full lines of clothing and accessories dedicated to the Hip Hop industry. According to Alim (2009), "It is clear that globalization has created multiple new opportunities for youth in particular to rework, reinvent, and recreate identities through the remixing of styles which are now, as a result of a multitude of technological innovations, more globally available than ever before." (p105).

As Hip Hop spread internationally it also encountered other languages which intermingled with American Hip Hop slang. As Sarkar and Allen (2007) point out, "Language mixing is linked in subtle ways to claims of territorial and cross-territorial belonging" (p.125). This was particularly important for young people living on the margins of American society whose values were seen as different. It extended into a metanarrative which applied to marginalised communities abroad. In this way, knowing American Hip Hop language was a way of connecting to the root of the culture and adding your own language was a way of expressing a particular identity through the art form. There are so many ways to look at Hip Hop, that it has become a complex culture to understand. This complexity has resulted in divergent opinions about what the term entails. Since the viewpoints are so vast and contrasted by those who consider themselves inside and outside the culture, I have included an overview at the end of this dissertation, (Annexe 1). Please refer to it for more information on Hip Hop culture and terminology.

Chapter Summaries

In the following chapters, I will explore the experiences of each participant in connection with Hip Hop, Education, Identity, and Immigration. All of these connections are examined using critical pedagogy, narrative inquiry and critical ethnography. The objective is to seek understanding about the role that Hip Hop played in the different lives of the participants. Particular attention is given to the Canadian Hip Hop context because of its role in fostering a multicultural and multilingual movement. Each chapter focuses on the diverse experiences of the participants as they relate to an overarching topic. When there are similarities or crossover in their stories they have been grouped together by sub-topics.

In Chapter 2, I expand on the rationale for the study and introduce the disciplines that I have selected for the study. I introduce the participants and follow with an approach to understanding and decoding the interviews. I also explain the need for lyrical analysis as another method of understanding the participants, beyond the interviews. Finally I give detailed information about Narrative Inquiry, Critical Ethnography and Critical Pedagogy and their relationship to this study. Particular emphasis is placed on Paulo Freire at the end of the chapter because of his contributions to the field of education and his influence on this dissertation. I conclude with Nomadic Massive's connection to Freire and critical pedagogy in general.

In chapter 3, I begin my inquiry with questions about immigration and migration. It is a premise of this study that the early experiences of cultural exchange affected the perception that participants had of other ethnic groups. The process of cultural exchange and exposure occurred differently for each member. Yet, everyone in the group experienced difference and being different from at a young age. In this chapter, experiences are grouped by similarity under the

umbrella of immigration and migration. In both cases, the commonality is that everyone experienced being different than the dominant class of the nations they resided. Although the dominant class was reflected differently in each place, a feeling of injustice was shared by participants. The first grouping is between Butta and Lou who both explored cultural difference through travel, relating to their parents work. The second grouping is between Vox and Meryem who both arrived in Canada as teenagers as a result of problems in their home countries. The last group includes Nantali, Waahli and Diegal who grew up in Montreal as the children of landed immigrants.

Chapter 4 deals more specifically with education. To begin, I draw a connection between Butta and Lou as they both went to different schools in many countries. Butta talks about his experiences in Kenya and Romania while Lou talks about Canada and Cuba. In both cases, the schools they went to were designed for foreigners. Although they were living in one country, they were being educated by another and this enabled a different perspective. The second connection I explore in this chapter is that of colonial schooling. In this case I looked at Waahli and Vox because they both went through French systems in French speaking countries. Waahli discusses the differences between private and public school experiences in Montreal and Vox examines the system in Haiti. Both experiences are contrasted as they are examples of a French system interpreted outside of France.

In Chapter 5, I look at Hip Hop's trajectory around the world through the eyes of the participants. In this chapter there are two groupings for the interviews. The first section reveals how Hip Hop crossed the border into Canada and became a big influence in the Caribbean community. This chapter sees Nantali, Waahli and Diegal explain the connection to New York city as well as explore the way Hip Hop changed youth culture in Montreal. The second part of

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the chapter focuses on the different ways Hip Hop was making its way around the world. Butta, Lou and Meryem talk about the different manifestations of Hip Hop culture in Latin America, Europe, Africa and how this helped their integration in the Canadian context. Lou talks about finding common ground with Hip Hop in Cuba and in Winnipeg. Butta talks about connecting to the Hip Hop community in Romania and realising it was a place where he could perfect his skills. Meryem discusses her experience with Hip Hop in Algeria and how she rediscovered the culture in Canadian high schools.

In Chapter 6, I look at identity in relation to Hip Hop. In a sense, there are many other chapters that contribute to the construction of identity, but this is the first time that I start dealing specifically with persona and Hip Hop. It is interesting to see how participants became figures in the community that they helped create. This chapter focuses on names and pseudonyms as they relate to identity and Hip Hop culture. In the context of Hip Hop identity a name is not a negligible thing. The interviews show that it may be, in fact one of the essential elements of participation in the culture. Symbolically it is a rebirth, a way of stepping consciously in to the culture. Every member of the group has a Hip Hop pseudonym but the way they got the name is unique. In this chapter, Nantali talks about her connection to her given name and the role it plays in her sense of identity. Butta talks about having to find a name in order to gain legitimacy in the game. Meryem talks about being given a name that is in line with the identity you are already exuding.

Chapter 7 begins before the group's inception but where I believe the group was first conceived. This chapter sheds light on the cross-cultural communication that was emerging through Hip Hop in Canada and how it was a cornerstone for community building through concrete action. It is the meeting of the two original members of the group, Lou and Vox. This section looks at their

dream and their conviction to move to Montreal to try and live it out. It is clear that this journey

to Quebec gave rise to what the group is today. While Lou and Vox were figuring out how to

make things work in Montreal, other members were already getting involved in the local

community. The second part of this chapter is told by some of the founding members of the

group; Butta, Waahli and Diegal talk about the Hip Hop scene in Montreal, how it evolved and

how it began to redefine itself though the actions of community members. Butta talks about the

different projects he was doing with other artists, giving honorable mention to Nomadic

Massive's original Dj, Static. Waahli talks about his experiences touring alone and his reluctance

to join a group. Diegal talks about his efforts to bring Hip Hop symposiums to Concordia

University and the Hip Hop night he initiated at a Montreal club. All three talk about meeting

Lou and how this became a galvanising force.

Chapter 8 shows the importance of Nomadic's connection to Cuba. It was such a pivotal point in

the evolution of the group that it could not go unmentioned. This experience was essential in

linking the local Hip Hop community in Montreal to other communies abroad. This chapter

provides a window into the two trips that the group made to Cuba and how it affected their

musical style as well as their pedagogical approach to Hip Hop. The chapter is divided into two

parts. The first outlines the events of the first trip, which could be defined as the occasion when

the members really developed a sense of solidarity a collective vision. Meryem, tells the story of

the second trip, in the latter part of part of the chapter. Through her account we confirm the

impact that Cuba had on the group because she missed the first trip. She speaks about coming to

an understanding of the group dynamics by going to Cuba with them.

Chapter 9 illustrates the different leadership roles that participants took in their respective fields

and the challenge of balancing this with their role as community leaders. This study reveals the

important qualities that of role models need to work successfully in the community; and Nomadic Massive members model these different qualities to the young people they work with. Outside of the music, most members have pursued other passions in tandem. This was an important discovery because it shows that music can encompass a social responsibility. It is something that the members do out of a sense of duty and love, not simply for a paycheque. This is reflected in their attention to message and their social engagements. In this chapter, I look at Diegal's career as a doctor and how he has made it work with a hectic touring schedule. I also look at Waahli's work at Head and Hands, a community organisation in Montreal. The second part of this chapter talks about Maison des Jeunes which is a community center where many members' of the band have worked. I look at Vox work as director and how he balances that role with Hip Hop. I also interview Meryem and Butta on their experience working as counselors and then leaving to pursue other career goals.

Chapter 10 focuses on the work that Nomadic members have initiated in the community. This became a defining factor in the group's evolution early on. First they witnessed and participated in symposiums and workshops in Cuba and then they went on to design their own. In this chapter I look at the different workshops that Nomadic members have created and the challenges they face trying to implement these workshops in different institutions. This chapter looks at interviews with Waahli, Lou, Butta and Nantali. Waahli talks about how Nomadic got involved with workshops by witnessing them abroad. Lou talks about initiating programs at Maison des Jeunes and James Lyng high school. Butta explores the challenges of working in the community and designing programs that apply to everyone Finally, Nantali talks about a series of workshops she designed called Hip Hop no Pop and how she went about implementing them in different educational contexts.

Chapter 11 seeks to answer the question of the band's longevity. In this chapter, I interview Vox, Diegal, Meryem and Nantali about their vision of the future. Vox talks about a group that is in an adolescent phase. He alludes to the fact that there is still room to grow. Diegal talks about the business side and how the group needs to consider this aspect, if it wants to continue to grow within the industry. Waahli talks about the uniqueness of the multicultural model and how that needs to be respected moving forward. Meryem talks about the social responsibility that the group has to serve within the community. It needs to act as a voice which spreads truths that are ignored in the media. Finally, Nantali talks about the educational responsibility that the group has. She maintains that the group must not neglect the influence that it has on the youth and the responsibility it has to educate them.

Chapter 12 looks exclusively at song lyrics. The songs have been chosen for their relationship to the stories that emerged in the interviews. These stories are an integral part of the trade and are presented artistically through Nomadic songs. Each member has a song represented in this section and I believe that the songs clearly represent the artist that wrote them. Lou recounts the story of his childhood in Algeria in *Child's Smile* and these experiences are reflected in his interview. In the song, *Where I am From* Meryem also describes her youth in Algeria but she speaks about it from another perspective. Whereas Lou talks about his family living in a foreign country, Meryem speaks about the oppression she experienced as a young woman. Both have elaborated on these same experiences in Chapter 3. In 21ième siècle, Diegal talks about the injustices of the 21st century. He speaks of a need for change and social justice in the face of pervasive inequity. These themes were often at the center of the symposiums that Diegal organised at universities. Vox verse on Take My Space deals with Haiti and is written in Creole. In this song, he talks about spirituality and the need to stay strong in the face of adversity. These

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themes were present in his interview Haitian history lesson in chapter 3. Waahli presents a dystopic view of the future using complex metaphors and vivid imagery in the song *Make it Work*. He looks at the problems of corporatisation and climate change and refers to the need for clear discussions. In Oil, Weapons and Drugs Butta tackles many socio-political issues including corruption and violence linked to international trade. His interest in world issues and politics are discussed in Chapter 4. Finally Tali's verse on Supafam deals with the community and its role in raising a child. She outlines many of the ideas that stem from her childhood growing up in Cotes Des Neiges among the Caribbean community.

In Chapter 13, I highlight and discuss the themes that emerged out of all the interviews. These themes include oppression, discrimination, multiculturalism, colonialism, teaching tools, cultural demystification and language. These themes represent the most prominent discoveries of this dissertation. The experiences of oppression and discrimination served as learning opportunities for young participants and as they aged they began to find ways to fight both with dialogue initiated by Hip Hop arts. Multiculturalism is reflected in the Montreal scene that all members were part of and it is equally reflected in the group through song lyrics and topics. In this section I talk about how Hip Hop helped bridge the gap between cultures. Colonialism emerged as a feature of dominant educational systems. Its persistence in schooling has had an effect on cultural values. Given that members of the group experienced different systems they were able to contrast and compare those realities. This moves us into the next section where I discuss the use of Hip Hop as an educational tool outside of the dominant system. Next I look at the experience of cultural exchange and its effect on cultural perception. All members of the group were confronted with different cultures in their youth, in Montreal and in the group. In this section I examine the importance of fraternising with other cultures to find common ground.

Finally, I discuss the theme of language as it relates to Hip Hop. Hip Hop contains a series of codes many of which are linguistic. Nomadic massive has pushed this envelope further by introducing multiple languages but through their experience travelling, they talk about the universality of Hip Hop language.

In Chapter 14, I revisit Freire's framework and its connection to the study by exploring issues of power in education. I reimagine multiculturalism, using critical pedagogy to explore the lingering effects of colonial education. I also demonstrate how Hip Hop has provided a space for a common culture among different people. In doing so, I address the initial questions of identity, leadership, education and cultural exchange outlined in the first chapter. I make connections between Hip Hop and the themes of the previous chapter and link those to my experience as a teacher and Freire's approach to critical pedagogy. I look at how these lessons may be incorporated into a formal education system like the one I work within. This chapter proposes changes that can be initiated using Hip Hop education, by focusing on the concrete lessons that I learned by conducting these interviews and analysing them for this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2: CRITICAL STORYTELLING: NARRATIVE INQUIRY, CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY, AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

The methods I used for this study allowed me to conduct a qualitative analysis of Nomadic Massive. I wanted to capture the story of the band from the stories of the members. In order to create this storied form it was appropriate to use individual interviews as a starting point. I interviewed seven people about their role in the group, their life experience, and their art. The members' artistic names are: Meduza (Meryem Saci), Vox Sambou (Robintz Paul), Butta Beats (Nicholas Palacios-Hardy), Lou Piensa (Louis Dufieux), Rawgged (Diegal Leger), Waahli (Ralph Joseph), and Tali (Nantali Indongo) (refer to annex for individual biographies). Due to their very public work, their identities cannot be concealed; the members were informed of this on their consent forms. Members are from different ethnic backgrounds and each speaks at least three languages: their mother tongue as well as French and English. The interviews were conducted in English although French and Spanish terms were commonly used. They are all over eighteen and signed their own consent forms. Each member has played a crucial role in the development of the group both musically and academically. All participants have full access to their interviews, which were recorded in audio. They had an opportunity to interact with the researcher and read all accounts written about them in order to check for accuracy and validity. Any information they preferred to exclude from the study was omitted for the protection of their privacy. They were also asked to submit lyrics for the purpose of a textual analysis.

I listened to the stories in an effort to construct a narrative of the individuals' experiences with Hip Hop and community development.   My first interviews were semi-structured, and I asked

open-ended questions to try to get a picture of the individuals and their development. I scanned the data for keywords and ideas, and came back to the interviewees with more probing questions regarding perceptions of the events in their lives and how these events shaped them. After synthesizing this information, I attempted to reiterate what was said in writing and had the participants read what I wrote about them. This approach ensures qualitative validation of the data by giving participants a say in their narrative and ensuring that there are no fabrications on my part.

In my analysis, I drew a timeline of each individual from childhood to the present, highlighting important events. These steps concluded with me checking the preliminary interviews for accuracy, validity and continuity. Once the historical line was drawn, I consulted the interviewees about my analysis. I asked if they would have drawn the same conclusions as I had reached. This was done to minimize my own bias in the study. Knowledge is always subjective, but I wanted to respect the poetic license that each member has to tell his or her story in the construction of a self-identity.

Lyrical Analysis

The collective brings a sense of solidarity, but members also built their own individual art portfolios over the years. As well as interviewing individual members on their artistic careers, I used some of their writings in my study. All participants in this study have left traces of their legacy in their music. Some very personal stories exist in the metaphors of their lyrics, which have been documented on Nomadic albums. I conducted a textual analysis of the lyrics before interviewing the author of the song. In this analysis, I scanned through the member's lyrics, looking for trends in themes, vocabulary, and messages. After studying these texts in detail, I approached the interviewee to exchange with them about the truth behind their words.

The process is intentionally layered in order to ensure a rigorous analysis, with the participant's involvement. I believe that this candid look at these leaders offers insight into why and how people take leadership roles in their communities. It may offer ideas to those struggling to find direction for their own art and community projects. It definitely offers a view into an educational world that is beyond traditional academics. These community leaders have picked up where the traditional system has failed. They have encountered problems in their experiences as students of both public and private education systems. Still, their drive to educate and reshape educational systems has offered countless youth a second chance, as well as provided new perspectives for integration in this multiethnic and multilingual society.

Methodologies

Narrative Methods and Critical Ethnography

Choosing the approach to this study posed certain challenges at the outset. It was clear to me that the study would be based on interviews, but from there it was important to choose an effective way to analyse the data and construct meaning. After researching different methods, I decided to use narrative methods in my data collection, critical ethnography for the analysis, and critical pedagogy for the framework. As Riessman (2008) points out, "narrative analysis refers to a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form" (p. 11). In this case, the common story is the story of identity and education through Hip Hop. The stories are generated from the individuals in the group, but out of these narratives a greater narrative emerges as these stories intersect. Clandenin and Connelly (2004) explain that, "Narrative inquiry is the study of experience, and experience, as John Dewey taught, is a matter of people in relation contextually and temporally" (p.189). The Nomadic Massive experience is constructed by the different realities of its members. Their life stories are what make Nomadic Massive

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multicultural, multilingual, and multidisciplinary. Their experiences are at the heart of the

Nomadic identity, and without this overlapping of stories, the entity simply does not exist.

Riessman (1998) proposed four ways of addressing validation with regards to narrative inquiry:

persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic use (pp.65-68). I use these methods in

order to situate myself within the context of this research. Persuasiveness refers to the amount of

evidence that I can gather to support the claims I am making. In this case, I have made the

interviews a focal point of the research; however, being an insider facilitates informal

observation. Through informal observation and field notes, I was able to gather important data

that subsequently informed the creation of the interview questions as well as the follow up. The

interviews were conducted separately so as to give full attention to each story and gather as much

data as possible from each person. Beyond the interviews and the observation there was other

material that also became part of the data gathering process—for example, articles, webpages

and song lyrics. These were gathered online, from album inserts, and from individuals as well.

Correspondence refers to taking the data back to the participant in order to get feedback. I went

through this step with each member and this helped narrow the collective story. Participants

were concerned with different aspects of the narrative as it related to them. In some cases they

became aware of redundancies or grammatical errors. In other cases they were more concerned

with the accuracy and detail of their stories. Some checked facts to make sure they were not

misquoted; in other cases I was asked to remove sections that included third party testimony. For

example, a member may have paraphrased what someone else said about education or music and

then wished to retract that statement.

Within the concept of coherence, Riessman (1993) proposed that one must address local, global, and thematic perspectives. I have been very conscious about these different levels of analysis in my study. First, I chose to start the interview questions by asking about participants' early childhood, knowing that these early experiences were instrumental in their development as community workers. The local realities of each member had an impact on the way they perceived social justice and change. These lessons were transported to the new, local reality in Montreal. As we examined the trajectory of the band into the global Hip Hop culture, I was able to make the connection between local involvement and the international Hip Hop movement. The group grew as a result of its experience with other Hip Hop movements abroad. This affected the politics of the group as they became informed about different realities and related them to their own experience. As I scanned the interviews, I was able to see common themes among the members, which I then used to construct the common story.

When Riessman (1993) talked about pragmatic use, she referred to the way in which this research can be used in the future. As Nomadic travelled around the globe, it became apparent that there was a move to legitimise the study of Hip Hop. As a group, we were invited to speak at universities, submit articles for Hip Hop journals, and conduct workshops. The more the Hip Hop generation ages, the more that Hip Hop becomes a topic for discussion. This process is similar to what happened in the jazz era. In the early 1900s, jazz was judged for its immoral nature. According to Porter (2002), "Some whites feared jazz because it was rooted in black culture, because it played a role in facilitating interracial contact, and because it symbolized, in racially coded terms, the intrusion of popular tastes into the national culture" (p.7). This, of course, came with a backlash of intellectual writing that attempted to minimize the impact of jazz on popular culture. According to Anderson (2004), the jazz critics of the 1920s were racists that

used their critiques of jazz as a way of expressing their dislike for African Americans. Hip Hop music, which emerged out of African American traditions, was also used to demonise this racial group. Those being studied do not always view the process of academic analysis of culture favourably; particularly if the one being studied is observed through an ethnocentric lens. As members of the Hip Hop community age and become members of the academic community, they serve as cultural liaisons between the two groups. Similar work with respect to jazz has legitimized the music and the culture and given it authority within the study of music. We don't hear people saying jazz is the devil's music or blaming it for the ills of society anymore. This is partly a result of the process of legitimization jazz underwent in intellectual spheres. Through my research, I hope to further the study of Hip Hop culture, so that those outside of the movement can develop a greater understanding.

I wanted the interviews to feel like conversations in which I spoke less than usual. For this reason, I interviewed participants in places that were comfortable or familiar to them. I conducted interviews at participants' homes or at their workplaces. I thought that holding interviews at the university would automatically change the tone. I brought snacks or coffee so that we felt comfortable talking for longer periods of time, and I advised participants that there would be time to review and edit their own interviews. This way they could feel comfortable sharing their stories, knowing that they could make modifications later. I wanted to follow through with the idea that narratives are collaborative constructions by giving the interviewees the freedom to consciously construct meaning.

The questions were always open ended, and they were set up chronologically. I had to narrow the study in this way so that I could compare the trajectories of each individual according to themes. The stories intersect by theme, not necessarily by time, because the age of the

participants varies greatly; therefore, some events may have taken place for one individual before another was born. Of course, as the story becomes about the group, this timeline contracts and the experiences overlap. When I looked at the beginning of the individuals' lives, they were in different countries and social contexts; thus, it was easier to contrast experiences in terms of themes rather than dates.

The first interview with each participant was designed to develop what Riessman (2008) refers to as a "life history grid." This enabled me to gather data in a coherent way and then categorise the narratives at the points where they naturally intersected. For example, one of the participants discussed living in Algeria before another participant was born there. In a sense, he sets up the story of Algeria before the revolution; the other participant was born into that turmoil. I saw one story as a continuation of the other, but from a different perspective. Through the various perspectives, I was able to get a more complete picture of the events from the outside. Furthermore, I was able to understand the effect that these experiences had on the individual, depending on their vantage point.

In his research about people suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, Williams (1984) interviewed several patients about their experience with the illness. He dealt with one interview at a time, organising it into a biographical sequence. He also cleaned up the interviews so that they would read like stories instead of interview questions. In my approach to narrative inquiry, I worried about the editing of interviews because editing has an effect on a story. In some cases, editing can actually change a story, interjecting issues of validity. Creswell (2012) points out that, "Whether we are aware of it or not, we always bring some beliefs and philosophical assumptions to our research" (p.15). The editing process raises another question of authority. How things are said in one context is received differently when read in another context. This is true even if the

text is untouched, so that if one party has the right to edit this story, the story may be changed completely. In the worst case scenario, the story might be modified to suit the interviewer's conclusions. In response to these concerns, I am explicit that the interview process is discursive and that both interviewer and interviewee are storytelling to some degree, a stance explored further below. I frequently draw upon my own experiences in relation to those of the other Nomadic Massive members, in an effort to remain objective by exposing my perspective.

Critical Ethnography

According to the *Cook* (2008),

Critical ethnography grew out of a dissatisfaction with both the a-theoretical stance of traditional ethnography, which ignored social structures such as class, patriarchy, and racism, and what some regarded as the overly deterministic and theoretical approaches of critical theory, which ignored the lived experience and agency of human actors. (p.149).

Critical ethnography came as an antidote to the type of ethnocentric anthropological research that did not acknowledge the perspective of the colonised people. Other cultures were understood through the prism of those who were studying it, not the ones being studied. It was important for me to examine insiders' perspectives so as not to be limited by a narrow view of Hip Hop culture.

In order for this research to be considered a critical ethnography, the argument has to be made for Hip Hop as a culture rather than simply a music genre since ethnography is the study of culture. An interesting debate about the spelling of the word Hip Hop may lead us to a better

understanding. In general, music genres are written using lower case letters. On the other hand, the names of cultures are written using upper case letters. When Rime magazine asked Hip Hop pioneer KRS-One (2005), his opinion on the matter, he was very clear in his response. Citing the definition of Hip Hop in the American Heritage and Oxford dictionary, KRS-One demonstrates that Hip Hop is already being treated as a culture. "Hip Hop spelled as 'hip hop' is simply grammatically incorrect because Hip Hop is technically a proper noun… to spell the name of any culture beginning with a lower case letter is simply disrespectful" (para. 2). He goes on to propose that it should be written as one word. The online reactions to this proposal offer more insight into the debate and show that not everyone agrees. Chuck Creekmur, CEO of allhiphop.com, says that he uses upper case but spells it with a dash. While some comment that it doesn't matter how it is spelled, others acknowledge that if KRS-One says it, it should be followed. Acknowledging Hip Hop as a culture, I spell it with upper case throughout this dissertation.

Hip Hop culture is recognizable, present, and global. Inspired by Black and Latino youth in New York City, it has been sustained by an international community of followers. Its story is of persecution, displacement, isolation, and despair, but also of finding creative ways out of that misery. It speaks to a void in popular education and empowers young people to continue to create programs for the advancement of their peers.

For my analysis, I place myself within the study as a facilitator and collaborator of the narratives. According to Dey (2001), "The narrative produced from this immersion reflects and embodies a hermeneutic understanding of the subjectivities of both the researcher and the researched" (p.108). I feel that the dialogue between marginalised groups is important to prevent the sort of fragmentation that may occur when people feel discriminated against.

I had done my MA thesis using auto-ethnography and decided to extend this into critical ethnography for the PhD, in order to include the other voices and link them to social change. The research is not simply the retelling of stories but about the role that these stories play in a cultural transformation. At the point where this research becomes political, it extends into critical ethnography. According to Anderson, "For the critical ethnographer, the cultural construction of meaning is inherently a matter of political and economic interests" (p.254). According to Madison (2012), "Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness and injustice within a particular *lived* domain" (p.5). Since critical ethnography is politically motivated, there is an intrinsic question of positionality with regards to the researcher. In her work on critical ethnography, she addresses five important questions, which I use to understand my positionality with respect to representing others:

1. How do we reflect upon and evaluate our own purpose, intentions and frames of analysis as researchers?
2. How do we predict consequences or our potential to cause harm?
3. How do we maintain a dialogue of cooperation in our research between ourselves and others?
4. How is the specificity of the local story relevant to the broader meanings and operations of the human condition?
5. How will our work make the greatest contribution to equity, freedom and justice? (Madison, 2012, p.4)

   I address each question in turn.

1. I position myself as an insider who has a limited understanding of the lives of the other insiders within the group. My intention is specifically to uncover knowledges about the culture that I would not be aware due to my limited understanding of the participants'

individual histories. My framework is connected to my MA research, which focused on my own experiences and which made me realise that I was part of a culture that was worthy of further research.

2. The potential to cause harm existed in misrepresenting the participants or revealing things that emerged in the interviews that were not intended. My own cultural bias could influence my analysis of the other, despite being part of the same community. This was addressed through fact checking and triangulation as well as research on the cultural contexts of each member. I interviewed different people about Hip Hop culture in order to tackle the same questions from multiple perspectives. This provided a more profound understanding of Hip Hop culture and brought awareness to the ethical questions that touched different cultural groups within the larger Hip Hop community. Those issues were taken into account during data analysis as they helped create a more accurate portrait of events to a third party observer; outsider of any of these cultural groups.

3. The dialogue of cooperation was already a fundamental part of Nomadic Massive. Even so, there was a new question of cooperation as related to the thesis. Now it was not the group's project but my own project for academic advancement. In the meetings that I had with the members, it was important for me to explain how the academic study of Hip Hop contributes to the legitimacy of the movement. This was mirrored by the efforts of other members in their particular domains. Nomadic was already working towards merging Hip Hop and education through their workshops and university conferences. It was easy for the group members to see that this thesis was an extension of this work, and that it would be mutually beneficial for the parties involved in the study.

4. The nature of Nomadic's work points to a larger audience. As we explore our own emancipation through Hip Hop, we inevitably encounter the other communities that have used this tool similarly. Nomadic Massive is one example of how Hip Hop contributes to the fight for local justice, but their work has intersected and grown as a result of their exchange with other cultures. In this way, the global vision has become quite clear. The more the band expands its reach into global and academic communities, the more they fulfill the goal of using Hip Hop as a voice against hegemony.

5. This research can contribute to the fight for social justice and equality in several ways. The first is through the dialogue itself. The group acts in line with this movement but the study brings important questions to the surface. In my research, I have become aware of issues that touch each member and their particular cultural group. In some cases, I can see the universality of the struggle but in other cases I have become more sensitive to the individual struggles. At the level of the group, it is important to share these stories, but in a broader sense, the idea of publishing these stories and making them available to a larger audience is equally important. As a multicultural group, our understanding of and sympathy towards each other's realities is fundamental to our quest for cultural freedom. This may be expanded to the other cultures we encounter, as well as to the academic world that studies these cultures.

The first challenge I faced in my analysis was my own involvement with the group because I could not deny my role in the construction of the narrative. Mishler proposed that the interviewer actually collaborates in making events and experiences meaningful (Mishler, 1986). I needed to consider this in all stages of the study. It was apparent in the questions I chose to ask, as well as how I asked them. It was evident in the information upon which I chose to follow up, and what I

chose to ignore. In the writing, it was present in the categories I chose to present. Using critical ethnography, I could situate myself within the context of the study and use this discursive approach as a way of searching for a common thread.

I wanted to create a collaborative narrative between interviewer and interviewee, so I gave participants a copy of their biographical account once it was transcribed and edited into prose. This layer of the investigation served many purposes: First, it safeguarded, to some degree, the fabrication of stories by the interviewer through interpretation. Second, it was a way to revisit the texts to search for meaning. In my editing, I inevitably came across themes that were common to many participants. Third and most important, the participants were able to reflect on their stories and realize that there was a larger, collective story to be told.

In many cases, participants became aware of their own accounts and chose to make modifications to reflect more accurate information. Some even asked for time to double check facts and dates before publication. This process opened up a dialogue among participants as they read each other's stories and checked facts. This perspective was important in determining which stories contributed to the larger narrative about the group. According to Hall (1997), there are consequences to representation because the way a particular group is perceived influences the way they are treated. By telling the stories of these individuals, we also tell the story of how Hip Hop came to Canada and how it influences new generations in this country.

This research explores how different cultures interact with each other in a country like Canada. People confront Canadian culture but also interrelate with other cultures that have settled here. In my particular case, the lens was always Latin American. My way of looking at family, education and overall identity stemmed from an understanding of my parents' culture. It created a duality

between the culture at home and the culture outside, as if there were two dominant views to negotiate between. According to Bakhtin (1984), "I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another" (p.287). As my experiences became more multi-cultural, I found that I was learning about different worldviews from my peers. These views were explored through dialogue about commonalities and contrasts. The language and the culture that united us and made these dialogues possible was Hip Hop. Throughout my analysis, I attempted to depict the things I discovered by being a part of this particular community and the perspective gained through the collective narrative. In my previous autoethnography I narrated my own story and this was helpful in understanding my own perspective. Critical ethnography allows me to place this perspective within a multicultural context, where others' stories offer a more nuanced depiction of the multicultural model.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Pedagogy and Freire

Breunig argues that there are many different definitions of critical pedagogy and that they vary by practitioner. In her article entitled "Problematizing critical pedagogy", she examines the way that different professors connect the idea of critical pedagogy with social justice. "While research participants all self-identified as critical pedagogues, there was some disparity in the ways in which they self-identified and this was often related to their definitions of critical pedagogy" (Breuing 2011, p.9). Some professors connected critical pedagogy to its different theorists. Different theorists have different views on the definition and the central purpose of critical pedagogy. For example, a professor who connected critical pedagogy to Marxist ideology would be more concerned with class struggle and emancipation. On the other hand, a professor who connected critical pedagogy to Dewey may look towards a definition that addresses the question

of democracy. If a professor looked more closely at Freire or Kincheloe, s/he would view critical

pedagogy through critical praxis and power structures (Breunig 2011).

My influences include Freire's work and the theorists that came after him. Yet in order to find

out where Nomadic Massive situates itself within critical pedagogy, I had to find the place where

these divergent views intersected. According to Bercaw and Stooksbury (1992), there are three

tenets that are inherent in a critical pedagogy. "These tenets are a culmination of perspectives

from various critical theorists including Giroux, McLaren, Delpit, Ladson-Billings, Dillard,

Hooks, and others. The three tenets are as follows: (a) reflection upon the individual's culture or

lived experience, (b) development of voice through a critical look at one's world and society,

which takes place in dialogue with others, and (c) transforming the society toward equality for all

citizens through active participation in democratic imperatives (p. 2)

Critical pedagogy combines Marxist ideology with notions of critical theory and power promoted

by the Frankfurt School. Freire's brand is connected with Catholic theology (in the form of

Liberation theology), as well as ancient Greek philosophy. In its purest form, critical pedagogy

deals with understanding oppression, power dynamics, and education. Freire (1970) proposed an

approach to tackling problems of oppression known as "critical praxis." In an attempt to move

the oppressed from reflection to action, he outlined the following steps: (1) Identify the problem,

(2) Analyze the problem, (3) Develop a plan, (4) Implement the Plan, and (5) Evaluate the Plan.

In order to contextualize these interviews within critical pedagogy, I revisited the most

influential text written by Paulo Freire (1970). Although the context for Freire's writing needs to

be taken into consideration—a feudal system in Latin America with hopes of liberation through

Marxism—his analysis of the colonial experience remains applicable in contemporary contexts.

His radical approach to education and revolutionary views on liberation offer real possibilities within the contemporary classroom. As the stories began to reflect issues of power and oppression, I needed a framework to contextualise the emerging themes. Critical pedagogy was the most relevant because of its support for dialogical research and its examination of power dynamics (Kincheloe, 2008). Questions of power are explored through the experiences of the participants as they tell their stories. The collection of data draws on narrative inquiry because of the storied form. The analysis employs critical ethnography because I am critically examining a culture through its people; however, given the socio-political themes and educational implications, it became important to frame this piece using critical pedagogy.

I started by thinking about the interviews and how they differed from the regular conversations I had with these participants. In most cases, the story that I asked them to relate was not completely foreign to me. At the same time, I had to create a space where this story could be told without my interjections or assumptions, as is common in conversation. Critical pedagogy informed my approach from the point of view of authority. A conversation is not without its power dynamics. People juggle between these roles in a conversation as one person or another talks about subjects in which they are experts; however, when one person interviews another, there is a sense that the one interviewing has control. The recording of interviews plays a role in this authority because it gives the interviewer the power to decide when the process starts and stops. The interview should be objective, but the process of interrogation causes a shift in power dynamics, which adds subjectivity. According to Hatch (2002), "In qualitative work, it is understood that the act of studying a social phenomenon influences the enactment of that phenomenon" (p.18)

I was conscious of themes, as I prepared my interview questions. In an effort to avoid outlining themes in the questions, I opted to ask open-ended questions about a particular period of time in the participant's life. I used a chronological approach for each participant, but when I came to connect the stories in my analysis this became problematic due to the different ages of the participants. At this point, I needed to look for themes to make sense of the overall story. Thematic grouping is congruent with narrative inquiry as a means of identifying which parts of the story are relevant to the research. According to Riessman (2005), "investigators collect many stories and inductively create conceptual groupings from the data" (p.2).

 The interview topics that initially shaped my questions, included early childhood, adolescence, immigration, music, career. These topics served the purpose of gathering data but during the analysis of this data, which employed a more critical lens, these topics were far too broad. In order to identify more specific themes that were relevant to the study, I used colour coding to avoid getting lost in the abundance of data. After compiling and editing the transcriptions of the interviews, I assigned a colour to each participant and coded all their interviews according to that colour. Afterwards, I laid them all out on the floor, in seven rows, by participant. I read each interview and separated them into groups according to themes that had developed during the exchanges. Now that the individual interviews were sectioned into themes, I undertook the complicated task of finding the common themes between them. At the end of this process, I had different, multi-coloured piles of data arranged thematically. I then returned to the computer to try to place them in a logical order for the story of Nomadic Massive. I kept the interviews colour coded on the computer screen and created a master document, where I could clearly see how the stories fit together.

This process allowed me to see that different participants had things in common with each other. Although commonalities did not always include all seven members of Nomadic Massive, smaller groups had overlapping experiences that served to build the experience of the entire group. Of course, I include myself in this narrative, and in this way I also related experiences when I saw they were relevant to the participants. In this case, the thematic approach also became interactional. Riessman (2005) refers to interactional analysis as a means of including the teller in the story: "Attention to thematic content and narrative structure are not abandoned in the interactional approach, but interest shifts to storytelling as a process of co-construction, where teller and listener create meaning collaboratively" (p.4). There were times when certain themes touched me directly, like when participants spoke about the challenges of second language learning or fitting in in high school. In other cases, for example with immigration, I tended to relate through my parents' experiences. Throughout the dissertation I have attempted to group participants into sections that reflect a common sub story that forms part of the larger story. In doing so, I became more aware of how our childhood experiences of displacement and alienation unite us now. Furthermore, it became quite clear that Hip Hop was an important factor in this unification.

More recently, critical pedagogy has also been applied to the study of Hip Hop. Williams (2009), who used Hip Hop to create cultural circles of discussion in California high schools writes, "As educators begin to grapple with the growth of Hip Hop, they are finding ways to tap into Hip Hop's power and its potential as a tool for the development of critical consciousness" (p.4). This has not necessarily been well received by all institutions because some of the messages in Hip Hop are controversial. At the same time, Hip Hop culture is a reaction to dominant notions of correctness; therefore, the deconstruction of Hip Hop lyrics and identity reveal realities lived by

an oppressed class. Furthermore, in the creative process of writing and freestyling, young people

have an opportunity to reshape this identity by adding their critical voice to the discourse**.**

As with critical pedagogy, Hip Hop education allows young people to identify issues that are not

part of mainstream education. The music and the culture serve to inform the oppressed about

particular injustices. After becoming aware of the problems in a language that they can

understand, they are able to analyze it and propose solutions. These solutions can be observed as

concrete actions or as creative expression that proposes other ways of looking at the problem.

With the help of critical educators, students can then evaluate their plan to initiate change or

challenge dominant values. Critical thinking is fueled by bringing Hip Hop themes, from an

outsider's perspective, into the classroom. It is a way of flipping the hierarchical model and

invigorating the debate about how we operate within politically driven institutions. Low (2011)

writes, "This move put students in the rare position of curricular authority, testified to by the

students' proud claim that, there's a lot going on in the school that teachers don't know about"

(p.2). I would extend this idea to argue that there is a lot going on in the society that teachers

don't know about.

The process of using Hip Hop puts students at the center of their research, and this is what can

prove unsettling for administrator and teachers; however, the idea of initiating your own

emancipation is central to Freirian teachings. Before any action can be taken, the oppressed must

first become aware of their oppression (Freire 1970). According to Akom (2009), "Freire's work,

in particular, provides us with the foundations for a theory of democratic schooling that is linked

to serving the most marginalized groups in our society"(p.56). Akom (2009), who uses what he

calls Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy to address issues of social inequity at San Francisco State

University, argues that in order for Freire's teachings to remain relevant to today's youth, they must be considered both subject and architects of the research. This is in keeping with my own positionality in this dissertation.

Nomadic Massive and Critical Pedagogy

Freire had developed a friendship with Professor Joe Kincheloe, who eventually founded the Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy at McGill University with Professor Shirley Steinberg. As stated on the project website, "The Freire Project is dedicated to building an international critical community which works to promote social justice in a variety of cultural contexts" (www.freireproject.org, About Section, para.1). This initiative may be considered one of Canada's premier contributions to the international dialogue on critical pedagogy. I became part of this international dialogue as a student of Kincheloe and Steinberg. In 2008, I was invited to meet and perform for Nita Freire during her visit to McGill University. Nita was very interested in the work that Nomadic Massive was doing with Canadian youth. She applauded the effort to incorporate music into alternative educational programs. The following year, Nomadic Massive traveled to Brazil, where they witnessed concrete evidence of Paulo Freire's legacy. Although I had studied Freire's theories at McGill, this visit allowed me to see what was *really* happening in the practical world of education.

