

**IN SEARCH OF UBUNTU RAP: THE CONSTRUCTION OF  
THE UMFUNDISI RAP TECHNIQUE AS A MODEL FOR  
THE EXPRESSION OF MA'AT  
IN RAP LYRICS**

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## ABSTRACT

The art and act of Rapping is a form of scientific research that takes place, in part, through introspection and sociocultural reflection. The Umfundisi Rap Technique and the theory of Ubuntu Rap are undergirded by the notion that to Rap is to research and reflect. That is, the act and art of Rapping involves, if not requires, the interrogation of one's own physical and/or social circumstances and reveals one's worldview through the conscious and subconscious signaling of their psychosocial location.

To locate a text is to recognize the predispositions and philosophical objectives of an author and interpret such language, attitude, and direction based on their proximity to/ distance from an Afrocentric psychology. However, what if there were a way to quantifiably measure location? What might such signposts and signals actually look like and how exactly might such "signposts" (or "words") relate to underlying attitudes and directions? Moreover, could the expression of *Ma'at* itself, or maybe some kind of psychosocial well-being, be measured?

If it were possible to measure a person's psychosocial attitude and direction, might that also mean that there could be a way to gauge what kinds of cultural notions an author's location is nearest to? The early MCs that held initial reverence and significance within their communities were those who could move the crowd with displays of rhetorical dexterity and celebrations of community. Rap's current condition where a substantial proportion, if not an overwhelming majority, of the contemporary Rap lyrics and aesthetics that receive the largest amounts of social and financial elevation endorse hegemonic social philosophies of xenophobia, patriarchal violence, and other forms of

psychological & physical subjugation has, for the most part, largely been agreed upon by most who have sought to examine Rap through an Afrocentric lens. Analyzing the conversation of thoughts particularly between the works of Tricia Rose, Joan Morgan, M.K. Asante, Jr., Jeff Chang, S. Craig Watkins, and Byron Hurt reveals two exceptionally noteworthy “crossover” events that brought forth the end of the era of Rap in which its overall orientation was primarily dictated by (and through) Afrikan agency amidst capitalist influences and duplicitous assurances of money, power, and assimilation from patriarchal Eurocentric corporate structures at the cost of the Afrikan cultural communal spirit.

The theory of Ubuntu Rap serves to emphasize the need for a very specific form of Afrocentric creative expression that addresses a very specific crisis. There is an intellectual and spiritual yearning, both conscious and subconscious, throughout the Afrikan diaspora for a framework of communication that is wholeheartedly and emphatically grounded in community, harmony, and sustainability. Ultimately, that is this project’s purpose and functional aspect: what routes can Rappers draw to navigate their way across the map of language & human speech toward a kind of *maa kheru*, or “trueness of voice”, designation? Such yearnings were the underlying driving force behind this project's intentions to imagine Ubuntu Rap as a particular canon/sub-genre of Rap grounded in Afrikan cultural ethical notions of community, harmony, and sustainability and to construct an Afrocentric research project that envisions the Umfundisi Rap Technique as a valid and practical method for the production of Ubuntu Rap.

To those who carry the torch,  
those who pass the torch,  
and to that  
which connects  
us all.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Historical Context

Rhythm, or the flow of human energies, has long been a fundamental aspect of the Afrikan worldview that places particular emphasis on ethical speech as well as a spiritual connectedness. In the early 1970s, these energies manifested among Afrikan youth in the New York City-area as a specific subcultural phenomenon known as ‘Hip-Hop’, with a distinct oral component, known as ‘Rap’. As Rap broadened its horizons from New York City apartment basements and recreation halls to become a subcultural force sweeping through Afrikan communities across the United States and the international Afrikan diaspora, Rap lyrics established themselves as, among many things, a social vehicle for communication with the ability “to unite a people and give them cohesion by way of ideas and emotions.”<sup>1</sup>

The legacy of Hip-Hop is intertwined with the essence of Afrikan spirituality: the rhythms and sound patterns within Hip-Hop’s instrumentation resonate spiritually as a vibrational attraction to the Afrikan aesthetics and motifs within. Over time, these rhythmic energies united with the Afrikan oral tradition to blossom into Rap, which exists now as Hip-Hop’s form of spoken (and written) documentation of Afrikan culture throughout the diaspora. As a subcultural manifestation and as a social movement, Rap is intrinsically imbued with powerful forces of rhetoric unique to traditional Afrikan modes

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Okwu Ugboajah, “‘Oramedia’ in Africa.” In *Mass Communication, Culture, and Society in West Africa*, edited by Frank Okwu Ugboajah, 165–76 (München ; New York: Hans Zell Publishers, 1985), 167.

of communication. When utilized by Rappers, the spoken word represents an amalgamation of various other iterations of creative expression of Afrikan culture through the spoken word, including, but not limited to: poetry, lecturing, testifying, sermonizing, proverb telling, mythology construction and transmission by community knowledge-persons, story-keeping and story-telling by griots, and intracultural communication through location-specific dialect construction. As with many of its spiritual predecessors in the Afrikan oral tradition, the source of the generative power of Rap is a life-giving essence that exists within the process of translating physical phenomena into metaphysical symbols, or the formation of speech. This essence is the foundation of the Afrikan concept of *Nommo*.