In Sao Paolo, Nomadic Massive visited a school that used Paulo Freire's pedagogy in their teacher education. This school is situated in a marginalized neighbourhood surrounded by metal refineries; the unions of these refineries funded the initiative to create this alternative school. The school developed its curriculum in collaboration with the parents of the students. As a

result, the school offers diverse programs such as history through music and the arts. The school also ensures that students are properly fed and have proper exercise programs. I was inspired to see Freire's work being carried on in his native country after his death. When Nita Freire came to speak at McGill University, she urged us to continue on the path that her husband had pioneered. She donated some of Paulo's original writings, as well as memorabilia, to McGill's Education Faculty. This gesture showed a willingness to share ideas and continue the dialogue that Paulo Freire had initiated.

Nomadic Massive may be viewed through the lens of critical pedagogy as an entity that has defied many of the stereotypical power structures. Nomadic Massive proposes an alternative education for disenfranchised youth who are otherwise disregarded by the standard system of education. Nomadic Massive recognizes Hip Hop as an international language and a culture of impoverished youth. As an entity, Nomadic Massive has reached out to these youth populations in order to initiate a dialogue that is inclusive. This comes from Nomadic Massive's initial experience with Cuban artists who used Hip Hop to bring consciousness to youth in that country. It was during their early experiences in Cuba that they adopted a model for reflection upon Hip Hop culture. In Cuba the dialogue, based on the lyrics, extended into questions of domestic violence, misogyny, freedom of speech, and social justice. The Cuban artists used this common language to educate local youth about things that were not taught in schools. A comprehensive look at this experience is outlined in chapter 7 of this dissertation.

Following this example, Nomadic Massive moved to expand its influence by becoming active in local youth centres and forging partnerships with other centres in the Americas. This was a way of developing a voice though dialogue. This move encompassed a model for dialogue within the group, as well as an international dialogue through cultural exchange. As an organization,

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Nomadic Massive has maintained a true democratic model, in which all members' voices are considered. Their way of working has been based on voluntary action and the delegation of tasks among members. In this organization, people who express a desire to learn about an element of the culture are given the necessary support from the group. This includes business initiatives as well as artistic endeavors. Nomadic Massive meetings involve round table discussions, during which each member is given time to comment on a particular issue on the agenda. Realizing the importance of direct communication, they adopted a harm reductive approach to the transmission of communication. Nomadic Massive no longer debates issues over email, as this proved extremely inefficient. Instead, they have opted for direct dialogue. The general procedure now is to bring unresolved issues to the round table, or to resolve disagreements among members face to face. These have become cornerstones of the Nomadic model that have allowed the group to stay together for over a decade. These strategies have proven equally effective in their workshops and talks with youth all over the world.

The process of creation in Nomadic Massive has been collaborative from the very beginning. They started as a group who were inspired by each other's music. They never had a musical director or leader of the band. They simply got together to make conscious music, never imagining that this music would be responsible for transporting them across the globe. Before long, they were touring around the world and eventually became recognized as a community organization because of their approach to cultural exchange. The Cuban experience had shown them that the best way to get to know a people was to live among them. Their projects always consisted of staying with artists and community leaders during visits. This approach has given a more comprehensive awareness of the issues affecting people living in these different realities. Most of the time, they stayed in marginalized areas and discovered that the richness of the

culture was not in the monuments of the city, but in the hearts of the people. Their visits were frequently coupled with formal discussions and workshops in which they learned about the struggles of the local underclass. The language of Hip Hop allowed them to communicate and collaborate with the people, and it conceptualized the experience as a common struggle. It is through this process of understanding and collaborating that Nomadic Massive initiates its transformation of the society. The first step involves understanding the problems from the inside, and the second is finding common ground so that the struggle against social injustice can be universalized. The three tenets, which show that Nomadic Massive is engaging in critical pedagogy, can also be observed in my research on the group. (a) The study asks the members of Nomadic to reflect on their culture and lived experience. (b) These reflections become a source of dialogue about Hip Hop culture in the society and among Nomadic Members. (c) The purpose of this dialogue is to address issues of social injustice by giving a voice to those who have experienced it, in an effort to initiate a cultural transformation though alternative education.

Although the literature on Hip Hop education has become quite extensive, the study of Nomadic Massive emerges out of a need to understand the Canadian connection to this story. This connection is important because Canada has the influence of American culture, due its proximity as well as the influence of different cultures due to its approach to multiculturalism. These two factors are what make studying Hip Hop in Canada so fascinating. Whereas American Hip Hop points to the American landscape and culture, Canadian Hip Hop points to the world at large because of the intermingling of cultures. In her work on Hip Hop literacy, Barret (2011) reveals that American Hip Hop is viewed as a standard, even among Hip Hop artists from other countries. In an interview with a Liberian rapper she writes, "He pointed out that American hip-hop is "up to standard," which implies that Liberian hip-hop is not. One of the main reasons was

a perceived deficit in Liberian English due to its incomprehensibility for Americans" (p.48). This implies that if Hip Hop is in a language other than American English it is somehow devalued. In Nomadic this perceived deficit is seen as a strength and reflects a particularly Canadian reality.

Nomadic Massive exemplifies this intermingling of cultures and the music is evidence of this harmonious fusion. The first notable quality is that the songs are in multiple languages and this is a reality that exists in the city where Nomadic Massive is based. Urban Montrealers often switch seamlessly between English and French but also incorporate vocabulary that has been brought by French speaking immigrants.   Hip Hop slang also plays a role in this communication and helps tie all the other cultural influences. This multicultural model is unique and has helped Nomadic Massive reach out to the world at large. Another factor which makes this study exclusive is the loop which is created when Nomadic Massive travels to different countries bringing their brand of Hip Hop. Once they integrate a new community, Hip Hop serves as a common language and artists are mutually influenced as a result. The varying cultural identities within the group serve as a natural filter for understanding the cultural complexities exemplified in each destination. This study uses these different perspectives in order to try to delve deeper into the understanding of cultural identity and emancipatory education.

CHAPTER 3: IMMIGRATION & MIGRATION

In this chapter, I explore the influence of immigration and migration on the different members of Nomadic Massive. The members of the group all have ties to countries other than Canada and these connections inform how members look at the world. Openness to cultural diversity is necessarily linked to individuals' early experiences with other cultures and customs. In fact, how we perceive other cultures is informed by the culture in which we grow up. According to Hofstede (2001), "Rituals are collective activities that are technically unnecessary to the achievement of desired ends but within a culture are considered socially essential, keeping the individual bound by the norms of collectivity" (p.10). An early exposure to different cultures in a positive context often invites a person to be more open to difference. In my interviews about immigration with members of Nomadic, I found some interesting parallels between their experiences.

Butta and Lou Look at Globe Trotting in Early Childhood

Butta and Lou both experienced multiple cultural realities from a young age. Due to their parents' jobs, they were whisked around the globe, giving them early exposure to diverse cultures and languages during their formative years. As a result, they developed ways of integrating into cultures—skills they carried with them into adulthood.   Both sets of parents made a point of mingling with residents to really feel what it was like to live locally. At the same time, they worked among a privileged class, so Butta and Lou were able to observe the contrast of social classes from within.

Butta told me the story of how his parents arrived in Canada, and it showed me how some Latin American families transport their history when they immigrate. In my own experience, the

political story of how my parents came to Canada is a poetic story that has become part of our family's folklore. It remains crystal clear in my conscience and in some way informs the individual that I am today. These stories, which occurred before we were born, form a narrative that becomes a part of how we identify as second-generation immigrants. Butta's story echoed the story of my own parents' arrival in Canada, and I found it interesting to hear how detailed it really was. The following is an excerpt of this story in Butta's words.

Butta's Parents

The dictatorship in Argentina lasted for quite a while, and the dirty war ensued. A lot of paramilitary groups were interested in cleansing society of its long-haired hippies and communists. It was very easy to be labeled as such if you were involved in issues of social justice. My father was involved in organising agrarian farmhands who were born and raised in Argentina but were of indigenous decent. They had never been naturalized, and had no proof of being born in Argentina. In the old style, big, political military chiefs owned all the land and ran the provinces as they saw fit, so these groups were subject to a lot of exploitation. My dad was involved in a group funded by a Canadian NGO called Peace and Development. The mission was to try and organise the workers to get documentation. There had been a long history of the farmhands trying to do that, but there were many cases of murder and other forms of intimidation. They started to work on a project to try and shift that reality, and it got my father in trouble with a group called Triple A (the Anti-Communist Alliance of Argentina).

My mom was from a very humble background. She started teaching in the same project. She taught sex education in a hyper-Catholic, rural area of Argentina, specifically for groups that didn't have any land or a steady income. In these communities, it was common for women to have 6 to 8 children. Basic sex education was considered anti-establishment, so you couldn't go

to a community where the church preached a certain dogma and initiate a new approach. Two

big no-nos in Latin America were land reform and women's rights. They had to go underground

for a while, and my dad received quite a lot of death threats. Finally, my dad cut his hair and

beard and went to the military police station to get passports for my mother and him to leave the

country. They got to Canada, where some friends that were working through Peace and

Development sponsored them. Right after they left Argentina, members of different military

organisations started visiting my family. They raided my grandmother's house looking for my

father, so they were extremely grateful to get out when they did. With the (Pierre) Trudeau years

came the open door immigration policies. They were looking for people with internationalist

points of view to help Canada become what we now understand it to be: a multicultural,

humanistic, first world, big brother. He was part of the generation that Canada contracted to

create dialogue with Central and South America. The same socialist tendencies that caused him

to leave Argentina ended up becoming viable work in a new country, and that's how his career

got started.

From a young age, the children of immigrants internalise the experiences of their parents, and it

guides a line of thinking in their lives as adults. Jensen (2003) states:

> Worldview beliefs find expression in and are passed on from generation to
>
> generation through a variety of everyday practices (such as behaviours pertaining
>
> to eating, dressing, sleeping, work and recreation) as well as practices marking
>
> life course transitions (such as graduating from school, marriage and having
>
> children). (p.190)

It struck me that the work Butta's father did in Argentina resembled the early initiatives of Paulo Freire in rural Brazil. The concept of social justice through education seemed to be a predominant idea in the leftist movements in Latin America in the seventies. I remember my mother telling me that when the dictatorship was installed in Chile, her father burned communist literature in the bathtub to avoid persecution. Butta and I both grew up with the idea that education could be emancipatory, and I can see how it has informed our decisions to pursue education in that way. Butta and I both grew up in Ontario, but his trajectory was quite different than mine. I spent all of my formative years in Canada in the public school system. Butta's experience was more culturally diverse, as he spent many of his formative years studying abroad. This caused him to shift between cultural identities. According to Oberg (2009), the process of cultural adjustment consists of distinct phases including honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment. Since Butta's family moved from country to country every four years, he experienced this process in each new destination. Because these experiences occurred in early life during his early identity formation, they inevitably affected his sense of self and the world around him. In the following excerpt, Butta describes this revolving door of cultural realities and identities.

Butta: Argentina to Kenya

Shortly after I was born, my father was offered a job in Central America with the Canadian International Development [Agency]. I went to a Costa Rican boarding school, and my brother and sister went to a British school because they were older. We stayed in Costa Rica for about three years. When we came back to Canada, I was introduced to Anglophone culture and experienced a lot of frustration. I couldn't speak English, and my older brother used to make fun of me. The cultural transition was difficult for my parents because their relationship to Latin

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America was intense. I grew up with a Latin American identity, but my way of becoming Canadian was by eliminating any kind of Spanish connection. My full name is Nicolas Ignacio Palacios-Hardy, so English kids made fun of my name. I was called Nick because it just made everything easier for everyone else. I became so self-conscious about my real name that I even told my parents to call me Nick. I was in Ottawa for three years, and I really lost my Spanish. I completely immersed myself in Anglophone culture in order to really be a part of it. Since my mother read me my older brother's books, I had a third grade reading level in kindergarten. It made me feel good to be articulate in English. It wasn't like I learned pronouns and verbs. The whole conversational aspect of it was what I wanted to master.

In third grade, my father got another posting in Africa. We moved to Kenya at the end of 1990. When we arrived in Nairobi, my father picked us up at the airport and started lecturing us about how it was going to be. In Ottawa, I was really sheltered from Black American culture. It was not available on the radio or through music channels. Luckily, I had friends who were from the Caribbean and Latin America. They had family in the United States and those cousins were living this cultural phenomenon called Hip Hop. We started hearing cassettes that were coming from people who were recording stuff off the radio in New York. The two big names for me at the time were Public Enemy and NWA. That's what got me really interested in understanding the socio-political implications of this culture. I just remember having these light bulbs go off in my head the minute I got to Kenya. I just sensed the origin of everything I had just been exposed to in Black America. I started drawing all these parallels. It was the kind of education that you can't really teach, you have to live through it, and for me it was the right place at the right time. This is when I really became involved in beat boxing. I had seen Slick Rick and Dougie Fresh videos in the summer of 1989, and then I heard Dougie Fresh beat boxing on a cassette. They

had come out with a movie called The Orderlies, and it just blew my mind. I wanted to be able to do that. The main attraction for me was drums in your mouth because you could do it anywhere. In Kenya, I was exposed to a lot of beautiful singing and choral traditions. They have all this polyrhythmic stuff, and they have a percussive approach to melody. So everything that's melodic has to fall in rhythm. One person does a call, then there's a response and then there are multiple responses. The responses are different but they overlap, so it becomes this awesome beat.

They have these international schools that have a mandate to expose students to local culture. I had some very progressive teachers who always reminded us of where we were. I got to see these choirs, when we did exchanges. We would do the exchange and bring a bunch of school supplies, but you could see how uncomfortable people were doing that. I was so embarrassed by how my peers acted around locals. This had everything to do with my parents. My father said, "You don't know anything about this place. You're going to have to learn a lot, so humble yourself." That earmarked my way of perceiving the experience. I was so nervous about being what they would call an "ozungu." Ozungu is like the white devil. I had already been called a Yankee in Argentina because of the way we dressed, and our style.

In Kenya, I realised that the Western lifestyle was related to the disparity in other parts of the world. The kind of excess we have means there has to be a deficit somewhere else, and that just killed me. There were so many people around me that weren't even aware of it. They were just living and laughing about it, and I would hear the comments. My father's job came with these social events between the international communities. I was lucky to have very open parents that had a great ability to communicate openly with human values. They were also caught up in that internal struggle, especially my mother. The international community imposes certain things on

you. They give you this big house, and everybody has guard dogs. The guard dogs were super sweet until they saw a Black person, and then they wanted to tear his throat. When you see that as a young child, you question why it is happening. This feeling of belonging and understanding myself had developed in Kenya. I started to develop ideas about politics and critical thinking. I started fighting for it, and then zip, we had to leave. There are people there who have enriched my life that I'll never see again. We were all crying when we left; it was really sad, actually. That's the first time I truly felt at home.

Butta's early experiences caused him to explore shifting paradigms. He was Latin American in Canada and then he was Canadian in Africa. Each time the reality shifted, he shifted in order to adjust to the changing cultures. As culture changed around him, he chose to ground himself in a sub-culture that transcended borders: Hip Hop culture. There are similarities in every member's account of his or her quest for identity in adolescence. Lou experienced a similar upbringing as he too, was taken from place to place because of his father's work. In examining Lou's experience, one can see how Hip Hop became a constant in an ever-changing childhood. Although Lou is from France, Latin America influenced him from an early age. At some point in his childhood, Spanish was the lingua franca of the household because his parents didn't share a mother tongue. However, he would soon learn that the language of Hip Hop was understood everywhere he went.

Lou: France to Algeria

My dad is from the South of France and my mother is originally from England. After they fell in love in Paris, my father had a real desire to get to know Latin America; the continent fascinated him, and there was a lot of stuff going on at the beginning of the 1970s. They started in Mexico and little by little, they ended up staying and working there. They were married in Managua,

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Nicaragua, in 1973, and lived in Central America for close to eight years, until my mom became pregnant with me. They decided to go back to France because it wasn't as easy for me to be born outside of that country. Shortly after I was born, my father was offered a job in the Port of Guayaquil, Ecuador. He accepted right away because they had spent so much time in Central America that they had a deep relationship with the Latin American world.

We lived in Ecuador for five years, and I basically have flashes of that time. I went to preschool in Spanish, but I also learned the basics of language because I got there when I was so young. As a child you pick up the language of the city. My dad only spoke a little English and my mom a little French, so Spanish became a common language between us. They sent me to France with a friend of theirs when I was four years old. I was sent to see my grandparents because they had only seen me as a newborn. They studied Spanish like crazy to try to communicate with me. My grandmother asked me something in Spanish shortly after I got there, and I was able to answer in French. This says a lot about how a child assimilates language. I had probably heard French through my dad because he had some French friends in Ecuador. So French ended up being a language that I understood and was able to reproduce. By the time I returned to Ecuador, I was speaking a lot of French. This would prove quite useful, as our next destination was Algeria.

The colonial system of education brings with it certain codes which become assimilated by students seeking advancement; however, the values projected through popular education sometimes conflict with the cultural values of the students. In Canada, we can clearly see these conflicts in the classroom. Students face internal and external conflicts when their cultural values and language are minimized by the dominant society. Camilleri and Malewska-Peyre (1997) argue that cultural context plays a significant role in how easily an individual constructs

identity: "The kind and extent of effort required in identity construction depends on the social context, but in every context there will be pressure from social expectations and the cultural system" (p. 51). While Lou was living in Algeria, the local people rejected the French system in an effort to restore local language and values. The French empire had sustained its influence in Algeria through the educational system, which defined social hierarchy. Lou had already come to appreciate the local culture because his parents lived among the people; however, his father's work as a French teacher was considered anti-Islamic under the Arabization movement that emerged in that era.

Back then they had something called coopération, which was basically an agreement between the French Department of Education, and other Francophone countries. That's how my dad found a job in Algeria. This program had French nationals teaching in Algerian high schools. Not many people were up for that type of job because it wasn't in the capital. We settled two hours outside the capital, in a beautiful area up in the mountains, in a small town called Medea, which had a rich religious history. Islam is the main religion of the country, and Medea was a place known for its religious fervor. At the same time, they spoke French, and in the 1980s Algeria was a socialist state. There was a new movement called Arabization, an effort to bring Arabic back into the education system. In particular, they wanted to bring back the Algerian dialect, which is different from classical Arabic. They wanted to bring it back ahead of French as the language of communication. I definitely think that in the minds of some people, we had no place being there.

Due to French colonialism, the French have school systems in a lot of different countries. There is one here in Montreal and many in the States. Mine was a tiny school that went from preschool to grade three. Most teachers were French and paid by the French government. I don't

remember any Algerian kids there. It was because you would have to pay as if you were a French citizen to attend that school. My friends, at that point, were Egyptians whose parents were working in Algeria. I also had Yugoslavian friends whose parents worked as doctors and nurses. That was a socialist agreement between the two countries. They sent their kids to French school, so their kids would have a European education. The school was split in half and behind the fence; there was an all-girl, local school. We would run up to these girls and chitchat through the fence, even though they didn't speak French and we didn't speak Arabic. There weren't any Arabic classes at our school. The only exposure was in the street, and I was the only non-Algerian living in my neighbourhood. All my friends were Algerian, and we had this weird Franco-Arab language. I remember being on the balcony calling down to my friend Mustafa and he would say "Buqwa," which came from pourquoi in French. We'd hang out all day. I never felt like I was different, even though I didn't speak the language.

My parents always had tapes of music from all over. Latin music was always present because they had lived in Latin America, but my dad was just interested in music from around the world. He'd go to these markets in Algeria and pick up tapes of traditional Algerian music. The label was obviously in Arabic, but he picked them based on the cover, and on Sunday mornings he would pop in a random tape like that. There was only one channel on the black and white TV. I think there was an effort to prevent western culture from infiltrating the country via television. As a result, I never saw any music videos. I saw some American shows, like Knight Rider, in French with Arabic subtitles. The rest was mostly foreign movies. They used to cut out all the scenes of people kissing; I remember that very well. That is when Spanish slowly disappeared and French became the language that we spoke at home.

Politics really started to take over the country, and there was a wave of terrorism on the part of militant groups. French foreigners were especially vulnerable because the symbol of France was colonial in the eyes of those groups. It was recommended that we leave. Of course, I didn't see or understand any of that. I just understood that it was time to go. I remember having a chat with my friend, Mustafa, and we couldn't understand what it meant. When you live in a small town, you are not used to people coming and going so much. After we left, it really blew up; it eventually erupted into a civil war. There were mass murders and horrible things. Some people that we knew were murdered, a neighbor in particular. The militant groups were revolting against the government. I always wonder about Mustafa. We kept in contact maybe for a year. I wrote letters and then, I just stopped. Interestingly enough, Meryem was born into what I left.

We left Algeria, to arrive in a small town in the north of France. There were only 800 people living there; it was very rural. The north of France is known for being desolate and grey. It was a mining town, about two and a half hours from Paris. The mentality in that town was very different from what I was used to. The first day of school, the teacher asked the kids where they were from and all the kids named these neighboring towns. When I was asked, I innocently said "Algeria," because that's where I had arrived from. Everybody turned and looked at me because I had blonde hair. This is actually a misconception because there are lots of blonde boys in Algeria. What I soon discovered in this town were these discriminating questions, "How did you live there with all those thieves?" an eight year-old kid asked me. That's the first time I ever saw discrimination. I didn't even understand the question. The largest non-European community in France is Algerian, and there is a gigantic stigma around Algerians. In the 1980s, the French media showed no Arabs on TV unless they were drug dealers, thugs, prostitutes or crazy Islamic militants. My dad broke it down to me and said that it was an unfortunate reality.

As a child, Lou was too young to understand the complexities of the political turmoil in the country. He was so immersed in the local culture of Algeria that he started to identify with it. His experience in Algeria is detailed in the lyrics of his song, "Child's Smile," which appears in the lyrical analysis section of this thesis. In this song, listeners can get a sense that he really felt at home in Algeria. The experience was similar to what Butta felt when he was in Kenya. I began to see that the way their parents approached living in foreign countries allowed them to integrate easily and truly feel connected to the culture through the people. What a shock, then, when Lou had to leave Algeria rather abruptly and return to what was supposed to be his native land. It almost seems as if the process of acculturation was more difficult in France than it was in Algeria. When the children of immigrants return to their motherland, there is an understanding that is built upon the folklore of that place. Second generation kids develop an identity that supposes that they are from somewhere else. It helps them understand why they feel out of place, and in some ways explain their differences. Yet when they return to this place, they are suddenly faced with the reality that their absence from the country has changed the way they look at the world. According to Foner (1997) "the cultures from which immigrants come are themselves the product of change so that it is misleading to assume a timeless past of family tradition there" (p. 963). As a result, their sense of belonging tied to culture suddenly becomes illusive.

Meryem and Vox Explore Leaving Their Homeland

We have seen with Butta and Lou that identity changed as they changed countries. They were continually negotiating between culture, language, and identity as the perspective shifted in every new place. In this section, I explore the reality of growing up in one place and then immigrating to another. Vox and Meryem spent their formative years in their native countries.

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They grew up in one reality, and their exposure to other cultures was limited to media and folklore. What is fascinating about these interviews is the difference between Meryem's Algeria and the Algeria that Lou experienced. In this section, gender and social status play a significant role in the lived experience of both people. Lou and his family left the political turmoil that Meryem was born into. Lou went home to France to escape the political danger, and Meryem eventually had to flee to France for similar reasons. Lou was a foreigner in Algeria who returned to France to realise he didn't belong there, while Meryem was an Algerian national who left because her values conflicted with the social norms. What is interesting about both these examples is that they seemed to identify with their nationalist identity more easily when they were actually outside the nation.

Meryem: Algeria to Montreal

I attended kindergarten, primary school, and high school in Algeria. School was very nationalistic because every morning we had to sing the anthem and pull up the flag. Considering that Algeria had recently gained independence, nationalism was really indoctrinated in our society. I remember going to school at a time of chaos. I was extremely young when terrorism and civil war hit. I remember seeing a lot of poverty. We didn't have running water and we didn't always have electricity. We had curfews so we couldn't go to parks and markets at certain times. In those days in Algeria, it was a big deal to just go on the street.

The most we understood when we were young is that there were people who really wanted to implement a certain kind of Islam, and not everybody agreed to it.   They just wanted to impose certain ways of living that were not the norm, and if you didn't do it, they could kill you. There was no emphasis about it placed on TV, or in school, and I just tried to brush it off and live normally. It almost felt like it was a normal life, and they made you feel like it was normal. I kept

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going to school but sometimes, they would close it and not tell us why. As a kid, you just celebrated because school was closed. I was not aware of the reasons until I got older. In sixth grade, a lot more people were talking. You get more of an idea of what is going on when family members are directly affected.

I was seven, and my father and I were just going for a ride to see a friend of his in a dangerous neighbourhood. There were a lot of crazy activities going on between the people there. At seven years old, I saw a gun for the first time. It was being pointed at my dad's head when they stole our car and left us on the road because the police were chasing them. Suddenly, it felt like a movie—my dad told me to wait; he called his friends, jumped in another car, and chased them. I didn't know what the hell was going on. When he got the car back, it had bullets in it. Then he hid the car in a garage and left the country for a month. He never gave me an explanation, so my mom tried to explain. She always told me that this was not normal, and that's why we were leaving. We would just be in traffic and thieves would come to steal my mom's jewellery through the window. You have to learn about these things really early on, but not everybody explains it to you. Instead of just brushing it off, she would actually take time to clarify it to me.

The transition to high school was good because the school was right behind my house. I just had to take this path down the mountain and the high school was right there. Education was the only thing that really mattered because, as a girl, you're not allowed to go out and play. As soon as you start growing breasts and looking more like a woman, you have to stay home. Guys still go out, and you just hang out by the window watching everybody else live their life outside. I was becoming more and more of a rebel because I didn't understand why I didn't have the same rights. I would always be by the window, checking people out and thinking, I should be out there too. I had the Mediterranean Sea out front. It was the best view, and I would pray and pray to be

out of there. I was six months old when my parents divorced, so it was always me and my mom in the house, and she was not your typical mother. She worked under the table as a beautician; she would fix her own car. She did a bunch of things that attracted attention to her. When you're in a poor neighbourhood, you deal with these third world problems—not enough resources and little catastrophes going on every five minutes. That was really hard for her and for me, but for safety I would stay home as much as possible.

The situation for Meryem seemed very dismal. She struggled through life with very little freedom. Her early experiences taught her that life was a series of seemingly insurmountable circumstances. The sea represented an imaginary escape, and yet her idea of what life elsewhere was like was quite limited. Media has become a self-guided, hands-on experience since the creation of the Internet. People can explore the world virtually and choose where they would like to visit on the web, exploring language, culture, and music at the touch of a button. Even before that, cable television offered the ability to see how other people in the world lived. In my conversation with Meryem, I began to wonder how individuals construct a worldview with limited access to media. In her case, media was not the only limitation. Without access to media, people come to know the world by meeting people from other places, as Lou and Butta experienced; however, Meryem's reality did not allow for any of these opportunities, so the only thing left to explore was music. Pop music served as an escape for her, and it was also a way of connecting to other youth in Algeria who felt the same sense of alienation.

My mother registered me in a conservatory. I would go there and have piano lessons, and that's when I started singing more seriously. That became part of my life in high school, and I started taking leads in choirs. That was the only social thing besides school. We worked in a German system where you had to learn everything by heart. It was all regurgitation, and we never had

multiple-choice tests. It was a very laborious education system compared to Montreal. I wasn't

singing yet, just doing a little theory. I made friends with some older students who were really

into improvisation. They played saxophone and piano, and they loved pop music. They knew how

to play Mariah Carey, and I just started chilling with them. It was the highlight of my life there

because I had an actual clique of people, and they were all musicians. We were the bad boys and

girls of the conservatory. We'd actually skip class to go into a room and freestyle. We were still

doing music, but it was our own stuff. One day the director heard me and said, "I have a song I

would love for you to sing. It's for peace, and I would like to have a choir of six and seven year

olds accompany you."

It was a call for peace and that's how it all started. When that director gave me the song for

peace, it culminated in the event that made us realise we had to get out of the country. We

performed the song on national TV. It was my biggest performance, and not a lot of conservative

Muslims liked that in the neighbourhood. To them, a girl was not supposed to sing. At this point,

my mom felt like we couldn't keep on being afraid every step of the way. "Everything you do is

going to turn back against us, and people are going to start preventing us from doing this," she

said. It was a general threat, but that's when my mom started seriously considering an

alternative. My dad had started the whole process, and when he stopped, we thought we had lost

the chance to get out. Then things got more hectic for us, and my mom really started seeking

solutions to get out.

My mom believed in my talent and my right to have a future. She knew I could do what I wanted;

I just couldn't do it in Algeria. She was able to pull some strings and get us visas to get to

France, and the process of leaving was extremely tough. She found a way to get fake passports,

and once she figured out the plan she sat me down a year ahead of time to tell me the strategy.

She said, "This is what we're going to do and if it works, we're starting a new life. If not, we might go back to Algeria and it will be worse because we'll be coming back to nothing." It was a very contradictory moment in my life because I grew up feeling very lonely and marginalized. I always prayed to get out of there, but the last year, I started making music and in some way, I felt like my dreams were coming true. I was starting to have a life there with my friends, and I loved it. I had a hard time dealing with it, but my ultimate dream was to be a singer. It really didn't look like it was possible for me to have that dream come true in Algeria.

My mom made me train hard before leaving. I had to learn to act like a French girl and act younger than my age because of the dates on the passport. I was very committed to helping my mom every step of the way, and she handled all the steps. I was more of a partner than a child, and it solidified my relationship with my mom a lot. The day we left, I felt heartbroken. I cried nonstop, and it was hard looking at pictures while practicing what I would say at the border.

Looking at Meryem's experience in Algeria helped me understand the experience of first generation immigrants. My parents came to Canada in the early seventies after Chile's democratically elected government was overthrown by a military coup. As a child, I remember going to rallies with my parents in Ottawa. They organised boycotts, hunger strikes and public protests at the parliament buildings in Ottawa. The second generation of immigrants inherit some of the struggles of their parents without ever having lived through the turmoil (Schwab, 2010). In many ways, these early experiences shape our political ideologies, and we develop a sense of solidarity with our parents' nation. The part that we miss out on is the process of acculturation, which is a series of struggles and difficulties. My parents kept their bags packed for years, imagining that they would soon return to their country. It seems that this is a reality for most that had to flee their homeland. By the time the second generation hears these stories, they

are already being raised in Canadian society with all its privileges and social norms. Culture in Canada is created by the folklore of our families, but our interpretation of it is through North American eyes. This is where the new culture begins to emerge, a hybrid of both. Meryem walked me through her experiences arriving in Montreal, and it shed light on a reality that I never lived, having being born here. Many of the students I teach might benefit from hearing this type of story because it sheds light on the struggles that their parents endured to get to Canada. It is part of their history, but it often becomes disconnected as their parents attempt to integrate into the local society and forget some of the difficult memories that caused them to emigrate.

We had some friends who lived in Montreal, and they hosted us for the first month. I gained so much weight because I had never eaten such variety in my life. I discovered cereal, bananas and Nutella. We were on Bien Etre Sociale, the Quebec welfare system. My first few months were all about getting paperwork, talking to lawyers, preparing files, and learning a story to present to the judge. Finding a school without all the required documentation was not easy because we had no status as refugees. I discovered that in Canada, they treat you like a human being, even if you don't have status. I know many countries that are not like that. After studying more about how it works everywhere else, this is the most humane approach I've seen to immigration. That summer was the last time they accepted refugees from Algeria. After that, there was a moratorium because the government of Algeria made an agreement with Canada to stop accepting refugees. This was just before September 11th, which closed all doors to Arabic countries. It was July 2000, and we passed in front of the judge right before all this madness started. We were lucky, and they had so many social programs to offer us. We used to go pick up food at one spot. We were also able to pick up free furniture when we moved into our apartment. We furnished our house with stuff from the street. We just waited until the end of the day to see what people threw

out. I used to hate it. I was an adolescent and cared what people thought about me. We were

poor in Algeria, but we weren't poor like that.

I registered to sing in a Gospel choir. It was a Haitian Gospel choir in Montreal North, and

they accepted me being non-Christian, non-Haitian, and fourteen years old. I went to St. Luc

high school because there was a music program. My mom wanted me to study music, and I

played clarinet for four years. I was bullied the first year because I didn't really speak English.

It was horrible, but I made it to the lead role in the musical that year. We had all of our classes

in Arabic in Algeria, but we spoke a dialect. French was our second language, and I started

learning English my last year in Algeria. Before we left, my mom got a nun to help me learn

more French. She had an English teacher come and help me as well. She would barter for these

services. She really wanted to get me ready so the transition wasn't too hard. In the end it was

hard because in English class in Quebec, people were already dialoguing in English. The funny

thing is that my English teacher in Montreal was Algerian. My math teacher was also Algerian.

I got lucky because I brought my notebooks from Algeria, and he was able to understand

because he studied there.

Acculturation is a process whereby outsiders adapt to the local culture through experiences.

Linguistic barriers pose a significant challenge, but beyond language, there is a sense of coming

to terms with all the other differences. "Language is not primarily a means of communication; it

is above all, a means of cultural construction in which our very selves and sense are constituted"

(Chambers, 1994, p.24) The changes in customs can cause a sense of depersonalisation; a feeling

may develop that individuals cannot be how they really are and that their way of thinking is

contrary to the norm. The second generation experiences this to a certain degree, but in many

cases they can negotiate between the home culture and the new culture in which they live. As

new immigrants gravitate to their community in Canada, their children seem to seek comfort in the second generation at large. Although my parents made friends with other immigrants from South America, my experience took me into larger circles of people from the Caribbean, Central America, and Asia. In these circles, what we had in common was that our parents were from somewhere else. We were used to having a different home life that was not reflected in the dominant culture. In many ways this served as an educational experience, as we had the privilege of learning about each other's culture. At first we began drawing parallels between our customs and values, but as we matured, we came to learn more about the political realities that brought us here in the first place.

Vox: Haiti to Winnipeg

I never learned anything about Haiti in Canadian public school. I am embarrassed to say that I probably could not have placed it on a map when I was in high school. My first experience with Haitian Creole was through Hip Hop music. I discovered Wyclef Jean in university, and I was fascinated by this language that sounded so much like French. In Nomadic Massive, I became immersed in the culture and the language because of the Haitian population in Montreal. Nomadic Massive has three Haitian members and the influence on the music is undeniable. Vox Sambou spent most of his youth in Haiti, and has become a cultural ambassador for the island through his music. In my interviews with Vox, I learned about Haitian history. This history cannot be disconnected from the history of the Americas, French colonization and slavery. With so many Haitians living in Montreal, it is important for youth to explore this history. The following is a description of Haiti's struggle for independence and the heavy price they paid for being the first country to gain independence from France. The effects of this revolution were passed down through generations and carried to Quebec through immigration.

This history is given little importance in the new context; this is one of the ways education acts as an agent of assimilation. According to Bruner (1994), "a choice of pedagogy inevitably communicates a conception of the learning process and the learner. Pedagogy is never innocent. It is a medium that caries its own message" (p.53). Some of the same techniques used in cultural invasion are employed in the process of assimilation through education; that is to say, there is a process by which the dominant culture presupposes its superiority and then dogmatically inculcates those values in the education system. According to Freire (1970), "For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority" (p.151). The attempt to integrate students by providing a new narrative may alienate them because they are not part of that narrative. Freire believed that both narratives had to be considered in order for there to be social equality. A school should, at least, be conscious of the cultural capital represented in its local population. This is a difficult task when we consider that curricula are designed by provinces whose populations consist of different cultural realities; however, in the absence of inclusive cultural education, Hip Hop emerges as an alternative method of learning about one's own history. The same stories and messages that Vox related in the interviews can be observed in the content of his lyrics. He offers people an alternative way of looking at Haiti. This is as important to Haitian youth as it is to their peers of other backgrounds.

I am from a town called Limbé, which is in the north of the country, about 250 km from Port au Prince. The Tahinos called it Guahaba, and the Africans called it Limbazawa, which means power and strength. Historically, Limbé was a very important place for the Haitian revolution for independence. One of the main architects of the revolution was a voodoo priest named François Makandal, who was born in Limbé. In 1791, he met with Bookman to forge a revolution. Bookman was from West Africa, and historians claim that he got this nickname

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because he always had the Quran with him. The English kidnapped him and brought him to Jamaica, but Bookman rejected being enslaved. They beat him until they burned him on one side of his body, but he did not submit.

The English knew that Haiti had the toughest laws for slaves in the Caribbean, so they decided to sell him to the French colonizers in Haiti. When he arrived in Haiti, he escaped to become a Maroon. Maroons are the Africans that escaped the plantations and hid in the mountains. The Africans met with the First Nations of the region, called the Arawak, and this is how they were able to survive in the mountains. Bookman went there and met with Makandal and they devised a plan. Their goal was to gather the slaves from all the different provinces in Haiti to revolt. That meeting happened in Limbé on a street called Nakano, which is at the corner where I went to primary school. They planned the meeting there, and then they moved to this region called Bois Kayman. The bois is the tree; kay is house, and then Imam: "The tree at the Imam's house." There was a big tree and everyone went there, from the 21st to the 22nd of August 1791.

The meeting became very spiritual because the Africans were playing drums and chanting. Bookman was about to make the Africans understand that if they wanted to go back to Africa, they had to fight. While they danced, they cut the neck of a pig. It was said that anyone who drank the blood would become invincible and that the bullet of the colonizer would not hit him. At that time, there were a few Africans who were born in the colony, but around 67 percent were from West Africa and wanted to go home. Bookman said, "Our people are waiting for us, we want to go back home." They ran down from the mountains and started burning the sugar cane plantation, the most lucrative thing for the French. The French had built Marseilles and Bordeaux with all the money from the sugar cane industry.

The Maroons started fighting the colonizers and a lot of them died, including Bookman. The French wanted to make an example of him, so they cut his head off and put it on a bayonet and exposed it in la Place du Limbé. They exposed his head in front of the church where people go and sit. When they exposed his head, his eyes stayed open. This is because they cut his head off when he was still alive. The other Africans were very worried, they regretted revolting and feared what was going to happen to them. Makandal, who had survived the revolt, preached to the revolutionaries: "He's watching all of you. If none of you avenge him, he will come back to haunt you." He was very charming and was a master of herbs. He knew all the leaves, and convinced the African women to participate in the battle by poisoning the food of the colonizers. Ironically, he eventually died from poisoning.

After him, there was Toussaint L'Ouverture, who was born of African parents in Breda, about 20 minutes from Limbé. He actually became a general in the French army. He was a house slave, so he was not on the plantation. While serving the masters, he was able to hear their conversations. The French couldn't fight the Spanish who were occupying the Dominican Republic, so Toussaint proposed that they use an army of slaves. One of the captains of the French army thought it was a good idea. They trained Toussaint to be one of the generals of the French army, but his role was to control the Africans. Within eight years, they were able to beat the Spanish. Unfortunately because he had negotiated to have France recognize Haiti as a French province, when he was captured in 1802, he was sent to France, where he died in prison.

After Toussaint, Jean Jacques Des Salines was promoted to general, and he continued the fight. Des Salines met with 20,000 soldiers in Limbé on November 6th, 1803, to plan the last battle against the French army. This battle happened at Verte, 20 km from Limbé. Des Salines planned everything in Limbe, moved from there, and crushed the French army. That was the birth of the

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first Black republic. By the 18th of November 1803, there were no slaves on the plantations, and the French colonizers had fled. I always say that Limbé should be a place of pilgrimage for Africans. All human beings that respect freedom should go and visit that place because everything happened right there.

As I listened to Vox recount the story of Haitian independence, I realized that it was a powerful source of inspiration for him. This idea of perpetual revolution was a way of seeing the struggle as bigger than any individual. I thought of my own history and how I had internalised the story of the coup in Chile, the torture and disappearance of civilians. For me, it was the story of how I got here, and in many ways it has helped me recognise the privilege into which I was born. I did not live through that reality, and yet I carry it inside of me.

When Vox arrived in Canada, he was already an adult; in fact, he was about the age that my parents were when they arrived. At this age, according to language development theory, it is almost impossible to speak the local language without an accent (Long, 1990). By post adolescence, language is already cemented, and so adaptation becomes a greater challenge. Vox's experience in Canada echoes many of the stories I heard from my parents. His process of adaptation is a common experience for newly landed immigrants. At first, North America seems like paradise where all dreams are possible; however, when they arrive, they are often far from the dream propagated in pop culture. The following is Vox Sambou's account of the catalytic events that caused him to leave Haiti, and his experience coming to Canada. Through this interview, I was able to examine challenges that I never had to face. Like Meryem, it was rather urgent for Vox to leave his home country, and both experienced an intense sense of nostalgia for the place they fled. In turn, both found comfort in relationships with other ethnic minorities that understood their struggle.

In December 1990, we had the first free election in Haiti in 30 years. Everyone participated, and it was completely democratic. The people voted for Aristide, and when he came to power, there was a complete social change. Everybody was proud to be Haitian again and participate in everyday work like cleaning the streets. You could go anywhere, and you wouldn't see garbage on the street. Before Aristide, the Haitian military were very tough. They would beat people for no reason. With Aristide, there was such peace and love in the air—no discrimination and no gun violence. Regrettably, six months later there was another coup, and he was sent into exile in the United States. After that, there was an immediate crack down on the youth. The soldiers went house to house, and you could hear people screaming from the beatings.

This reminded people of the dictatorship, where people were killed and "made disappear." A lot of people left Limbé to go to Port au Prince to get to other places by boat. My brother, the priest, left to study theology at the University of Montréal. He did not come back because there was so much insecurity. He was offered a job in Winnipeg and was told he could apply for Canadian residency. He applied for the whole family, but things got hectic in Haiti. While the request was in process, another brother of mine was almost killed in Haiti. He was arrested in Limbé and beaten severely. People came to my house with guns looking for him, but he fled with my older brother. My parents moved them to Port au Prince and then filed papers to move them to Miami. They drove from Miami to Grand Fox Winnipeg, where they applied for refugee status. Since I was the youngest, I was less of a threat to the military government.

We finally received the residency papers in November 1995; the process took four years. When we received the documents, my mother rolled on the floor like we had won the lottery. I was so happy; it was such a relief. I was leaving the misery, I thought. The sensation was weird when I

was leaving. I had big jeans and heavy clothes because Canada was so cold. I was with my whole family on the way to the airport. I have an older sister named Bernadette who was born before my dad married my mom. My mother and father had adopted her daughter so that she could have papers to go to Canada. On the way to the airport, Bernadette told me that I was never going to see her again. She said, "I'm telling you this because I want you to think of me when you look at my daughter. I have AIDS and I'm not going to live for long." I was already sad about leaving, and then she told me that. I got on the plane. My sister died four months later.

We arrived at Mirabel on December 14th at night. It was so cold, but all I thought about was my sister. It was my first time on a plane, and I felt like my head was going to explode. I was looking at all the lights and remembering how dark it was in Haiti. It was like those alien movies, where you look at Earth from space. Everything was so strange; there was water in the faucet, one hot and one cold. The next day, I met my cousin and he talked in a dialect of French that I couldn't understand. After a few hours, I started to understand a bit more. He invited me to play basketball with his boys. When I stepped outside, I noticed that there was nobody on the street. I was born in a place where there were always people on the street, so it freaked me out. I came out, and the cold felt like it going through my face. We met up with his friends, and it was the first time in my life that I had seen a bunch of young Haitians speaking French to each other. In my school, they would beat us to make us speak French. We would speak it in the classroom, but outside we would all speak Creole.

After three days in Montreal, I left for Winnipeg. When I got off the bus, I saw the two brothers that came before us as refugees. They looked like different people, with big coats and beards. We got to the apartment; it was all painted white, and everything was so quiet. Then my mom

said: "this is where we are going to live." I used to see my mom and dad moving about, but now they would just get up, eat, and go to bed. My brothers had two jobs, and I never saw them. I would open the fridge and see that they had names on the bottles of milk, to see which one was whose. When we grew up everything was open. We ate together, we did everything together, and now there was all this division. My father couldn't stand it, and he moved to Montreal because there were more Haitians there. He thought it would be better for him.

Nantali, Diegal and Waahli Discuss Caribbean Culture in Montreal

Lou and Butta brought with them intercultural experiences, rich with diversity and languages. Meryem and Vox carried their cultural identities with them and had struggled so much that they valued every opportunity in Canada. Both of them have become strong advocates for issues of social justice in their homelands. The rest of the Nomadic Massive members shared my experience of being of the second generation. I grew up in Ottawa with very little ethnic diversity. Although my childhood was full of Chilean culture, my social reality was very Canadian, and it wasn't until my Canadian friends started coming over that I realized how different my home life was. The advantage of being born in Canada or arriving at a young age is that the local language is assimilated more easily. In his work on the *Critical Hypothesis Period*, Pinker (1994) proposes that young children have an innate ability to learn language, which disappears as they age. In a multicultural place like Canada, linguistic discrimination represents another way that the society becomes stratified. In fact, even among immigrants, the second generation mocks the new immigrants based on their accents and customs. This is congruent with Freire's notions of oppression. The cycle sees those who have felt oppressed oppressing

others as a way of raising their own social status. Freire (1970) argued that, "The oppressed, instead of striving for liberation tend themselves to become oppressors" (p.45).

 From outside, one sees Latin American communities, Caribbean communities, Asian communities, and so on. By delving deeper into these communities, one realizes that they, too, are stratified from within. In my experience growing up, I realized differences between Central and South America: South Americans considered themselves more European, and thus displayed discriminating attitudes towards people of Central America. Of course, these behaviours were more easily observed from within the community.

As I interviewed Tali, Waahli, and Diegal, I began to see that the experiences of many Caribbean immigrants were similar. In this case, there was a linguistic divide; Haitians were perceived to have the upper hand in Quebec because they spoke French. As a result, people from other commonwealth nations found themselves marginalized by fellow Caribbean immigrants. It was fascinating for me to learn about this because it exposed the lasting effect that colonization has had. In the following section, I will examine the realities of those members of Nomadic who were raised in Montreal. Even among these three participants, the idiosyncrasies of the different cultures living in Montreal can be observed. Nantali talked to me about the obstacles her parents faced as Black Anglophones in Quebec. She detailed the experience of foreign workers from the Caribbean, and how local politics played a significant role in the relation between immigrants from that part of the world.

Nantali: Anglo Caribbean Culture in Montreal

My mother emigrated from St. Vincent in 1959, under an immigration program called The Scheme. It was a Canadian program that invited domestic workers from the Caribbean to come

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work in Canada. That program existed as a result of England closing its doors to immigration, and because of the demand for domestic work in Canada. My mother came under that program, and her country's approach was different from other Caribbean countries. St. Vincent chose to send professionals who weren't necessarily domestics, thinking that Canada would hire them for better jobs. All of this came down to economic development in the home country. The better the job, the more money she could send back. My mother was a teacher in the Caribbean. They sent her to work in the far north of the country where there were very few resources. She was frustrated with that experience, so she signed up for The Scheme and ended up here in Montreal.

My father came here a little bit later. He came from Petit Martinique, an island of Grenada. He first came to the United States at about age 16 to go to school. He completed a degree at St. John's University in New York, before coming to Canada. They met in the late 1960s, and then my father was one of the people involved in the Sir George Williams incident [at Concordia University]. This incident involved six Caribbean students who accused a professor of racism because the professor flunked all of them. It led to a huge sit-in at the computer lab, on the 9th floor of the Hall building. This turned into a huge raid, and a fire broke out in the computer lab. By the time the fire broke out, other people had infiltrated the movement. They were Concordia students, but at the time in Quebec, the FLQ were pretty active and some of them infiltrated.

My father was one of those people arrested, and they were trying to put him in jail. He wasn't granted clemency by his country, so he had to go somewhere else. He left and they moved to Tanzania, Africa. My father went there to meet Walter Rodney, who was a well-known economist from Jamaica. Walter Rodney was in Africa during what was called the Pan African movement. Ideologically, that's where they were in terms of race, identity, and politics. They were coming from countries that were colonized, and they didn't know much about Africa. They

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had a socialist view on things, and the Pan African movement was very much based in those values. They lived there for a little while, but it didn't work out as they had hoped. My father could not come back to Canada, so my mother came to Montreal and had me, and we lived between cities. We traveled from Montreal to New York for a while because he was in New York. It couldn't last very long in that way, so I grew up in Montreal with my mom.

I was born in the Caribbean hub of Montreal, a neighbourhood called Côtes des Neiges. It was 1976, the year the Parti Quebecois came into power. A lot of immigrants and Caribbean people in particular voted for the Parti Québécois because they were talking about unions and the labour movement. Coming out of the colonial experience, they voted for the PQ and they eventually felt duped. My mother was a nurse at that point and the PQ government started changing all these laws about French in the province. They hired the Haitian community to pass certain messages on to the English Caribbean community. They called working professionals in the English Caribbean community and told them they had to take French classes to keep their jobs. They went to the office on Jean Talon, where they were eventually told to move to Ontario because they were never going to learn French. It created the perception that the French Caribbean community was getting advantages that the English Caribbean community was not.

As a result, there was a lot of tension between French and English speaking Caribbean people. It was a linguistic divide because before, it was all considered Caribbean. It was also based in post-colonial trauma that trickled down to us from first generation Canadians. They call us second generation because we were born of the first generation to take citizenship. Second generation children started to get all this postcolonial stuff on them, and it shaped their identity in Montreal. Any identity complex that had developed because someone was colonized was transferred to the child who was never colonized, so to speak. Because of that, we grew up with

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this division between French and English, and then we developed these allegiances that the Parti Québécois encouraged.

That's when Bill 101 talks started to really frighten Caribbean people. From her experience in the 1960s, my mother was up to speed on what was happening in the school systems. She got this sense that Black kids weren't getting the best quality education and that Bill 101 was really going to make it difficult for English Black kids in Montreal. Rather than send me to Coronation Elementary, where my entire neighbourhood went, she sent me to a French immersion program at Roslyn, in Westmount. I lived in the working class community, but I went to school in an upper class community in a French immersion program, with no one at home to help me with French. My mom just got a sense that we had to do this sooner than later. She sent me to a French daycare, French preschool, and then I did the French immersion program.

There were two things going on: issues of language and issues of class. When I finished primary school, I had a level of French that was considered first language. This allowed me access to the higher-level French class in high school. It was important for my mom to send me to a private school because she came from a British mentality. She felt that their school system was better than what she was seeing in Montreal, so she sent me to Villa Maria, an all-girl school. It was interesting growing up Caribbean, Black, and working class while rubbing shoulders with these kids who were extremely wealthy, living on top of the hill in Westmount. That would be the experience that exposed me the most to issues of racism. In my own community, it would also be an issue, the fact that I went to this White school because they thought I was trying to be somebody else.

In speaking with Nantali, I became aware of these intercultural conflicts. I could not have understood the history of the Caribbean community in Montreal without speaking about these issues with people who lived through it. It is evident that the colonial footprint follows people even after they have left their homeland. In this case, the relations between second-generation immigrants were affected by many external factors. The colonial mentality, local politics, and language actually shaped the way the second generation viewed one another. It is a reality that exists among many immigrant communities, but it is almost unperceivable from the outside. In the quest to belong, divisions are created, and identity is cemented through the creation of "other." It seems unnatural at first, but in reality, it is the unfortunate repetition of cycles. Newly landed immigrants are "otherized" by virtue of being different. Interestingly, this feeling of marginalization does not lead to a sense of solidarity with all of those who are marginalized. Instead, it seems to propagate the pattern, because there is a new system of values that influences a new system of social hierarchy. According to Freire (1970), "The behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor" (p.31).

Those who have been excluded from the dominant class do the same to others. They may look down at others who are less educated in the dominant system, or even create divisions within cultures that have a lot in common. Giroux (1994) explores the politics of cultural difference in *Living Dangerously.* In the book, he demystifies common and often irresponsible approaches to teaching multiculturalism. In his more recent work, he connects the idea of inclusion to democracy. He argues that democratic notions are made irrelevant if citizens are not taught to be critical and to recognise that they are part of a common struggle (Giroux, 2011). In the Quebec context, the status quo operates in French, and this has created division among immigrant communities who are of different linguistic backgrounds. According to Bloommart (1999),

"Restricted and specific language ideologies such as variationism mediated through expert voices speaking on 'local' cases, data and issues . . . provide the building stones for a muscled societal and political ideology . . ." (p.19).

Nantali describes the linguistic divide in Quebec, and how that caused friction among fellow Caribbean people. One could live a lifetime looking at others through a colonial lens, affirming their own identity through division. Montreal offers the opportunity to interact with so many other cultures, and yet it is possible to remain rigid and insular if no one makes an effort to step out of the box. For some people, the exposure to other cultures is through media. In homogenous societies, it is easy to stereotype and discriminate without consequence. In his influential book entitled *Orientalism*, Said (1979) explores how Western depictions of the Middle East were inherently Eurocentric and discriminating. Because these depictions largely reached a European audience, a romanticised and unrealistic view of the Middle East developed and remained largely unchallenged.

An exchange between cultures is necessary to move beyond concepts of tolerance and look towards understanding. In Nomadic this happened organically. There was no intention to make it multicultural or multilingual; it was just born that way. The result was an education that was not possible in any school system. After speaking to Nantali about the reality of the English speaking Caribbean community in Montreal, I was able to see the perspective of Haitian immigrants from speaking with Diegal and Waahli, who offered another viewpoint into this process of acculturation in Quebec. They grew up on the other side of the French and English debate by virtue of being born in a different colony. What is interesting to explore with these two interviews is the difference in their Montreal experiences. For immigrants, Canada represents one destination, but as Canadians well know, there are many different types of Canada. Diegal

talks to us about growing up in the suburbs of Montreal as one of the first Haitian families, and Waahli shows us the reality of growing up in an urban setting.

Diegal: Reunification of the Diaspora

My story is a story of reunification because of how it is with the Haitian diaspora. I was part of the second wave of Haitian immigration. We had to leave because of the dictatorship with Baby Doc and Papa Doc. The first wave of Haitian immigration was in 1960s and early 1970s because of political repression. Papa Doc killed off the opposition and the resistance, so a lot of the Haitian intellectuals left. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the second wave left. This group was more proletarian, working class, and motivated less by political repression than by economic hardships. My father came to North America first to find work, because we had an aunt in Montreal. He was back and forth to the States searching for employment. Then my older brother came and my mother and I stayed in Haiti for another year. At the end of December 1982, we were all reunited at Mirabel airport. I was seven years old.

My aunt lived in Villeray, so that is where we settled first. During the school week, we would go to Ville Saint-Laurent, where my uncle lived. I went back and forth between boroughs until we moved to Saint-Laurent a year later. I had no concept of anything at that time. I was just following orders. I didn't have any feeling of identity with any culture. I knew I was Haitian but that's pretty much it. I remember in third grade, this Iranian girl and I had the best grades in French, and it was ironic because we were immigrants. My dad was doing a lot of work in transportation. He would go back and forth to New York City to work in taxis and school buses and stuff like that. He was often gone, so I was with my mom and my brother. My mom worked in a factory, this hosiery gig, making undergarments. She worked there for a long time.

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By the time I was in fifth grade, we moved to Pierrefonds, a Montreal suburb. We were one of the first Haitian families to come to that area. At home we listened to the CKUT radio station every Saturday. There was a Haitian show that played music and discussed issues that were important to the community. My dad's music collection included a lot of kompa, but also some Mexican music and jazz. My musical culture comes from his collection. It is where I gained my appreciation for different types of music. There was always something playing—the radio, the TV, or both at the same time. It was seldom silent in my household.

There were a few Haitians in the high school, and we lived in the same neighbourhood. You know you are Haitian because you look alike, but Creole wasn't really spoken outside the house. There is this thing with immigrants because you have to integrate and fit in. You speak your native tongue at home, but in social settings you try to be included, so you speak French. I was fluent in Creole at home, but outside I was always shy to speak it. Among Haitian youth, we spoke a creolized type of French. Haitians have this thing where they mix Creole with proper French and English. It's like Montreal slang. My school was mostly Anglophones and French Canadians. In my class, there was one Greek guy who was my best friend. There was a Colombian, and another guy from Saudi Arabia. We had one of every type of person, a small representation. In high school, I was a dancer, and my brother was a rapper. I formed this Hip Hop dance group with the Greek friend. We were called Champ I and Champion.

As Diegal described the process of discovering his cultural self, I could see that the process bore commonalities for many of those who were exposed to a different culture at home. Although culture was preserved through customs and language, this language was not spoken outside the home. This seemed to reflect an idea that it was necessary to speak French in Quebec in order not to be treated differently. Vox spoke about how French was the language of instruction in

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Haiti, even though the vast majority spoke Creole as a mother tongue. This was the same in Algeria where the majority spoke Arabic but studied in French before the process of "Arabization," about which Lou spoke. This is characteristic of the process of assimilation, because people feel obligated to speak the dominant language. At the same time, the mother tongue allows people to feel culturally connected to a community.

In Montreal, the dialects of French brought by immigrants have influenced the type of French that is spoken among the second generation. These languages became intertwined with English and developed into a local slang that is often used in the Montreal Hip Hop community. Professor Sarkar and Weiner (2006) explored this reality in their work on code switching in Quebec. Their publication, "Multilingual Code Switching in Quebec Rap: Poetry Pragmatics and Performativity" appeared in the *International Journal of Multilingualism*. They explored this linguistic phenomenon in Quebec and its political implications in light of Bill 101 and the protection of the French language (Sarkar & Weiner, 2006). Code switching in Quebec is viewed as a threat to the preservation of Quebecois French. Most recently, a Quebecois group called Dead Obies came under fire in the media for its use of "Franglais" in their lyrics (McCan 2014). At the same time, this multilingual dialect is representative of the urban multicultural identity of Montreal.

In the next section of this chapter, Waahli's description of growing up in Montreal shares some similarities with Diegal's experience. They both had been exposed to other music through their father's respective collections. If language and food are reminiscent of a culture, music is another element which draws the second generation to their roots. When I was a child, my parents used to play their recordings of Andean music. The melodies were etched into my memory, and I often sought comfort in this music when I felt misunderstood or lost in a cultural sense. At the

end of high school, I traveled to Chile in search of this music, and I came to the sad realization that by that time, the youth of my generation were more into American music. I had to travel to the mountains of Peru to be connected with the music that I considered culturally traditional. These early experiences with music from around the world have definitely influenced what became the sound of Nomadic Massive. Each member carried musical knowledge and a repertoire which became fused.

When cultural communities in Canada practice their customs, they can still find a sense of belonging; however, sometimes an individual may be the only one in the neighbourhood or in the school, and this causes a sense of depersonalization. We each understand certain social codes, and we are confronted with the fact that in some spheres we are simply misunderstood. Waahli's experience is thought-provoking because he started off being the only Black kid in one neighbourhood, but then moved to an area of high Black representation. It is clear that this move had a profound influence on his cultural identity. He describes a reality in which it was easier to live because everything was understood. At the same time, he speaks about how this insular way of living may also cause us to become close-minded to other cultures.

Waahli: Multicultured Glasses

My father left the place where he grew up in Port au Prince because of political instability and lack of opportunity during the Papa Doc era. He decided to come to Montreal because it was French, and it was a big city with jobs. A lot of people were talking about it in Haiti at the time. In 1971, he came to Montreal, where he worked in a garage for a year. Then, to make extra money, he started training people in the art of kickboxing. He eventually brought my mom over in 1972. My brother and I were born over the next two years. My dad left the family when I was like three but I was kickboxing with my brother, so we used to see him quite often. My father is a

talented musician; he plays guitar. He played music when he was around, and he was a radio host. I remember growing up, there was always soul, funk and traditional Haitian music, like kompa and rara, playing in the background every day.

I grew up in a poor neighbourhood called Villeray. All my friends were Quebecois and maybe one or two Haitians. It was mostly White folks until we moved to St. Michel. I wasn't really exposed to multiculturalism until then. It's funny, it wasn't until I started going to school that I realized I was a different colour. Before that, I did not see that I was Black. I was just a human being, born in Montreal, with no sense of culture. The only culture I knew was Haitian culture; the music, the food, and the different values. As soon as I started going to elementary school, I began recognizing it in social circles. It's like people made me realize that I was a different colour with their insults and racial slurs. It was out of pure ignorance—from how people were educated at home. When they were in social settings, they repeated what their parents said around the supper table. This made me question myself; why was I Black and why was this person White?

I was probably 10 years old when I saw the movie Roots with my aunt. That movie had a strong impact on me because the day after watching that movie I said to myself, "I am not going to take any bullshit anymore." It was done. I got into two fights the same week. I was not a kid who liked to fight; it's just that something clicked. I wasn't going to accept the racial slurs or the taunting anymore, so I started fighting. Back in the days people were like, "Everybody meet at 3:30 after school!" It was kind of a show, you know. There would be a little crowd waiting to have VIP seats to watch the fights. My mom would always talk to me about power dynamics. "You will have to work twice as hard to succeed," she kept saying to my brother and me. That shaped the way that I thought and perceived the world around me because, like I said, I didn't

realize that I was Black until people made it so. I knew what my mom was saying. I saw the struggle she was going through. I know that she had to sacrifice everything just to give her children a better future.

When I moved to Saint-Michel, I felt like I could relate to everybody. At home, we ate the same food and spoke the same language. My parents always spoke to me in Creole, never French. I would answer back in French because I wasn't at ease, but I got to learn Creole because I always heard it growing up. So when we got together, it was easy for us to relate. We knew what kind of jokes we could crack, and we could laugh about certain habits that Haitians have. We incorporated that into the world that we lived in. As a youth, you are exposed to what is dominant. You know White supremacy as a teenager, but you don't know how to explain all these racial dynamics. Your only reference is your identity and your culture. You expose it by staying strong and even closing yourself to different cultures. Still, when you do not try to learn from other cultures, you remain ignorant and become judgemental. We all judge in one way or another but at that time, I have to admit that I was very judgemental.

I couldn't put it into words, but there was that thing about not liking yourself. Seeing Black folks cultivate the sense of self-hate, of not liking who you are as a Black person because of the historical line. That was reflected in a lot of Black on Black fights because there was a lot of Black on Black violence in Saint-Michel. I had tons of friends who were in gangs. We could call it organized crimes. There was a gang called Family, another called Company B, and another gang in Montreal North called P.E., which stood for Public Enemy. They were real entities that existed at that time. They went to stores and stole shoes. They would fight with other people to show that they were tough and to gain respect. This was among Haitians, and that's the sad part about it. That's what I am saying about self-hate; they don't realize that Black is beautiful. They

dwell on the stereotype that they are lazy or good for nothing and that is reflected in Black on Black violence. Some people thought I was in gangs because I used to play hockey with some of them in the alley. I used to go to basement church parties where all of these people would hang out, and there were always fights. Despite these fights I would still go, but I was really not into that.

Waahli said it quite clearly, and it is worth repeating: he was not aware that he was Black until people made it so. The shaping of identity is multi-layered and dependent on internal and external factors. Nantali talked about the influence of language and politics, but another layer is our reaction to how people treat us. This is something that really resonated with me during Waahli's interview. What did being Latin American mean to my parents, and how did that change for me? My parents revered the writers, the poets and the revolutionaries. They tried to instill these Latin American values and traditions in me. At the same time, my peer group had a different view of what it meant to be Latino. Latin America was not diverse in the eyes of the dominant class. It was something that could easily be understood and defined by a few catch phrases and the names of some Mexican dishes. Otherwise it was viewed through the media lens, which painted a picture of gangs, thieves, and delinquents.

In his work entitled *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard (1994) explores the idea of symbols replacing reality. In this work, he looks at four stages of constructing meaning. In the first stage, a representative image may perhaps seem real. In the 1980s and 1990s, the mediatized image of Latin America was of dictators, drug dealers, and gang warfare. This influenced the way people saw Latin Americans, and how young people of that community identified themselves. Soon the image based on a partial reality became a pervasive reality. This is the second stage, according to Baudrillard. It results in self-fulfilling prophecy that causes people to act like the stereotype. In

many cases, adolescents feel it is better to be feared than misunderstood. Chen and Bargh (1997) argue that, "Often, the outcome is that the anticipatory behavior itself causes the other person to engage in the expected behavior. Most deleterious is when the expectation is false to begin with…" (p.542). This encompasses the third stage for Baudrillard, whereby the copy of what was unreal becomes the real, although it has little basis in reality. Finally, once the copy fulfills the original notion as perceived through the media, then it is accepted as reality. As a result, young Latinos who never had gang affiliations, who were educated, became perceived as gangsters by virtue of the fact that this image confirmed the original, fabricated stereotype.

CHAPTER 4: EDUCATION

When children first enter the school system, they don't really think about all of the colonial implications of that education. They don't think about tracing the system's origins at such a young age. They simply enter the world of education as a disciple. It seems like the most logical thing to do when a child gets up in the morning. The system itself begins to shape them with empirical knowledge and the process we call socialization. They do not just learn to read and write, but also how to act in a society. They learn social norms, and they begin to understand social hierarchy—that adults determine right from wrong. In this chapter, I examine the different experiences that members of Nomadic had with schooling in their respective countries and in Canada. These contrasting images demonstrate how formal education continues to inculcate colonial values, and how these educational histories shape each member's different approaches to critical pedagogy.

Adolescents begin to discover that there is another social world that exists among peers. This social world has its own hierarchy, which is complex. At this level of society, social status may be related to a number of factors. It may not initially be money, although that will inevitably become a factor. It may not be about good looks, although this will equally play a role in later life. At a very young age, the ego becomes a significant factor in the way we establish social distance and build our social defenses. Alex Holder explores the idea of social defenses and the transition between childhood and adolescence. In his analysis of previous work by Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, he points out that puberty poses a particular conundrum for young people as they realize that the methods used in childhood are no longer relevant in adolescence (Holder, 2005).

Schooling is such an important part of growing up. It is a place where children start to understand how they fit into the society. It teaches dominant culture and social norms and acts as a microcosm of the larger society. The demographics of a school greatly influence the educational experience. In Meryem's case, she was lucky to find Algerian teachers who sympathised with her struggle to adapt to the new society. Diegal seemed to find friendship among other immigrants. Nantali found that there was marginalisation within her school that affected how students treated each other. The education system serves as a blueprint for what the society is like.

Lou and Butta attended many institutions, thus fragmenting their experiences. As their parents moved about, they explored an internationalist type of schooling. It came with a degree of privilege within the society, but their parents were also adamant about learning from local people. The experiences juxtaposed realities and forced them to try to find truth somewhere in between. This exercise in integration served them in their future community projects. Freire talked about the importance of understanding the local struggle in order to assist in the liberation of a people. He argued that if ideas neglected the community's perspective, any assistance would be inherently oppressive. "One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding" (Freire, 1979, p.95). Nomadic members who had worked within bureaucratic environments often expressed similar frustrations; the people who made the decisions had no direct contact with the people affected by those decisions.

Lou and Butta Explore Culture, Schooling and Teachers

Butta: Culture Shock

I got back from Kenya to start middle school in Canada. Nairobi was very different because of all these security matters. There were dangerous situations that a lot of people in Canada will never experience. In Ottawa, people didn't know anything about Kenya. They always lived in the same neighbourhood, and they pretended to know what they were talking about. I struggled a lot with that because people's perception of Kenya was very narrow. I tried to dismiss their discrimination as a silly way of thinking, but I started realizing what local ignorance was. I experienced it through my Spanish heritage, because I'm a White male of European descent. People didn't think about what they were saying in front of me because they weren't aware of my cultural background. They felt like they were in a comfort zone. We were all White and friendly, and there was no way I could be ethnic. I was like a double agent, going back to tell my ethnic friends what they said in White circles.

In high school, I had a lot of problems with the teachers, and everything was so one sided. My experience wasn't represented at all, so I automatically felt excluded. If I talked about something passionately, they would try to humiliate me to downplay their own ignorance. It just ended up being a real culture clash. I was supposed to be Canadian, but I just didn't feel Canadian in terms of my concepts. By the time I was 16, I had been kicked out of one school. I had anger management counselling at another school because I threw a chair at a teacher. There were a lot of problems between my parents and me. I resented the feelings that came from the experience they had given me. I went kind of nuts, and my dad sent me packing to Argentina for a month, to chill out. I was just in the countryside, and it really allowed me to return to my Spanish linguistic ability. I could understand everything, but my vocabulary had been greatly

diminished. Our parents always spoke to us in Spanish, but we usually responded in English.

Between brothers, we spoke in English. That was our way of being separate from our parents. It

was like our secret world because our parents didn't understand half of what we were saying.

Again, the clash of language and culture seemed to be a congruent theme for everyone in my

study. Although Butta did not feel Canadian, he used English as a coded language with his

siblings. Yet when his father sent him to Argentina, he appreciated becoming reacquainted with

his mother tongue. This insider/outsider perspective is very evident in his experience. Fluent

speakers of any language have the privilege of understanding all the subtleties of a particular

culture. Perceived to be part of that culture, individuals are more easily accepted by the group.

Still, Butta goes on to say that his features allowed him to blend in a circle with which he did not

necessarily identify. This suggests another dilemma within cultural identification. On one hand,

some individuals may be explicitly excluded from a group, making the separation a very obvious

phenomenon. On the other hand, individuals may be included in a particular group while still

feeling an internal disconnection. This is probably common to any adolescent's experience

navigating through different social groups growing up. For Butta, though, it was a question of

extremes, because he never had time to settle into any identity before being moved. Just as he

was deciding whether to identify with Latino or Canadian culture, he was whisked away to

Eastern Europe.

Butta: Romanian Schooling

My brother and sister had left home to go to university, and I was the only one who went to

Romania with my parents. In Romania, I started at the American International School of

Bucharest. I didn't know anything about Romania. We didn't have the Internet back then, and it

was rare to see a computer in a house. I bought a bunch of new Hip Hop albums before I left

Canada. I had my Sony Discman, and I was bumping all kinds of new stuff, and this became my

retreat. The day after I got to Romania was the first day of school. I woke up at six and there was

a chauffeur that picked me up at seven. In Kenya, school was this vast land with buildings built

like huts. In Romania, it was this old mansion that had been converted to a high school. It used

to belong to a Romanian princess. I remember getting out of the van with all the Canadian

embassy kids. The first person that I really hung out with was the chauffer. I had never been shy

to talk to people and that's something that people in the international community were naturally

scared of. I think my personality saved me from a lot of that isolation. I got to know people right

away, whether I was in Kenya or Romania. Living in Romania opened up a lot of things for me.

The most important teachers of my youth were a couple named Joe and Vicki Garboli. Joe came

from a destitute, White sharecropping family from Southern California. He had served in

Vietnam and eventually travelled the world. He travelled until he met his wife, Vicki. They

moved to Europe and bought a Volkswagen Beetle, which they drove all the way to Iran where

the car broke down. They worked in Iran at the international school, and that's where they

started teaching. They were never trained as teachers, but they realized it was something they

could do to sustain themselves. Joe was a brilliant man who just let me vent about everything. He

told me to not get caught up in my own self-destructiveness. He spoke to me in a way that

always allowed me to feel comfortable because he never talked down to me.

Thanks to the small class setting, we developed real relationships with our teachers. I think this

is really important because if you have peers that are conscious and critical thinkers, it becomes

socially unacceptable to be ignorant. It was a space where I felt comfortable enough to address

those interpersonal issues. Joe taught English Literature and Modern 20th Century History,

probably the two things that I excel at now.   There's a relationship between the way I read and

the way I think about language and history. It's because of the way you can connect dots. The literature of history is something that he taught me to think about a lot. There was a real focus on critical analysis. It wasn't enough to just rehash historical events. You had to write essays about theoretical issues in modern contexts, so you had to read multiple points of views to draw your own conclusions. I had to be able to argue my points in these debates.

Early life lessons are often cemented in the subconscious. When Nomadic Massive gets picked up at the airport, Butta often travels in the front seat talking to the driver. Individuals who may consider themselves as products of immigration usually find that they are something other than normal—viewed as foreigners in the place they are born as well as in the place their parents are from. In my case, I fell into the Latino stereotype in English Canada and somehow fit into the Anglo stereotype in Quebec, alienated in both contexts but for different reasons that had very little to do with me as an individual. As a result of this sense of alienation, a community begins to develop around people who share this bicultural experience. In my generation, Hip Hop became a philosophy that brought people from different backgrounds together. Hip Hop existed in all of the cultural identities that Butta explored because it had become global. So when he heard polyrhythms on a school field trip in Kenya, or checked out local rappers in Romania, he also discovered that Hip Hop was borderless.

In this way, it was easy to become enamoured with Hip Hop, because it was a culture that reflected the identity which he knew but was not manifested anywhere else. While Butta was finding his path through these different systems, Lou was also living through different educational experiences in another part of the world. In both cases, these schooling experiences shaped their ways of looking at the world. At the same time, they both began to seek refuge in Hip Hop music and culture. For Lou, the cultural extremes were notable. He shifted from one

country to another, and in the process he changed educational institutions. Until he arrived in Winnipeg, Lou had always studied in French schools around the world. Suddenly he was immersed in an English educational system which introduced him to another way of thinking, and a completely different cultural demographic in Canada.

Lou: English School

After three years, my dad got an offer in Canada. It was the first time that he got something stable with an interesting salary. I remember him telling me it was a good thing, and this good thing was called Winnipeg. For me it was (North) America and I admired everything American from the stuff I saw on TV. I had an aunt in Miami, and we stopped there before going to Winnipeg at the end of September. Imagine getting to Winnipeg late in the new school year, and through Miami. I left the ocean and the blue skies and took the plane to Winnipeg, feeling like it would probably be similar. The first difference I noticed was the cars. I remember seeing the Pontiac Firebird, which was the Knight Rider car, from Algerian television. They didn't have those in Europe. The next thing I noticed were sneakers because I started to get into shoes when I lived in France.

In Winnipeg, I started local schooling, which was a completely different scene. Suddenly, it was extremely multicultural and completely Anglophone. However, I felt more at ease than I did at the French school. There was definitely a large Black population in that scene. At the same time, Winnipeg's Black community was relatively small. There were many Filipinos and a lot of First Nations people as well. Those were the major communities, and then any other culture you could think of, just not from the Francophone world. This was my first experience with Anglophones, and it is where I learned English.

In Winnipeg, Francophone kids spoke English with each other. The French they spoke didn't have that swing. They couldn't see that it could be cool and quick so they chose to speak English instead. They were prohibited from speaking English at (French) school in an effort to preserve French. Once I was talking to my mom in English, and this teacher said, "Speak French!" In my head, I was like, "I don't need you to tell me to speak French—I am from France!" Obviously their mentality was that you needed to get away from English. Their French was not as good as their English, and that was their native language. I can understand where the angst came from, but I don't agree with the method. That was the first time I saw the opposition of the two languages in Canada.

Lou's rap repertoire boasts an array of different styles and languages. His ability to switch from language to language is connected to the many different examples of immersion he experienced in early life. He makes the distinction between a type of French that is considered cool, and another which students are shy to speak. The French not considered cool by the young Manitobans was subject to the judgment of the dominant English population. In keeping with Freire's (1970) theory of oppression, the young French kids in the minority strived to emulate the dominant Anglophone class. It was a question of perspective and youth identity especially, a characteristic of Hip Hop culture in Canada in the 1990's. By virtue of the way music was diffused in those days, it was rare to encounter French Hip Hop in Winnipeg. At that time, the only way to discover international Hip Hop was to physically go exploring somewhere else. After four years in Canada, his father sought to leave the cold Winnipeg winters and started looking for contracts in the Caribbean. Lou's next influential experience took him to Cuba, where he again became immersed in a new language and culture. This trip also set the stage for the first Nomadic Massive adventure.

Lou: Cuban School

I arrived in Cuba, and the first night, my parents and I went for a walk along the boardwalk called the Malecón. I knew a little bit about the history because my dad was always into world history. He looked up to what happened in Cuba in the 1960s. As a teenager, the story of Che and Fidel represented regeneration. I remember listening to the radio at this little restaurant and it was all in Spanish. I listened to it and thought it was not completely foreign to me. I had lost a lot, but I picked it up in about two months. I guess I had it inside. It was just there waiting to be motivated. I came to Canada as a French speaker and left for Cuba as an Anglophone. In Cuba, I went back to a French School. It was a small house with three students per class. All the classes were mixed levels and it was mostly correspondence and tutoring.

My dad worked at Alliance Française, which was very laid back. It was an old building, nothing flashy or snobby about it. There was a lot of cool cultural stuff, but his work was related to the embassy. That's how I ended up meeting sons of diplomats, who had a similar upbringing in the sense that they moved around their whole lives; however, they lived in completely different realities. It's that closed community type of lifestyle—a French person who goes to another country and only hangs out with French people in a neighbourhood where everyone is a foreigner. I think that's the reality for a lot of expatriate people. They tend to fall into that out of a feeling that it's not safe or proper to go beyond those walls. Sometimes they don't have a choice, because that's what that job entails.

Fortunately, Alliance Française was not a diplomatic position. It was more cultural, so my dad was with local artists. The house we lived in was half house, half school, so we had students coming in all the time. The school was in the neighbourhood, so everybody around me was

Cuban. The other people I knew lived in a very remote neighbourhood, which must have been like Beverly Hills before Castro. They put a lot of people who worked for foreign companies or diplomats in those neighbourhoods. It was very residential, with front yards and gates and everything. In contrast, my family lived right on the street. The friends I made were Cubans of all sorts of lifestyles. In Havana, the neighbourhoods were very mixed. In a building in Havana, you could see the son of a rich family living alone in a six-bedroom apartment, and beside him the same sized apartment was divided for six families.

I was living a privileged life, like never before. The feeling was inescapable. I was hanging out with friends who just didn't have access to what I had. I was going out with ten dollars and that is all it was for me. For my friends, it was the equivalent of a hundred dollars or more. As real as the privilege was, I think my friendships were still quite authentic. I was exposed to racism from expatriates in the way they spoke about Cubans, particularly Black Cubans. They spoke with a kind of arrogance. Often times, people who lived a privileged lifestyle in Cuba went back to a regular job in their own countries. In Cuba, they were able to employ six people to serve them, paying them 20 bucks a month each.

I used to bike to school every day. I'd be on the bike path, watching everything on the street, picking up girls at the red light who needed a ride. I went from waiting for the bus alone in minus 30 temperatures to being on a bike with a beautiful girl, in front of the ocean. Exploring the streets of Cuba changed my experience. I went to school with the daughter of the French consul, who was living a completely different lifestyle. Another kid in my class was the son of a French gasoline company. They were escorted to school, dropped off and picked up at the end of the day. Where I lived was very central, and that's how I integrated so quickly. I tried to make new friends outside because I didn't feel I related to that privileged circle.

In Cuba, Lou witnessed the disparity between the diplomatic lifestyle and the local way of life. This was not unlike what Butta experienced while living in Kenya. For most that grow up around the elite, it is the only reality they know. In each case, Butta and Lou were able to observe the contrasts between the diplomatic lifestyle and the local reality. When they lived in Canada, they went to public schools and mingled with all different types of cultures. They were part of a large middle class with an implied uniformity. Once they were hosted in another country, their status became artificially elevated; therefore, they were able to see the injustice because of their previous life experience. Their parents' openness to other cultures gave them this perspective. As a result, they began to learn about the importance of language and dialect. As they changed countries, the dominant language changed as well. They became very skilled in switching languages and learning about how people interacted. When Lou tells the story of biking to school and compares it to the cold bus stop in Winnipeg, I am reminded of the experience Vox had as a newly landed immigrant. Changing countries is not only an experience that affects the mind but it also touches all the senses. The first shock for many coming to Canada seems to be the cold, but then there are other elements which often affect us on a subconscious level—the music playing in the shopping malls, the smell of the food, the way people talk to each other. The experience can be so overwhelming that we feel fatigued from trying to understand it all at once.