The “driving power that gives life and efficacy to all things [as] word and water and seed and blood in one,”<sup>2</sup> *Nommo* is regarded as a “physical-spiritual life force which awakens all ‘sleeping’ forces.”<sup>3</sup> It represents the physical manifestation of spiritual energy, where “every human thought, once expressed, becomes reality.”<sup>4</sup> Various aspects of the Afrikan ontological framework maintain a spiritual hierarchy of organisms that places humans in the most elevated position by virtue of their exclusive ability to communicate with words. This unique ability, according to Dogon mythology, also presents a unique responsibility: “For the word holds the course of things in train and changes and transforms them. And since the word has this power [...] There is no

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<sup>2</sup> Janheinz Jahn and Marjorie Grene. *Muntu: An Outline of the New African Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1979), 101.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 133.

‘harmless’, noncommittal word. Every word has consequences.’<sup>5</sup> These spiritual consequences that hold humans accountable over their words (and actions) are perhaps best understood through the Kemetic spiritual and ethical framework established by *Ma’at*.

The significance of the Kemetic spiritual ideal of *Ma’at* can be easily contextualized by its ontological role as an omnipresent essence throughout our physical and metaphysical environments and a divine force of (meta)physical creation derived from the Kemetic universal creator, Ra. This ontological context and significance is vital to understanding the associated psychosocial importance and veneration of *Ma’at*, where it also serves as an ethical framework for ideal speech and action by all community members (regardless of social role). Within this context, *Ma’at* represented way of living that highly esteemed thoughts, actions, and words (spoken and written) emphasizing, as later elucidated by Karenga, “truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order.” However, the clearest representation of the centrality of physical harmony as it directly impacts metaphysical harmony lies in the written edicts of Ptah Hotep from 2400 BCE regarding “correct communication behavior” and how it affects “societal order”. Ptah Hotep describes a phenomenon known as “Good Speech” and emphasizes that it “must bring about harmony and congruence” for the individual as well as the collective and includes “communication areas such as argument, silence, messages, nonverbals, [and] listening”. The Kemetic phenomenon of “Good Speech” reaches a symbolic zenith at the height of its physical and metaphysical significance: upon cessation of a human’s physical being, the communications of their physical presence may be measured and

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 133.

adjudicated as *maa kheru* or “true of voice”. This indication of rhetorical proficiency in a steadfast dedication to *Ma’at* and fundamental Afrikan cultural values of harmony and propriety is essential for any spirit to be considered for elevation to a fully venerated ancestor. Moreover, it also serves as further evidence that proximity to a culturally authentic Afrikan center and a grounded yet progressive Afrocentric location can be measured, in part, by dedication to a harmonious and sustainable approach to all physical interactions (including speech and action) and a worldview rooted in balance & reciprocity.

Nonetheless, the impact of the historical patriarchal hegemony upon Afrikan culture cannot be understated. As a manifestation of the Afrikan experience in the United States, Hip-Hop has not been exempt from the influence of social philosophies and ideologies that are not in accordance with *Ma’at*. Specifically, both the desire to psychologically align oneself in proximity to Eurocentric capitalism as well as the varying degrees of participation in an exploitative framework of industrialization surrounding the production and consumption of Rap have been especially destructive to Rap’s intrinsic Afrocentric elements. However, given the precarious nature of the Afrikan existence in the United States in relation to labor, commerce, the financial history of European nations, and contemporary socioeconomics, care must be taken to discern grounded, community-oriented efforts from Afrikans to improve their immediate material conditions from actions to hoard and perpetually increase individual accumulations of capital.

While patriarchal corporate media empires had been existing and influencing the production of Afrikan art in the United States long before the genesis of Rap, there is an

especially unique manner in which Rap lyrics particularly have been modified by destructive anti-Afrikan psychosocial cultural forces while still retaining core Afrikan forms of cultural expression. The varying degrees of participation in an exploitative framework of industrialization surrounding the production and consumption of Rap are indicative of the depth to which the desires of the aforementioned media empires ultimately affect the intrinsic nature of Rap aesthetics and lyrics primarily produced and consumed. Former record corporation executive Nana Ashhurst was a direct witness to just how influential such media empires were throughout her lengthy tenure with Def Jam Recordings. Ashhurst's time with Def Jam Recordings was revealing for many reasons, most remarkably for her recognition of a distinct psychological shift in multiple corporations' economic approach to Rap. While much of what Ashhurst deems "gangsta Rap" carried a degree of accurate and authentic self-ethnographic documentation, there was nonetheless a specific turning point in the kind of lyrical content and aesthetics that began receiving the majority of the financial support provided by capitalist media empires. As Def Jam themselves began orienting toward such "gangsta Rap", other corporations also began shifting their financial support away from artists with lyrics & intentions closer aligned with Afrocentric cultural & ethical values to artists producing lyrical content with an increased focus on violence, abuse, exploitation, and many other social philosophies discordant with *Ma'at*.