Waahli and Vox Discuss Different French School Systems

In many countries, social status is reinforced and maintained by education and more importantly, access to education. Bourdieu (1993) argues that, "The education system follows a culturally legitimizing function by reproducing, via the delimitation of what deserves to be conserved, transmitted and acquired the distinction between the legitimate and the illegitimate way of

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dealing with legitimate works" (p.291). In Haiti, the importance of getting into a good school from kindergarten was essential to ensure a prosperous future. As Haitian immigrants entered the Quebecois education system, they seemed to bring these notions with them. Speaking French was prioritised, and Creole remained a home language. There was social and family pressure to adapt to the local culture in order to not be left behind. As a result, many families made sacrifices to ensure that they could put their children in French private institutions. Waahli experienced the clash between culture and social class in Quebec. He went from being a visible minority in a private institution to finding his cultural identity in the public school system. He describes the public school as stratified according to race, and yet he preferred it to the elite school because he did not feel ostracised.

Waahli: Private College to Public School

After elementary school, my mother decided to put me in a private school. Despite having good grades, I was very turbulent and caused a lot of trouble. I was basically a class clown. All of my friends went to public school after grade 6. I lived in Saint-Michel, but I went to school in the Plateau at College Français. I remember not being happy about it because back then there weren't many Black folks at College Français. Now you see that there are a lot more, but when I went there, there were about 10. It was mostly rich kids and I didn't fit in. Most of the kids that went there were from Outremont and Westmont. My mom wanted the best for us. She thought I had talent but lacked discipline. Every time she would see my teachers, they would say the same thing.

I got kicked out of College Français for being a brat. I never failed a course. It was just hard for me to get disciplined so I went from private to public. At École Joseph Francois Perrault in Saint- Michel, I was exposed to the multicultural side of Montreal. In College Français, people

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came from a wealthy background, and I'm not from that background at all. There was some kind of favouritism, and the way people taught was very different. At JFP, I was more inclined to hang out with people who were like me. I would just hang out with Black folks because we understood each other, and it was easier. There were certain things that hurt me that I probably didn't hear from these people. The school was divided into three wings. The A side was for the enriched kids; the B side was for the regular stream, and C was all the immigrant kids and kids from immigrant families. As a result, the school was divided by social class. I was in C so I got to hang out with the Black folks. That started shaping my way of seeing myself in this world.

The day you start saying no is the day that you start to exist. Prior to that, I was taking a lot and not reacting to it. I was shaping my opinions in spite of my social setting and social pressures. I was saying what I had to say, responding and defending myself with words and arguments. Staying with Black folks started to define my Blackness because I felt supported. I was also hanging out with Italians because it was the same thing in Saint-Michel. Maybe we were not of the same social class, but they were still sons of immigrants. We use to hang out together, but the relationship stayed outside the home. I was never invited to go inside an Italian house for supper or to play. I could play with them at school or in the street, but no more. They used to come to my house. My parents didn't have attitudes against that, but I felt that there was a form of racism there that I couldn't quite put into words.

Vox experienced a similar clash when he changed from a rural public school to a private college in Haiti. In each case, the constant was French colonization and its effects on class-consciousness. The institutions they attended exuded a sense of normalcy tied to the values endorsed by this system. For most students, these values were common, so the institution could easily be viewed as serving the purpose of educating. However, when a variable is introduced, in

this case a student who does not fit in, it becomes possible to see the institution as fulfilling the purpose of indoctrination. Depending on one's perspective, either conclusion may be drawn. It also stands to reason that teachers are less aware of their indoctrination if they have come to identify with the values they teach. According to research from the University of New Brunswick on citizenship education, "It seems to us what passes for citizenship education, particularly in the Canadian context, is often more akin to indoctrination" (Sears & Hughes 2006, p.1).

Vox: Colonial Schooling

The school system in Haiti works against Haitians. The simple fact is that Haitian education adopted a system imposed by the French. They could no longer enslave you physically, so they found a way to enslave you mentally. You were not allowed to speak Creole at school, and even the teachers didn't speak French. You can see that these people are not authentic. The books and lessons were learned by memorization. It's like you are just repeating it and you don't know what you are talking about. If you don't know your lessons they would use something called rikwaz, which is a cow skin, cut very long and thin and then braided. The French masters beat the slaves with this during slavery. They have another thing called the piquet: they put you in the corner for the whole day and humiliate you. You don't have any system that is really working to prevent this from happening.

The entire school system is based on divisions. It's about competing all the time. Students are constantly being ranked. The person that's last sits at the back of the class because they are ashamed. It's always an older guy because he did the class twice. It's always a guy that doesn't speak in class—the guy that cannot pronounce things well in French. This continues outside the

school because if you speak French in Haiti, you are considered higher in the society. It's not just a language thing, it shows where you come from. People that only speak Creole will exaggerate it to make it sound like French, to look more educated because being educated means knowing how to speak French.

I left Limbe to go to Collège Saint-Martial, a Catholic school in Port-au-Prince. Many former presidents have passed through this school. The only reason I was able to get in was because of my brother. He was a priest and so was the director of the school. Usually they don't take people from secondary school; they select people when they are in kindergarten. The first school you go to determines what type of life you are going to live in Haiti. If you want your kids to make it, they have to speak French from kindergarten, have a specific uniform, and you have to pay every month. The French controlled the school system directly because Catholic schools are run by Catholic priests. Haiti is a part of the Francophonie,[2] and you have a specific program to go through. The Haitian elite collaborate to keep the poor down as much as possible. Even though they understand the system is not good for Haiti, they are so comfortable in it that they keep it. Those people would die for their country anytime because they are able to enjoy how good it is. They love Haiti, but they don't love Haitians, and there's a big difference. If they accept you and you are in their entourage, it's not because you're Haitian, it's because of your status.

This mentality is from the time of colonization. It stays there because the White man raped the Black slave and the kids were called mulatto. Mulatto kids were saved from working on the plantation because they were the masters' children. The master did everything to give his children a good education, even sending them to France. They formed this mulatto class that

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[2] The Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)

mixed with the Africans to win independence; however, when the French left, they believed that they were moving up to replace that social class.

I discovered who I was the first year of high school. I didn't know anybody, and there were about fifty people in the class. The first question I answered made everybody laugh. Even the teacher was on the floor laughing. I asked the teacher what was so funny. He asked me to repeat it again so I said, "devoir deyeye," He was asking me, "Where is your homework?" I was telling him it was in the back of the notebook. In Port-au-Prince they use an L, whereas in the north we use Y. They say deyeyel. As soon as I spoke that way, I was identified as a countryside boy, in other words, uneducated, poor, and uncultured. The whole class started calling me Lakay, which means "home" in the countryside but also means "countryside man" in the city.

I asked the teacher, "Haven't you ever heard people speak like that before?" And he replied, "Of course, that's where I come from!" I was so confused and it took a long time before I understood. That's why I say that the education system works against Haitians. It's the same falsified mentality that we still have from slavery. The slave saw the master beating his brother, and he laughed to distance himself. Inside he may feel bad, but over time people become desensitized. They would rather make fun of it than try to take action. That's why the teacher laughed. He wouldn't defend me because they might laugh at him. Your status in this society is so important that you have to struggle to keep it.

I realized I was not like the others, and I was fighting every day. I was coming face to face with guys who were a lot bigger than me. At the end of the second year, one of the first kids I fought came back to bug me, and I fought with him again. They took us to the principal, and he kicked the other kid out of school. His name was Steven St. Pierre Andre. The whole class was so mad,

and it was my fault. What made me so sad was that his parents came to beg. He had been there since kindergarten. He was like family, and because of me, he was kicked out. I saw his parents at the principal's office with their knees on the floor. They humiliated the parents, and blamed them for the behaviour. They were hard working people. The school was so expensive, but they found the money no matter how hard it was, and still they had to go through this humiliation. The only reason they didn't kick me out was because of my brother. What would they say to him?

In the 1970s, social psychologist Henri Tajfel conducted a series of experiments demonstrating that discrimination emerged from identification with a particular social group. He showed that it was not necessary to have intergroup conflict in order to have a negative view of another group (Tajfel, 1970). Identity is closely tied to one's position in the hierarchy of a society. It exists at all levels: familial, professional, social, and political. Individuals believe they are defined by who they are, when in reality, they are just as much defined by who they are not. For example, being Canadian is often tied to the idea of not being American. Sumara, Davis and Laidlaw (1987) state that, "discussions around Canadian identity tend to cluster around claims that Canadians are not overbearing, not totalizing, not monolithic, not unified, not static: or, put more bluntly, Canadians are not Americans" (p.147). At the same time, within Canada another fragmentation occurs. Among immigrant populations, a cultural sense of identity is tied to language and customs. Even if newcomers abandon their language and adopt local customs, the dominant class assigns cultural identities to them because they look different or speak with an accent.

Tajfel later argued that the need to categorize was useful to humans as a means of differentiating and understanding the world; however, when it comes to categorizing ourselves, humans have a tendency to assume that we are better than those who are not in our category. This feeling of

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superiority is fueled by a sense that the other is less worthy, and this can arise as a feeling outside of any particular altercation (Tajfeld & Turner, 1979). This type of cultural categorization occurs on all levels of society, but when there is a power imbalance; acts of dehumanization are justified by the original notions of superiority. Freire (1970) argues that oppression dehumanizes both oppressor and oppressed. This was illustrated in Vox's description of the elite class in Haiti, who saw the injustice of the poor but did nothing to change the system that caused their poverty.

Vox's account of going to a private school similarly exemplified this concept. He was ridiculed because he was from the countryside. His teacher didn't defend him because he had come to identify with the dominant mentality, despite being from the countryside as well. They shared a common cultural identity, but given the importance of social class in Haiti, they were in opposition.

CHAPTER 5: HIP HOP

Nantali, Waahli and Diegal Discuss Hip Hop in North America

In this Chapter, I will explore Hip Hop history in Canada through the lens of the Montreal experience. Given that this dissertation explores the Canadian contribution to global Hip Hop, it is essential to understand how Hip Hop got here in the first place. At the beginning of the Hip Hop era, enthusiasts obtained their music on cassette tapes. In today's world, the search for identity has an undeniable virtual component. As youth construct online personas, they expose themselves to different streams of media and entertainment. Nostalgia for early MTV music videos does not affect the teenagers of today. Their experience is more interactive and collaborative than ever before. The international Hip Hop community thrives on the exchange between artists of different cultures; through the Internet, that community is exposed to different manifestations of the genre. Nomadic Massive lived through the My Space era and witnessed the fall of the music industry into an online world of free entertainment. Long before this dramatic shift, Nomadic members constructed their identities by connecting with like-minded individuals living across the Canadian-American border. In those days, the journey was quite physical. It is impossible to think of Hip Hop without considering New York City, where Hip Hop was born and still resides. In the pre-Internet era, the only way to gain access to Hip Hop was by going there to get it. Montreal's proximity to New York allowed young people to experience the culture and bring it back to Montreal. As Tali and Diegal explain, Hip Hop culture came to Montreal with Caribbean immigrants who frequented the Big Apple. They brought it in the form of fashion—by wearing Hip Hop clothing. They brought it in the form of media, with cassettes and VHS tapes. They adopted Hip Hop slang and learned the dances, and soon it became homegrown. Montreal had rap groups and dance crews, and they began to

interact with the American artists. The thirst for identity was being quenched by this discovery that there was a place for alienated youth in North America.

Tali: The New York Influence

 Between 10 and 13, I travelled to New York very often with my mother. This was a common reality for a lot of Caribbean families in Montreal because they had family living there. It was the 1980s, and the U.S. economy was much stronger than the Canadian economy, so they went to New York every long weekend. They would go there to buy curtains in bulk, or whatever they could get, to bring back. Meanwhile, we were the kids at home with our cousins listening to this new music and seeing this fresh style. This is where we all shaped a lot of our identity as Black Montrealers. There was no real Black arts culture in Montreal and no role models, so everything for us came from an American perspective. Beat Street came out when I was 10, and I remember seeing it in the theatre with my mom.

 I was 13 when I got my first tape off the street, in New York. It was Queen Latifah's "Welcome to Mi Casa," and people used to sell those things out of brief cases in New York. We spent most of our time in Brooklyn, so I was accustomed to that kind of thing. I remember getting a Wu-Tang mix-tape from a dude who was five years older than me. It was this TDK tape and he wrote Wu-Tang, and then he drew these little figurines on it. This was a very popular aesthetic connected to this new wave of Afrocentricity that was going on then. People in New York and consequently people in Montreal started wearing African inspired clothing and jewellery. I used to have a T-shirt that read: "it's a Black thing, you wouldn't understand." It had the continent of Africa with the faces of different Black leaders. This was a really common thing, and it was very empowering for us as teenagers to be able to have something to identify with. All of that

paraphernalia, this music and this aesthetic, really came to Montreal with these trips to New York. The culture penetrated Montreal in a strong way, and I was right there with it.

At that time, everybody wore hi-top fades, or the step hairstyle. Girls wanted to look like MC Lyte, so they used to wear the "door-knocker" earrings. Beyond the fashion, I started to get a little bit more into the ideologies of Hip Hop culture. I liked the philosophies of Hip Hop in addition to the music. I kept listening to a lot of X-Clan, so I started to learn a little bit more about Hip Hop, its history, and its socio-political significance in the United States. At 13, I wasn't learning about socio-political stuff in school. I wrote an essay for English class when I was 15—an analytical essay on the concept of "edutainment," which was something KRS-One talked about quite a bit in his music. At the same time, there were a lot of issues here in Montreal with police brutality and racial profiling. We heard about what was going on with Public Enemy and the government, and all that stuff really became political here in the 1990s. This was during the conscious rap era. The Cosby Show was on television, but so was A Different World, which explored aspects of the Hip Hop aesthetic and culture more deeply.

We were really surrounded by the culture by the mid-1990s. It was definitely enjoyable, and I secretly engaged in writing rap verses. I wrote a couple of rhymes here and there, but I didn't think I was ever going to be a rapper. If anything, I thought I would be a dancer because I was already into Afro-Caribbean dance. I got into dance because one of my cousins was a good friend with these two amazing dancers. I lived on Côte Sainte-Catherine, and those two guys lived in my neighbourhood. When my cousin was supposed to be babysitting me, he would leave me with them, and they taught me how to dance. We call it Hip Hop dance today but it's really party moves or the kinds of stuff that you see in the videos. Some people were break dancing in the neighbourhoods, but I liked the dance moves from the videos and tried to interpret the

choreography. When I got to CEGEP, I met Waahli, who was part of a rap crew called the

Cynics. Then I met B-Boys like Dazzle—he was in Flo Rock back then—and DJs like Simahlak.

Nantali offers an interesting look at the creation of a youth culture during its inception in Canada. The search for identity in adolescence is a normal part of growing up, but Nantali reveals the intricacies of cultural construction and awareness among Black Montreal youth in Montreal. It was facilitated by a blend of cultural symbols which pointed to Africa but still remained North American as they fought against ideas of normalcy in the West. Freire's theory of critical consciousness proposes that one can be liberated through awareness followed by action. In this account by Nantali, I can see how youth in Montreal explored their cultural identity through emblematic objects like jewelry and clothing. At the same time, the symbols were supplemented by creative action which equally served to define the culture. It was through dance, graffiti and rap that the culture was able to flourish outside of New York. The many ways to come to the culture are connected to its survival and it's the way that it is is passed down from generation to generation. In Montreal, it would help to connect people that had inherited rivalries from their colonial ancestors. This was the case for Nantali's friendship with Waahli which developed through a common understanding of Hip Hop culture and a defiance of socio-cultural norms.

Waahli: Adopting Hip Hop Culture

When I was 15 years old, I discovered rap music. I heard the De La Soul song, Say No Go, and it struck me. I used to go back and forth to New York because we had a lot of family there. These people spoke in Creole mixed with English words, and I couldn't understand. I was exposed to English a little bit, but when Hip Hop came along, I really started doing my research. I was 15, and Mike Mission and Sean Dog were playing underground Hip Hop on CKUT radio every

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Saturday. That's where I discovered the Beastie Boys, Erik B, Rakim, EPMD, KRS-1, Tribe Called Quest, Jungle Brothers and De La Soul. This became my reference. I was always happy when my mom would say, "We are going to New York," because I could tape some songs and come back to Montreal and show my friends. In Hip Hop, you have to be fresh. You need to have the freshest new kicks and be the first to have that song that no one has heard.

I became very attached to this music and this culture. I listened to every single rap verse and became more and more interested by the many different styles and flows. There were so many different ways of passing a message. De La Soul had a way of passing a clear message, straight up but real and poetic. Before learning English, I wrote the rhymes down phonetically. I couldn't understand, so it was basically all just sound. I wanted to understand what these people were saying, so I decided to go to Vanier College in English while everyone else went to Ville Mont Royal in French. It was easy for me to learn English because I had a goal behind it. I was reading and writing in English, trying to get familiar with all the grammar. Then, I revisited all the De La Soul songs I used to recite. I thought the songs were about having a good time but I realized they were rapping about how hard it was growing up poor and how people judge you. This solidified my connection to Hip Hop culture because I knew the story. It spoke about the struggle of my parents coming here and making sacrifices for their kids. It spoke about growing up with all of these social classes and power dynamics.

Waahli clearly echoes the importance of New York in the proliferation of Hip Hop culture but he goes on to discuss the importance of educating oneself with the knowledge from the movement. There is this interesting dichotomy in Hip Hop which seems to be understood by those who practice the culture and Waahli touches on it with seeming acceptance. On one hand, there is a need to look fresh and have the latest fashion which is indicative of a consumerist influence on

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the culture. On the other hand there is this underlying understanding that one should be informed and seek to gain knowledge through the teachings of Hip Hop culture; this seems exemplary of a more traditional approach. It appears paradoxical, at first, until one considers that the idea of looking fresh was a cultural symbol connected to pride and distinction. It was a way of subverting the common stereotypes connected to marginalised youth. Even if it was not possible to afford the symbols of wealth it was important to put an effort into appearing that one could. This type of rhetoric is evident in much of the commercialised music which commonly boasts about what the artists have in terms of wealth or power. Whereas there is another brand of Hip Hop which is more concerned with knowledge and wisdom. Truthfully, these types of Hip Hop are not mutually exclusive, in that mainstream hip hop can contain some conscious theory and conscious rap can display materialistic imagery. Understanding this spectrum allows for the diversity of the culture and it is within this multiplicity that Hip Hop enthusiasts reside. Membership to any culture requires an understanding of its codes, idiosyncrasies, and contradictions. These things can be taught in a classroom but more often they are learned by participating in the culture. Waahli demonstrates how he became attuned to this knowledge and how it shaped his social experience in College.

There were certain books that you needed to read to know what an MC was talking about. There was certain knowledge that you could not understand from the songs, without understanding the references. If you didn't understand the supreme alphabet, or supreme mathematics and the 5%, you could not completely understand a group like the Poor Righteous Teachers. You would be totally lost. All of the symbols are very important. It's based on a belief system that is solid. It's through Hip Hop that I discovered jazz music, and it's through Hip Hop that I discovered Islam. I went on a spiritual quest and learned about what attracted me the most in spirituality. It's a mix

of a lot of things. I can say that Islam played a big part because of the music that I listened to. The 5 % developed I Self Lord and Master as an acronym for Islam. I learned about all of these little references from Hip Hop. When Buckshot from Black Moon says arm, double leg, arm, head, he is talking about Allah. So all of these artists had these references you had to research to understand. This was before the Internet, so you had to go to the bookstore or share books in the community. I was lucky to meet people who were happy to share that knowledge and didn't keep it to themselves.

In college, Hip Hop culture gave me new types of social groups. I met Nantali at Vanier College. We were listening to the same type of conscious Hip Hop, so we got to vibe like that. We used to see each other at the Cage. That's where all the Black folks used to hang out; it was surrounded by steel bars. The Black Association asked the school to remove the bars so we wouldn't look like we were stuck in a prison. They actually did remove them, and I was involved in that process. Still, there were rivalries between English and French Caribbean communities. A lot of the West Indian people were not really interested in talking with Haitians. I always thought language was the reason behind it, because that's all I could see. I started talking to a few people from the West Indies when I started dressing with style. I remember wearing a lot of expensive brands that I couldn't afford. At Vanier, we were just a small group of Haitians. All the Black folks would sit in the same area, but Haitians would be in one spot, and Vincentians and Jamaicans would be in another. There was not a lot of interaction, but Tali was someone who didn't mind crossing over.

Later, I started meeting Haitian people who were into Hip Hop music. I got exposed to this guy named Parmee and another named Dazzle. We created this band called the Cynics in 1996. We used to do shows and socials at Dawson College. I sang back-up vocals at first, but then I started

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to write. My friend Alex had a studio in Ville Saint-Laurent, and he was making beats. We used

to write songs to the beats, and we came out with a few mix tapes. We went to perform once in

Ottawa, and there was this guy who was really interested in us. He asked us to come to Toronto

to meet Craig Manning, the CEO at BMG. The guy let us stay in this big house. He introduced

us to a lot of people, bought us some new clothes, and took us to BMG studios to meet the CEO.

Inside Craig Manning's office, I saw all these vinyls on the wall and pictures of artists that we

liked. He started playing our demo and he did not even nod his head. After listening to it, he

said, "Do you guys have any more stuff?" That was all we had, so we had to go back to

Montreal empty handed. After we came back, we were shocked by what happened, and the band

was dismantled. I don't know if it was the pressure of being faced with something we really

wanted, but when we came back, we separated and everyone went into a deep spiritual search.

That's when I decided to focus on my solo career. It was more challenging because I had never

written a song from beginning to end.

Over the course of his adolescent life, Hip Hop allowed Waahli to perfect his language skills,

write and recite poetry, meet different people in College, start a group and meet with a CEO at

BMG. Although he did not sign with BMG, the experience demonstrates how Hip Hop has the

power to propel people out of their comfort zone. It was an alternative educational tool which

allowed Waahli to advance in domains that school aims to teach such as language, socialization

and leadership. Those lessons continued to serve Waahli after College in his expansion into the

world of performance with Nomadic Massive and retail with his soap business; the starting point

for these massive endeavours was often a cassette tape from New York. It's interesting to see

which tape was the first or most influential and how the connection to a particular song can

foreshadow the trajectory of an artist. For Waahli it was De La Soul and their ability to spread a

clear message. For Nantali it was Queen Latifah, a strong female presence in the industry to this day. Diegal's first choice was Kool Moe Dee which also proved quite prophetic. Perhaps we cannot attribute Diegal's choice to become a doctor to the song, "I Go to Work" but it is obvious that his work ethic is reflected in the type of music he listens to.

Diegal: Getting Started in the Hip Hop Game

The first tape I bought with my own money was Kool Moe Dee. He had a song called "I Go to Work." He had all these analogies about going to work as a doctor, a scientist or an architect. I thought that was cool, and I tried to learn the words. In high school, there was a buzz about Hip Hop. My brother started listening to LL Cool J, and these guys at school were doing the same dance moves from the videos. My first access to Hip Hop came through the dances and the videos. We didn't take lessons, but now they call that style of dance New Jack. At that time, we called it B-boying. Being a B-boy was to dress fresh and just have the attitude. It all depended on your budget, but you tried your best to imitate the style of what was current at the time. In those days, the style was weird and very baggy. We had a talent show at my school, and we did a few things with my brother's group. He rapped and I had this B-Boy performance.

Hip Hop was important because we were consuming it. There were a lot of live shows back in the late 1990s. We were old enough to get some money, go out, and stay up late. It was the golden era of Hip Hop, and we hung out wherever there were shows. Sometimes we would come downtown for shows, but it was basically jams and block parties in the community. I was still in the West Island, so we hung out in the burbs. Occasionally we'd go to Montreal North when there were activities there. It was a lot of house parties and church basement parties. The Greek Church had a lot of Jamaican parties with Caribbean music. My brother was still doing shows, and we had friends who were DJs and who had gigs around town. I've been carrying crates and

carrying speakers ever since those days. At these events I used to dance or rap and once in a while even beat box.

Hip Hop's influence in the Montreal scene is undeniable. It has become a youth culture, especially among immigrants and children of immigrants. I observe this just by living in the city. The graffiti and the different styles that the youth wear are evidence of Hip Hop's effect on Montreal's cultural landscape. As an outsider, it is easy to see that a particular sub-culture is present; however, the real discovery is the education passed down through this culture. Everyone spoke about it in a different way, but it is irrefutable that Hip Hop taught the youth lessons that were not available in their classrooms. Waahli spoke of a spiritual journey and learning about the Nation of Islam in the United States. He also attributed his proficiency in English to studying the lyrics of Hip Hop songs he didn't understand. Tali spoke of how she learned philosophy and history through Hip Hop culture, and how it played a role in constructing a Black identity. Diegal said it was a culture that was consumed by a generation in search of a cultural identity. A community emerged around this culture, and it began to help bridge the gap between Caribbean communities that had become estranged due to local language politics. The children of immigrants had inherited colonial identities, and Hip Hop provided an opportunity to step out of this paradigm. It helped them transcend the language debate in Quebec and gave them a chance to explore their Black identities in Canada. All of these experiences represent the cornerstones for building the Hip Hop community that exists in Montreal today. Meanwhile, the rest of the group discovered the impact that Hip Hop already had outside North America.

Lou, Butta, Meryem and Vox Discuss Hip Hop's Impact Abroad

Direct access to New York made it easy for Montreal youth to appropriate Hip Hop culture; however, outside of North America, the culture remained obscure and inaccessible. Astonishingly, it still managed to penetrate the borders of countries that did not have great relations with the U.S. Lou, Butta, and Meryem all discovered Hip Hop abroad. They clearly describe how it was exported, how people gravitated towards it, and eventually transformed it into something local. When they arrived in different parts of Canada from overseas, their relationship with Hip Hop continued and served to define their culture. All of them speak about an allegiance to Hip Hop that is universally transferable. Mitchell (2001) writes, "In its initial stages, appropriations of rap and hip hop outside the USA often mimicked US models, but in most countries where rap has taken root, hip hop scenes have rapidly developed from an adoption to an adaptation of U.S. musical forms and idioms" (p.11). Lou talks about how Cuban youth used Hip Hop during the American embargo. He eventually took what he learned in Cuba and used it in Winnipeg to promote the culture. Butta talks about learning how to rap in Romania and studying African American history through samples. Meryem shows how rap culture and rivalries influenced Algerian youth. She also observed those realities in her high school in Montreal. All around the world, group members discovered that this culture influenced local youth. Their experiences are a demonstration of Hip Hop's overwhelming power to influence young people and ignite critical dialogue among them. As they each negotiated between different identities, Hip Hop provided a platform of inclusion and debate. As Lou shows in the following description of Hip Hop in Cuba, people were quick to use it as a tool to inform and educate. He then expanded on this platform by creating a radio show in Winnipeg.

Lou: Hip Hop in Cuba

There's a neighbourhood in Cuba called Alamar. It is a big housing complex outside of Havana with about 500 buildings. It was built after the revolution, and it is right on the waterfront. If you're on the top of that building, in front of the ocean, you can catch the Miami airwaves easily with an antenna. It's only 90 miles away. With just the antenna, they were able to catch shows like Soul Train and stuff like that. This is how Cubans first became exposed to Hip Hop music. My dad introduced me to some young Cubans who worked at the Alliance Française library. I spoke to them and met this kid who was a rapper. I started going to these Hip Hop shows, and then Fab Five Freddy came to Cuba. Fab Five Freddy is a pioneer of Hip Hop from New York, who first released Afrika Bambaataa. I was invited to his conference, and that's where I met Obsession and other important Cuban Hip Hop artists. At the conference, we discussed the very political aspect of Hip Hop in Cuba, which I thought was really interesting. At the time, I saw all these kids that were into Hip Hop culture. They rapped really well and loved the same music. They were up to-date on the culture and were really community oriented. What struck me was that they were doing it for nothing—just for the feeling of being somebody. They were expressing their pride, their history, their knowledge, and their consciousness. I met Obsession and saw that the Hip Hop scene there completely related to the conscious Hip Hop scene in the States. The American scene kept on feeding information, and American artists started coming to perform. Through that, I was able to meet Common, Dead Prez, and the list goes on. It was interesting to see how people manifested themselves culturally and found ways to build a community.

The fact that Miami Hip Hop stations were heard in Cuba demonstrates how close the two places are geographically. Otherwise Havana and Miami are worlds apart and still both used Hip Hop to attract youth audiences. The interesting thing to remark here is how the language barrier allowed for a transformation which suited the needs of either community. For the most part, Cubans were not emulating the messages in the music they heard over the airways. This may be partly due to the fact that the music was not in their mother tongue so the listeners probably gravitated more to the music than the content. However, Hip Hop is a music which thrives on describing local realities in order for it to be considered credible by its listeners. In this way, the type of Hip Hop that was being interpreted on Cuban shores dealt with Cuban realities. Under the Castro regime, Hip Hop served as a platform to discuss issues which were not being discussed openly in Cuban society due to fears of repression. Although we can observe copies of mainstream Hip Hop around the world in which the symbols are examples of the vulgarization of capitalist values; Hip Hop's real strength internationally has been in facilitating dialogue among marginalized people about the status quo. These discussions are essential to critical consciousness in places where that type of consciousness is overtly frowned upon by dictatorships. When Lou returned to Canada from Cuba he was able to use Hip Hop to initiate a dialogue among French Canadian communities. He was surprised to see that French rap from France was not popular among French Canadians in central Canada. He observed that young French Canadians were listening to American music and this was serving to define their interpretations of what was fashionable.

Lou: Hip Hop in Canada

In Winnipeg, Much Music basically schooled me on Hip Hop with these cool documentaries. I would go to the Francophone library and take out music magazines from France. I began to see that there were French groups and that Hip Hop was getting huge in France. A lot of the new rappers in France were of African descent, typically Algerian. I felt like it mirrored me somehow, and with American Hip Hop, there was a Latino aspect that I identified with through Spanish. There was this Francophone radio, which catered to a French neighbourhood of Winnipeg called Saint Boniface. At that point, there was no Hip Hop on FM radio, not even a little bit. At best, you might sometimes hear stuff like Busta Move or It Takes Two.

My friend and I decided to propose a radio show where we could play Hip Hop. We had to play 30 percent French music, and the guy at the radio asked how we were going to do that with Hip Hop. I had some tapes to show them from France, so they decided to give us our own show. In those days, you could tell who was into Hip Hop pretty easily because the fashion wasn't like everybody else. Hip Hop kids used to wear Chicago Bulls jackets and caps. I would just go up to them on the bus or on the street and ask if they listened to Hip Hop. I would tell them about the show and we would exchange numbers. I started making these new friends on the street and tried to connect with them and invite them to the radio to talk about Hip Hop. One friend in particular opened me up to the Hip Hop scene in Winnipeg. I went to these events, and saw these guys rapping and sounding like the dudes on TV. I looked in amazement and thought that I could do that too

The transition from observer or fan into artist was one that many members of the group stumbled upon while living abroad. The realization that it was something that could be created and fostered emerges from Hip Hop's universal appeal. It doesn't require a huge investment to get

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started; a pen and a paper, a simple beatbox or even clapping to keep the beat are sufficient to start freestyling. Other types of music require instruments and equipment and this is what makes Hip Hop so attractive to people who are on the move or who have little resources. Even the new technologies that have become incorporated into Hip Hop are more or less portable. Laptops can be used to create beats, drum machines can easily fit into a backpack and so the quality of sound has improved but the portability remains the same. Lou saw a niche that was not being exploited in French Canada and he was quick to see the opportunity. In fact, it was a way for him to bring unity to an otherwise disconnected community in Western Canada. This speaks to a more important need for innovation in marginalized communities. As young French Canadians in Winnipeg were surrounded by English culture, they often minimized the importance of French and used English instead. At some point the media was beginning to overtake their identity by simply ignoring it. In Lou's case, he was able to bring some of that French pride through new music that the youth could identify with. It was not old traditional French songs which may have represented something for their grandparents but a new wave that was cool and contemporary and which connected to other French communities around the world.

Butta saw Hip Hop as a way of claiming an identity while he was in Romania. Inside Canada he felt that he did not fully belong, but in Romania he explored the culture that he left behind and that was just flourishing. He connected to Hip Hop through underground radio in Romania and perfected his craft among other enthusiasts who seemed to relate to Hip Hop although it was not something that was born in Europe. Before long, he too, realized that he could bring something unique to this emerging genre, in a place that was finding its own version of the art form.

Butta: Hip Hop in Romania

Bucharest is a very scarred city that was levelled by war. In terms of Hip Hop, they were late in the game. In the late 1990s, it was just starting to bubble up. You had these graffiti guys, but they would just tag the name of a rapper. Usually they tagged Tupac or Biggie. Tupac died right before I left for Romania, and Biggie died the following year. There were a couple of groups that were popping up, like BNG Mafia, which was like the Romanian NWA. They came from the projects, and their parents were tortured by the security system. I met this guy from Uganda named Uche. We clicked right away because of our love for Hip Hop. He gave me two cassette tapes: Black Sheep and A Tribe Called Quest. He put me onto this radio show where there was a local DJ who had grown up in New York. He introduced the radio show, and he had Fat Joe from New York "bigging up" the program. Everything I had heard before on the radio was techno, but suddenly Fat Joe was on the air. It really broadened my international perspective. I had seen the culture in Africa and in Latin America. Now I witnessed another version of the exact same thing in Romania. I started building relationships with people who came from different places, and all of them liked Hip Hop.

I became really good at beat boxing in Romania. I also started to realize that I could rap better than most of the people there. I was isolated, so I picked up a pen and started to write. I was fully invested in Hip Hop culture by that point. There were a couple of records that talked about the history of the music they sampled. Gang Starr had a track called "The Jazz" where he mentions the names of the masters. It really opened my mind to the heritage of Hip Hop. It comes from blues, gospel, jazz, funk, and soul, mixed with reggae and DJ culture. Immigrants started Hip Hop; that's the thing that people never understand. They think it's American, but it's from the people who were racially or culturally excluded in America. I started learning those

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things, and it totally made sense to me. I felt a kinship to it like I've never felt to anything

before: not a flag, not a race, or a nation.

Hip Hop served the purpose of inclusion for groups that felt excluded and this is the reason for its international appeal. It was adopted and adapted by youth in communities worldwide; Butta experienced its impact on Romanian youth, as they heard it on the radio and created local groups. He connected to it as a way of feeling local in a place that was unfamiliar and this exemplifies the concept of Hip Hop as a culture. Hip Hop is not necessarily loved internationally, but it is recognised and practised all over the world. Lou's experience demonstrates how Hip Hop arrived to Cuba, Butta explores the link with Romania and both return to Canada with these international versions of Hip Hop. This is what begins to shape the sound and the message of the group.

For Meryem, Hip Hop arrived via satellite along with American pop music. She did not fully connect to it until she arrived in Canada and recognized Hip Hop culture in her high school. She saw it as a way of identifying and it began to shape her music career. Hip Hop seems to enable connections through common understanding. Meryem shows how Hip Hop helped with the process of acculturation upon arriving in Montreal. She could have gravitated towards local Algerian immigrants, but instead chose a more universal community connected through Hip Hop culture. She invested her energy into it and it gave her a way of understanding belonging that was beyond national.

Meryem: Discovering Hip Hop

In Algeria, we would go to my uncle's place by the water. They used to have a lot of parties there, and that's where I discovered rap music. At that time, there was a whole youth movement. They all dressed up like 90s Hip Hop, and everybody talked about west coast and east coast. I

really didn't pay too much attention to it. My last year in Algeria, I started to like Hip Hop because of Eminem and a bunch of stars that started coming out in 2000. There were some hits that involved rock with Hip Hop at that time. I was still very much an R&B and pop fan. When I came to Montreal, I went through multiple phases, but at the end of high school, I met a group called the Royal Peasants. They eventually became my first rap crew. My high school was all about Hip Hop, and I started to see how it affected everybody in the school. I began to realize how it influenced their styles and attitudes. It didn't compute, until I met people like Urban Logics and Senecal who embodied that culture. They were very conscious guys even in their writing, but they were also into the dark side of the thug life. There were gangs and a lot of fights, because everybody thought they were superstars. That's when I discovered the freestyle sessions or ciphers as we call them. I started coming in and singing choruses, and I felt like I could relate to this aspect. There was an element of freedom of expression, and I could just go with the feeling. I became fascinated with the whole storytelling element of it. I liked the swagger and I just wanted to be part of it. I started getting into Hip Hop dance troops, and this really solidified my English. I mastered English by reading and studying verses. I started learning what a lyricist was and tried writing verses. When I was fourteen, I started writing poetry, but when I met these guys, the switch was like night and day with English. I was exposed to so much more vocabulary. I would just sit down with them and they were able to break it down to me bar by bar. That's how I studied Hip Hop.

Hip Hop was so much more than just a musical genre; it extended far beyond beats and rhymes and served as an informal school where young people felt included and connected. It was an alternative form of education that maintained the lessons that had been passed down from generation to generation. It motivated enthusiasts to read more about history and expand their

linguistic competencies. It revealed the music of the past through sampling and educated the youth about empowerment and alternative ways of living. All the members of Nomadic Massive shared this experience. Whether through trips to New York or radio stations abroad, they were learning about Hip Hop culture and passing along the knowledge in the form of cassette tapes and discussion. With time and experience the members of Nomadic Massive took it upon themselves to become cultural ambassadors of Hip Hop, but before doing so they had to be schooled in the tradition by elders in the community. The resources were not yet in the libraries and online information was still inconceivable, yet the culture was tangible in so many other ways. It was expressed through the clothing, the jewellery, the dances, the music, and the events that brought like-minded individuals closer and closer together.

My own journey into this culture began with collecting cassette tapes from flea markets in Latin America. When my parents took me to Latin America, I spent hours rummaging through bins of cassettes in these massive markets. This is where I discovered Hip Hop in Spanish. Most of the groups were coming out of California but Latino Hip Hop rarely made it into Canadian music stores. I would return home with a bunch of these tapes and memorize the lyrics in Spanish. For me, it made Hip Hop culturally relevant and I began to see my place within this culture. It helped me navigate through high school life and the feeling of being different. It was acceptable, within this culture, to speak your mind and celebrate not fully being accepted. As Latino Hip Hop spread across the Americas, there were more and more groups from South America and this allowed me to explore the different realities through the lyrics of local artists.

CHAPTER 6: IDENTITY

In this chapter, I explore the complexities of identity within a multicultural context. The interviews in this section highlight how Hip Hop became a driving force in each member's quest to find themselves amidst contrasting cultural experiences. I found it fascinating to watch how troublesome experiences helped shaped each person's identity. Participants often remember these experiences as turning points in their thinking. Human beings can point to several different factors in the construction of their identity. As social animals, our identity exists in relation to others. Social identity theory proposes that people's identity exists in relation to a social group. According to Burke and Stets (1989), "a social group is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as part of the same social category" (p.225). Sometime these categories become stereotypes for people outside of the group. As I explored cultures other than my own, I realized that there were internal layers of discrimination that I could not see from outside. In this case, the social group would not be specific enough to completely define identity. By going through the different layers, peeling away race, gender, language, social class, family, etc., one arrives at a core individual. This individual is an amalgamation of all these notions but is also something beyond these characteristics of identity. Identity theory, which shares similarities with social identity theory, places greater emphasis on peoples' positions within their social group (Stryker & Burke, 1982).

Humans construct cultural identity in many different ways. We attach ourselves to our symbols in order to proclaim who we are. We use language to uniquely express ourselves and delineate how we see the world. Art is a means of expressing our beliefs by telling stories and creating characters. Hip Hop culture invites the individual to adopt a pseudonym and take on a persona.

In this way, young people can step away from their cultural constraints and forge an independent identity. This may be perceived as counter culture, but the people engaging in Hip Hop were already outside of the dominant society. As Butta said, Hip Hop was created by people who were not accepted by the status quo. Hip Hop youth asserted their identity as different from the dominant class; many people identified with this. It made them feel included in a global culture that acknowledged their oppression and provided a platform to speak about it.

In the following section, Nantali, Butta and Meryem talk about the search for identity through a name. Many immigrants and their children know what it is like to sit in a classroom knowing that their names will be called and inevitably mispronounced. A name comes with many assumptions, and it serves as a cultural identification for an individual who is different. Some people choose to simplify their names; others have this done for them by a coach or teacher. The intention may be to make things easier for everyone; it is a mild form of assimilation. Recent studies have revealed that people are discriminated against in the workplace on the basis of their names. A field experiment published in the *Economic Review* suggested a negative correlation between having an African American name and being hired for a job (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). During slavery, Africans were taken from their homelands and renamed upon their arrival to the Americas. This cut the historical line and imposed an idea of cultural superiority that has persisted through generations. I found it fascinating to connect cultures and names, because names often carry stories. Identifying with a name gives individuals the freedom to express their stories. Nantali's story of cultural identity is embedded in the experiences of her parents before she was born, and she carries that story with her name. Butta speaks of becoming a performer and adopting a persona in order to brand himself as an artist. Meryem's stage name speaks to her role as a female artist surrounded by male rappers. Hip Hop gives power to the pseudonym and

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challenges artists to be confident about it. They may choose a name that suits them or that speaks to a particular skillset, so that the name is "authentic."

Nantali, Butta and Meryem Discuss Names and Identity

Tali: What's in a Name?

In the 1970s and 1980s in Black North American communities, it was really important for people to find African tradition. It was like a rebirth of the Pan-African stuff in the post-civil rights era. The Black Panthers had just dissolved and people like the Last Poets were surfacing. During the Black Panthers movement, people gave themselves African names. That continued into the 1980s, but they were inventing names by then. They gave names that they thought were African, like Laquisha or McQuana. I already had an African name because when my parents moved to Tanzania, my father was really gung ho about identifying with African groups. Not to say that any of his storyline brings him back to Tanzania, but he comes from a much more diverse ethnic background. His mother was what we call a Black Carib. So she was a mix of African and Carib Indian, an indigenous tribe of the West Indies. His father was half White.

After experiencing racial inequality in Montreal, he had developed a very strong opinion about being African. We still see that today with people of mixed identity. They are trying to choose one. He definitely felt a need to identify, so he took an African name and became the son of a tribe. They lived with this tribe who were part of a clan in Tanzania. The Chief's daughter gave a name to my mom to give to me. Nantali means "princess of the lion clan" and Indongo was the family name of that tribe. I have a second name, Pele, which means, "Child born on Sunday." I'm the only person in my family with this name. My name gives me comfort with Black identity. I am not wondering who I am. Some people can only trace their names back to an estate owner, equivalent to a slave master.

If the quest for a personal history ends with the name of a slave master there is something clearly missing. Nantali demonstrates that there is pride and history in a name. It can have the power to reveal something more about who you are and where you come from. She shows this yearning that people had to be from somewhere else by giving their kids African sounding names. At the same time, she carried an authentic African name with an understanding of its importance from a very young age. Identity needs to be identifiable and this happens through the symbols of our identity; physical traits, cultural association, language abilities and so on. When your name is different, it becomes quite obvious, especially in the school context. In order to understand and represent a name that is different it seems appropriate to understand the way you go it. The problem is not so much being different as it is the assumption that being different is in some way bad. If young people carry names that show them as different, they are confronted with a decision to embrace the difference or modify it, by simplifying the name, for example.

Butta explores how not having a name in Hip Hop makes you forgettable. It is interesting to acknowledge here that there is a stark difference between Nantali's example and Butta's. I Nantali's case, she inherited the name and so the cultural identity was already embedded within the name. In Butta's case it was a question of finding a suitable name for himself.

Butta: Identity through Pseudonyms

I met a girl from Boston in my first creative writing class, and she told me about a beat boxing competition. I went there, and that is where I met Latiff, Justice and Abra. They were the beat box godfathers of Montreal, and we all competed against each other. It was the first time I had ever competed, but I pretended I had been doing it my whole life. I didn't win, but I got a lot of respect for the quality of my drums and my showmanship. They asked me my name; everybody had these cool names like Quadriceptor.

I was just "Nicolas," so that week I decided I was going to find a name. I told myself that was the reason I didn't win. It wasn't about my skills; it was because of poor marketing. I always liked alliteration, like in the name Diamond D or Buffy the Human Beatbox. I looked for a beat box name because I hadn't fully committed to being a rapper yet. I didn't think I was ever going to be a rapper. I had to come up with something fresh, and I didn't want to use the word beat box because it was too 1980s. There was a track by this R&B group called Butter Love, and I remember friends of mine used to say "it's butter" when everything was cool. I spent like an hour thinking of ways to use Butta in my name. I had to figure out my signature because that's what you do in Hip Hop. You have to come up with your tag and then form the graffiti background. So I started doing that, and that is how I became Butta Beats.

The idea of claiming your space came as a realisation for Butta. Whether through graffiti art, beatboxing or rhyming it was important to be assertive. How could you be remembered without a name? The name is required to be a contender in any one of the Hip Hop arts and it's interesting to see how the naming is almost an informal initiation into the culture.

Meryem: Being Named by Your Crew

I grew up in Côtes des Neiges, so most of my friends were either Haitian or Latino. I started picking up Spanish and Creole through all of that experience. I was part of a Haitian Gospel choir, and I started picking up Creole in the church. Strangely, I was never surrounded by Algerians in Montreal. Where I was, it was more Anglophone. There were Algerians at my school, but I surrounded myself more with Latinos, Filipinos, Caribbean people, and West Africans. I don't know what the main thing was, but I definitely found a sense of warmth in these communities. I saw things that were completely different from what my culture had taught. This naturally made me seek beyond my comfort zone and expand my horizons to meet others.

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I had a phase where I was in love with mythology. I started writing verses with the Royal Peasants, and one of the emcees was like, "we need to get you a nickname!" I didn't see myself as an emcee. I wasn't rapping yet, but they all had nicknames which went with their characters. I used to be fascinated with the concept of Medusa, and we found out that Medusa means "sovereign female wisdom." That's what I represented to these guys because they were always up to no good, and I was always telling them to stop. There were a bunch of jokes about the whole snakes and my curls, so I was really associated with that image. They bought me a book for my birthday with her on the cover, and it naturally became my nickname. At that time, we did this event in Kent Park called Hip Hop Don't Stop, and we had to perform and because we needed a name, that's what it became. The host read it Meduza instead of Medusa, and we kept it because it sounded cooler.

When I was young, I learned that having an uncommon name automatically set you apart. This was most notable on the first day of school when the new teacher would take attendance. I was usually the last one on the list and I spent the whole time anticipating the long pause and then the butchering of my name. I would quickly offer an alternative in order to feel included. My name is Alejandro but I would suggest "Alex" and later "Ali" which was quickly adopted by my classmates. As a teacher, I have noticed that sometimes children with Asian names often have an English name that they use in school. However, when I was young my father took the name change as a denial of my culture. He would tell me that it was a beautiful name and it was my responsibility to teach people how to pronounce it. I was so determined to belong at that time that I actually had my name changed to "Ali" when I got to high school to avoid embarrassment. One day the teacher read out Alejandro and I went straight to the office to see what happened.

They told me that my father had requested it be changed back. We finally found a compromise and changed the spelling to "Ale," which exists as a short form for Alejandro. The problem is that when this is read in English it sounds like a type of beer and that is exactly what was written on my high school diploma, *Ale Sepulveda*.

Over time, I learned to like my given name and this went hand in hand with adopting a cultural identity. Since my parents took us back to Chile frequently, I developed a sense of what it meant to be Chilean and I started feeling proud of my heritage. After accepting this, I became more willing to pronounce my name in Spanish and explain to people that it was the Spanish equivalent of Alexander. Out of this experience, I learned that the issue is not so much about having nicknames or diminutives, it is about identifying. If you decide that you want to be called something because it suits you, and you feel comfortable, then it does not necessarily come into conflict with your identity. The problem is when others decide that your name is too complicated and needs to be simplified in order to adhere to the dominant norms. In this case, your cultural identity is being devalued because it is being diminished by this act of simplification. Nantali said that she carried her identity within her name and she bore it proudly. Butta Beats put thought into his pseudonym and forged an identity around it. For Meryem, the name was given but it exemplified her innate characteristics. In Nomadic Massive, some of the MC names have become so entrenched in the person's identity that even their families refer to them by this name. Vox and Waahli are both referred to as such outside the context of the group, even though these are not their given names. From the moment you get your name you start becoming the artist want to be.

CHAPTER 7: THE BIRTH OF NOMADIC MASSIVE

In this chapter, I look at Hip Hop as a culture space where people of different backgrounds gained an understanding about each other. The beginning of Nomadic Massive is the beginning of the intercultural experience and creative process. As with many important organizations, the idea began with the aspirations of a few. In the case of Nomadic Massive, it was important for the lives of the members to intersect in order for it to grow into the entity we now know. There were many encounters that proved essential in the creation of Nomadic Massive, but upon reflection, Cuba was the birthplace. Still, if Cuba can be considered the birthplace, the idea preceded this birth by a few years. The first meeting of any two members of the group happened in Winnipeg, where Lou and Vox had attended the same high school. They crossed paths briefly and eventually made the journey to Montreal in a minivan, in search of a culture in which they could explore their creativity. Their early struggles and visions soon became aligned with other members to build the organization we know today.

The following is the story of their encounter and their initiation into the Montreal music scene. Through their eyes, readers can see how Hip Hop proved to be a unifying force among immigrants who were not of the same cultural background. There was an undeniable connection between the two, rooted in music and the French language. It allowed them to dream, beyond the confinement of the long Canadian winters, about another life in a metropolitan city. The journey itself shows the vastness of the country, but more specifically symbolizes the quest to find oneself amidst this vastness. The initial decision to set up in Montreal served as a precursor to the programs that have been designed for young people in search of identity in multicultural Montreal.

The Meeting of Lou and Vox

Lou: *I met Vox right before leaving to live in Cuba. We met briefly at a party and then didn't speak until I returned. I had done a record with my friends in Cuba, and then a tape with my group in Winnipeg. I was recording and performing, and Vox was doing the same, so we became friends. When graduation came, he told me he was going to study in Ottawa, and I told him I was looking into moving to Montreal. I had been to Montreal once, and I liked the fact that it was bilingual. I wanted to continue living in Canada, but I didn't want to live in Winnipeg anymore. I had a lot of rough times coming back from Cuba. When we discovered that we were both going east, we decided to go together. His van was packed ridiculously over capacity, and it was very dangerous. We set off on what was supposed to be a 36-hour journey that ended up taking five days. The car broke down in the middle of the highway at 2 a.m. in rural Ontario.*

Vox: *We really got to know each other on that trip. Lou had a lot of big suitcases, but I didn't think anything of it. I thought the Plymouth Voyageur would carry anything I put on its back, but those things were too heavy. It was so heavy that the transmission broke. It happened when were in Wawa, Ontario, and these local guys towed us to a mechanic. We didn't have anywhere to sleep, so they let us sleep in the garage. Early the next morning, another mechanic opened the garage and called his friend to say, "I think you have two dead bodies in your shop!" They fixed the car and it was so expensive. This incident may have cost me my law degree. I had to use the money I saved for my studies in Ottawa to fix the car.*

Lou: *My first experience in Montreal was in Rivière-des-Prairies where I stayed with Vox's cousins for a little bit. It was very suburban—mostly houses, duplexes, and apartment buildings.*

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I spent a lot of time going to record stores, trying to find out as much as I could about what was going on. There was no Internet at that time, but I just tried to get information. I loved the fact that French Hip Hop was in the stores. I had a friend who lived in Montreal, who I had met in Winnipeg. Her name was Spicey, and I recorded my first record with her in 1995. She was an R&B singer, and she invited me to a couple of shows. Meanwhile, I was accepted into translation at Concordia, and I did a whole project on translating Hip Hop lyrics, where I explored Paris and New York Hip Hop slang.

There are many instances in early immigration when we really don't know where we are going or what we are going to do. The dream of opportunity comes face to face with the sad reality that moving to a new country comes with much uncertainty and doubt. It was within the smaller community of French artists in Winnipeg, that Lou and Vox manage to meet. What happened next was only the product of two dreams intersecting at the right time. This was the dream of making a music career in Montreal. I think this trip is a precursor to all the Nomadic Massive road trips that would follow. Getting to know each other in the van and facing unforeseen obstacles together is congruent with the Nomadic Massive experience on the road. I can only imagine the conversations and aspirations the two shared on their way to the East. However, the first years in Montreal would be like the first years in Winnipeg in that everything was new and different despite being in French. The early years show the level of dedication that was required to build a following in an industry that was definitely mainstream in Montreal. The two really put themselves out there and this is absolutely necessary in Hip Hop. It's an urban art that dwells in the city and Vox and Lou understood that it would take some legwork. As they describe their first show I am reminded of all the silly things you have to do before playing on the big stages.

Vox: *One of the first shows we had in Montreal was at the Olympic stadium. It was a car show, and it went horribly. We were rapping to a group of guys that were told they were going to see a wet t-shirt competition. I didn't know it, but we were actually the opening act for the wet t-shirt competition. This concept was new to me. They were yelling "Wet t-shirt! Wet t-shirt!" but I understood, "give us a t-shirt!" Sometimes in Hip Hop shows, rappers throw t-shirts so I said, "the t-shirts are coming!" They started throwing papers at us and we continued. We finished our song and we got offstage. The girls came up and then I understood. Lou was always talking to me about Cuba, and he took me to Havana in 2003. It was really something amazing. I always give him credit for showing me this world. When I went to Cuba the first time, it was like a movie. Their style, their swagger, and that sense of community really impressed me. It reminded me of Haiti, but it was not Haiti. I was very captivated by the music. We got to perform there, and when we came back we got the invitation to perform at the Cuban Hip Hop Festival; that is how Nomadic got together.*

Original Members

Lou: *After a year, Vox left his studies in Ottawa and moved to Montreal. We met Diegal through a woman who was managing us. Diegal said he was organizing a Hip Hop Symposium and invited us to perform there. Butta was performing there with the Pot Roast Orchestra, and Waahli was performing as a solo artist. After that, we started going to this Hip Hop night that Diegal used to host with DJ Static. One night, Butta was performing there with Ali Sepu, and that's how I met all the original members.*

I was working in translation at the University, but I didn't like it. I used to watch political documentaries in the faculty lounge. Once I was watching one called Life and Death in Jamaica, and that's where I met a videographer named Stefan Verna. By then, Vox and I were recording

at a studio called Hot Tracks. We started putting on shows with Hot Tracks, and we called the

series Racine. One of the guys launched a record, and I hosted the show. Stefan filmed the show,

and he referred me to this thing called Terminus 1525. Terminus 1525 was looking for a

producer in Montreal, and it was a dream come true for a couple of years. I learned to organize

myself because I had nobody telling me what to do, and I made my own schedule. We did the

Terminus show and I got real money to organize it. We got like $10,000, and everybody got paid

adequately.

Before the band bore this name, the original members of Nomadic Massive met in The Plateau

neighbourhood. They were part of a bourgeoning culture that could be found on the stoops of

Plateau apartments, at loft parties in Old Montreal, and Tuesday nights at the Sapphire Club on

Saint-Laurent Boulevard. In the early 2000s, Hip Hop was beginning to thrive in Montreal, and

there was no shortage of venues playing the music and hosting DJ and B-Boy battles. Many of

the pioneers of the Hip Hop movement in Montreal lurked in these locations, and it was only a

matter of time before like-minded individuals began to find each other. The Montreal scene in

those days was about taking initiative and creating events. With his work at Terminus 1525, Lou

gained experience in organizing artists and making concrete things happen. He learned these

skills in Cuba, watching his father work with local artists at the Alliance Française.

It is important to recognize that at this time there was no organized Hip Hop scene in Montreal;

therefore, it was crucial for people to have a vision of what it could become. Vox and Lou took

any shows they could get, and although they didn't realize it, the tough crowds they faced

provided training for more important shows. Concordia University served as an important

location for the group, as it was a multicultural hub of young intellectuals. This made it possible

to initiate such projects as the Hip Hop Symposium, where the members eventually met. It was

also the place where Lou met Stefan Verna, who not only helped him get a great job, but also followed the band with a documentary team the first time they went to Cuba. Montreal made all of these connections possible, and the band quickly became emblematic of the multicultural Hip Hop scene it helped to create.

While Lou and Vox were finding their place in Montreal, those who already resided there were exploring ways to develop the local Hip Hop culture. The first priority was to make the culture accessible by creating events, and the second was to reach out to the community for collaboration and support. Through shows, workshops, radio, and marketing, the members of Nomadic Massive were already thoroughly involved in the local scene before realizing that they could be stronger as a group. Diegal, Butta and Waahli explain what was going on in Montreal right before the group formed and made the epic journey to Cuba.

Butta, Waahli, and Diegal Discuss Nomadic and the Montreal Scene

Butta: Wefunk, Pot Roast Orchestra, and Iron Chef

In Montreal, I was hanging out with graffiti kids who spoke a dialect of French that I had never experienced. I hung out with kids who spoke French in Romania, but their French was from France. There were so many words and expressions that I had to learn. In terms of Hip Hop, I gravitated towards English because it was my academic language, so it was easier to write. I used to cypher on a program called "We Funk," hosted by DJ Static and Professor Groove. I met Diegal at the We Funk radio station. He was a club promoter at that time. It was the early 2000s, and I started meeting a lot of B-Boys and graffiti kids. It was a vibrant time in the Plateau because it hadn't become so gentrified like it is now. The cost of living was absurdly cheap. It was like $400 for a 7-1/2 on Colonial Street, where I lived.

I ended up starting a band called the Pot Roast Orchestra with a couple of friends in Montreal. I was the beat boxer, and I rapped in English and Spanish. We performed at these loft parties in Saint-Henri and Pointe Saint-Charles, and that's where I built my reputation as a performer. I was working with this guy named Chilan, a Guatemalan American who taught me a lot about music production. He had a great work ethic and understood clearly how to sample music well. I was good at rapping, beat boxing and getting into trouble. I wasn't into writing songs. The Pot Roast Orchestra started to develop that, but they often had 62 bar verses followed by a drum solo. I wanted to create something concrete by getting involved in recording, and I struggled for a while to figure out how.

When I was really broke, I cooked for my friends at their house. Chilan put me onto the Iron Chef show, and we thought it would be a good concept for an album. I met Ali Sepu at one of these dinners, and we started jamming together. We got Sepu on that album but it was never released. I did a show with Chilan and Ali at Sapphire, where I rapped in Spanish. Lou Piensa came up to me afterwards and started talking in Spanish with a Cuban accent. Neither of us realized that the other could speak English, and we spent about three months communicating in our Latino identities. We just bonded because we had the same kind of international perspective. He put on this show called Mental Revolution; that's where I met Hest, who eventually became the graffiti artist for Nomadic Massive.

I used to throw parties in a loft in Little Burgundy to pay rent. Lou came to one of those with Mark Perry, a student of Cuban Hip Hop from the States. All these guys who are prominent characters in the Nomadic story started popping up at those parties. It all bubbled up in less than a year, and Lou started talking about this possibility of going to Puerto Rico. I was beat boxing, Vox was rapping in Creole, and Lou was rapping in Spanish. We had practice after

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practice, but it just wasn't sounding good. We were all really excited, but in a way we were relieved when it didn't work out, finally. After Puerto Rico fell through, Lou started working for Terminus 1525, which was sponsored by the Canada Council of the Arts. With that budget, we developed Hold Up Mental at the SAT on Saint-Laurent Boulevard. He asked me to be part of the musical direction, and I recruited a keyboard player, a drummer and a DJ. We were still missing an element, so Ali Sepu was eventually added to the mix. We called ourselves Aces High, and we made $500 each. I was so happy to have the ability to pay people for music. We were locally active on a scene that was just dying to develop into a culture. We all started dialoguing a lot, creating more music, and that's when Nomadic was born.

Up to this point, Butta was always taken around by his parents. Montreal was the first place he chose and would stay in indefinitely. From his account of his early days in Montreal it is apparent that Hip Hop was beginning to occupy a more important space, particularly among the university crowd. In some ways, the conditions in Montreal were right for the expansion of the Hip Hop movement. With all the universities in close proximity students from all over Canada and abroad were looking for hotspots to hang out in. Butta shows that Hip Hop became a source of revenue in Montreal while he was still in school. Through parties and shows he was able to subsidise his stay in the city and help build the Hip Hop community which was becoming more and more significant. The transition from traveling beatboxer and rapper to beat maker and drummer happened in Montreal and was the result of the entrepreneurial culture of the city. Rent was cheap enough to survive and venues were becoming more and more open to hosting Hip Hop nights. Although it was not the only thing you would find in the bars going up and down St Laurent Boulevard, there was a place for it and a loyal community that followed the movement.

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Waahli: Getting Involved with Nomadic

In 2002, I entered the Hip Hop Forever contest where I won second place. Initially there was no prize but then, out of the blue, there was a prize to go to Mexico for a tour. I met Lou the same year, through the Hip Hop Symposium that Diegal organized. He asked me if I could perform at Mental Revolution, but I was going on the tour. The tickets were already paid for, and I had five shows in different cities. It reminded me when we almost got the deal with BMG, when I was with the Cynics. This is what it would have looked like if we had put in the work and done something with our music. When I came back, I started meeting the members of what would become Nomadic Massive.

In 2003, I left for Mexico again. I traveled all around the country and saw everything on my own schedule. It taught me a lot about trusting people. I had good and bad experiences but ultimately, I was happy to have done it. I think sometimes we have the need to do this type of traveling. The reason I came back early was actually very beautiful. I came back for the birth of my daughter in 2003, and Nomadic Massive was born the following year. It's funny because it was the same people that I used to see at Hip Hop events. Diegal had this thing called Rock Deep every Tuesday with DJ Static and Professor Groove. Butta used to be with the Pot Roast Orchestra, and I saw him perform at the Hip Hop Symposium at Concordia University. Lou was recruiting people to go to Cuba for a Hip Hop festival. I was sceptical because I knew what could happen with groups. I was coming with a more mature approach based on the experience I had with the Synics. Eventually, Nomadic Massive shaped me and opened me up to be accepting of other cultures. The process of accepting different cultures in one group helped me accept cultures on a larger scale, and be less judgemental. It also helped me express my own culture. My first verse in Creole was with Nomadic in the song, "Neg Chanté".

Waahli observed all of the advances in the Hip Hop community in Montreal at a time when he was working on his solo career. The multicultural experience I the group proved to be eye opening because he had built up an identity which was reluctant to mix cultures. This obviously came from his negative experiences as a child feeling discriminated against for his Haitian background. He speaks of a time when Nomadic Massive was not yet a family unit. They were stray artists mingling at different events trying to make connections and find their niche in the Hip Hop community. Some went the gangsta route others wanted to go mainstream but Nomadic Massive found its following in the international conscious movement. Waahli clearly demonstrates how this was something new and unsettling at first but in time the experience itself caused some walls to come down and allowed for a shift in perspective with respect to intercultural connections. He mentions all the groundwork that was being laid down by future members of Nomadic Massive. One member who had the vision to bring Hip Hop into the academic realm was Diegal. He saw the opportunity for dialogue and was able to blend that with community as we can see in his description below.

Diegal: Rock Deep, Symposium and Terminus

In 2001, I went to Florida for a B-Boy event with the Solid State dance crew. We spent a whole weekend attending workshops, battles, and shows. We were really inspired and thought we should have something like that in Montreal. Solid State did the Jazz Fest that year and after the show, we were listening to the radio and we heard some old school Hip Hop. The program was called "We Funk" on CKUT. I said, "Let's have these guys as the DJs for a Hip Hop night." So we sought out DJ Static and Professor Groove, and they knew other people in the Hip Hop scene. We secured a place at Sapphire Club on Saint-Laurent and started on the concept. We wanted to reproduce in Montreal what we saw at the B-Boy Summit in Florida. We called the

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night Rock Deep, and it ran for about 4 years at that location. It was the place to go on Tuesdays for the dancers and the underground Hip Hop purists. That's where I started hosting as an emcee. I had been writing raps since 1999, and by this time, I was coming up with bass lines that were eventually integrated into songs. Rock Deep started as a night for the dancers, and then we started inviting DJs and emcees. Waahli had a friend named Eve who was also in Solid State. We became good friends, even roommates at one point. I received these newsletters from the West Coast of the U.S. talking about Hip Hop conferences and programs of study including Hip Hop. All of this was very inspiring to me. In the last years of university, a friend and I started talking about Hip Hop and academics. There was this opportunity, a call for submissions, where we could present our project and receive funding from the university. That's how the Hip Hop Symposium was born. The idea for the symposium was to take our space. I met Lou during the first Hip Hop Symposium in 2002. Lou was referred to me as someone who should perform at the event. I contacted him and he showed up with Vox Sambou. These two sort of came as a duo at that time. For me, Nomadic begins at the symposium.

We were all performing as individual artists at that time. I was doing Rock Deep, and these people started coming out to that night to perform. Slowly, we started to appreciate each other's talents. When Lou got his job with Terminus, he hooked a lot of people up. He had this project called The Mental Revolution and then Hold Up Mental. These were precursors to the whole multimedia thing, and that's how we integrated graffiti artists like Hest. Then there was the famous meeting about the Cuban Hip Hop festival. It was an opportunity to showcase our talents, but there was only one spot available, so we decided to go as a collective. We had no money, and we didn't know about the grant game yet, so we started fundraising. Waahli used to have a night called Afro Funk Seventies, and we started there. We did another fundraising event

at Rock Deep. Then we went to Cuba and got deep into the whole community thing. When we came back, we felt like we had to thank the people, and this kept the momentum going. We talked about the trip in the media, and then different community organizations started hiring us.

The story of Nomadic comes from everywhere. All the different places that people were from or lived in influenced their work in Montreal, and helped solidify a cultural identity. However through Nomadic, the music which came from abroad was reinvented and then re-exported as the group began exploring their reach outside of the city. In this chapter, we see how things were bubbling in Montreal, how people were creating opportunities for one another. They exchanged musical ideas and philosophies and built a hub for other enthusiasts arriving to the city. Perhaps that would have been enough to live out the Hip Hop dream in Montreal but the global experiences of each member lead them to dream beyond borders and this is how Canada contributed to Hip Hop internationally.

CHAPTER 8: NOMADIC IN CUBA

In this chapter, I look at the group's first experience outside Canada and how that became a roadmap for intercultural exchange and community building. All of the work that was being done in Montreal culminated in the trip to Cuba and this was a unique place to start the adventure. Cuba was still under a US trade embargo when Nomadic made their first trip. This was also important because this made Cuba a gateway for Hip Hop made outside the US. Some prominent artists like The Roots and Common still found ways to get there through Canada or Mexico but overall it was a meeting place for everyone else doing Hip Hop around the world. In this chapter I will underline the importance of the Cuban experience in the development of the Nomadic Massive model. This section exposes the profound influence that Cuba had on Nomadic Massive's approach to cultural exchange, workshops and symposiums.

Cuba 1st Trip

In 2004, Nomadic Massive went to Cuba for an international Hip Hop festival, accompanied by a full documentary team. When I arrived in Cuba, my room was scarcely larger than the bed it encased. "You'll be sharing this room, but you can sleep head to foot," I was told reassuringly. The first night we were all up talking about Canada and Cuba and their idiosyncrasies. The conversation seemed endless as we told stories that even members of the group had not previously heard. I ended up sharing the small room with Lou; he was the expert on Cuba. His father brought him there while he was still a teenager, never realising that this experience would influence Lou's development as an urban artist. He always maintained contact with the culture through his comrades from the Cuban Hip Hop scene. Well-known group Obsession was

responsible for our invitation to Cuba, and they provided us with a place to stay while we were there. I stayed in their parents' house, and other members of Nomadic were scattered throughout the neighbourhood with local artists.

At this time, Nomadic Massive just performed music for art's sake; there was no discussion about community development or workshops. In fact, the group never really got the chance to perform on this trip. This first Cuban experience ended up being about the planning and the cultural exchange because natural disaster forced the government to cancel the festival. As a result, Nomadic Massive was thrust into disaster relief and prevention. Although disappointing, the trip provided a bonding experience that likely may not have occurred otherwise. For me, this was the beginning of the Nomadic Massive collective spirit, and I spoke about it at a TedX talk at Concordia University. The following is an excerpt from that appearance. It demonstrates the catalytic events that set this group into motion.

We (Nomadic Massive) were all invited as solo artists, to perform at the Cuban Hip Hop festival in Havana in 2004. During our visit, we stayed in an area called Regla with local Hip Hop group Obsession. Unfortunately, our performances were cut short due to a natural disaster, Hurricane Charlie. We helped board up windows and doors in preparation for the storm and spent a sleepless night huddled in the living room as roofs flew off adjacent buildings and power lines were destroyed. After the hurricane, the entire country mobilized to help the victims. The festival was cancelled, but we became intimately involved with the community as they strived to rebuild. We came back to Montreal completely changed and profoundly affected by our common lived experience. From that moment, we embarked on the adventure that has come to be known as Nomadic Massive.

The early years of Nomadic Massive looked quite different from today. In those days, Nomadic Massive was not a band but a guitar and a beatbox. Initially, the group was only six ambitious young men willing to sacrifice comfort and financial stability for a greater cause. Those years saw other members pass through. Among them, the first female vocalist, Sayen, who eventually left to pursue a music career in Chile. As Sayen prepared to leave for Latin America, Meryem was coming up in the Montreal Hip Hop scene. Her work with Royal Peasants kept her in the Côtes-des-Neiges neighbourhood that was also home to the Nomadic Massive studio. Meryem was only eighteen at the time. In the years that followed her arrival, the group became extremely well known in Montreal and was invited to Cuba for a second time. This time the group had a number of shows under their belt, and they were beginning to understand the full implications of the movement. During this second visit, they were able to participate in workshops and contribute to the discussions surrounding the culture. Meryem explains that this trip allowed her to understand where Nomadic was coming from, and why they saw Hip Hop as a global culture:

Meryem: Getting Involved with the Band

The same year that I did Hip Hop Don't Stop, I met a girl named Anisa, who was in the Hip Hop scene as a videographer. She saw me sing and asked me if I had ever heard of Nomadic Massive. She explained that they were a multilingual Hip Hop band and said the singer was about to leave. They were very involved in the community, so I was intrigued to see what it was all about. Vox invited me to a practice, and I took it as an opportunity to discover a new crew. I came into this dark room, in the basement of Kent Park community centre, and everybody looked so hardcore but on instruments. I had never seen a rap crew, rapping over live instruments. When I walked in, Sayen was singing "Compelled" and Lou had a verse. I almost fell on the floor. I was there with Logics, and we were both in awe. I was used to loops and beats but this was a

whole different experience for us. I started getting inspired, wanting to write then and there. They were playing the blues song with Sayen, and she invited me to join in. At the same practice, I wrote "Desert Drop" to this loop Ali was playing. I just loved the sound of the guitar. It was really that moment that I started hearing so much more musicality than what I was used to. The band invited me to be part of Hold Up Mental because they were inviting guests from the community. At that time, Sayen was back and forth from Chile, and the band hadn't discussed what the next step was. I didn't know what to expect, but I kept coming to practices. We did Hold Up Mental, and then there was this huge meeting in July about whether I should be part of the group. The band auditioned me and Diegal said, "You're 18 years old. Are you really ready for the sacrifice?" I didn't know if I could sing alone. Tali was just hanging out at the practices, singing harmonies and I kept pushing her to become more involved. Eventually, she did all the shows in Montréal, and then Nomadic went to Cuba again but she didn't come.

Cuba 2nd Trip

The second invitation to Cuba was for the international Hip Hop Symposium. On this occasion, the group was invited to participate in talks on race, gender, and politics in Hip Hop culture. They also hosted workshops on poetry, improvisation, and beatboxing—a sharing of knowledge through a common language. During the day, they discussed issues of marginalization and segregation, while at night the ideas were expressed and exchanged through art. The musical energy drew crowds of people from the surrounding neighbourhoods, among them a collection of international reporters. Inside, there was live painting, music, and dance in the spirit of Hip Hop.

Participants arrived from Europe and Latin America, as well as other Cuban cities like Camaguey and Santiago. In some cases, participants had traveled 16 hours on a train to share in this cultural exchange. They were housed in rooms with bunk beds, air conditioning, running

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water, laundry service and provided 2 meals a day. For the next 7 days they ate, drank and slept within the walls of a Hip Hop commune. They became aware of their own cultural norms as they interacted with people of different communities. Meryem described this experience as the moment when she began to understand Nomadic Massive's role in the international community. She saw that these projects involved a supplementary effort behind the scenes. The obstacles of the second trip to Cuba did not compare to the natural disaster of the first trip, and this became a theme in the group: there are always ways to figure out the next step, and obstacles can be overcome collectively.

Meryem

Cuba was the first trip involving me, and it was symbolic because the visit to Cuba two years before is what made Nomadic. It felt like they were coming full circle to integrate me into the band. I never experienced anything like that. It was my first taste of what it was like to be a touring artist. It definitely created a different bond between all of us because we went through a lot of crazy experiences there. We had financial crises galore, and we had to coordinate and organize ourselves. That's how I first started getting involved in the finances of the band. I wasn't aware of all the logistics and it was the first time I understood what it was to run a band administratively. It was really a learning experience for me to be the only girl traveling with a bunch of dudes, in a place where I didn't really speak the language.

Still, I connected to the people through music, and it was extremely inspiring. There was so much that went on there that I can't even quantify how it affected me. Ultimately, what we got out of that was another level of unity within the band. Back then, being nomadic was intuitive. The Cuban symposium reinforced that for me and made me see the purpose of Nomadic Massive. I was moved to see this whole diversity and the fact that we could go out in the world and have

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that impact. It felt like there were people everywhere just like us. It was beautiful to see an

extended community and feel that the exchange was of primary importance. For me, it was

definitely a trip into the nomadic experience. Every single day, there was something. We had a

practice space; we had a studio, and we were not slacking. We never took anything for granted.

The days were filled with musical activities, shows, rehearsals, studio, and conferences.

Cuba was important because it provided a model for discussion and debate. It was Nomadic's

first experience with cultural exchange and it laid the groundwork for future projects. After

exploring Hip Hop culture and music, the next step was to employ Hip Hop as a tool for dialogue

and Cuba provided the framework for a coherent dialogue that was unafraid to tackle some of the

more controversial implications of the movement. It helped members address issues of violence,

racism, misogyny and corporatization. This was not something that was being openly questioned

in Hip Hop spheres at the time. The Cuban perspective offered a way of looking at this

American counter culture from a critical perspective because it was a culture that was flourishing

among Cuban youth despite the ongoing friction with the United States. It was something to be

studied and understood before it was appropriated and this was an opportunity for Nomadic

Massive to look at their own culture through the eyes of another.

CHAPTER 9: JUGGLING WORK AND PASSION

In this chapter, I will examine the challenges of balancing economic stability with social responsibility and how this relates to leadership. For the members of Nomadic Massive, a Hip Hop career emerged out of serendipitous events. As young listeners, Hip Hop provided a way of finding culture and identity where they felt misunderstood. At the time of the group's formation, the members had been pursuing other careers when they decided to do music. Their areas of interest were diverse, and the workload seemed to double as the band was booked for larger events abroad. The members continued to pursue their individual careers in tandem with touring and promoting the band. As a group that claimed to be involved in the community, they were fully immersed as musicians and professionals. This resulted in a sort of juggling act, but it also speaks to the commitment that the members have to the movement. Some members finished degrees while working with the band. Others started working full time while managing to carve out enough time for rehearsals and shows. While I was growing up, my parents often attended or organized community events. They both worked full time, but there was something that they needed more than money—a sense of belonging. When they felt that they didn't fit in, they made a space for themselves. The development of the community was a social responsibility, while they worked for financial stability.

One of Nomadic Massive's first live shows was at an event for Victor Jara, a Chilean songwriter who was executed by the Pinochet government. My father recited some of Jara's poetry and introduced the group. On this occasion, Nomadic decided to come dressed as different professionals. It was our style for that show, and it reminded me of the song Diegal referenced called "I Go To Work." At that time we were all students, but it served as a type of foreshadowing of what we would later become. Mass media has created an obsession with

stardom that presupposes if a group is not famous, they are wasting their time. I think Nomadic Massive shows that an individual can continue to be a strong force in the community even with a full time job.Young people look up to pop stars, and some dream of becoming like them. Statistics suggest that many, even most, will fail at becoming superstars, and so parents encourage children to do things that will lead them to secure jobs. In the same way, there are youngsters who look up to athletes, wishing one day to be in the big leagues. The spaces are limited in this field as well, but most parents do not prevent a child from playing sports because they figure it is good for them even without the fame. I believe art should be viewed in a similar way in our society. People should be free to produce it and consume it as a way of generating their own narrative within a particular social context. Like folklore, art tells a more real story about what is going on in the community. According to author Evelyn Hatcher (1999), art is not purely aesthetic. It has socio-cultural implications and acts as a tool of communication that helps keep culture alive. "As art performs such a great variety of social functions, and as function is so closely related to meaning, one can consider all art as a form of communication" (p.134).

When looking at pop culture and hearing Hollywood stories, one gets a different sense of the world through products engineered for the masses. Appealing, in the same way as fast food, commoditized culture satisfies desires momentarily but ultimately numbs the ability to discern hunger from addiction. The more that culture becomes corporatized, the less that it reflects the voice of the community; instead, it becomes a reflection of corporate values. According to the author of *Culture Inc*. (Schiller, 1989), the same propaganda machine that began in the anti-communist era eventually became a tool for social conditioning. As the culture identified a common enemy, it became easier to tell people what to think. "The Russian Revolution…made anti-communism a permanent feature of the American landscape" (p.14).

Although Hip Hop started as a conscious culture critical of the social system, it eventually became corporatized and used for the purpose of social conditioning. Nomadic Massive offers an alternative to corporatized culture in order to build within the community. For this reason, it was important to connect to the community in a concrete way, to show youth that ambition could be positive, and that participating in the community had many benefits. At the same time, it was critical to show the world that Hip Hop artists did not always fulfill or follow media stereotypes. Diegal's career trajectory is full of sacrifice and dedication. He explains that faced with the decision between music and career, he chose both. The drive was always there to do both, so he did not see a reason to abandon one for the other. This was the case for many members, especially as they got older. Pressure from parents and friends came in the form of advice: it may be cool to rap when an individual is in high school, but people would ask: "What are you really going to do with your life?"

Diegal: Podiatry School and Playing Bass

When I graduated from CEGEP, there was a new program at Concordia University called Exercise Science. I applied and did two and a half years in a specialization. I was a first responder on the field, taping ankles and things like that. The opportunities were working as a trainer in a gym for seven dollars an hour, so I felt like I could get paid more doing other things. There were certain subjects I was interested in, so I took some independent courses. I started taking a class in world music history with the late Daniel Feist. He had a program called Rhythms International on Mix 96 radio. World Music History was the best way for me to learn about music and different cultures. We had people like Sala Wilson come and do workshops talking about Steel Pan in the Caribbean. Then there was this Dominican accordion player

named Joaquin Diaz and Paulo Ramos, a Brazilian singer. I was being exposed to all these world music artists who were living in Montreal.