### **Statement of Problem**

Often colloquially known as a "language of the people", Rap possesses an immense potential in contributing to, if not spiritually spearheading, a psychosocial reorientation for all of Afrika's offspring toward an ethical value system grounded in an

Afrocentric framework. Thus, the most pressing questions that must be asked of this potential are how and why Rap should contribute to a firm intellectual and spiritual rootedness in Afrocentric ethical values. To answer the question of “how” remains the primary objective of this dissertation project. However, the answer to the question of “why” can already be understood by examining the philosophical intersection of the Afrikan cultural mandate for a harmonious approach to all physical interactions (including speech and action) as put forth in the Kemetic spiritual ideal of *Ma’at* with the Afronographic nature of Rap in its self-expressiveness and self-reflectiveness. The nature of Rap as a tool for both personal and collective reflection as well as functional rhetoric means that the diversity of lyrical content and aesthetics represented by various Rappers are representative of the diversity of Afrikan experience in the United States through time and space. Thus, it could be considered that the degree of decapitation and lynching present in contemporary Rap lyrics embraces is reflective of the degree to which the Afrikan experience within a Western psychosocial hegemony has internalized anti-Afrikan notions, especially those pertaining specifically to community, harmony, and sustainability. If the internalization of non-communal, unharmonious, and unsustainable psychosocial values is understood as yet another affront in the perpetual war of resistance against a centuries-long, global anti-Afrikan sociopolitical hegemonic framework, then I maintain that there exists the need for a framework for the alignment of lyrics with the essence of *Nommo* and the Kemetic spiritual ideal designation of *maa kheru* in order to generate an strengthened centeredness in, and more resolute orientation toward, a *Ma’at*-rooted ethical approach that values community, harmony, and sustainability.

It is specifically this thread of striving toward the metaphysical (and physical) ideal of *Ma'at* through communication and the spoken word that locates Rap within the rhetorical genealogy of the Afrikan oral tradition, not just as it pertains to the spiritual significance of the spoken word but also in how the spiritual significance translates to a sociocultural importance. From the primary method of interpersonal communication to its most resonant applications as a vehicle for mythology and information transmission between generations of Afrikans for multiple millennia, Afrikan culture has long utilized the spoken word for countless reasons vital to the wellness and sustainability of Afrikan culture and people. Rapping also calls upon the culturally relevant spiritual capacity of the spoken word in serving as yet another manifestation of Afrikan resistance through the power of Afrocentric rhetoric, whether channeling the defiant spirit of Sundiata of Mali or the impassioned verbal charges of Maria W. Stewart. Further, given Rap's location within the context of Hip-Hop as a subcultural phenomenon birthed, in part, from "the tension between the cultural fractures produced by postindustrial oppression and the binding ties of cultural expressivity [for Afrikans in the United States],"<sup>6</sup> Rap exists as a prominent database of diverse Afronographic accounts of the Afrikan diasporic experience in the United States.

It can ultimately be determined that a rhetorical praxis oriented toward the Kemetic ideal of a designation as *maa kheru* serves as a psychological defense against "decapitated" and "lynched" texts and value systems. Whereas a decapitated text has no discernible Afrikan elements as the author strives to omit or obscure any Afrikan cultural roots and a lynched text suffers from cultural dislocation in its ignorant embrace of anti-

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<sup>6</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, Music/Culture (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), 21.

Afrikan cultural values, both are detrimental to the construction, development, and maintenance of a value system aligned with *Ma'at*. For Rappers, psychosocial values that prioritize being “true” in voice and purpose and a praxis that is oriented toward community, harmony, and sustainability is particularly vital, as the generative power of the Rapper’s word is an essential force in the continued struggle for the wellness of Afrika and all of her children.

### **Purpose of Study**

The aims of this dissertation project are two-fold: the first aim is to affirm the need for an approach to the formation of Rap lyrics that is grounded in *Ma'at* and oriented toward the spiritual ideal of a designation as *maa kheru*. Secondly, this project also seeks to construct a methodology for the praxis of lyrical formation that grounds Rap’s self-reflective essence specifically in the *ukweli* and *utulivu* canons of Afrocentric research and provides Rappers with a means to self-assess their lyrics’ alignment with an ethical value system grounded in *Ma'at*. To accomplish the first aim, this project puts forth a lyrical canon, known as Ubuntu Rap, that establishes community, harmony, and sustainability as central tenets. To this project’s second aim, the Umfundisi technique provides a practical model for Rappers to utilize the power of their word to exponentially generate wellness for the Earth and all of its inhabitants. This is done through two steps: firstly, the Ukweli Grounding reaffirms the Rapper’s intentions to center community and harmony. Secondly, the Utulivu Check-In is a Likert scale-based framework that provides Rappers with a method to examine their lyrics for alignment with an ethical value system oriented toward *Ma'at*.

Presently, the impact of the historical patriarchal hegemony upon Afrikan culture cannot be understated. As a manifestation of the Afrikan experience in the United States, Rap has not been exempt from the psychological, spiritual, and physical poison of the anti-Afrikan philosophies employed in service of colonialism. These anti-Afrikan perspectives have been reinforced through various doctrines, religions, and experiments over multiple millennia. Thus, the Afrocentric ethical responsibility of Rap is one that calls intentions and lyrics that are in direct conflict with decapitated and lynched psychosocial notions that contribute to an unharmonious and unsustainable existence for Afrika and her children. With the legacy of Rap intertwined with the essence of Afrikan spirituality, philosophical perspectives derived from the *Ma'at* and imbued with the essence of *Nommo* should guide the rhetoric utilized and exhibited within Rap.

Given Rap's nature as an Afronographic database, this dissertation project seeks to investigate where contributions to such a culturally rich repository of experiences, stories, and information can and should maintain an orientation toward an ethical value system rooted in *Ma'at* and centering notions of community, harmony, and sustainability. Just as Ptah Hotep called for "Good Speech" to reach a designation as "true of voice", the concept of *Nommo* maintains that there is an immense spiritual potential in each word that profoundly empowers the act of speaking, to the point where those who "fail to use [their] verbal power in the service of the community" are considered unsustainable, socially detrimental influences with no belonging in the community and no designation as "true of voice".<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jahn, 130.