We started Nomadic in the summer of 2004, and I was starting podiatry school in September, in another city. The program lasted 4 years. It was an hour and a half away, so if they needed me, I came back. I used the time on the bus to catch up on my studies. Music and medicine were always very important to me. Since they came into my life at the same time, it made sense to pursue both careers. Now it has become more challenging because we are traveling so much, and we have more responsibilities. I have a clinic to pay and all these other expenses, but so far it has worked. At times, we struggled to find solutions when I wasn't there. We started subbing and including other people who were friends. We created these precedents so that it could still be sustainable. That's when we started feeling like Nomadic was bigger than us, bigger than just the individual. It's a product of those people, but it became a movement. If we were booked to play a particular set, the spirit of Nomadic could be reproduced through the music.

Many members of the group speak of the fact that Nomadic Massive is something larger than any individual. This idea has made it possible to reconfigure the group when one person is absent, in order to deal with the demands of the industry. Artists recruited from the community form part of the larger Nomadic family, and they have left their mark on the group as well. The experience of working with professionally trained musicians on tour has served as an apprenticeship that was mutually beneficial. Diegal could have easily left the band and allowed someone else to take his place, but the level of commitment and understanding of his social responsibility compelled him to make the sacrifice. As others entered their respective professions, the precedents created by Diegal made it possible for them to balance career and music.

In Waahli's case, his career allowed him to use his artistic skills on the job.   He was often

discriminated against, and he was starting to feel that he had to change his identity to adapt to the

workplace. He explains that people are surprised to come to the centre and discover that he is the

legal coordinator because he does not fit the archetype of a legal expert. At the same time, it is

important for people to break through stereotypes and see beyond appearances.

Waahli: Head and Hands

I studied paralegal technology. It was a three-year program where I learned civil law, civil

procedures, commercial, and criminal law. I started learning about contracts, and I realized it

was a skill I could use in Nomadic. When I graduated, I looked for an internship in immigration.

I tried to apply at l'Office de la Protection Intelectuel du Canada, but they said they didn't have

the government structure to offer an internship. I went to a few unsuccessful interviews with

immigration firms. The rejection had a lot to do with the way I look. I have a big beard and long

hair. I knew it was going to be a challenge to find a job in an area where 90% is proper attire

and 10% is what you learned in school. I remember my mom telling me I would never get a job if

I didn't cut my beard, but I still went to the interviews. I thought I would dress well and do my

best. After all, if I cut my hair I would still be Black. One day, I saw an ad in the local paper for

this community organization called Head and Hands in NDG. I went to the interview and got a

job as a legal coordinator. This place was 90% knowledge and 10% proper attire.

My life experience can be poured into my program at Head and Hands, and I like this because I

can incorporate Hip Hop as a tool. Over there, I offer racial profiling workshops where I use

Hip Hop to talk about the legalities of certain things. I want youth to participate in the

workshops and get something out of it, without feeling alienated. The point is not to bombard

them with information that they probably won't remember. Head and Hands gives me the

freedom to make the program and the flexibility to arrange my schedule. You have to be able to balance being in a band and having a full-time job. If I had worked with Immigration Canada, I don't think I would have had that flexibility. Head and Hands is a non-profit community organization. They are for social change, and Nomadic Massive is for social change, so there is no contradiction. They understand that it works together because Nomadic brings a lot to Head and Hands, and Head and Hands bring a lot to Nomadic.

If youth remain entrenched in the stereotypes of their own culture, they may come to believe that certain professions are out of their reach. Canada has a narrative of equal opportunity, but the reality in the job market is different. A 2008 study proposed that White traits were more commonly associated with leadership prototypes in the American workplace (Rosette, Leonardelli & Phillips, 2008). According to Rosch and Mervis (1975), a cultural prototype serves as a standard for the category it represents: if particular traits or manners are valued in an institution or social group, people emulate them in order to ascend to more important positions of power.

Maison Des Jeunes

For Nomadic Massive, working in the community began with one neighbourhood, Côtes-des-Neiges. This neighbourhood was vibrant with culture and violence, and everyone in Nomadic lived there at some point. The youth centre served as a hub for young people of the community. Members of Nomadic worked there as animators and volunteers. They helped design youth programs around music and built a recording studio for the youth. Michaëlle Jean visited the centre when she was Governor General of Canada. Children and parents of the community welcomed her; they were proud of what they were able to build together. Today, the Nomadic

studios are located just above the studio that was built for the community's youth, making it easy to keep the connection with local youth.

I remember an outing where we brought some urban youth on a camping trip. For me it was a revealing experience because I came to realize that these young people had never known a world outside their neighbourhood. I began to realize that the travelling I had done in my life was an enormous privilege that allowed me to see different perspectives. I sat on the board of the youth centre that year and was able to observe the conversation between community leaders and delegates. The youth centre provided a cultural space for the youth of the community and helped combat culture shock and alienation. I will next examine how Nomadic became involved with the youth centre, and how it became a place for professional development that informed how members interacted with youth for the purpose of community development. The section presents the stories of Vox, Meryem and Butta, who all worked at the centre for a period time.

Vox: Becoming Director of Maison Des Jeunes

My second year at Ottawa University, the grant I had received from Quebec was cancelled. I had no more money to pay for school. I had to find a job, and I couldn't find one in Ottawa, so I came back to Montreal where I found work at the youth centre. I started as a youth worker in an outreach program. I went to different parks and metros, passing out flyers and telling kids about activities in the neighbourhood. I started with a 6-month contract. Then I was recruited by Peter Flagle, who was working in an organization called Black Youth in Action. He was looking for lawyers to help troubled youth who couldn't afford legal services. I got that job because he was in touch with Lou, and he thought Lou was Black. The grant came from Minority Affairs, and the person had to be a visible minority, so Lou didn't qualify.

When that contract ended, there was another opening at the youth centre, so I came back as an interventionist. Six months later the director quit, leaving the post vacant. I applied and got the job as director in September 2005. Meryem came to participate in Nomadic when she was still a youth. The first meeting we had with her was at the youth centre. We were rehearsing for a show at Maison des Jeunes, and she was from the neighbourhood. She came into Nomadic at just 18 years old. We pushed her to take her place and encouraged her with positive energy. Modibo was a teenager at the centre, and we first integrated him into the band. We did fund raisers for him to buy his trombone, and now he is doing his Bachelors in Music at the University of Toronto. Anyone that Modibo will be able to reach is Nomadic's work as well.

Vox shows how the youth center became an important place for youth in the community that were looking for an outlet. It was a starting point for him and it would become a cultural space for the youngsters of the community which was unlike school. Many centers like this exist in Montreal and they are doing the work that is often neglected by the more formal institution of public school. The community of young people that frequent these youth centers are of diverse backgrounds which are not necessarily acknowledged in the school system. By acknowledge I mean, their history isn't taught, their difference is not celebrated and they are not regarded as knowledgeable unless their knowledge is based on school subject matter. In this case, the youth center gives them a chance to shine and explore such creative avenues as the arts through Hip Hop. Vox shows us that there can be a cycle of empowerment whereby older members of the youth center mentor other young people who arrive to the community and the country. This was certainly the case for Meyem and for Butta.

Meryem: Working at Maison des Jeunes

My position at the youth centre was as an animator. We had to program activities with the artistic kids, and that is how I started working. I got very inspired with what everybody was doing there. When Vox talked to me about being on staff, I figured it was the perfect thing. I'm from Côtes-des-Neiges, and I was one of the youth hanging around in the area. I knew what it was like to be on the streets and in the parks. I knew what it was like being a young immigrant who was into Hip Hop. I felt like I could definitely fit in there, and it was good because they had a program called She Leads which helped me explore programs aimed at girls. I helped girls write songs, prepare shows, and do dances. I trained a female trio and wrote songs with them that they performed at the end of the year. It was beautiful to see them, creating events and administrating all of this stuff. I really enjoyed working there, developing the bond with the youth. You can do certain things to affect the lives of people by the simple implementation of programs. I had to attend a few board meetings and see how the bureaucracy worked and how the decisions were made. This frustrated me because they seemed so far removed from what was actually being lived. I had to understand what budget cuts were and how being part of a certain community, you don't get the same funding. We were dealing with police brutality and a bunch of discrimination problems, so it was really intense. I started working in real estate in September of 2007 while still at the youth centre. I was doing both, and I was going to university full time. As soon as I finished my real estate course, I went to university for political science. Then there were too many cuts at the youth centre. I did real estate hoping it would allow me the flexibility to go to university and do my music. For a while, I was still working weekends at the youth centre. I eventually stopped working there but I miss it a lot. With the youth, I felt like I was making an impact in someone's life.

Meryem shows the level of dedication that was necessary to continue working in community projects. She also highlights the rewards that come with giving back to the community. If we refer back to the obstacles that she had to face just to pursue an artistic career it is quite ironic that she would end up leading a group of girls in music and dance. What is more astonishing is that she did not need to do it as a job; there was a sense of responsibility that drove her to give back. She knew the difficulties of integration and the obstacles that the young people would face on their journey and this seemed to fuel her involvement until it was no longer possible, I can imagine that these young girls saw, through Meryem, that it was possible to pursue higher education and progress while maintaining committed to art and community development and this has been a common theme among all members of the group. Even in the face of limited resources and budget cuts there was still a willingness to make things happen or as the saying in Hip Hop goes, "to make something out of nothing." In the following excerpt, we can see that Butta's work in the youth center also exemplifies this quote. When faced with a lack of equipment, everybody pooled their resources together to make the dream of the studio a reality.

Butta: Creating a Space for Creativity

We always wanted to create a music program at Côtes-des-Neiges, and when Vox became the director, we really started discussing it. There were so many logistical issues, and we had no money. Then this DJ from France, named Syde, showed up, and he had worked with youth in Marseille. Maison des Jeunes owned another building that wasn't being used for the youth, so we had an opportunity to have a separate space. This building had a little booth, so we started dreaming up ways to make it work with our little budget. Syde brought his computer, and we borrowed Lou's speakers. I brought my turntables, and we just tried to see how we were going to do it. We came up with the name No Bad Sound, and we had a bunch of kids showing up

regularly. We recognized the need for that musical outlet, whether or not they were going to become superstars. By the time they were 14 in this neighbourhood, most of them were getting kicked out of school. They came from low-income families and hung out in the park. The park was filled with older youth who went through the same struggle and were now involved in everything from credit card fraud to armed robbery. We developed an honest relationship, and they would ask me to advise them on all sorts of things. Honestly, I was not here to tell them what to do with their life. I didn't want them to think that. My goal was to help them learn the bigger picture about things. It's all relative, because community organizations fail youth all the time. I didn't want to be involved in a community organization that set youth up to fail.

The approach that Butta took with the youth in the center was surely influenced by his experiences studying abroad. The limited view of the future that school provides a young person is often at the center of their disconnection. If college and university are part of their trajectory then public school serves as a necessary step in that direction. However, if those are not the goals of some students, the rhetoric is disconnected from their reality. If school's main purpose is to prepare youth for higher education, then isn't it always future driven. If you don't study then you won't get good grades and if you don't get good grades, you won't get into a good school and so on. In Butta's case he chose not to adopt this persona with the children at the youth center. Instead he chose to meet them where they were at. He would not shy away from certain topics and did not adopt a paternalistic attitude towards them. In this way, he built a trusting relationship and was probably more aware of what was really going on in the lives of those kids than their teachers and, in some cases, their parents. This is a lesson for teachers and parents alike. If the distance you created through your authority is so much that you are no longer trusted, what could you be missing about the child you claim to educate?

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CHAPTER 10: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH HIP HOP

In this chapter, I explore Hip Hop as a tool for local and global social change. Nomadic Massive's early involvement with the international Hip Hop community opened the chapter on alternative education. Hip Hop had touched the hearts of countless communities abroad who adopted it as a tool for social change. In 2004, when Nomadic traveled to Havana for the *Global Hip Hop Symposium*, it became clear that Hip Hop was becoming the music of marginalized youth cross the Americas. Hip Hop culture was rapidly becoming the expression of working class youth. The explosion of the culture came at a time when it was increasingly common to connect to other communities online. As Nomadic Massive continued its journey across the Americas, it felt as if the world was beginning to shrink. They traveled to Haiti to conduct workshops in communities devastated by the earthquake. The visit offered a space for people of the community to express themselves through music, as a form of healing. They travelled to the favelas of Sao Paulo to perform in local communities, fortunate to catch a glimpse of the culture that existed beyond the postcard. In every place, it became evident that music had a transformative effect on people's consciousness. In Cuba, Nomadic Massive attended seminars about racial stereotypes in Hip Hop. In Sao Paulo, Nomadic performed at a detention centre for young men. The Nomads soon realized that they had a responsibility to educate through dialogue if they were to respect Hip Hop's roots. The musical exchanges among community leaders allowed for a greater closeness among artists. This contributed to a sharing of ideas through art and dialogue.

Before long, Nomadic Massive was invited to university forums to tackle the academic side of the Hip Hop debate. In the university context, Nomadic Massive usually shows up in a

classroom or a lecture hall and plays a few songs to set the tone for the forum. After the music, the members share stories about their many experiences with critical pedagogy in Haiti, Cuba, Brazil, and so on. The idea is to offer the same space for students to tackle complex issues that exist in their society but not in their textbooks. Hip Hop music has given a voice to the voiceless, and this serves as a model for young adults, who are trying to find themselves, to develop critical thinking skills. The Nomadic approach to these talks establishes the role of the artist as a purveyor of perspectives not often represented in mainstream media. Their collective experience in law, medicine, education, translation, community development, and real estate gives them a comprehensive view of the world. It also demonstrates that they adopted music as a vehicle for cultural expansion rather than a simple means of earning money. Having gone through the struggles of immigration, higher education, and music production, Nomadic Massive offers a wealth of knowledge that inspires the bourgeoning intellect of college and university students. They are multicultural, multi-lingual, and multi-generational, and this gives rise to multiple perspectives instrumental to the development of human consciousness. That is why they have been invited to speak at numerous international summits over the years. From the Governor General's international youth summit in Edmonton in 2008, to Ted X talks at Concordia University in 2010, their story is one that encompasses the many realities of the contemporary world and causes participants to examine their epistemologies. Nomadic Massive delves into questions of social hierarchy, cultural identity, racial discrimination, and immigration—themes as apparent in their music as they are in the forums.

Teachers are often discouraged because some feel they must compete with pop culture for their student's attention. Mass media has changed the role of the educator considerably. Teachers are no longer the undeniable bearers of truth. It is in their best interests to adapt and learn about youth language and culture so that they can create an emotional link with students. Such rapport is often negated in current, conservative educational discourses; for fear that it will put teachers' authority into question. Delpit (1995) writes, "…if teachers hope to avoid negatively stereotyping the language patterns of their students, it is important that they be encouraged to interact with, and willingly learn from knowledgeable members of their student's cultural group" (p.56). I believe that although teenagers may act indifferently, they need to feel that their teachers care about them before they can trust them. By learning about youth culture, teachers can demonstrate that we are making an effort to understand them. Hip Hop music has captivated young audiences across the globe because it developed as a culture and not simply as a musical genre. Hip Hop is multi-faceted, making it possible for youth to arrive at it via different channels.

Workshops

Nomadic Massive members have gone through different education systems, and they recognize the importance of education in children's lives. The concept for the workshops was to open up a space for dialogue and creative expression. The workshops began informally, and in some cases spontaneously, but the result became a blueprint for cross-cultural exchange. In the workshops, Nomadic Massive interacts on another level: they are open for questions and dialogue about cultural issues as well as music. Different workshops are designed to stimulate discussion and have participants actually get up and move.

Waahli describes how the workshops came to be incorporated within the Nomadic Massive model. In many ways, the group inherited the formula from its counterparts in other countries. Lou then discusses how the workshops were adapted to larger projects at the youth centre and at a local high school. These workshops function as alternative forms of education within the larger institution. Hip Hop concepts like the cypher and the battle are utilized to get ideas flowing, then, animators work with the participants to conceptualize and critique what emerges. Through dialogue and creative expression, youth are able to work together in an experience that puts them at the centre. According to Emdin (2013), "Each element of hip-hop lends itself to a particular component of teaching that is necessary for any classroom". This type of collaborative work builds a sense of awareness, and brings about discussion on issues not typically tackled in public school curricula. It offers a framework for critical thinking among peers and educators. According to Freire (1979), shifting the traditional hierarchy in education is an essential step in transcending oppression in society. "Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students" (p.72).

Waahli: International Workshops

It seemed like a natural progression to get into doing workshops. Each individual was led in that direction because of the music we do. Everyone brought their traditions and used Hip Hop as a common denominator. It was an evolution that started from the cultural exchanges we did in Cuba, Brazil, Haiti and France. The work we did then could be looked at as less structured presentations that became more structured workshops. When we went to Brazil to perform at a juvenile detention centre, it was just a show that ended with a discussion. Then that progression led to workshops that we could do in the community. I see it as something that was meant to

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happen. If you're a teacher or a performer, you can transfer these skills to workshops. The
international Hip Hop community always talks more about the Golden Era or Boom Bap. They
try to preserve that type of Hip Hop and make it current instead of commercial. Commercial Hip
Hop talks about certain topics that have nothing to do with what Hip Hop was at the beginning.
Mainstream Hip Hop talks about drugs and women and materialism as opposed to identity or the
class struggle.

I got to go to Haiti, where my parents grew up, and do workshops with local youth. This was
one of my most enriching experiences with Nomadic. I felt so invested in these workshops that I
didn't care about the money. I was just happy to go there and give back. There were a lot of
things going through my mind while I was flying there. I didn't know what to expect. When I got
to Port-au-Prince, the people were very welcoming despite being in a desperate situation after
the earthquake. When I was in Montreal watching scenes of the earthquake on television, I felt
powerless. I saw all this money being given to Haitian relief, but that's not all that they need.
They need moral support and cultural arts as well. That's also part of the long healing process. I
was happy to be part of that process, which has become fundamental in these workshops.

Waahli shows that the workshops were not part of the original model of the group but that they
came as a necessary part of the evolution which was equally beneficial for the members of the
band. The band only became aware of this important outlet while traveling. After the
earthquake, it seemed trivial to go and do Hip Hop in Haiti. It seemed like Haitians needed
money and help with infrastructure but once the band returned they felt that people also needed
moral support and Waahli demonstrated this very well. Some people send donations, some help
build schools and of course others do nothing. In this case it was important to do something and
lifting people's spirits after a natural catastrophe in not an easy task. As Waahli outlines, the

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experience was a way to bring a sense of normalcy in the face of tragedy. He also speaks about the transformation it had on the members who went to help. After the earthquake, many stories emerged about the mismanagement of funds by charity organizations; years later, many buildings were still sitting in shambles. However small the gesture was to go and do workshops in Haiti, it was concrete and part of the larger story of healing.

Lou: No Bad Sound and James Lyng

With Terminus 1525, we did these workshops for refugees. I was working with two guys who wanted to organize something similar with kids. We just started calling up youth centres and ended up finding Maison des Jeunes Côtes-des-Neiges. They were the most receptive, so I started working there full-time. Eventually Vox became the director, and we opened up NBS with Butta and DJ Syde. I think everybody has had a similar experience because it's something that we truly believe in, and there are many teachable moments. We built the program with a concern to better the community and pass on tools and knowledge from one generation to the next. NBS was an initiative to give young people of Côtes-des-Neiges a creative space with a bit of direction that they could access free of charge. As far as content goes, they could express themselves artistically even if they were not that good yet. It's a space for them to speak their minds and start to value themselves.

Since then, I have expanded to James Lyng High School in Montreal and various schools across Quebec and the States. James Lyng is a public school, and I work through a program called W.O.R.D., which stands for Writing Our Rhymes Down. We have made these critical thinking workshops where we start with the history of Hip Hop and follow it through from the perspective of the industry and the community. We also have these practical workshops where we actually create songs, learn to rap, make beats, and produce a final product. Community work is often

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considered a pastime activity, and although we see it that way, we also see that doesn't need to

neglect the quality of the work. The more quality it has, the better one feels about it.

Lou brings light to the importance of the teachable moments and the importance of providing a

space for these moments to happen. He speaks of a common sentiment among members to give

back through Hip Hop. For the first time in Nomadic's history the public schools were actually

seeking assistance from the community workers. Up to this point, the youth center was serving

the purpose of filling the void left by the public education system. Suddenly, there were

opportunities to bring Hip Hop into the school system. For the most part this was done to address

the issue of a rising dropout rate. The idea was to get kids interested in school again and teach

them using Hip Hop as a facilitator With Hip Hop, students were able to innovate and reframe

the position of the teacher, in order to make the experience more collaborative and inclusive.

According to Emdin (2013), *"For the pedagogue, one of the chief things that hip-hop shows is*

how and why it is important to improvise. It shows them that the educator, despite having to

have a clearly planned lesson, must always be prepared to veer from the script in response to

where the students are physically and emotionally positioned."

Butta: Workshops with Kids

The best way to get through to a young person is by not talking down to them. That's because

it's all ego in adolescence. I realized that Hip Hop culture levelled the playing field because

there's no hierarchy. If I have more skills than you, you have to recognize it. The more

experience I got, the more I felt it was important to be knowledgeable. I had been working hard

to refine my skills and I became an avid student of the culture. I began to explore Hip Hop by

looking at the socio-political history, and I developed a framework around that. The skill sets are

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relative to what each person brings with them. You can't teach someone graffiti if they don't

know how to draw a straight line first. You have to go to the source of the first problem. I had

problems with traditional education, so I started thinking of ways around these problems.

Many people I grew up with had brilliant minds, yet they were terrible in school. We had to

develop our own Hip Hop community in order to highlight our concerns and our message. The

best way for me to be involved was to address the issues and be sincere about working in the

community. It is day in and day out, getting to know kids and learning about who their parents

are. You have administrators talking about the community who don't even reach out to the

parents. They don't consider how different cultures might feel about urban arts or even how to

define urban arts in a multicultural context. If we can continue to hammer out those issues, we

can develop a real community, and that also means involving more people of colour in the

decision making process.

Butta raises an interesting point about developing a community in order to highlight collective

concerns. He is careful not to discount the parents' involvement in this community and alludes

to the fact that their perspective is often neglected. Families that immigrated to Canada brought

their culture with them but this culture became part of the multitude of other cultures doing the

same thing. For Butta, Hip Hop was the ultimate way of leveling the playing field among all

these cultures, especially with regards to the youth that were living in the cultural mosaic and

seeking an identity within it. This identity was not completely inherited from their parents or the

traditional Canadian culture but rather, an amalgamation of the experience of immigration. Butta

speaks of developing skills and allowing those proficiencies to be markers of progress regardless

of age or authority. As the Hip Hop community became more connected and defined its own

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progress it would be able to stand as an entity with multicultural concerns that would affect the entire community and not just one particular group.

Tali: Hip Hop No Pop

I started doing community work through Hip Hop and Nomadic Massive. An opportunity came to me to design a program, and it started to really gel all parts of my history and the way I think. I understood that Hip Hop was more than entertainment, and this really came together when I created Hip Hop No Pop. Hip Hop No Pop is an educational, interactive program that looks at Hip Hop culture from a historical, critical perspective. Instead of looking at it from its artistic roots, we're looking at slavery and the civil rights movement. We explore the conditions that made it ripe for this youth movement to spread. We do this in a series of four workshops, and it was designed for high school kids, but now we do it with everybody. This project started in the standard traditional education system in the classroom. Then we started thinking about how to make it a job development program. The goals were to teach people sustainability and how to link it to governance, and to teach what I call "civil literacy."

I started travelling quite a bit to present Hip Hop No Pop. It really just opened up what I already had in me, in terms of community involvement. I had done some other community work before coming to Nomadic, but Hip Hop No Pop was a way to take what I love as an artist and use it to speak about all this other stuff that is pertinent to the community. I see rap as a form of folk music because it's the people's music. Nomadic Massive really personifies this because we bring unconventional and politicized topics to the rap game. In Canadian Hip Hop, we can definitely be recognized as a group that brings those issues forward. We're actually doing more in terms of community work, and our professional career is moving to new heights. Nomadic has something really special that could evolve into this much greater thing. McGee from Nomadic

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Wax was pitching us as a school for this upcoming festival, and that is truly what it is. We are like a traveling classroom.

Nantali's work with Hip Hop no Pop shows the adaptability of the workshops and the interconnectivity between art, career and community. This work, which was first presented to students in a classroom context, has now become exportable to other contexts. Furthermore, the work is now designed to also educate teachers about the use of Hip Hop in a critical context. My personal experience as a witness of these workshops has shown me how different they are than traditional teaching. Hip Hop no Pop illustrates such issues as inequality, cultural capital and racial profiling by using concrete examples that get the kids out of their chairs and moving about the space. The scenarios that Nantali presents are embodied within the exercises and force students to criticise power structures which they become aware of through the lesson. Instead of supposing that things are how they should be, Hip Hop no Pop allows students to question dominant thinking within a safe space. It not only allows students to be critical of the status quo, however. It also gives them room to question themselves, their attitudes and even some of the negative messages that arise within Hip Hop culture.

CHAPTER 11: A VISION OF SUSTAINABILITY

Questions of longevity are not unusual for any band that lasts more than a few years. Nomadic Massive has survived the changing of managers, recording studios, and rehearsal spaces. The group has adapted itself to the departure of key members. It takes a conscious approach to human resources in which people's personal obligations are respected. The seeds that were sown in the early years continue to grow today, and there are more projects on the horizon. The band's repertoire is a testament to the characteristic of multiplicity, but for some critics, the multitude of languages and styles has proven overwhelming. A review of the second album proposed, "If Nomadic Massive could condense their multinational influences into a more cohesive vision, the results would be breathtaking" (Scroggins, 2009). It was difficult to label the group, and this made branding a challenge. This suited the Nomadic identity because as cultural nomads, we never fit into a category. It is an organization that has defined itself as a result of its initiatives.

The following is an attempt to define what the industry deems undefinable. Through the eyes of Nomadic members, one may begin to understand the band's true identity. Vox describes the maturing process of the band and suggests that there is still wisdom to come. Diegal defines the social responsibility that is essential to the Nomadic ethos. Waahli expands on this notion and talks about the importance of the multicultural identity of the band. Meryem then speaks about the sustainability of the group through touring. The Internet era decimated the music industry, and Nomadic Massive is living through the changes in that structure. Touring is a way of sustaining the group while fulfilling its mandate to visit other communities. Finally, Nantali discusses the educational element in the band. She speaks of the oral tradition as a pedagogical tool that is reflected in the cultural tradition of the group.

Vox: The Adolescence of Nomadic

I see Nomadic like a seed that keeps growing and touching nature in different ways, even in ways that we are not aware of. The way Nomadic came about was so strong that it began growing by itself. If you think of Nomadic as a child, it's still in its adolescence. It has only been 10 years. When it was in its infancy, the first step was going to Cuba. Now we are finding our identity. We are still in that process, a bit more mature but still only 10 years old. For each individual, Nomadic became a force of empowerment beyond limitations. Wherever I go, I have that with me.

I have to play a role in the community because the youth are watching me. I'm in contact with them and I have built experiences around Nomadic Massive. Nomadic can't die because it is not one individual; it's a collective that brings so many things to so many people. It is a spirit with a force behind it. We have touched so many people in Brazil, Cuba and the United States. I think Nomadic brings authenticity and allows you to be yourself. I don't think it's just a question of diversity. The diversity is part of the look, but I think it's the authenticity of the individuals. We are very approachable and we get a lot of respect for that.

Diegal: The Business Side of Things

Wherever we go, we represent more than ourselves; we represent our culture, our heritage and our families. Given the social inequities, class and cast systems, and egregious debt that we have inherited and through which we must navigate, Nomadic Massive chooses to see artistic expression as a public service. The artist has the power to use the tools at his disposal to affect change, and engage in dialogue. We have had the chance to share with people who are like-minded, as well as people who have challenged our values. We even started community

organizations of our own. There was Solidayiti in the North of Haiti, which emerged after the earthquake; Students for the Advancement of Hip Hop, who hosted five Hip Hop Symposiums at Concordia University; Hip Hop No Pop, teaching workshops about the nonviolent origins of Hip Hop; and No Bad Sound, the studio that helps young kids of Côtes-des-Neiges engage in alternative arts and music by putting their thoughts on paper.

We assume this responsibility with our proactive work and our sound. We have to be on our business game to capitalize on all these efforts and turn them into a source of income for a long time. There are so many ways: marketing, royalties, licensing, touring and stuff like that. We have the community development and education as well as the university settings. All of us have our skills, and we can talk about our experience in Nomadic or in other spheres of life. There are going to be new generations of kids, so we need to create the opportunities. If we create and offer them, someone will hire us. I think we should be as diversified as possible if we're smart about it. Nomadic teaches you about not giving up on projects. I learned the value of sacrifice, self-effacement, working as a team, and time management in this group.

Waahli: A Multicultural Model

As cliché as it sounds, Nomadic Massive should become an institution where multiculturalism is celebrated to the maximum degree. This mixture of cultures has been happening more and more. I'm not saying racism is sinking, but it's changing. It's having less relevance in certain places. In Montreal specifically, Nomadic Massive played a big role as a reference for what multiculturalism could bring. It is an organization based on understanding, acceptance, and working together. It has also served as a trampoline for every individual in the band in his or her career. Sustainability is important so that all of these years of work are not poured into an empty cup. We are reaping the benefits of it now, but we also realize that we need to give that extra

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push in order for it to continue. There's a time for beginner's luck, and now beginner's luck is done. If you want to sustain it, there's a bit of work to be done. When that work is done you continue to reap.

Meryem: Nomadic Massive's Role

I think we've come to a place now where we're trying to be more of a touring band. We're in a society where we are consistently afraid of differences, and we're afraid to associate with people of different backgrounds. Montréal has showcased a breakthrough when it comes to diverse backgrounds connecting and coming together. The Nomadic message has represented the culmination of what that image could be. It's a beautiful message, which brings us to what Hip Hop is about. We have educators and social workers, which is not your typical image of rappers. I've always seen it as an important musical group when it comes to expanding musical flavours and experimenting with the different styles and sounds. Nomadic brings that richness to the culture of Hip Hop that was originally based off sampling and loops.

We are ambassadors and journalists of what's going on in the world. Nomadic has that role when it comes to creating alternative ways of educating youth. I see Nomadic making one, major, solid, classic album that would bring together all the elements that brought us together in the first place. This album will encompass that essential message that was driving all of us in the beginning. I want to continue to merge music and education and allow that ice to break between the formal and the informal world, between people on the streets and people in the offices. It's a strong message and it's a positive one. It's inspiring, and if it's captured and contained properly, I think it's going to resonate for longer than we could resonate alone.

Tali: Bridging the Gap

In our work, we prioritize young people who are in the margins, the people who are born with a heritage of poverty. This poverty can be economic, social, linguistic, or of gender. These young people are on a path filled with booby traps leading to this idea of under achievement. When we work with those members of society, we ask them what they think. We help them articulate their ideas through Hip Hop. We ask challenging questions, and those are the moments of informal learning, when we turn traditional top down education on its back. By joining its ends, we create a new classroom that is circular. We call it a cypher in Hip Hop.

In our experience, art and music seep into people's consciousness easily. So while bumping beats with youth from Côte-des-Neiges or drilling rhymes with kids in Port-au-Prince, we are engaging the youth. In a detention centre, in a favela, or on First Nations reserves, we complete an unplanned curriculum of reading, writing and comprehension. If you are going to write a rhyme, you have to be able to read it. If you're going to say something, you better say something that people are going to understand. So you need to use your dictionary and even a thesaurus. Our curriculum is about accountability because we let kids know that it is their responsibility to be involved. We teach history through samples because music from the past allows us to talk about our history. We prioritize young people because it is all about bridging the gap. We are public servants, whistle blowers, and community developers.

CHAPTER 12: LYRICAL ANALYSIS

Nomadic Massive does not disconnect lyrical content from lived experience. Their lyrics clearly show their cultural identities and their concern for future generations. In many cases, the lyrics I have chosen to analyze in this dissertation tell the same story as the interviews. When presented through song, however, they penetrate the subconscious mind. The process of interviewing allowed me to dig deeper into the metaphors of song lyrics. I could see that the sense of purpose I found in the lyrics came from a history of cultural awareness. Antaki argues that, "summarizing the themes of what participants might say in an interaction typically does not involve any analysis of the discourse that they are using" (Antaki, Billig, Edwards & Potter, 2003, para.14). Discourse analysis allows the reader to go to a deeper place within the literature, to look at how people construct meaning through art and language.

In this approach, I will address the issues of language from a cultural perspective. Hip Hop culture has developed its own way of communicating ideas, which have come to be universal. The lyrics show a vulnerability that is perhaps not evident in interviews, because the context is different. In the interviews, the discussion is framed as academic. The intention of a song is to communicate a message. I have observed the proofreading that goes on and the adjustments that are made in order to have a coherent message among the group. These very debates about content seem to strengthen the overall identity of the band. In my analysis, I connect the lyrics to the lived experience of the writer. I look at the text as a reflection of what the rapper is trying to communicate about the society to the society. I have chosen one poem per artist, and I comment on each individually, and then draw parallels between them.

Lou: Child's Smile

I would wake up to the sound of Islam

That was Peace, God is great

Meditation brings calm

Even my pops who's not religious

As the sun rose, he saw the beauty in the way they sang psalms.

Step out my bed and go towards the living room,

Slash bedroom, slash dining room

And see my pops writing and my mom smiling

And the soundtrack to it all could've been Pakistani

Borderless choice of music always

That's why my soundtracks will have you travelling far away

It's no surprise that I'm always reflective,

I see the world around me from so many perspectives.

Like this . . . .

(Child's Smile, 2008)

In Child' Smile, Lou takes the listener to Algeria, where he spent his childhood. The experience of growing up outside his native France marked him profoundly. It was a time when he did not know discrimination, even though he was different from his peers. The song speaks to a time when he felt secure in his family; he observed a happy home life despite not having a lot of money. He speaks of his father's fascination with foreign cultures and alludes to the fact that different cultural music often played in his house. This inevitably influenced the youngster as he sought to include a variety of cultural samples in his own music. This song also speaks about having respect for different religions. He says that his father was able to see the beautiful parts of other religions. This was another important lesson for a young Lou Piensa. This openness has allowed him to learn about other cultures and interact with them on an even playing field. The song includes Meryem Saci on the chorus and serves to join the two experiences that each had growing up in Algeria. In terms of multiculturalism, their perspective is interesting. Multiculturalism in the West is often seen as cultural integration to Western ways. In this case, Lou gives the perspective of the westerner's integration. He offers listeners the possibility to put themselves in the immigrant's shoes.

Meryem: Where I Am From

I from the third world, cursed to be a girl

The weight of the universe is forced on us

Scandalized for wearing mini skirts

Beaten down for speaking loud

Or fighting for equal rights

Female SOS lines are overworked

The plague of terrorism, in the name of Islamic wisdom

Had many women stolen, raped by the dozen

Some pregnant get cut open

And watch their babies slaughtered in torment

Some mothers are martyrs in their own apartment

Authorities are the worst enemies

Conspire in the middle of atrocities

We're living in a tyrant democracy

That keeps exhorting us, letting us die of thirst

Cuz they don't give a damn about us!

Where I am from is a world,

Where we don't dream of diamonds and pearls,

We dream of being heard.

(Where I Am From, 2008)

The images in Meryem's writing are far from fictional. The chapters of Meryem's life are revealed through much of her poetry. She speaks about injustice and oppression and the reality of growing up in tyranny. She confesses that it was rare for her to write songs about romantic love. Her approach to music has been linked to her experience of being prevented from doing it. In this way, she views the stage as a platform that should not be wasted. As a result, she communicates with her audience with real content and analysis of the world. She often speaks about Hip Hop giving a voice to the voiceless, and in reading Meryem's story, one sees that she is not speaking hypothetically. Her experience in Montreal opened her eyes to a different society. She saw that she could explore her talents without the fear of being reprimanded. Many immigrants idolize America and the American dream. Meryem could easily be singing about the good life and the bling associated with certain genres of Hip Hop, yet she chooses to stand out by offering a more unique perspective. She says, "Where I am from, we don't dream of diamonds and pearls, we dream of being heard." This is an important message for youth who can easily get caught up in the materialism of western society. Many members of Nomadic spoke about the need to be up to date on Hip Hop fashion. They admitted that it was important to have the freshest clothes and the latest gear. It was a form of status among youth who didn't come from affluent backgrounds. Waahli spoke about buying shoes he couldn't afford, and Vox spoke about saving for a year to buy a pair of Fila sneakers. Meryem avoids these topics altogether to get to the depth of the problem. This has allowed her to connect with young women suffering from similar oppression around the world. In Meryem's case, taking her space involved leaving her homeland. Her lyrics describe the suffocation of military regimes and the obstacles for young women.

Diegal: Au 21ième Siècle

Original French Verse

Au 21ᵉ siècle, l'homme invisible d'Ellison existe

Le préjudice, demeure, persiste et puis signe

La résistance n'est plus dès qu'on s'y résigne

Et l'amnésie collective s'installe tranquille

La haine dans ce monde est basée sur des faits vécus

L'Histoire se répète à chaque fois qu'on dit, jamais plus !

Les cœurs s'assèchent comme un désert où il n'a jamais plu

Où les vautours rapaces guettent et restent à l'affût

Il y a de ceux qui ne connaîtront jamais l'aube de la faim

Pour d'autres la fin du monde arrive chaque matin

Le quotidien est aigre-doux comme le sucre de la canne,

Et la misère dans la main nègre qui la coupe d'une hache

Ainsi va la vie qui va ! Ce n'est pas d'elle qu'on se cache

On prend notre place sur la scène et pas dans les coulisses

Même si on se dirige tout droit vers le précipice

Chaque jour on le lit sur la page frontispice

English Translation

In the 21st century, Ellison's invisible man exists

Prejudice remains and keeps keeping on

Resistance is no more once we've resigned

And collective amnesia seeps in unchecked

Hatred in the world is based on a true story

History repeats itself every time we say "never again,"

Hearts dry up like a desert where it has never rained

Where rapacious vultures are on the lookout

There are those that will never know the dawn of hunger

For others, the end of the world comes every morning

Their days are bitter sweet like sugar cane and Black pain

Misery in the Black man's hand cuts it down with an axe

That's the way life goes, we're not hiding from it

We take our space at the front, not backstage

Even though we're heading straight for the precipice

Every day we read it on the front page

(Au 21ième siècle, 2008)

Diegal writes critical pieces that reflect the struggle for equality and recognition. He will often engage the crowd before starting a song. As a bass player, his ability to address the audience is limited; however, what he loses in time, he makes up for with intensity. It is as if he prepares the audience for what they are about to hear. He reminds them that there are challenges to overcome, and that we cannot disconnect ourselves from our history. In the song "21ième siècle," he speaks of the cyclical nature of history. He alludes to the struggle of the sugar cane worker in the Caribbean. He outlines the disparity between those who know real misery and those who will never know hunger. A common theme in this piece is the idea of creating a space. He says we can no longer stay backstage, meaning that we have to express our identity. These are powerful messages for young people. The concept behind this song is something that Nomadic can stand behind. Everyone in the group knows that unless you take the space, it will not be given. Vox and Lou learned about this when they came to Montreal with the dream of becoming Hip Hop artists. Diegal and Butta saw this same need when they began animating Hip Hop nights in Montreal. Nantali experienced it when she was the only Caribbean child in elementary school, and Waahli experienced it when he was the only French kid at an English school. The experiences were different but common. The lesson is profound because it is the opposite of what school teaches young people. Most of the time schools attempt to homogenize culture towards what is dominant. Even schools with the best intentions have hegemonic agendas of which they may not even be aware. According to Apple (2010), "a national curriculum at a time of neo-liberal and neo-conservative hegemony is a formula for what I will call very bluntly simply 'educational apartheid'" (p.xxii).

Vox: Take My Space

I need love like an orphan, I've been on morphine.

Too much pain and I have to break through that coffin.

It's time for laughing. Watch the sun rising.

Elevate, recognize let your soul shine.

Je médite la vie toujours attentif aux cris,

Résistant à tout mépris pour assurer ma survie.

Cuidado hermano, dame la mano.

Corazon abierto, no sea extraño o raro.

Estamos luchando por los mismo de verdad.

Vamos a ganar esta batalla.

Ya tu sabes que el Haitiano tiene fuerza.

No te equivoques,

Nou sevi ak gwo lwa ke'm toujou rete ouve pou nou pa pran nan fo pa.

Pa mele ake coka pou nou pa tombe nan ka,

Yon sel fason nou ka soti se investi nan love la.

Respekte tout fanm djanm e mete tet yo ansanm

Translation of Verse

I meditate life always attentive to cries

Resistant to all scorn to ensure my survival

Be careful brother, give me your hand

Open your heart, don't be a stranger

We are fighting for the same battle

We will win this fight

Yeah you know that this Haitian is strong

Don't get confused. We deal with big spirits

My heart is always open,

I make moves with precaution.

Don't get involved with coca so as not to get in trouble

The only way to get out of it is to invest in the other

Respect all women and put your heads together

(Take My Space, 2008)

In this piece, Vox Sambou shows versatility in his ability to switch languages within a verse. He grew up with Creole and French, but also uses many other languages within the group. He began writing in English in Montreal and continued with Spanish after returning from Cuba. Multilingualism is a Nomadic trait, and it is a feature of the communities in which the members grew up. Montreal is known as a bilingual city, but in reality it is a multilingual city. These languages are not necessarily spoken exclusively. They are interchanged and understood between members of the community because of their cross-cultural experiences. In linguistics, this phenomenon is known as code switching and Nomadic Massive engages in it on a regular basis. Poplack (1993) defines code switching as, "the juxtaposition of sentences or sentence fragments each of which is internally consistent with the morphological and syntactic (optionally phonological) rules of the language of its provenance" (p. 255). If there are common languages in Nomadic Massive, they are the colonial languages. English and French are spoken by all, and they become the backbone of communication. At the same time, Spanish became prevalent after the Cuba trip, and Portuguese was incorporated after the trip to Brazil. Within this spectrum, there are also expressions from Creole and Arabic that have been assimilated into communications. This multilingual way of communicating and writing has become emblematic in Nomadic. It happened incidentally, but it exemplifies the intention to be inclusive. Vox also speaks about the need to be resilient. He says that we must resist scorn and be attentive to the cries of our brothers. In this sense, he may actually be referring to his brothers as he described the torment they went through before leaving Haiti. He may also be speaking to the larger brotherhood that exists in the common struggle against oppression. Another theme, predominant in Sambou's writing, is the strength of the Haitian people, particularly the women. He frequently cautions youth against the use of drugs and promotes optimism in the face of adversity.

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Waahli: Make It Work

Soon our vending machines will start selling Oxygen/

And our tap water will be only good to use as acid/

Polar bears up north will start surfing with sunglasses/

It might not be a concern but it will be in your kids' lifetime/

The world has been a messy place just like some people's mind/

Wondering when they'll sell wisdom lights at the Wal-Mart/

They're constantly exploiting and on top we're supporting them/

It's like a distorted melodic headlock in my head box/

The air is so polluted that my mind goes in reverse/

It's like...inimeahmeahmgrellnieah...only me can decipher this /

So comfy inside our conditioning we're slow to move/

We've got seven days and 24 hours, who you're going to call to save the day/

My soul contains more resources and more flow than the James Bay River/

I plunge deep within so I can fix my broken feather/

Enter, yes sir! Together, we're clever/

We could surely fix the weather, if it's clean with in our cypher/

(Make it Work, 2008)

Waahli's lyrics are very visual; he constructs vivid images in his writing. He speaks about current issues and is up to date on contemporary problems. He often addresses these issues allegorically. In his opening lines, he talks about the world's resources and the depletion of the icecaps with a series of pictures. He talks about oxygen in a vending machine and polar bears wearing sunglasses. These are easily relatable images for a young audience, but the underlying message is one of environmental concern. His approach is playfully provocative as he juxtaposes corporate images with life sources. He speaks of buying wisdom at the Walmart in an effort to expose our contribution to our own exploitation. Waahli explores the theme of pushing forward, another key element in Nomadic Massive. It resonates in the titles of their hit songs, "Moving Forward" and "Take My Space" and appears again in this song entitled "Make it Work." It comes from the experience of getting through problems that seemed insurmountable. Waahli referred to this common struggle that he identified within Hip Hop culture. Once he began to study the lyrics of his favourite groups, he learned that other people felt the same way. This gave him the courage to defend his way of living and his identity. In his music, we see the idea of reaching within to that spiritual place in order to gain strength to face the outside world. These lessons were learned after the breakup of his first rap crew, as he faced the reality of going solo. This wisdom is not bound by any one religion. It comes from a spiritual pursuit, and this is a good way of approaching youth. Waahli's experience at Head and Hands taught him about the harm of a reductive approach. He is attentive to the process of becoming. We can observe this when he says that together we can fix the weather if we are clean within our cypher. This speaks to the idea of clear communication.

Butta: Oil, Weapons & Drugs

'Its oil, weapons and drugs man, s**t man, why u think them troops are all up in Afghanistan?/

You know the plan, cultivate poppies and pipelines they ain't pimping sand/

Way before they copped that, secured the Kosovo land/

A common trade route of Afghan heroin/

Europe's' demands can't be left in a guy like Milosevic's' hands/

Cut out the middle man, up the profit margin/

Akin to the culture of that 7-11/

But now, it's 9-11 decisions with the zeal of religion,

Traditions of purging the systems under suspicion/

While plugging in a new mission of fear, crusades and inquisitions/

So what's your position? Best to be submission!/

Ask questions, its borderline dissension/

Even if they spending pensions on so called deterrents and prevention/

OH! Forgot to mention, Saddam used to be their henchman,

Funded his ascension hence the lack of intervention/

Previously so read that history,

Read between the lines folds of time move cyclically/

The OPEC Sheiks wet their beak because they got their knowledge elite,

Strong or weak an empire at its peak physique/

Them guns shoot for virtual loot, Bush and Blair just there to look cute/

 Show me them lobbies and them interest groups/

Power suits, pursuits at the root, of why the media can only have martyrs or mutes!

(Oil, Weapons and Drugs, 2006)

Butta's commentary on Western foreign policy results from his passion for political history. His experience with education abroad has made him aware of his privilege. His childhood memories suggest that he was exposed to different social classes. This influenced him, causing him to be critical of exploitative governments. In this song, he trudges through the numerous casualties of the oil trade and seems to leave no stone unturned. This is definitely not the media's take on the war in the Middle East. When Butta listened to early Hip Hop, he learned about jazz masters through the references in the music. When young people listen to Butta's compositions, they learn about contemporary world issues. Butta connects the dots in a way that gives listeners a path to retrace. He says that when he was young, he reached the point where he saw the connections between world events. He had an epiphany in Kenya, when he realized the connection between the excessive western lifestyle and disparity in Africa. He explores the interconnectivity of the world in his work, and his view contains many perspectives. This gives him the privilege of exposing without presupposing. He is an alternative educator with little patience for institutionalized learning. He wants to lay the facts on the table so that the learner can form his or her own informed opinion.

Tali: Supafam

Now I am an only child

But I've got family for days

A bunch of them are relatives

The rest, well, they just claim me

Seems to be some kind of community thing,

Like you ain't gonna act a fool

When your mother's sister's neighbour's watching

It's about respect and the values we collectin'

Yo, village raise a child

Yo, child keep your village accountable

We counting you

Who cares about family trees?

I care that families read!

Love, learn so you can lead.

(Supafam, 2011)

Nantali offers us a different perspective on family values. She grew up as an only child but always felt that she had community support. She felt this void when she moved to the suburbs of Montreal. Still, she never let go of her roots and found ways to remain connected through art and sports. She talks about the importance of sharing community values and watching each other's children. She witnessed the problems that young people got into when they were left astray. In the community, Nantali is recognized as an artist, a journalist, and a community leader. She also explores themes of action and education in her music. For Nantali, it is important to take action in the community in order to have a voice. Her mother struggled to make sure that she was well educated. She became involved in school the activities to show that they belonged. Nantali opens a dialogue about mutual accountability in her writing. This comes with asking hard questions and not shying away from difficult issues. Nantali says that the child should hold his village accountable. This speaks to a civic responsibility that is essential to the community. She also addresses the importance of literacy in the community. When she says, "Who cares about family trees, I care that families read," she alludes to the importance of educating marginalized youth within the community. She had the privilege of going to private school, where she witnessed the importance of learning dominant syntax in order to defend the rights of marginalized people. This was an important teaching of Paulo Freire when he spoke about literacy and its connection to emancipation (Freire 1970). Delpit (1995) offers some advice for teachers on how to negotiate between the dialect of students and academic language, "Teachers need to support the language that students bring to school, provide them input from an additional code, and give them an opportunity to use the new code in a non-threatening, real communicative context" (p. 53). Nantali explores these themes in Hip Hop No Pop, and helps educators in the public system understand the viewpoints of the students they teach.

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CHAPTER 13: THEMES

In this chapter I will outline the themes that emerged from the participant's experiences. Their individual stories provided a deeper look at how Hip Hop shaped their identity and perspective. The interview process revealed a rich and complex narrative that ran through the lives of all participants. The story of the individuals makes up the story of Nomadic Massive as members act as protagonists in different parts of the narrative. This story has episodes that evolve and overlap to contribute to the greater narrative of the group. It displays different examples of conflict and resolution which speak to the larger question of why we should do research on Hip Hop in education. From a research perspective, it is important to highlight the common themes that emerged over the course of the study, in order to fully understand the significance of the story.

Living through Oppression

One of the initial themes I encountered in my research was the theme of oppression. In framing this research under critical pedagogy, I knew that I would be exploring dominant power structures. Kincheloe wrote (2008), "When critical pedagogy embraces multiculturalism, it focuses on the subtle workings of racism, sexism, class biased, cultural oppression and homophobia" (p.9). I never specifically asked a question about power, but it seemed an unavoidable topic in conversations about Hip Hop and education. The theme of oppression was first apparent in the early years of the participants' lives. Some members experienced oppression first hand, by way of persecution and loss of civil liberties. This was particularly evident in Meryem's experience as a young artist in Algeria. There was an inability to flourish as a female artist in Algeria due to religious pressure at the time. She spoke about how it was frowned upon

for a woman to show herself in this way. Her mother's quest to give her a better chance ultimately landed Meryem in Montreal, where she continued to voice her disdain for oppression. She used the stage to denounce oppression—what she was prevented from doing back home.

Oppression was also observable in Vox's account of the political instability in Haiti. He connected the present political turmoil in Haiti with the history of the island under French rule. He explained how oppression continued long after the French were kicked out of Haiti; through the church and the through the educational system. This was exemplary of the cyclical nature of oppression outlined by Freire (1970), who stated that the oppressed will identify with the oppressor and "have no consciousness of themselves as persons or as members of an oppressed class" (p. 30). The instability caused his family to find a way out of Haiti, and Vox eventually found his place in Montreal. He leads a youth centre that aims to keep young people out of trouble and he leads the Vox Sambou band which tours the world, spreading a similar message of awareness. Nantali discussed her father's experience in Montreal when he attempted to challenge the status quo at Concordia University. He, along with fellow students, protested what they saw as systematic discrimination by a professor. This eventually caused her father to seek refuge, with his family, in Tanzania. This dramatic situation exposed institutional oppression to a young Nantali, who learned to spot subtler versions of oppression and call them out.

These different examples of institutionalised oppression were catalytic events for the future of Nomadic Massive. These life lessons gave members of the group the ability to recognise injustice, to read between the lines, and to understand that dominant power structures played an enormous role in discrimination. As they grew into young adults, they inevitably became more critical in their thinking, and Hip Hop culture provided a forum to express these alternative perspectives and learn about others

Deconstructing Discrimination

This leads me to the second observable theme, which is separate from the first although clearly connected. At the macro level oppression may be understood as systematic discrimination of a particular group. Oppression is a large umbrella encompassing different acts and atrocities. The first component of oppression that is observable to a young child is the concept of unfairness. A child can see that someone is treated differently and regardless if this difference is favorable or unfavorable, it is perceived as unfairness. As a child begins to explore the reasoning behind unfairness, s/he will soon discover prejudice and all its subsets: racism, sexism, classism, and so on. Since I started this research by asking questions about NM member's in early childhood, I saw discrimination as the recognizable element within oppression. That is to say, it is what all members saw before they could understand the larger picture. My sister and I learned about oppression from our parents' experience in Chile under Pinochet. Although the idea of oppression was indigestible at such a young age, we were still exposed to the injustice through acts of political discrimination. We witnessed the discussions, we went to the rallies, and we saw the videos that people showed in church basements and community centres. It was the beginning of understanding that the world was not as it seemed.

When the Arabization movement came to Algeria, Lou was suddenly perceived as an enemy because he was from France. He said in his interview that he did not understand the political implications of his presence in Algeria; he just knew that he had to leave. He lamented leaving behind his best friend at the time, an Algerian neighbour. He went on to feel discriminated in France because of his sympathy for Algeria and again he could not understand why. This experience provides an important window into the world of perspective. It is instrumental in understanding how nationalism shapes identity, particularly through the discrimination of the

other. Somehow, the identification of an inferior group serves to nourish the nationalist sentiment. According to Barbour and Carmichael (2000), "it (nationalism) can be seen in ideological terms as the defence of a world view and its symbols against rival world views which are considered to be fundamentally erroneous and which, if successful, would force the conquered to act in ways abhorrent to their beliefs" (p.3).

In some cases, participants had witnessed discrimination from the side of the perpetrator. Butta became aware of discrimination by observing the privileged class. He says that in Kenya, he was shocked at how the diplomats engaged with the locals and how they spoke about them within their circles. This was something that he experienced throughout his life as an invisible minority. It is something that he refers to as the White surprise. He spoke of several occasions where he was privy to certain conversations where people degraded minorities, not realising that he was one. Waahli described the subtle ways that discrimination was felt among racial groups in Montreal. He says that there were some kids with whom he just played in the street; they never invited him over to their house. These are the pieces of the puzzle that young people try to put together. Young people experience these levels of discrimination differently, but many go unnoticed, especially if they are acts among minority groups.

Beyond racism, there were also examples of linguistic discrimination in this dissertation. According to Pool (1987), "To blame a minority's disadvantages on the deficiency of its language rather than on discrimination legitimizes the privileges of other groups and the platform of assimilationist leaders in the minority" (p. 5). Nantali spoke about how Anglophones from the Caribbean were discriminated against in Quebec. They were not eligible for certain jobs and they were often told to leave the province by French speaking immigrants. Vox experienced this type of discrimination when he attended a prestigious school in Haiti. When his dialect was seen

to be from the countryside, he was immediately ridiculed, even by his teacher. This exposed Freire's notion that the oppressed have a tendency to become the oppressor when given the privilege. The teacher who laughed at his countryside accent was from the same region. This made me reflect on discrimination as an unconscious tool of protection for some people. As a nation identifies a common enemy in order to assert its superiority, in turn, the individual can do the same with another person. It is a warped safeguard against a feeling of powerlessness and creates a false sense of security. Hip Hop has given youth a language and a culture which has the power to denounce this type of injustice and Nomadic Massive embraced this tool as a means of demystifying stereotypes and discrimination.

Cultural Identity in a Multicultural Context

Individuals possess a worldview that is a reaction to the observable world, in connection with notions of self. According to social identity theory and identity theory, these notions of self are in relation to the perceived social group and the position within that social group. My parents' culture affects who I am; Canadian culture affects the way I am. Beyond that, there are my personal experiences. These experiences cannot be separated from my interactions with others. After Waahli was treated as an outsider because of his ethnic background, he went through a metamorphosis. He vowed to not be pushed around anymore; he defended and asserted himself as a Black man. In the context in which he was living, being Black was an idea that was reflected by his Haitian culture and projected by White society's view of Black. Within the stereotyping of this identity, he had to continue to search for a deeper sense of self to defy the stereotypes. After all, he was raised in Quebec, so his identity, even as a Black man, had to reflect the Black culture of North America. Hall (1990) discusses the Jamaican identity as an appropriation of African culture but also as a new thing separate from Africa. He argues that,

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"Africa must at least be reckoned with by the Caribbean people, but it cannot in any simple sense be merely recovered" (p. 230). While Jamaicans were influenced by African culture, it is not the same culture, and this speaks to interpretations of what it means to be Black. In this way, being Haitian in Montreal, for example, is different from being Haitian in Haiti because of the cultural context. Waahli went on to explore Hip Hop as a way of finding more universal truths and a more coherent identity that reflected his authentic experience. Hall (1990) also says that Caribbean people should not accept the West's view that Africa is a singular timeless and primitive identity. The diaspora has its own cultural evolution within a new cultural context. While members of the diaspora evolve, African culture, in all its multiplicity, necessarily evolves as well.

Nantali spoke about her mother's push to put her in a French program at a school which was further from home. This move was in reaction to what her mother observed as linguistic discrimination in Montreal. Nantali spoke of the need to participate in activities with the dominant class in order to assert one's presence and demystify stereotypes. Still, her own cultural group viewed her differently because she chose to study somewhere else. She said that she found strength in her name; the fact that it was different reminded everyone that she was too. I appreciated this idea that one could mingle without completely assimilating. Time and time again, I observed that being between social groups forced members of the group to seek a deeper identity. Butta and Lou forged their identities through always being foreigners, due to their parents travelling. I remember negotiating between the different Latino identities prescribed to me by my peers and my parents. Were any of them real or did each perspective serve to address their own understanding of this cultural identity? This reveals that identity is a social construct

that is particularly fragile in adolescence and more so in a pluralistic society, where there is no clear tradition that applies to all.

Persistence of Colonial Relations

Another theme which cannot be ignored is that of colonialism. This theme is connected to the first three because it is intrinsically oppressive and discriminating. There is no question that colonialism delineates philosophies of right and wrong and that this necessarily shapes the individuals living in colonised lands. The idea of colonialism is inextricably connected to critical pedagogy but I did not explicitly plan to talk about it in this study. Whether this is inherently connected to my acceptance of my own colonial identity or the lack of colonial confrontation I experienced in my life, this was one of the most revealing themes of this study, for me. I began to realise that colonisation is a layered and cyclical process. According to Usher and Edwards (2000), "Critical pedagogy is concerned with deconstructing authoritative voices— those who peak for and on behalf of others—both on the global and macro-level and the localised micro-level—the classroom is itself a 'colonised' site" (p. 216). I am here, exploring colonialism in North America and the Caribbean, assuming that colonisation is an oppressive act which divides people. At the same time, I am doing this from a Latin American perspective without questioning Spanish colonialism and how that has come to shape my own identity.

In this study, I became aware of French colonialism due to the context. We are located in Quebec and some participants come from French speaking countries. Some sections of this dissertation may seem like I intended to denounce French colonialism and this is far from true; however, this theme kept coming up as a precursor to other discussions. It came up so much that it could not be avoided, and still I want to reiterate that French colonialism is not more brutal or oppressive than any other form of colonialism. I was interested in exploring how colonialism

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affects social stratification and, in turn, fuels prejudice and discrimination. In doing so, it has an effect on the identity of individuals who find themselves identified or dismissed by colonial ideals.

In Haiti, Vox described the ongoing struggle that stemmed from French rule and sanctions on the island. Despite all the damage done by France, it was shocking to observe that the French language and culture remained virtuous ideals in the society. This story continued in Quebec as Diegal and Waahli both explained that Creole was a language to be spoken at home. Whether explicit or not, they learned that their native language was not to be heard outside the home. Vox learned about this in Haiti but Diegal and Waahli never went to school in Haiti. Nantali spoke about how these colonial concepts trickled down to the second generation.

There are many layers to this but it is all about positionality. How one may be perceived by others and one's perceptions of the self can change depending on a colonial context. In Latin America, I am considered White. This idea comes as a differentiation between Black and Native. It is White in a European sense and this comes from Spanish colonialism—a Eurocentric view which devalued the native populations living in Latin America and that relied on African slaves to build the colonies. Yet in Canada, I am no longer White because there is a category for Latinos. From a Latin American perspective, this category seems absurd because of the differences among people within Latin America. Colonial identity becomes a national identity over time, and this nationalism is taught in the school system and reinforced by the media. Usually when one's ideals and values are close to the ideals projected by government, media, society, and so forth, one may not be aware of the indoctrination. It is when those values differ greatly, or when you are visibly different, that these things can be more easily detected.

Education as a Cultural Tool

Education is a theme that cannot be overlooked in this dissertation because it appears as a double-edged sword. In some cases the education system is responsible for maintaining power structures that disadvantage certain individuals. In other cases, education may be viewed as liberating people from this very oppression. A discussion about education as a theme is futile if we do not first identify first the purpose of education. According to Chomsky (2012), education can serve the purpose of forming creative individuals who are capable of facing the world with tools and strategies to cope. He also says that in other cases, education can serve the purpose of indoctrination, whereby its function is to streamline individuals who will be complacent and loyal to their society. There is no question that the individuals in my study value knowledge and learning, but their views on education can be clearly connected to their concrete experiences with education.

My personal view on education is that it has a dual function. It needs to shape individuals to become productive and, more importantly, cooperative members of society. It also has to nurture individual learners and acknowledge their uniqueness. Perhaps intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can coexist in our educational system, as they do in life outside the classroom. Around the world, education is viewed differently by different societies. The details of the discussion about systems can touch a variety of subjects; letter grades versus number grades, marks versus competencies, citizenry versus mastery, and so on. The multiple discussions will never be resolved because they are all perspectives on the process of becoming educated and the process is connected to an outcome. Even the concept of literacy, which appears as a fundamental characteristic of education, can mean different things to different people. Giroux (2006) argues for a broader definition of literacy in order to foment a more critical approach to

education. In an interview about media literacy Giroux says, "This means at the very least, pluralizing the notion of literacy so we can expand its meaning to mastering the languages, knowledge, skills, tools, new technologies and methods of a range of modes of communication including but going beyond, print culture" (Giroux, 2006, p.6). We can read textbooks, articles or even websites, but through these artifacts we read the world in which we live.

For members of Nomadic, education was a necessary process, but it was not a shared experience until Hip Hop came along. The subject of education in Lou's life was connected to his moving around the globe. His father was a French teacher and so no matter where he went, Lou was educated by the same system; however, he recounts that the education system was influenced by the local culture. He spoke of the school in Cuba, which always had people coming and going. It was situated in an active neighbourhood and this was part of his educational experience. This particular experience was about giving him an opportunity to interact with locals, and it is where he ultimately met the rap group that would greatly influence his musical career and in turn Nomadic Massive's musical career. His earlier accounts of education in Algeria described a segregated system where he was not encouraged to mingle with local students, particularly female students. He talked about how he and his classmates would try to communicate with the neighbouring girls' school through the fence, using signs and a limited vocabulary.

The cultural context of a school plays a significant role in the educational context of an institution. Waahli spoke about his experience at Vanier College where Black students all had their lockers in an area surrounded by bars. He participated in an effort to have these bars removed, and Nantali was also a part of this movement. These experiences, not anchored in curriculum or even the classroom, are part of the educational experience. School is an idea but it is also a physical place that develops as a microcosm of the society. Behaviours that are

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tolerated or ignored are indicative of the larger narrative within an institution. As stated previously, if one is part of the narrative or specifically valued within that narrative, it is sometimes difficult to view the institution as unjust.

In some cases, special people help individuals navigate through this feeling of alienation. In Meryem's case, she was lucky to find Algerian teachers when she arrived in Montreal. She explained that these teachers understood the way she had been taught in Algeria and showed her how to adapt to the North American way of teaching. In this example, I observed that educational systems place value on specific knowledge but also on how that knowledge is obtained. It is a great advantage to live in the country where you have been educated because you understand implicit and explicit norms through education. On the other hand, if an individual comes from another country, s/he is immediately placed at a disadvantage. Much previously cherished knowledge becomes irrelevant or impertinent in the new context. As more and more schools become technologically equipped, the art of handwriting becomes less and less important. This skill that once was a clear marker of an educated person will soon become obsolete.

The issue is that the institution defines what constitutes the valuable skills and this serves to divert the attention of the learner from greater questions. The formality of the institution can often detract from its responsibility to encourage creativity. Vox spoke in detail about how this spreads through the different levels of the society. When he spoke about the teacher who could not reveal his social status to his students, he outlined a potential outcome. He described a hypothetical scenario where the students become aware that their teacher is from the countryside, and they then tell their parents. Then the parents complain to the institution because it is supposed to have higher standards. I ask myself what students learn, beyond the lesson in the

classroom. Do they learn to fight oppression or find creative solutions against discrimination, or do they learn that it is better to assimilate?

Butta and Diegal had more favourable experiences with education, but it was not in the way of the system; rather, it seemed more connected to individual teachers. Diegal spoke about how the English teachers at his school organised talent shows, which allowed him to perform in front of his peers. He spoke of a university professor who opened his eyes to the cultural and musical diversity of Montreal. Butta spoke about a teacher who was able to sympathise with his adolescent struggle for truth. He remembered that this teacher taught him how to navigate through the system and not confront every part of it. It is not surprising that Butta now works at a school with historically high dropout rates, working to get kids back on track.

Cultural Exchange as a Tool of Demystification

Cultural exchange is an important element in the Nomadic model, but it was already an important part of the participants' lives. In some ways, the experience of immigration naturally is coupled with cultural exchange. Immigrants are confronted with the host culture but also interact with other cultures living in Canada. In this exchange it becomes apparent that everyone is uninformed in some way. We have all come to understand the other trivially, through stereotype and anecdote. This way of looking at the world may have served a political purpose in a more homogenous society but in the new context, these generalisations suddenly become divisive. Understanding another culture through our own prism is a way of fictionalising the "other" to suit our own cultural understanding. It is reminiscent of the early anthropological research on colonised people, which eventually informed how the West understood cultural difference. McGrane (1992) argues that, "Anthropology is institutionalized and as an institution is involved in reproduction of Western society" (p. 3). The observer projects their concepts of

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normalcy on the observed and draws conclusions to support these concepts. Left unchallenged, these concepts become part of reality and support a false feeling of superiority. The language used to describe "other" as primitive, savage or uncivilised becomes part of the cultural narrative of the West.

In this case, the textual understanding of a people may not be as valuable as the experimental understanding of a people. In a formal context, I could learn about another culture from a textbook. My class could have a discussion about the text and draw conclusions about a people, but this has very little to do with reality. Even if a member of this group were present in the discussion, the group would look to this person as representative of the group when in fact there are many perspectives within any given cultural group. Some people draw these conclusions when they get a limited view of a particular place. For example, a couple visits a resort in Cuba and has a terrible experience with hotel staff. Suddenly this becomes a perception of the entire country. They then relate the experience to others who have never been there, and it becomes a way of understanding the place. The couple may have had an incredible experience and this would still not be reflective of an entire people. It would not accurately portray what it is like to live in Cuba or more deeply what it means to be Cuban. I had visited Cuba a few times before going with Nomadic Massive. The experience of living with locals and working on mutual projects gave me another view of this place. According to Wunderlich (2006), although Hip Hop initially represented imperialism because it was American, it eventually became regarded as a cultural tool of communication among Afro Cubans as well as a means of communicating with artists outside Cuba (Wunderlich 2006).Within the group we learn from each other's cultures through our interactions. As we travel, we learn about other cultures by living and working with them. At the same time, as the multicultural group moves together, it becomes aware of its

common culture which is facilitated by the Hip Hop experience. Cultural exchange allows us to learn about other cultures while sharing elements of our own. In this way, cultural exchange teaches us a great deal about ourselves, our cultural identity, and our human identity.

Hip Hop as a Common Language

Hip Hop is a dominant theme in this story because it is the element that connects all the others. Hip Hop expressed the frustration that everyone felt growing up. It also embodied a way out of that frustration by offering a space for creative expression. In doing so, it created its own codes of conduct, authenticity and process. It served as an information superhighway before the Internet was a prevalent tool for exchange. It communicated a message that was heard around the globe and inspired young people to engage in creative rebellion. Hip Hop did this at its best; however, it has also been criticised for being a vulgar art which glorifies violence and misogyny. It has been blamed for the degradation of society and the corruption of youth. It seems impossible that this is the same type of Hip Hop that I write about here. Yet if Hip Hop is a culture, then it could contain characteristics of both. Cultures are celebrated and demonised all the time, when internally there is much diversity. If Hip Hop is an art, art has many faces; it can be beautifully provocative at times and gruesomely controversial at others.

In this dissertation, I also examined Hip Hop's role in education. For that purpose, Hip Hop can be regarded as a tool. As a tool, it is not inherently good or bad, because a tool is neutral until it is used. In an interview about technology in education, Chomsky (2012) spoke of tools as having the same capacity for good and evil. "It's kind of like a hammer. The hammer doesn't care whether you use it to build a house or whether in torture you use it to crush somebody's skull. The hammer can do either." (January 2012)

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Hip Hop educated members of Nomadic about a reality that they could relate to. Waahli learned English by listening to De La Soul; it motivated him to discover the meaning behind the lyrics he had been singing. Within this educational framework, he also learned philosophy, religion and culture from a Hip Hop perspective unavailable from the school curriculum. Alim (2007) argues that, "Whereas teachers consistently engage in in behaviours that aim to produce a homogeneous academic language, many students are busy celebrating, highlighting and consciously manipulating diverse language varieties" (p.164). In many ways, Hip Hop talked about the things that were not being talked about in school, in a language that young people understood, before the advent of Internet chatrooms and online forums. As a learner, Waahli was being enriched and learned about a culture to which he could belong. By engaging in rapping and deejaying, he became a Hip Hop teacher. The power of liberation in Hip Hop comes from this opportunity to engage and further the movement through participation and performance.

Diegal used Hip Hop as a way of connecting young people in the community in two distinct ways. The first was by developing a Hip Hop night in Montreal so that people could interact with others in the culture. The event that he initiated became a place for people to congregate and come closer together. Many other projects in the Hip Hop community were conceived during his Hip Hop encounters. The other initiative was the Hip Hop symposium, a forum designed to talk about the deeper questions affecting the community. In merging the two worlds, he helped to legitimise the culture at Concordia University by giving people a space to talk about the often-controversial side of Hip Hop. It was a space for people in the community to talk, but it also served the purpose of demystifying myths for people who were outside of the community. Smitherman (1997) writes, "The communicative practices of the Hip Hop Nation are firmly rooted in the African American speech community. Hip Hop's rappers are both in and of this

community, sounding the clarion call, arousing the dead citizens (those lacking in consciousness), showcasing the culture of the U.S.G. and representing the case of America's still dispossessed slave descendants" (p. 20).

Hip Hop kept Butta grounded through all his international experiences. He took Hip Hop with him and used the portability of beat boxing as a way of staying connected. He used Hip Hop to learn about the local communities he visited. He used it to relate to music while living in Kenya; he used it to communicate with youth while living in Romania, and he ultimately used it to create a name for himself in Montreal. Alim (2009) states that, "This is a Hip Hop that hasn't recently 'gone global' (as most media reports would have it). It is a Hip Hop that has *been* global and is already local at the same time" (p. 19). Hip Hop was a way to pay rent in his early days in the city, and overtime this grew into larger projects. It started with house parties, evolved into bar gigs, and eventually international festivals. Outside of this, Butta has used Hip Hop as an educational tool in schools. He understands the negative impact that a formal education can have on free thinkers. Hip Hop is a means of holding creative minds accountable because it is about individual expression. His contribution to the Hip Hop scene in Montreal includes earlier projects with the Pot Roast Orchestra, as well as his work with la LIHQ (Ligue d'Improvisation Hip Hop du Québec).

Hip Hop was an important tool for the participants' professional development. Lou's entrepreneurial spirit was tested with his involvement with the Terminus project. This was one of his first major contracts involving the production of shows. He had to oversee the creation of the show, the hosting, and the marketing. The amount of work required to bring the vision to fruition was overwhelming. The notoriety that followed was incredible. He soon became known for hosting and putting on shows, and this played a major role in what became the Nomadic

experience. Long before his work with big Hip Hop shows, he was hustling to make Hip Hop valid in his community. He did this by performing at any event that he could, including car shows and activist fundraisers. He also did this by gaining legitimacy on the radio with his French Hip Hop program in Winnipeg. Motley and Henderson (2007) discuss the concept of "glocalisation," whereby the individual works to adapt global Hip Hop culture to the local reality: "while the core essence and elements of Hip Hop are shared by all members of the Hip Hop culture, the aesthetic is adapted to suit multiple national cultures, localized conditions and grievances" (p. 6) After all of this work with local Hip Hop communities, it was understandable that Lou had the capacity to bring Nomadic Massive onto the international stage. In addressing the local reality of the Hip Hop community in Canada, Nomadic Massive was able to find their place in the global context.

Hip Hop was significant in many stages of Nantali's life. As a second-generation youth living in Montreal, she was faced with two challenges. The first was cultural and the second linguistic. She explored the importance of French in Quebec and the way it divided immigrants. She felt that the province made it difficult for English speaking immigrants to feel at home. It was not surprising then that English-speaking immigrants to the province sought to identify with Hip Hop culture coming out of New York. Nantali explained that it was through her many trips to New York that she collected Hip Hop cassette tapes and learned about Hip Hop fashion. According to Basu and Jemelle (2006),

> Thirty years since its inception in the South Bronx, New York City Hip Hop's
> expressive cultures, language, music sartorial styles, dance and art has migrated
> across racial ideological and national boundaries to become one of the foremost

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forces in youth culture globally, resulting in a plethora of mass mediated and

grassroots expressions the world over. (p.3).

Back in Montreal, a parallel culture emerged through the consumption of this art, imported by immigrants. Soon it evolved into videos, which brought the dances and then church basement parties where the culture was lived. Diegal spoke of these nights and of partnerships with Hip Hop communities in the U.S. Nantali came to identify with this new culture, born in Montreal, which served to break down some of the linguistic barriers with which she grew up. Hip Hop was a way of relating to Waahli in high school when she had grown up with a divide between Haitians and Vincentians; they both referred to this experience in their interviews.

Hip Hop was a culture that Meryem saw when she first came to Canada. She had heard mainstream Hip Hop in Algeria, but when she came to Montreal, she observed that it was a way that people related to each other. She looked for ways to relate and she did so by learning Hip Hop culture. She learned the dances; she learned how to rap and beatbox. This immersion into Hip Hop made learning English easier and served as a platform for her to share her views with other young people. Having felt silenced in her youth, Hip Hop was the perfect antidote. Her ability to sing was something she carried with her when she came to Canada as a refugee. Her involvement with Hip Hop allowed her to denounce the injustice that she lived as a child and to reach a much larger audience. According to Washington (2015), "Hip Hop culture represents a platform where urban African American young men have not been prevented from expressing points of view about forms of oppression that limit their life opportunities" (p.114). Meryem has shown that this idea is no longer limited to young African American men. She integrated easily with other immigrant communities through Hip Hop. She spoke of her exchanges with Latinos and Haitians living in the Côtes de Neiges borough of Montreal.

Hip Hop was a discovery for me. I never went on weekend trips to New York as a kid and my parents did not settle in different countries every few years. They chose to settle in Ottawa, Canada, and I was born there. I didn't arrive as an immigrant or a refugee but somehow I always felt like I didn't completely fit in. I respected dominant ways of thinking and used these ways of thinking as a lens for looking at the world. The world seemed unjust but it seemed that if you could just fit in, it would somehow be less so. Now I understand that the reason for this is because if you adjust enough towards assimilation, you feel above others who have not assimilated as much.

CHAPTER 14: CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I revisit Freire's framework and its connection to the study by exploring issues of power in education. I reimagine multiculturalism, using critical pedagogy to explore the lingering effects of colonial education. I also demonstrate how Hip Hop has provided a space for a common culture among different people. In doing so, I address the initial questions of identity, leadership, education and cultural exchange outlined in the first chapter. We currently face challenges in Canada with the integration of new immigrants, causing repercussions in Canadian society. The province of Quebec recently faced an ideological battle between assimilation and integration with the Parti Quebecois' proposed Charter of Values. A recent CBC poll on discrimination revealed that attitudes towards immigrants vary greatly across the country (Research House, 2014). The recent Republican race in the United States, where Donald Trump is currently leading, clearly reveals discriminatory attitudes towards foreigners, across the border. At this level of government, discrimination can become part of a rhetoric which does not necessarily reflect the majority. This is one reason why it was important for me to embark on this exploratory journey with individuals who had not only suffered cultural alienation, but who were exploring creative ways around it. During this process, I not only learned about the individuals, but I started to develop a greater understanding of the different cultural realities that exist within society. I gathered information that could be used in an educational context to stimulate youth and give them a voice of artistic expression. I observed different leadership models that suit a variety of contexts, inside and outside the classroom. I explored the Canadian connection to Hip Hop and how it has shaped identity both locally and internationally.

In this chapter, I synthesise the lessons learned throughout the dissertation and attempt to give tangible applications for society by identifying common themes throughout the interviews. Although the sample size was small, the individuals in the study have collectively affected a generation of young people by offering alternatives to the dominant narratives of identity and power. Music has been a common denominator, but more importantly, Hip Hop culture has served as a tool for a contemporary style of community development. The effectiveness of this approach may be seen in the many communities that benefit from it. Nomadic Massive members have witnessed these benefits and used the knowledge they acquired abroad in their own community. I wish to demonstrate, in concrete terms, the lessons we can extrapolate from the interviews.

Global Conscientization and Dialogue through Hip Hop

Using narrative inquiry and Freire's framework for understanding its social implications, it became clear that Hip Hop could be considered a form of critical pedagogy and the literature supports this hypothesis. According to Morrel (2002), "The influence of rap as a voice of resistance for urban youth proliferates through artists who endeavor to bring an accurate yet critical depiction of the urban situation to a hip-hop generation." (p.74). Whether intentional or not, Hip Hop's voice emerged as a reaction to disenfranchisement. According to Freire, this is the first step to liberation—the realisation that one is oppressed. Freire's arguments are not necessarily related to a violent uprising of the oppressed, but to a process of understanding through education, which he referred to as conscientization (Freire, 1970). In terms of Hip Hop, this process is engaged by listening to the different perspectives of social reality outlined by the multiple Hip Hop art forms; however, the mere consumption of this art is not a critical process in and of itself—it serves only as data that enters the mind of the consumer without analysis.

Freire argued that traditional education relied on a system of banking, in which individuals in a subordinate position filled their minds with information given to them by people in power (Freire, 1970). Freire wrote this at a time when access to information was still a privilege of the powerful. With the introduction of the Internet, the question of access no longer seems valid, and yet many schools still operate under the principle of feeding information and determining which information is fed. In many ways, Hip Hop exists outside of this loop because it was born in the margins of society. As a result, it has not had to adhere to the same social or academic codes. This in itself is liberating, because it allows individuals to express themselves more honestly under the protection of poetic license. Even voices that are limited due to dictatorship or social repression have been able to communicate with the Hip Hop community at large.

In Freire's understanding of education, the real problem is not with the content but the context. He speaks of liberation through dialogue, which he believes leads to a greater understanding of the society in which we live (Freire, 1970). Hip Hop has definitely opened an international dialogue, and Nomadic Massive has tapped into various global communities and participated in collaborative projects with them. The participatory element is fundamental for Freire, because he argues that revolution cannot be prescriptive. He encouraged leaders of the community to create a space for people to speak openly and debate issues affecting their community. Nomadic members were all conscious of the need for this space, and they eventually found it in Hip Hop. Realising the importance of this space, they began to find ways to provide this opportunity for the next generation. This is absolutely necessary in the liberation of the oppressed; Freire did not believe that oppressors would be capable of liberating the oppressed because they would have too much to lose. This notion had been explored about twenty years previously in Orwell's analysis of the Russian revolution, *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1946).