Chapter 1 establishes the “Ubuntu Rap Theory” and expands upon the personal and theoretical journeys that comprised this dissertation project. Chapter 1 also affirms Rap as an Afronographic form of Afrocentric research and examines the significance of Ruth Reviere’s *ukweli*, *utulivu*, *uhaki*, *ujamaa*, and *kujitoa* Afrocentric research canons for Rappers. Chapter 2 serves as an overview for the Umfundisi technique, including an analysis of the Kariamuwelsh-Asante’s Umfundalai technique as a reference model framework and a discussion of the selection of community, harmony, and sustainability as the Umfundisi technique’s three distinct conceptual sub-groupings. Chapters 3 and 4 present more thorough presentations of the two components of the Umfundisi technique: the Ukweli Grounding and its theoretical underpinnings in Chapter 3 and the Uzulivu Check-In’s practical functionality in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation project with a discussion of the future implications of this project and additional potential applications and/or evolutions for the Umfundisi Rap Technique.

### **Significance and Limitations of Study**

This project asserts its intellectual significance through its emphasis on the capacity for an approach to the construction of Rap lyrics rooted in *Ma’at* to combat the ideologies and behaviors that reinforce the perpetual assault on agency of Afrika and the multitude of expressions of Afrikan culture. Moreover, a form of praxis that specifically centers community, harmony, and sustainability is an Afrocentric spiritual mandate that can “activate the consciousness and open the hearts of Afrikans [toward] creating a new

political discourse and praxis” throughout the Afrikan diaspora.<sup>8</sup> The ultimate goal of this project, the concept of Ubuntu Rap, and the Umfundisi technique is a lyrical praxis that presents Rappers with a model for utilizing their generative word power toward advocacy for a sustainable physical, mental, and spiritual human existence. This project characterizes such a sustainable human existence as constituting of not just a continuing physical aliveness and a comprehensive kind of wellness for humans, but specifically an antagonism toward oppression and desire for wellness for the Earth itself and all of its inhabitants.

The Ukweli Grounding serves as Umfundisi’s central aligning principle. It connects the technique with its theoretical foundations in the concept of Ubuntu Rap along with its specific call for alignment with the *Ma’at*-rooted values of community, harmony, and sustainability in the Utulivu Check-In. The significance of the Ukweli Grounding thus lies in it simultaneously serving as both psychological reminder and reaffirmation, amplified and manifested through the generative power of the Rapper’s spoken word. By committing to repeated self-reflection as well as centering an intention rooted in “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”, the Rapper has already begun orienting their lyrics & intentions toward community, harmony, and sustainability. In this manner, the Ukweli Grounding also contextualizes the significance of the Utulivu Check-In: whereas the Ukweli Grounding serves to establish intention and orientation toward community, harmony, and sustainability, the Utulivu Check-In provides an avenue for Rappers to hold

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<sup>8</sup> Nah Dove, “Race Revisited: Against a Cultural Construction Bearing Significant Implications,” *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity* 13, no. 2 (July 3, 2018): 129–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18186874.2018.1538703>, 139.

that which they ultimately generate with their lyrics accountable to their intentions. The construction of an accurate and reliable self-screening, Likert scale-based model is a central aspect of this project's development of the Umfundisi technique.

Gordon's Black Existentialism framework also provides a lens through which to consider the primary limitation of this dissertation project. Of the ills that have come to impair those intrinsically Afrocentric elements of Rap, the various financial influences of the existing socioeconomic structure(s) in the United States are the most significant. These influences have come to manifest themselves through: 1) the desire to psychologically align oneself in proximity to Eurocentric capitalism and 2) the varying degrees of participation in an exploitative framework of industrialization surrounding the production and consumption of Rap. The former manifestation is a particularly interesting one to consider, given the precarious nature of the Afrikan existence in the United States in relation to labor, commerce, the financial history of European nations, and contemporary socioeconomics. However, care must be taken to discern grounded, community-oriented efforts to improve immediate material conditions from actions to hoard and perpetually increase individual accumulations of capital.

While patriarchal corporate media empires had been existing and been influencing the production of Afrikan art in the United States long before the genesis of Rap (specifically as the oral component of Hip-Hop), there is an especially unique manner in which Rap lyrics in particular have been swayed by destructive anti-Afrikan psychosocial cultural forces. Despite this, Rap has still retained many core forms of Afrikan cultural expression. Thus, this dissertation project maintains that the varying degrees of participation in an exploitative framework of industrialization surrounding the production

(and consumption) of Rap lyrics are indicative of the depth to which the desires of the aforementioned hegemonic media empires have ultimately disrupted the intrinsic Afrocentric essence of Rap. Nonetheless, further and future elaborations of this dissertation project hope to approach and examine in-depth the psychological and social nuances of economic survival within the existing capitalist patriarchal global socio-economic framework.

### **Theories and Methods**

The methodology of this dissertation project is a two-part Afrocentric qualitative approach grounded in the Afrocentric Paradigm as well as Reviere's five research canons: *ukweli*, *utulivu*, *uhaki*, *ujamaa*, and *kujitoa*. The first section of this project additionally employs the Colonial Paradigm in conjunction with Tillotson's Agency Reduction Framework Theory in framing the need for an approach to the formation of Rap lyrics that is grounded in *Ma'at*, an approach that this project seeks to characterize as "Ubuntu Rap". The second section incorporates Gordon's concept of Black Existentialism as well as foundational principles of Asante's Location Theory in defining lyrical technique known as "Umfundisi". Modeled after Kariamuwelsh-Asante's Umfundalai technique, Umfundisi provides practical guidance for the understanding and expression of Ubuntu Rap.