Freire saw little value in using distance to assert authority. In fact, he attributed such practices to the oppressive class, more concerned with dividing people by distorting their perception of reality. He outlined the tools of dehumanization linked to colonisation (Freire, 1970). At some time in their adolescence, the members of Nomadic each encountered dehumanization, and the discovery disturbed them quite deeply. These early observations planted the seeds for change in their own lives and roused their interest in Hip Hop. According to Butler (2009), "We judge a world we refuse to know, and our judgment becomes one means of refusing to know that world" (p.156). Humanizing another person requires acknowledging them and interacting with them on an individual level. Only then can stereotypes be demystified, along with prejudices that cause judgment of the other as an imaginary character. Hip Hop has the ability to level the playing field by placing emphasis on skill and ability instead of status. In the culture of battling, a level of respect emerges from the rawness of the interaction. This represents a form of empowerment that some children cannot experience in an educational system that speaks about them but not to them. This is a major flaw in educational systems with culturally diverse populations. The lessons address a reality that the students are not living. In fact, sometimes the lessons address a fictional reality that creates a sense of alienation. Students need to understand their society's norms and values, but they also have to understand how they fit into that story.

Reimagining Multiculturalism through the Hip Hop Community

In a society where multiculturalism is the norm, one might imagine that the culture would naturally become fragmented. This study clearly showed that although Canada offers many services to newly landed immigrants, it does little to address intercultural dialogue. The Charter of Values in Quebec, which aimed to create unity through the removal of religious symbols, eventually created a greater sense of alienation among cultures that felt they were targeted by the

proposed legislation. The society attempted to define itself by what it was not, instead of looking

for commonalities. The population rejected the Charter, and voted out the PQ government with

overwhelming numbers (Hopper, 2014). This provided a clear indication that the people in

power were out of touch with the society they governed. Many immigrants to Quebec had

already experienced French colonialism in their native countries, and this approach had opened

old wounds. It caused an inevitable rift between cultures that felt outside of the society because

of their beliefs. Young Quebeckers intermingle with people of different cultures, and the Charter

only served to delineate imaginary borders between them. The lack of representation made it

difficult for cultural communities to raise a collective voice in order to show that Quebecois

identity was indeed more multi-faceted than the politicians understood it to be. Low, Sarkar and

Winer (2009), demonstrate that the issue of identity in Quebec goes deeper than just the use of

French but extends to the type of French used.

French is still given the top-ranking status index within the Montreal Hip Hop community's

order of indexicalities, as the lingua franca of their generation and of the larger international

Francophonie Hip-Hop scene. But the Bill 101generation is definitely messing with the order of

indexicalities in other ways. First of all, the 'French' of the Hip-Hop community is not the 'Good

French' of the establishment; it is a much more widely inclusive category that includes' Bad

French,' regional and class dialects, (p.77).

Nomadic Massive has never been limited by cultural borders, so it was easy for them to talk to

youth about identity and understand that it was not a static concept. Through their hands-on

experience, youth witnessed what many people know intuitively—human beings have more in

common than they are sometimes led to believe. The only way to realize this is to learn about

other cultures and their struggles. The story of these struggles is embedded in Hip Hop music,

and the more the Nomadic members studied Hip Hop, the more they became aware of these common struggles. This helped Waahli and Tali transcend the rivalries between English and French Caribbean people in Montreal. Lou and Butta found that Hip Hop gave them something to cling to in an ever-changing cultural landscape. They found a synergy and an acceptance in that culture which made them feel less alone in the world. They studied it, developed an understanding of it, and this ultimately led to the development of programs for Montreal youth.

In these examples, none of the people shared the same cultural background, but they all found something in common. This has been the most enriching element in Nomadic, the discovery of commonalities through a borderless culture. As a young man, Waahli used Hip Hop to fight against the stereotypes of his Haitian culture and avoided falling into self-fulfilling prophecies. He educated himself with Hip Hop and then transformed his knowledge into a strategy for working with underprivileged youth. Nantali gravitated towards this culture and saw it as a means of expression in a place where the status quo often trivialized Black identity. It formed the basis of her workshops, which were used to educate young people and make them aware of institutionalized racism.

Colonisation and the Classroom

The lesson for me as an educator is clear: Hip Hop is a viable pedagogical tool if used correctly. It reaches beyond the traditional curriculum and is a means of cultural expression. In my own practice, Hip Hop has become a way to connect with young Montrealers. As Butta explained, Hip Hop is not a culture of hierarchy but a culture of skill. This investigation into the lives of Nomadic members has shed light on my own practice by reframing my approach to teaching in a multi-ethnic environment. Two contrasting lessons resonate with me regarding education. The first is the negative effect that colonial education has on the population of a country and how that

trickles down to future generations. The second is the positive effect that begins when individuals learns about their culture through the oral tradition.

The French system left its mark on the many countries it colonised by upholding the status quo and inculcating values that reinforced French superiority. Vox spoke about how the system continues to mentally enslave people in Haiti, long after that country gained its independence. This was most evident in the importance given to the French language and how it became a symbol of status and privilege.   Meryem experienced a similar stratification in Algeria, where the French had managed to call the country a department of France, but then extended citizenship only to a chosen few. Muslims were considered subjects and not citizens, with the exception of a minority referred to as "meritorious Muslims" or "les évolués," in French (Cantier 2002). "Almost all of the handful of Muslims who accepted French citizenship were évolués; more significantly, it was in this privileged group of Muslims, strongly influenced by French culture and political attitudes, that a new Algerian self-consciousness developed." (Federal Research Division Library of Congress, p. 34). In fact, it was this notion of maintaining French values through education that allowed Lou to travel the world, as his father was posted in many French schools abroad.

In this study, I have looked at the French system because it seemed to be a common factor for many. At the same time, what I discovered is present in many educational systems, and is not exclusively French. The system addresses the needs of the nation as a way of normalizing culture, and teaches so-called common values. People adhere to these systems because it is seen as a way of ascending in the societal hierarchy; however, this process occurs at the detriment of people's identity and culture. If cultural integration ignores or devalues a person's heritage, it leaves a scar. In France, this has been quite evident with Muslim populations, which have been

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treated as a colonised people despite being French citizens. Canada offers a different approach

to immigration, and according to Meryem, adopts one of the most humane approaches in the

world.

 As a teacher, though, I wonder if we could not take the approach a little further in the classroom.

After listening to Vox talk about the history of Haiti, it dawned on me that this history is not

taught in schools. It is an integral part of who he is, yet he did not learn it in any Haitian school.

Similarly, I learned the history of the Chilean coup d'état from my parents and the Chilean

community in Canada. This same history was not taught in Chilean high schools under the

Pinochet dictatorship. As a result, many young Chileans felt disconnected from this history,

which served to define my identity abroad. In a practical sense, teachers can follow Freire's

example and take the time to learn about the histories of the individuals in their classrooms.

Using this knowledge helps to connect the dots, as Butta discussed in his interviews.

After speaking to Vox, I incorporated some of what I learned in my Montreal classroom. I

noticed an immediate reaction from my Haitian students, but students of other backgrounds were

also intrigued. I began to include this exercise more regularly and felt that it had a positive

impact on my teaching. I looked deeper into Algerian history and incorporated examples into the

classroom. Little by little, I made it my daily homework to study the cultures that were

represented in the classroom. Somehow this new approach also had a positive effect on my

relationships with colleagues, as they, too, came from diverse backgrounds. I read about Haitian

independence, for example, and then checked facts with some of the Haitian teachers.

Waahli said that society taught him that he was Black before he realized it. When he did, he felt

uncomfortable among those people who had defined him. When he moved to a Haitian

neighbourhood in Montreal, he found that things became easier socially. At the same time, the neighbourhood served as a platform for what he refers to as "the judgmental years." He had been judged while he was in the minority, so it was natural for him to judge when he found himself in a more homogenous setting.

It became increasingly obvious to me that collectively learning about our different backgrounds is an emancipatory process. We inevitably see our commonalities, and it provides a concrete way of combatting ignorance in a diverse society. Canada bases its history in the colonial experience: the arrival of the British and the French, Upper and Lower Canada, the treaties with the First Nations, and so on. While all these lessons are relevant, they don't extend into the contemporary history that explains the arrival of so many immigrants to Canada. Where do students learn about the arrival of North Africans to Quebec? Where do they learn about the influence that Haitian teachers had on the profession in Montreal? More importantly, where do teachers learn about these stories?

I remember doing presentations in primary school about where we were from. I interviewed my grandparents about the Chilean flag and the National anthem, but that didn't really reveal the depth of my connection to the country. Instead, it offered a way of understanding culture through monuments, icons and simulacra. Everyone felt that the experience was multicultural, but it did not answer the question of why we were here in Canada. A teacher transmits knowledge to students, and the process of transmission is at the forefront of teacher training; however, context plays an enormous role in stimulating students, and that is where the teacher's autonomy comes into play. The examples they choose to use or ignore contribute to the learning experience. In my classroom, the effect of using relatable examples has been fruitful. My own learning has been enriched, allowing me to connect on a deeper level.

Hip Hop as Common Language

Language has played a crucial role in assimilation, and schools have upheld this approach by neglecting common languages in favour of colonial languages. Across the Caribbean, local dialects are not permitted in schools. Vox spoke about the fact that even the French teachers in his schools did not really speak French. Lou spoke about the Arabization movement, which attempted to bring local Arabic into schools where French was the norm. Although viewed as an anti-colonial move, in fact it was a move towards an older colonial language. In fact, a truly anti-colonial approach would bring the Berber language into schools. In speaking to Meryem, I learned that although we call Algerians Arabs, this is not entirely true. The Berber people are native to North Africa and were not Muslim until the Ottoman Empire imposed the religion on local indigenous tribes in 1525. The same had happened with Christianity when the Roman Empire occupied the region in the year 98 AD. The difficulty in maintaining the Berber language relates to the fact that a series of different colonial powers sought to exterminate this culture through conquest and later through the education system. Yet the Berber language has survived these attempts, and still exists among the people in the same way that Creole exists in Haiti and Patois (more formally known as Jamaican Creole) in Jamaica. This speaks to the power of the oral tradition and its ability to transcend colonial rule. It is part of cultural identification, but at the same time it serves as a hierarchical marker that can prove disadvantageous to those who have not learned the dominant syntax.

We are certainly not free from such markers in North America. Many different dialects of English emerge among people of different cultural communities. They may serve to create a common code among speakers but can also alienate them in other settings. Then there is the question of accents; people may be perceived as less competent or learned when they speak the

dominant language with a heavy accent. These are perhaps unchangeable realities, but Freire teaches that one language does not have to destroy another. In the case of Nomadic, the multiplicity of languages made it easier to reach into other communities. Beyond this, however, speaking many languages allowed members to understand different perspectives.

As far back as the late 1800s, people thought about developing a common universal language. The first Universal Congress of Esperanto was held in France in 1905. This language, which was constructed using existing languages, was supposed to facilitate understanding around the world. Esperanto borrows from Indo-European semantics as well as Slavic pronunciation, but the vocabulary is primarily based in the Romance languages. Its universality, however, is based in Europe, so although it was meant to be politically neutral, it is inherently Eurocentric. Furthermore, despite its use as a second language in different countries of Europe, South America and Africa, it has not become as universal as English, which spread across the globe through imperialism. All across the world, people want to learn English because of the access that it affords its speakers.

With Nomadic, I discovered that Hip Hop serves as a sort of international code that goes beyond the grammar rules of any particular language. According to Gilles et al (2009), "Music has obvious connections to national identity and identifications, and especially to traditional music of a culture, which has deep-seated historical, and often linguistic, roots," but what happens when a particular type of music is appropriated across national borders? Lou and Butta exposed the reach of Hip Hop in all the cultures they encountered around the world. Waahli and Tali found that it was a common denominator among Caribbean youth growing up in Montreal. Everywhere that Nomadic travelled, they witnessed the universality of Hip Hop. For the most

part, it is not taught in schools; it is not a written language, but it survives by way of the oral tradition, becoming a way for young people to communicate and learn about each other's reality.

This common code then becomes a source of identity for marginalised youth rejected by the local culture. To the dominant class, it may appear insular and counter cultural. This definitely describes the case in the early years of Hip Hop, when it was still on the fringes of society. Nowadays, it is a cultural identity not bound by the regular constraints of a culture. This can be freeing for young people who are caught between cultures. The international Hip Hop community has many hubs where local people are working to enrich their communities through art.

Hip Hop as Common Culture

Nomadic Massive's different programs with youth offer a space for interaction and collaboration among people of different ethnic backgrounds, addressing an important demographic in society. The idea of being different than the dominant culture is clear for all immigrants, but among immigrants there is another struggle: internal stratification is often present within communities. Culture clashes exist among families with different belief systems. People carry their cultures with them when they leave, passing them on to their children. The next generation bears this cultural burden, with no roadmap to navigate the new culture they are forming as second-generation immigrants. Normal practices and customs suddenly become exotic in a new land. They become interpreted through the lens of the dominant structure and then reflected back to the citizens in different ways, for example, the media's portrayal of culture. Lou recalled seeing how Arabs were portrayed negatively on French television and the perception that it created among school children. Stereotyping often exists among locals. Waahli said that kids said racist

things to him when he was young, and he concluded that such ideas were heard at home and then mimicked by his classmates.

Hip Hop was not consumed through mass media in its early days, and so the genre's artists were free to criticize power structures. This resonated with young people who did not have a space to react to injustice. In this way, Hip Hop was empowering to those feeling oppressed. This extended to marginalized communities, immigrant populations, displaced peoples, and so on. Butta spoke about how people viewed Hip Hop as American music, but in fact, it was the music of those who had been rejected by American society. Hip Hop culture spread by means of cassette tapes that were physically transported by enthusiasts. These tapes provided fans with knowledge that they could share with their peers. This was how Hip Hop's followers were educated, and the way in which it developed into a culture that could be studied.

I believe that Hip Hop can be used to bring about positive change in the community. It allows young people to explore important issues through artistic expression. It has the potential to be used as a framework for debates about culture and power. Nomadic Massive has demonstrated, through their interviews and their work, that Hip Hop has transformative qualities. Hip Hop transforms individuals by providing a space to raise their voices. It transforms society by offering an alternative form of education for people who do not feel represented. As a culture, it can be considered borderless and far-reaching. My experience with Hip Hop has allowed me to understand different cultures and explore ideas that I would have otherwise not encountered. It is a growing field within academia, and it is a culture that continues to evolve as new generations become involved. Its longevity shows that it is a culture that also transcends the generation gap. Many adults in their 40s can remember the golden era of Hip Hop, and this history should be passed on to the young people of today. Perhaps it is not unfathomable to have Hip Hop

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departments in universities, much like jazz departments of today. In the future, students may study verses in school as today's students study Shakespeare. Shakespearean plays were a public forum for poetry, where people witnessed the craft as an oral tradition, not unlike the Hip Hop cypher.

Hip Hop started speaking to me when I realised that knowledge was being manipulated by dominant culture. The school system and the popular media avoided certain topics which became clear to me through Hip Hop. This is when I began to really listen and do the type of independent research that Waahli described in his interview. I listened to songs over and over for hidden meanings, practicing flows over tracks and writing rhymes to try to fit those rhythms. All of this was a learning process. While doing this, I practiced guitar in my family's cultural tradition and looked to incorporate the two. Now I can look back at those seemingly insignificant moments with fondness, because I know that those melodies and rhythms eventually became part of a much larger story. The way I really discovered Hip Hop was through Nomadic Massive. The international, multi-lingual and instrumental way of approaching the art form is what gave me access to this world. From there, I was able to encounter different cultures in Montreal, travel to many countries across the globe, and meet the most interesting people working for social justice in their communities. Hip Hop has facilitated and contextualised all of these experiences for me.

CHAPTER 15: LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This dissertation is entitled *Life Stories of a Montreal Hip Hop Group*, and I believe the title is appropriate because the narratives are critical to the thesis. The sample size is small because the depth of the stories provides a rich source of data to examine; however, this small sample created an inherent limitation because the topic—Hip Hop and Hip Hop culture—is too large to be defined by such a small sample. As a result, I considered that the participants shared Hip Hop culture within the context of the city of Montreal. At this level, I was confident in their ability to portray some of the finer details of Hip Hop culture and its following in Montreal. Moreover, this city provided an interesting look at the world through the many ethnic groups that settled there. In this way, participants brought stories of other realities that they explored using Hip Hop. At the same time, the narratives explored other themes such as displacement and the challenges related to integration. These themes are pertinent outside of Hip Hop culture and have far reaching possibilities in terms of community building. While Hip Hop culture is important to this dissertation, it does not represent an analysis of Hip Hop culture; it is, instead, a study of how critical pedagogy and Hip Hop have become symbiotic in the life story of a Montreal Band. I have attempted to provide definitions and explanations within the dissertation to encourage a better understanding, and I look forward to continuing my research on Hip Hop after the completion of this dissertation.

In my approach to looking at the part of the culture that touched Nomadic Massive, I blended narrative inquiry and critical ethnography. I chose critical ethnography as an extension of auto ethnography methodology, with which I had worked at the Masters level. Originally, I explored critical ethnography because of its connection to my previous work, and because I sought to write about Hip Hop as a culture. Critical ethnography shaped the way I conducted my

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observations and took field notes, because it made me aware of my researcher perspective and the potential conflicts of being an insider. It seemed as though I would continue in this direction—but then the narratives took center stage. Although the research could have focused on the political voice and struggle of the participants and how this was situated within Hip Hop culture, the narratives pointed more strongly in the direction of education and acculturation. There are elements of critical ethnography that could have been explored further. There is no overt call for justice emerging out of this study. What is much more present is the call for understanding and creativity within education in order to address the diversity and richness of the environment. There are no whistleblowers in this study because, it seems, participants did not feel trapped by other people but rather by perpetual systems and institutions. In this case, the common constraint was colonialism, which was omnipresent and not attributable to any individual. In fact, to become aware of colonialism and its impact on culture is to also realise that we are all complicit with it in some way. This multiple perspective on colonial institutions and education and their impact on the diaspora proved to be a real discovery of the research. At that juncture, the narratives pointed towards Hip Hop as a conduit for change; this is how the study connects to a critical pedagogy framework.

Perhaps narrative inquiry as a method and critical pedagogy as a framework would have sufficed to address the issue of criticality; however, once the narratives really began to focus on education and, more specifically, epistemology, I remained convinced about employing critical pedagogy. I had explored it in depth and realised that there had been an evolution of thought from Freire's early writings as they touched other philosophers in the field such as Giroux, Kincheloe, McLaren, and so on. Critical pedagogy continues to be reshaped and reimagined in different contexts, as I am sure Freire would have applauded. The very nature of critical pedagogy

supposes that it must adapt itself to each context. Nomadic Massive did that in their work abroad and in Montreal; however, they were not explicitly aware that they were engaging in critical pedagogy. Perhaps the study would have gained from sharing some of the key concepts of critical pedagogy with the participants beforehand; however, given that I was part of the group, I decided not to do this because it reduced objectivity. My observations would then have been about something the participants were instructed to do rather than what they did naturally. Of course, participants became aware of critical pedagogy throughout the study, through the interviews and as the scope of their work touched other communities working with it. This was another reason that critical ethnography weighed less in importance as the study progressed. I stand by the decision to use critical ethnography as an introductory methodology, as it was helpful for observational techniques. Even so, I acknowledge that there are further scopes to explore with regards to critical ethnography, particularly in the area of the socio-economic implications of the study. I maintain that critical pedagogy is appropriate and center myself in this framework as I look towards my future research in education and its colonial footprint. Narrative inquiry was quite useful once the narratives narrowed the themes and subject matter. It is a method that I would consider using in my future studies because of how it contextualises the content of long stories.

Finally, after examining the theoretical aspects for the past seven years, I will now focus on a more practical and pragmatic approach to the field of critical pedagogy. As a teacher, I am very lucky to be in constant observation and self-observation of my practices and their effect on a large population. My research has shed light on my teaching. Now I see that although curriculum imposes boundaries, a number of limitations can be overcome in practice. The curriculum proposes exploration of theoretical concepts, but creativity can still play a role in how

that curriculum is communicated to the students. Also, as teachers we have the privilege of making that content come alive by connecting it to the community we face in our schools. I have become aware of this through this dissertation, and I do not take the responsibility lightly. I think that I have a lot to learn about how to practice teaching that is inclusive and engaging. Before this thesis, I believed I was doing that, and to a certain extent, I was. Now that I have explored all these other perspectives, however, I am motivated to apply what I have learned with my students and colleagues. Over the next few years, I intend to take notes on my own behavioural changes in the classroom since the conclusion of this study. I would like to focus on writing for educational journals about my observations as a critical pedagogy practitioner. I would also like to teach at the university level in second language education and teacher training. I look forward to embarking on research projects with new colleagues interested in investigating alternative education abroad. Outside of academia, I am also quite interested in writing a novel for teenagers about growing up different in a Canadian city.

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APPENDIX 1: ELEMENTS OF HIP HOP CULTURE

The following is a description of the different aspects of Hip Hop, so that readers may better understand the culture and its nomenclature if they are unfamiliar with common Hip Hop concepts.

Master of Ceremonies

The acronym MC stands for master of ceremonies; it is the contemporary term for a rapper, and is sometimes written as emcee. The term rapping is associated with the rhythmical recitation of verses, over a beat played by a disc jockey or DJ. As a prelude to a song, an MC would "rap" over a beat, attempting to arouse enthusiasm in the crowd. Then the song would play and he would continue to entice them with actions and words. Today, rappers are at the forefront of the Hip Hop movement because they have moved into the limelight. In commercial terms, they often constitute their brand. One recent article reveals that, "hip-hop is primarily known for its connection with rappers," (Tillie-Allen, 2005, p.31). Even with a crew of dancers, DJs, and back up vocalists, the MC's ability to attract attention enables his or her persona to be a marketable commodity. Rappers transmit the messages, and they should take this responsibility seriously; however, the commercial influence on Hip Hop has caused many artists to opt for simplistic and sensationalist approaches to song recording. As a result, a repetition and even saturation of negative messages have emerged in mainstream Hip Hop.

Emcees are not necessarily responsible for educating a population; however, by virtue of their art form, they have the opportunity to do so if they choose. When Hip Hop becomes merely a commodity, then rap songs reproduce the perverse desires reflected in mainstream media. The same fantasies that are advertised in the media become part of the commercialization of Hip

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Hop. Conversely, as an "uncontaminated" art form, Hip Hop acts as a grapevine covering the globe, informing individuals about injustice. In this case, the emcee is a purveyor of legitimate knowledge within a community. In both scenarios, the artist may choose not to be aware. The opportunity is there, but it requires decisive action on the part of the artist if he/she chooses to seize it.

Disc Jockeys

Originally, DJs created beats by manipulating a vinyl record back and forth in order to repeat a drum loop. With the use of two turntables, a DJ was able to synthesize a new song by blending beat with melody. DJing is an art form in and of itself. A DJ does more than simply play records. He manipulates sounds, speeds, and frequencies in order to blend music and make it sound seamless. Many different DJ competitions showcase the talents of DJs from around the world. These days, DJs use digital samples and manipulate them using a machine called a "sampler." In the studio, producers use online technology to further manipulate samples and polish sounds to make songs appropriate for distribution. Nobody in Hip Hop uses the term disc jockey anymore. Acronyms are very common in Hip Hop culture and in this case, the acronym has become the word DJ (or deejay). The use of live bands is also becoming more and more popular in large Hip Hop performances. The availability of online tools for music production has revolutionized the way beat makers work. It used to be necessary to purchase expensive equipment in order to get professional sound recordings. Nowadays, programs can be downloaded and copied, making it easier for people to become producers. Of course, this means that there is more competition, but there is also a bigger playing field. Distribution has evolved from cassettes sold out of the trunk of a car into YouTube videos and mp3s, and the market has followed.

Visual Arts

There are two aspects in Hip Hop culture within the visual arts: graffiti and tagging. Both are related but can remain mutually exclusive in practice. In Hip Hop, the term graffiti refers to a type of mural created by using spray cans. This art form can be beautiful and is sometimes tolerated in major cities. For example, in the Plateau neighbourhood of Montreal, "graphers" are hired by local businesses to make walls attractive and to prevent tagging. Tagging is generally associated with gang culture (Chang, 2005). We see tagging all over major North American cities. It is a type of "scribbling" that usually seems unintelligible to the naked eye. Each tag actually says something, but the coded messages make it difficult for law enforcement to decipher. Interestingly, tagging has spread across North America via public transportation.

In the 1970s, people began tagging trains, and as a result their art was transported from coast to coast. This eventually evolved into tagging buses, trucks, and anything on four wheels. In gang culture, tagging over someone else's work is grounds for retaliation. This retaliation can come in the form of new, offensive tags on enemy turf. In the worst of the scenarios, people have been physically assaulted or even murdered for disrespecting someone's work. For these reasons, some American cities have adopted a much more militant approach in order to control tagging (Chang, 2005). Outside of North America, street art has been influenced by graffiti culture. In Latin America during the 1980s, a culture of "muralism" developed as a reaction to totalitarian regimes. These traditions eventually merged with graffiti art and spread through Hip Hop culture. All around the world, visual art is being used to denounce injustice, by exposing people to images that are not prevalent in the mainstream. Although Hip Hop did not invent this, it has been successful in fighting for freedom of expression through graffiti.

Dance

Hip Hop dancing was born as breakdancing in New York City streets. The style enabled street performers to make money, and it was often performed in teams who competed for the accolades of a cheering crowd. Dance provides yet another way for youth to create an identity within Hip Hop culture. Today, Hip Hop dancing has evolved, with many other genres emerging as a result. It has changed from an improvisational street art to a choreographed performance art vital for any major Hip Hop show. It is also common these days for rappers to be dancers, and Hip Hop artists have invented many new dances. These dances become yet another marketable product; this is not a new phenomenon. In the 1960s, a dance craze called the twist was started by Chubby Checker and followed by such bands as the Beatles. Recently, Soulja Boy created a similar movement in the Hip Hop community with his song, Crank That. In this video, he displays the simple moves of a dance called the Superman, while ridiculing those who cannot do it. "Oh, I see you try to do it like me, man that dance was ugly" (Soulja Boy, 2007, Track 2). This type of mockery is quite common in Hip Hop songs, a carry-over from the early days of street competition. Nowadays, we refer to dancers in Hip Hop as B-Girls and B-Boys. The "B" still makes reference to the original term, breakdancing (Chang, 2005). Some members of Nomadic actually came to Hip Hop culture through dance. Nantali and Diegal both spoke of their affinity for Hip Hop dance before they started rapping. Dance is a form of cultural expression and is often part of cultural ceremonies. Vox spoke of the significance of dance in the rituals before the Haitian revolution. When I was growing up in Ottawa, we were exposed to Hip Hop dancing through Somali refugees who did the latest moves at high school dances. Hip Hop brought African culture to the Americas through dance, but battling turned it into something homegrown.

Fashion

In the 1980s, Hip Hop began its love affair with commercialism. Common styles associated with early Hip Hop fashion included brand name sneakers, baseball caps, hooded sweatshirts, and overalls. Today, Hip Hop fashion has become a central part of Hip Hop culture. Significant emphasis is placed on having the latest clothing and accessories. In Hip Hop, flashy accessories are known as "bling." An individual who has the latest accessories is said to be "blinging" (Westbrook, 2002). Over the years, Hip Hop fashion has become commercialized, both by corporations and more recently by the artists themselves. Products are propagated by music videos—entire songs can be based on a product or fashion style. Hip Hop star Nelly's song Air Force One talks exclusively about a brand of Nike shoes by the same name (Nelly, 2002). The song was a four-minute commercial aimed at convincing kids to buy a particular shoe brand and model. Such mass marketing can prove difficult for children who do not have the means to keep up with the latest fashion. According to a 2007 study, people who were on the lower income scale tended to spend more money on "conspicuous commodities" (Charles, 2007). In other words, people who make less spend more on items that make them appear wealthier. Hip Hop has a tendency towards fantasy that is supported by bling culture.

Hip Hop Language

In the book, *Global Englishes*, author Alastair Pennycook (2007) describes a 2003 court case where a British judge was unable to decipher whether some lyrics on a Hip Hop album were offensive because he simply could not understand them. "In spite of searching the web to try to understand some of the lyrics, he concluded that, although they were in a form of English, they were for 'practical purposes a foreign language' and he had no expert evidence as to what they meant" (p. 2). The judge said that he was unable to understand what terms like "fo shizzle my

nizzle," meant. Adolescents or others familiar with Snoop Doggy Dog's music could have easily revealed the meaning of the phrase "Fo shizzle my nizzle," which translates into "for sure my nigga." Although an alarming translation, in this example the word nigga implies a term of endearment. This language is an active part of youth interaction; understanding it gives us a window into an otherwise unseen world. According to Freire (1998):

> Educators need to know what happens in the world of the children with whom
> they work. They need to know the universe of their dreams, the language with
> which they skillfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world,
> what they know independently of the school, and how they know it (pp. 72-73).

As Hip Hop dialect expanded through new idioms and vocabulary, it became unintelligible to speakers of Standard English. Recent attempts have been to decode Hip Hop language, such as the Hip Hoptionary, by Anthony Westbrook (2002). Language is a fundamental part of one's unique cultural identity. Even within national borders, the nuances of dialect define such things as regionalism and social class. Language is directly connected to power and Freire recognized examined this in his struggle against oppression. In an interview with Literacy.org in 1996, Freire said that he defended the rights of the poor to learn the language of the dominant class in order to fight for justice. At the same time, he said that literacy should not be taught in a way that was detrimental to the dialect of the learner. In Freire's words:

> It is necessary, in being a democratic and tolerant teacher . . . to make clear to the
> kids or to the adults that their way of speaking is as beautiful as our way of
> speaking. Second, that they have the right to speak like this. Third, nevertheless,
> they need to learn the so-called dominant syntax for different reasons. That is, the

more the oppressed, the poor people grasp the dominant syntax, the more they can

articulate their voices and their speech in the struggle against injustice. (Freire,

1996, para. 6)

Freire (1970) criticized dominant education systems for assuming that students were empty

valves to be filled by the knowledgeable teacher. He called this approach the "banking method"

and proposed that it dehumanized the individual by assuming that his or her knowledge was

invalid. As educational institutions decide on curricula, they give importance to certain beliefs,

data and knowledge while implicitly or explicitly devaluing others.

APPENDIX 2: BIOGRAPHIES AND PHOTOS

(Kerr, 2006)

Lou Piensa has been active in the international Hip Hop scene for over 15 years. He has been involved in many aspects of the movement including radio, music production, performance and events organization. He has shared the stage with such artists as Common, Dead Prez, Tony Touch, K'Naan, Jean Grey, Foreign Beggars and more. Since the year 2000, he has lived in the Côte des Neiges neigbourhood of Montreal, Canada. A trilingual MC (English, French and Spanish), Lou also has a decade-long tie with the Cuban Hip Hop scene, particularly with the pioneering duo Obsesion. In 2004, he helped initiate the creation of Nomadic Massive, a multilingual and eclectic live Hip Hop crew with whom he has been making noise both as an MC and producer. Lou was born in France but grew up in Ecuador, Algeria, Canada, and Cuba. This has given him an ability to adapt with ease, and it has fueled his international vision of Hip Hop culture. His production reflects an eclectic musical upbringing, finding inspiration in rhythms from the world over. When he is not teaching high school kids or working on a Hip Hop project, he can be found making beats and writing rhymes in preparation for travelling the world with music.

(Kerr, 2006)

Meryem's story is unique in the band, in that it is a story of exile. Meryem liked to listen to American artists like Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey. Before learning to speak English, she mimicked the sounds in the songs without understanding the words. Her lack of understanding did not matter so much in this case because she was primarily perfecting her innate talent for singing. Her life story is a testament to her ability to adapt and rise above adversity in any situation with which she is presented. At the same time that Lou was living in Algeria with his family, Meryem's family wanted to leave the country. The turbulence in Algeria in the 1980s caused many people to seek asylum in other countries. Mother and child escaped using fake French passports and entered Canada in the summer of 2000. She concentrated her efforts to give back to the community that cared for her upon arrival in the Maison des Jeunes, Côtes des Neiges. She worked there with young girls, doing workshops in music and empowerment. Many young women view her as a source of strength, and her involvement was instrumental in creating further projects designed for young women. Many of the young people in the community mimicked stereotypes and behaviors that they witnessed in American Hip Hop culture; thus it was important for Meryem to give young women a voice, as well as strategies to combat objectification.

(Kerr, 2006)

Waahli is vegetarian, but once in a while he will eat chicken, especially when it is cooked by his mom. His dad, a skilled guitarist, arrived in Canada in 1971 from Haiti, to escape political instability, followed by his mom in 1972. After completing degrees in communication, art, theater, and paralegal technology, Waahli now works as the legal coordinator at the Head and Hands clinic in NDG. There, he provides youth between the ages of 12-25 with resources by using a harm reductive approach. The goal is to empower them to make informed decisions in resolving their legal issues. He performed as a solo artist before the Nomadic Massive collective came together. He tapped into Hip Hop culture at a very early age. Growing up in St. Michel, he faced a lot of social injustice. The message relayed by various artists who made conscious Hip Hop spoke to him directly, and he felt deeply inspired to emulate that type of lifestyle through his own personal experience. Waahli has been involved in making music for social change while celebrating life, which he categorizes as "Edutainment." His vision is to be active in making a difference for himself and for the world around him, both musically and socially.

Tali aka The Black Girl

(Kerr, 2006)

Nantali Indongo studied literature at the University of Ottawa, and earned a graduate certificate in journalism from Humber College. Nantali is an alternative educator who uses Hip Hop culture as a contemporary educational tool. Nantali Indongo and Maryse Legagneur co-founded the *Hip Hop No Pop* program and have been invited to tour high schools and CEGEP campuses, teaching workshops on topics critical for today's youth. These workshops include the non-violent origins of Hip Hop, and Hip Hop as a tool for social change. The workshops she now runs are rooted in an attempt to confront mainstream interpretations of Hip Hop, while trying to push kids to be critical thinkers by attempting to put Hip Hop into context. She looks at the history of hip-hopHip Hop culture as a movement and its connections to histories of struggle from the civil rights movement all the way back to African traditions. A regular contributor to Community Contact, Quebec's major English-language Black community newspaper, Nantali sits on the governing board of the Maison des Jeunes de la Côte-des-Neiges. In addition, she is also currently pursuing a graduate degree in education at McGill University.
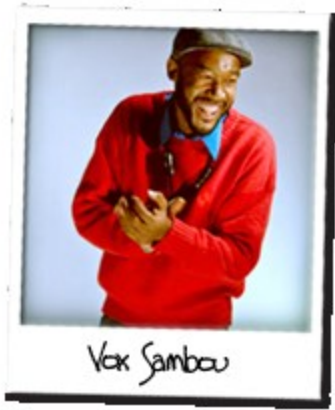
(Kerr, 2006)

A versatile Argentine artist, Butta Beats was often seen and heard in freestyle sessions, beatboxing encounters, concerts, on street corners, and on the radio. He was part of the We Funk Family with DJ Static and Professor Groove, and the Iron Chef Project with Ali Sepu. The latter allowed him to integrate his South American folkloric influences with occidental urban music. He has a Fine Arts degree from Concordia University, where he specialised in drawing and painting. Butta Beats was able, through Hip Hop and with Nomadic Massive, to find the perfect medium to express his positive social discourse. Butta Beats is many things to many people. He is a beatboxer, multi-lingual rapper, freestyler, multi-instrumentalist, composer, producer, singer, songwriter, draughtsman, painter, chef, social worker and educator, and urban philosopher.

(Kerr, 2006)

Diegal Leger, alias Rawgged MC, was born in Haïti and raised in Montreal. His childhood was stimulated by music, sports and academics. A shy kid, he internalized the realities of immigration, soaked in sounds and rhythms of Haitian community radio, vintage cassettes from his father's collection of kompa, and other classics of musicianship from non-western traditions. Later, he found the confidence to express himself first on pots and pans, by beatboxing in the shower and while commuting to and from school, through rhyming, and ultimately through learning the electric bass. He took a break from his academic career in the life sciences to explore other disciplines such as history and administration. It was through Rockdeep Tuesdays that he promoted and hosted the annual Montreal International Hip Hop Symposium, where he met most members of Nomadic Massive. In 2004, the year that Nomadic Massive was founded, he enrolled in the doctoral program in podiatric medicine at the University of Quebec in Trois-Rivieres. He graduated in 2008, practiced at the Clinique and Centre de Chirurgie Podiatrique in Terrebonne, and founded his own private practice. So far, he has managed to combine and balance his passions and interests in the fields of health science, music, and community involvement.

(Kerr, 2006)

Vox Sambou was born in the town of Limbe in Northern Haiti. Vox Sambou has been writing and performing since he was 14 years old. Montreal, Canada is now his home. A founding member of the international crew Nomadic Massive, he also asserts his individualism within this collective, which facilitates his desire to bring light to the injustices taking place worldwide, and particularly in Haiti. Vox hopes to bring back a sense of pride to his people by shedding light on their rich and unique cultural heritage. He feels that although it is important to identify the issues surrounding the problem, it is equally urgent to find concrete solutions. He exercises this credo everyday as director of a youth community centre in the borough of Côte-des-Neiges. Having completed his first solo album and released three videos, performing as a solo artist and with Nomadic Massive has kept him busy both locally and abroad. Notably, Vox Sambou took part in the Montreal International Jazz Festival, Festival International Nuits d'Afrique, Festival du Monde Arabe, Festival Urbain de Trois-Rivières, the Indie Unlimited Festival, The 2nd Annual Cuban Hip Hop Symposium, and Blackitude Vozes Negras da Bahia, Brazil, just to name a few.

APPENDIX 3: NOMADIC MASSIVE ONLINE RESOURCES AND VIDEOS

Ache Promo: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbMx8Xbtwv0

Afro Latin Soul, 2010. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1U0X8flOGnc

Aryane Moffat. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lctpb2oQ92M

Ayiti Workshops: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LovTLvMmamY

CMJ Festival 2009. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuGIvDS5uWY&playnext=
    1&list=PL85ECEF487376180E&feature=results_main

CUTV: Interview Waahli Lou: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYdyqNSc9LI

Development through arts Haiti: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnyo5DCS1Qg

Fama, 2004/ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGOyks8LOow

Interview with Nomadic 2nd Album release: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UY8CulHJdA

JazzFest 2012 Interview: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMNSdTV2Bss

Manifesto: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIXektZmwmk

Meryem Interview: http://vimeo.com/51154251

Montreal Jazz Fest 2007: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mS3UxInLjKM

Moving Forward, 2009. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7yDvLrqH58&feature=fvst

Narcy FMA festival: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVWJABinBjk

Nomadic Ad: Kalmunity Bobards. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPHhLnAYkqw

Nomadic Massive 2006 Corona Theatre: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTFKs9hl9cs

Nomadic with Narcy (Velvet Panda): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bp9s7dY5VIM

Nomadic Workshop, Haiti: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mP53ImD0yMM

Ottawa Shows Interview: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxT9Ha8gqKI and
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pcUvlo797E

Reveye, 2010. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzIR9l8c7Mg

Sad But True, 2008. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2Uufu5WtDY

Supafam, 2012. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8aQLouxzVRI

Tali Interview: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_EV9dZOVfw

TedX,/ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIllg9dqrLo

Vox Sambou Haiti Project: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wlWcW63ZSrk

Waahli Interview: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXcNdH1DAlc

Washington DC: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PchQgB5Nl1c

WBL Teach In 2010/ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWWft5x0RG0

Webster Hall: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=co61tROgd-w