The Colonial Paradigm provides the socio-historical contextualization for the various societal issues that have plagued the Afrikan experience in America, including education, economics, governance, and physical health. Critically, it illustrates the existence of a hegemonic, dominant group along with a distinct subordinate group. It also describes the maintenance of an intentional imbalance in agency and power that is part of

an overarching project seeking to force Afrikans, as the subordinate group to Europe-centered patriarchal hegemony, “to abandon their own cultural values and adopt the values of [the] dominant group.”<sup>9</sup> Combined with Dr. Michael Tillotson’s Agency Reduction Framework Theory specifically designed to “expose, situate, and explain ideological trends that are intended to compel African Americans to distance themselves from their collective identity," the Colonial Paradigm establishes a lens through which this dissertation project analyzes certain anti-Afrikan psychosocial philosophies discordant with *Ma’at* expressed by Afrikans.<sup>10</sup>

The Location Theory is also central to this dissertation project’s analysis of Rappers, particularly the interrogation of the psychological influences that factor into the process of constructing Rap lyrics. The intention behind the development of Dr. Molefi Kete Asante’s theory greatly aligns with the purposes of this study, as Dr. Asante notes that, “through the expression of their writing, authors leave their insignia on their written products [and] through the signposts and signals writers leave in their work, researchers are able to locate a text.”<sup>11</sup> To locate a text is to recognize the predispositions and philosophical objectives of an author and interpret such “language, attitude, and direction” based on their proximity to/distance from an Afrocentric psychology. This is a core consideration for the methodology of this dissertation project, as it assists in illustrating the connection between a Rapper’s lyrically expressed ethical value system

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<sup>9</sup> Serie McDougal III, *Research Methods in Africana Studies*, Revised edition, Black Studies and Critical Thinking, vol. 203 (New York ; Bern ; Frankfurt ; Berlin: Peter Lang, 2017), 38.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 75.

and the potential existence (or absence) of the Rapper's consideration of an Afrocentric ethical responsibility.

Gordon's Black Existentialism is an especially valuable framework to this study. Despite its misnomer<sup>12</sup>, it affords a great deal of context specifically toward the various efforts required to create the diverse forms of oratorical self-expression known as collectively known as Rap. As Dr. McDougal III notes, the authors of the framework realize that particular ways of articulation and expression of culture and self from a subordinate class existing within a social hegemony (as described by the Colonial Paradigm) must be interrogated through a theoretical perspective that centers & validates the emotional diversity of living through such a tumultuous existence. Black Existentialism importantly represents "the articulation of the humanity of dominated people, especially in theories of (1) racism and oppression, (2) the power of the life-affirming aspects of Black music, (3) the rigorous and systematic ways of studying Black people, (4) the interdependent relationships between identity and liberation, and (5) the impact of crises of knowledge on the formation of people in each epoch."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the Black Existentialism framework is of particular benefit to this dissertation project for its intellectual synthesis of the lyrically expressed location of a Rapper with a psychosocial

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<sup>12</sup> In "Race Revisited: Against a Cultural Construction bearing Significant Implications", Nah Dove sheds light on the dominant anti-Afrikan hegemony's "serious efforts to prove scientifically that humans are distinctly different, based largely on skin colour." Thus, "Black" as a label is a misnomer that is misguided at best, but more likely an intentional tool in the psychological subjugation of Afrika. As Dove notes, "'African'" is used to identify people who retained their melanin and populated Afrika and other places, to which they migrated to more recently, as well as those who are in the more contemporary diaspora, who identify with their cultural heritage and Afrikan ancestry.

<sup>13</sup> McDougal III, 67.

context for how (temporally, spatially, and psychologically) they may have arrived at their location. This also serves to contextualize the process by which Afrikans in America come to question, understand, reckon with, and/or rationalize the specific nature of their existence(s) and how they do so through the construction of Rap lyrics.

### **Definition of Terms**

Abolition - The inclusive liberation of all persons that have been marginalized, subjugated, and/or oppressed based on cultural location, mental or physical ability, socio-economic status, biological anatomy, or gender expression

Afrikan - Of/relating to the continent of Afrika and the international Afrikan diaspora

Afrocentric - Of/relating to the Afrocentric Paradigm, a theoretical and practical framework grounded in the philosophy that any/all examinations, analyses, and/or discussions of Afrikan phenomena must center the Afrikan experience and perspective

Eurocentric - Relating to the global Western imperialist project, or the summation of the innumerable economic, social, and political institutions, policies, and ideologies deriving from and/or contributing to European colonialism

Hip-Hop - A multifaceted Afrikan cultural phenomenon comprised of five aspects of self-expression: Hip-Hop Fashion, Hip-Hop Music/Instrumentation (known as “DJ-ing”), Hip-Hop Visual Art (known as “graffiti”), Hip-Hop Dance (known as “breaking”), and Hip-Hop Rhetoric (known as “Rap”)

*Ma'at* - An omnipresent essence throughout all environments and a divine force of creation derived from the Kemetic universal creator, Ra, that was later characterized by Maulana Karenga's Seven Cardinal Virtues of *Ma'at* to represent: Truth, Justice, Balance, Order, Propriety, Harmony, and Reciprocity

*Nommo* - Rooted in Dogon ontological philosophies; the generative power of the spoken word and the physical manifestation of spiritual energy as transformed through the process of speech

Rap - An artistic form that employs verbal communication and the use of the spoken word with technical aspects including, but not limited to, syllabic modification, vocal distortion, tone/pronunciation alteration, ululation, and scat singing as well as rhetorical aspects including, but not limited to, rhymes, shout-outs, toasts, boasts, "dozens", and improvisation/"freestyling"

*Ubuntu* - An axiological philosophy with an approximate English translation of "A person is a person because of other persons" or "I am because we are" and rooted in Afrikan cultural notions of interdependence, community, harmony, and sustainability

### **Literature Review**

*The Afrocentric Idea* by Molefi K. Asante is a core intellectual contribution to the field of Africology. In it, Asante dovetails the central essences of Afrikan spirituality with a disciplined, paradigmatic examination of Afrikan culture across millennia. With an intellectual rootedness in Afrikan agency and an affinity toward Afrika and her people,

Asante efficiently defines the Maatian spiritual and ethical structure from which the Afrocentric paradigm operates. From this point, Asante is able to then analyze the present psychosocial situations that Afrikans in America face: “Although our traditional values such as harmony, justice, equality, patience, diligence, and good-naturedness are not foreign to us today, they are rarely represented in the media, which instead produces a flood of images and ideas about how nihilistic we have become.”<sup>14</sup> Especially pertinent to the current context that Rap occupies, Asante determines that, “although I do not dismiss the realities of violence and other destructive behaviors, I believe that the media make them seem more pervasive than ever.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, this dissertation project ultimately relies, in part, upon Asante’s concluding remark that “if we have lost anything, it is our cultural centeredness; that is, we have been moved off our own platforms [...] [and] by regaining our own platforms, standing in our own cultural spaces, and believing that our way of viewing the universe is just as valid as any, we will achieve the kind of transformation that we need.”<sup>16</sup>

*Ma’at: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt* by Maulana Karenga is a foundational text for the grounding of the Afrocentric paradigm’s functional aspect in a particular ethical framework. This ethical framework of *Ma’at*, as a moral ideal, is central to the orientation of this dissertation project. The text serves to “delineate and critically examine *Ma’at*” and is especially noteworthy as it examines “the usefulness of Maatian ethical thought as a resource for modern moral discourse and philosophic reflection on critical

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<sup>14</sup> Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentric Idea Revised* (Temple University Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 8.

moral issues.”<sup>17</sup> This situates the psychological, social, and cultural needs of the Ubuntu Rap Theory and the intentions of the Umfundisi technique definitively within the ethical framework of *Ma’at*. Moreover, this establishes the ethical orientation of the Ubuntu Rap Theory and the Umfundisi technique as in alignment with the spiritual ideal of *maakheru*, or “true of voice”, that derives a great deal of cultural significance from *Nommo*.

“Toward An Afrocentric Methodology” by Ruth Reviere establishes *ukweli*, *utulivu*, *uhaki*, *ujamaa*, and *kujittoa* as the five core tenets that any Afrocentric research endeavor must employ in order to ensure that such research “harmonizes diverse African, and other, values and experiences into a coherent and comprehensive definition of [...] [a] perspective that allows the researcher to put African ideals and values at the center of the inquiry.”<sup>18</sup> Reviere’s descriptions reveal a shared ethical essence between an Afrocentric research methodology and an intellectual framework oriented toward a reverence for *Ma’at*. Core ethical considerations of truth, balance, justice, harmony, and reciprocity in action, thought, and speech are central both to characterizations of *Ma’at* and Reviere’s Afrocentric research canons. Reviere’s Afrocentric research canons serve dual utility for this dissertation project: both individually and in concert with each other, the canons dictate the methodology of this dissertation project as well as serving as the ideological guide and framework for Ubuntu Rap’s (and the Umfundisi technique’s) focus on community, harmony, and sustainability.

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<sup>17</sup> Maulana Karenga, *Maat, the Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt: A Study in Classical African Ethics*, African Studies : History, Politics, Economics, Culture (New York: Routledge, 2004), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Ruth Reviere, “Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology,” *Journal of Black Studies* 31, no. 6 (2001): 709–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002193470103100601>, 712-713.

*Muntu* by Janheinz Jahn is a vital contribution to the theoretical foundation of *Nommo* as a generative force within the spoken word that is derived from a permeating spiritual essence that is central human existence, specifically within the Dogon ontological framework. As Jahn describes, *Nommo* is “the driving power that gives life and efficacy”<sup>19</sup> as a “physical-spiritual life force which awakens all ‘sleeping’ forces and gives physical and spiritual life.”<sup>20</sup> Crucial to this dissertation project especially is the linkage illuminated in the text of this spiritual life force of *Nommo* to an ethical responsibility grounded in an Afrikan worldview (and situated firmly within the Ntu’ology framework) and centered on values of community, harmony, and balance. According to Jahn, “The word is there before the image. It is the word, *Nommo*, that creates the image. Before that there is *Kintu*, a ‘thing’, which is no image, but just the thing itself. But in the moment when the thing is invoked, appealed to, conjured up through *Nommo*, the word--in that moment *Nommo*, the procreative force, transforms the thing into an image.”<sup>21</sup> This ability to transform the abstract into a specifically material existence thus means that “every human thought, once expressed, becomes reality. For the word holds the course of things in train and changes and transforms them. And since the word has this power [...] There is no ‘harmless’, noncommittal word. Every word has consequences. Therefore the word binds the [human]. And the [human] is responsible for [their] word.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jahn, 101.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 133.

*Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* by Tricia Rose is a seminal text in framing the historical impact of Rap on the socialization and developing psychologies of Afrikans in America in the latter half of the 20th century. The text grapples with Rap's "core organizing principles" in seeking to contextualize Rap as a "processes of culture making in a capitalist and fully commodified society."<sup>23</sup> Rose puts forth a crucial query that incorporates D. Soyini Madison's philosophy of "alternative modernities" with the generative power of Rap's lyricism, asking, "How does [Rap] sustain and transform long-standing [Afrikan] cultural forms and traditions?"<sup>24</sup> Together with its successor, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop -- and Why It Matters*, Rose importantly illustrates Rap as "a complex cultural reformulation of a community's knowledge and memory of itself"<sup>25</sup> while also tracking specific ideologies that shed light on Rap's "shifting relationship to dominant culture."<sup>26</sup>

*It's Bigger Than Hip Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation* by M.K. Asante, Jr. provides an essential construction of the many various psychosocial dilemmas that that the subcultural phenomenon of Hip-Hop currently faces. Asante, Jr. notes that the crisis (or crises) "isn't[/aren't] just that rap music, hip hop's voice box of values and ideas, has drifted into the shallowest pool of poetic possibilities, or even that most of today's hip hop betrays the attitudes and ideals that framed it"<sup>27</sup> but that what was

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<sup>23</sup> Rose, *Black Noise*, XII-XIII.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, XIV.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, XV.

<sup>27</sup> M.K. Asante, Jr., *It's Bigger than Hip-Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation*, 1st ed (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 5.

“founded on the principles of rebellion, over the past decade has been lulled into being a conservative instrument, promoting nothing new or remotely challenging to [the hegemonic] cultural ideology.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the text aligns intrinsic Afrocentric elements of Hip-Hop with the functional aspect of the Afrocentric paradigm. Asante, Jr. first notes that “the word ‘hip’ comes out of the Wolof language [...] In Wolof, there’s a verb, ‘hipi,’ which means ‘to open one’s eyes and see.’ So, *hipi* is a term of enlightenment. My first name means ‘to see or to be enlightened’.”<sup>29</sup> Continuing on, Asante, Jr. then explains that “‘hop’ is an Old English word that means ‘to spring into action.’ So what I’m about is enlightenment, then action. Without the enlightenment, you’re not going to know what to do, but without the hop or the action, well, then it’s just rhymes.”<sup>30</sup> To this end, perhaps the most significant theoretical contribution Asante Jr.’s book provides this dissertation project is a succinct yet emphatic call for a theory such as Ubuntu Rap with an accompanying practical guide for the lyrical expression of an ethical value system rooted in *Ma’at* in the Umfundisi technique: “Let us embrace the traditional African idea of ubuntu, which means ‘humanity toward others’; I am because we are; I am what I am because of what we all are. [...] Ubuntu insists that we all be open and available to others; that we affirm and encourage others to reach their potential.”<sup>31</sup>

In their essay, “‘Good speech’ - An Interpretive Essay Investigating an African Philosophy of Communication”, Venita Kelley refers us back to the Kemetic spiritual

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 255.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 245.

ideal of *Ma'at* and, specifically, Ptah Hotep's written edicts from 2400 BCE on "correct [communication] behavior."<sup>32</sup> In the edicts, Ptah Hotep used a phrase that can be transliterated & translated to mean "Good Speech" in order to illustrate "an Afrikan infrastructure for social interaction in both the private and public realms."<sup>33</sup> Good Speech, as Ptah Hotep describes it, "must bring about harmony and congruence between philosophy about life as well as the living of that life both for the person and for the collective [...] [in] communication areas such as argument, silence, messages, nonverbals, listening, ontological, and cosmological systems."<sup>34</sup> Ptah Hotep refers to Good Speech as "the mechanism by which societal order is achieved"; thus, as Kelley, summates, "the Good Speech proclamations that Ptah Hotep sets forth as rules for personal and societal conduct are the foundational beliefs [Afrikans in America] access(ed) in order to respond to and shape United States society."<sup>35</sup> Because its essence permeates our Afrikan communal consciousness and our interpersonal methods of communication, regardless of geographic or temporal location within the history of the Afrikan diaspora, it stands that Ptah Hotep's characterization of Good Speech also serves as a foremost example of Afrikan oratory's ability to meaningfully confront and remedy many of the illnesses associated with the psychosocial assault on Afrika by way of a multifaceted, millennia-old hegemony rooted in subjugation and oppression.

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<sup>32</sup> Venita Kelley, "'Good Speech': An Interpretive Essay Investigating an African Philosophy of Communication," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 1 (2002): 44–54, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/200357650/abstract/5B418232F5241D8PQ/1>, 45.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

In *Chronicling Stankonia: The Rise of the Hip-Hop South*, Regina N. Bradley utilizes a central narrative around Georgia-based Rap duo OutKast to emphasize Rap's capacity as a tool for a kind of Afronography that takes into account the diversity of the Afrikan diasporic lived experience with a specific consideration of how geographic differences and similarities within the United States affect of Rappers' expressions of self. Bradley highlights the duo's embrace of the metaphysical and concepts seemingly foreign to the material conditions of the world and society that they physically inhabit (themes of outer space and feeling "alien" are relied upon heavily throughout the duo's catalog). Bradley calls upon a specific set of lyrics from one member in recalling that "Benjamin celebrates his Africanness—'original skin'—and his alienness/outkastedness. He states his mind 'warps and bends' meaning, is in constant flux between ideas, time periods, and experiences, and is a complicated being."<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Bradley further connects the significance of the duo's naming ("an acronym for 'Operating under the Krooked American System Too Long'"<sup>37</sup>) with their frequent lyrical expressions and aesthetic incorporations of an Afrikan worldview, noting a particular composition's underlying themes of "the intersection of multiple threads representing [Afrikans in America's] constant search for home, belonging, and their future selves."<sup>38</sup>

*When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks It Down* by Joan Morgan provides a necessary examination of how particular aspects of the ever-changing subcultural phenomenon and movement of Hip-Hop, with Rap as its oral

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<sup>36</sup> Regina N. Bradley, *Chronicling Stankonia: The Rise of the Hip Hop South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 27.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 24.

component, have operated within and contributed to the dominant patriarchal psychosocial hegemony. Morgan writes specifically with an orientation toward sex- and gender-based oppression that Afrikan women in America have faced, especially from other members of the Afrikan diasporic community. An exercise in Afronography itself, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost* serves both as catharsis and investigation for Morgan: “Props given to rap music’s artistic merits, [...] its ability to be alternately beautiful, poignant, powerful, strong, irreverent, visceral, and mesmerizing.”<sup>39</sup> Continuing on, she notes that, “in between the beats, booty shaking, and hedonistic abandon, I have to wonder if there isn’t something inherently [patriarchal] in supporting a music that repeatedly reduces me to tits and ass and encourages pimping on the regular.”<sup>40</sup> What this often means for the relationship between such internalized hegemonic patriarchy expressed through Rap lyrics and Afrikan women is that, for her, “my decision to expose myself to the sexism of Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, Snoop Dogg, or the Notorious B.I.G. is really my plea to my brothers to tell me who they are. I need to know why they are so angry at me. Why is disrespecting me one of the few things that make them feel like men?”<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Morgan realizes the linkages between internalization of destructive ideologies rooted in the dominant patriarchal hegemony and an unsustainable, unharmonious worldview and psychosocial affect, noting that “what passes for ‘40 and a blunt’ good times in most of [Rap] is really alcoholism, substance abuse, and chemical dependency. When brothers can talk so cavalierly about killing each

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<sup>39</sup> Joan Morgan, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: My Life as a Hip-Hop Feminist* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 66.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 72.

other and then reveal that they have no expectation to see their twenty-first birthday, that is straight-up depression masquerading as machismo.”<sup>42</sup>

*Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*, edited by Jeff Chang, establishes itself as an essential collection of essays contributing to the various discussions revolving around the sociocultural significance of the subcultural movement known as Hip-Hop. Features in the volume speak to a breadth of discussion topics, from contextual analyses of “Hip-Hop[’s beginning] under the conditions of poverty and lack of resources” with a “point of view about money, competition for survival, scarcity of resources and exploitation [that] runs through [the dominant] culture”<sup>43</sup> to affirmations of Rap as “a resilience of the human spirit [and a] process of transforming yourself and your environment [...] confronting ‘conventional wisdom’ and critically questioning accepted norms.”<sup>44</sup> Along with its predecessor, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of The Hip-Hop Generation*, Chang brings a microscopic lens to the cultural history and significance of Hip-Hop as well as the sociocultural contexts that contributed to its genesis in New York City as well as its vigorous spread throughout the Afrikan diaspora. In the words of Hip-Hop progenitor DJ Kool Herc, “Hip-Hop says [...] We are a family. It ain’t about security. It ain’t about bling-bling [jewelry]. It ain’t about how much your gun can shoot

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>43</sup> Jeff Chang, ed., *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop* (New York: BasicCivitas Books, 2006), 340.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 267.

[...] It is not about me being better than you or you being better than me. It's about you and me, connecting."<sup>45</sup>

*To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans From 1800*, edited by Robin D.G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, also contributes to such chronological contextualization of Rap. Similar to Timothy Welbeck's "People's Instinctive Travels and the Paths to Rhythms: Hip-Hop's Continuation of the Enduring Tradition of African and African American Rhetorical Forms and Tropes", Portia K. Maultsby's "Africanisms in African American Music", and Geneva Smitherman's "'The Chain Remain the Same': Communicative Practices in the Hip Hop Nation", Kelley maintains Rap's "long prehistory [...] that can be traced back to preaching, singing the blues, the rhyming styles of black radio DJs, and toasting."<sup>46</sup>

*Iwé Illanan: A Umfundalai Teacher's Handbook*, edited by Kariamuwelsh and C. Kemal Nance serves as the central text and guidebook for the "breadth of knowledge that comprises Umfundalai's movements system, philosophy, and emerging methodology" as a Pan-Afrikan contemporary dance technique.<sup>47</sup> According to Welsh, the Umfundalai dance technique "was developed as a means to access and utilize movement traditions that exist in Africa and the Diaspora in order to stylize selected movements for neo-traditional and contemporary expression [...] that speak to the African and Diasporan

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<sup>45</sup> Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, 1. Picador ed (New York: Picador, 2005), XI.

<sup>46</sup> Kelley, 309.

<sup>47</sup> Kariamuwelsh and C. Kemal Nance, eds., *Iwé Illanan "Step by Step": A Umfundalai Teacher's Handbook* (Lulu.com, 2017), II.

aesthetic sensibilities and sensitivities.”<sup>48</sup> Of particular importance to this dissertation project (along with its future evolutions and iterations) is Welsh’s declaration of Umfundalai’s longevity and mutability, similar to Madison’s “alternative modernities”: “As a Pan-African technique, the Umfundalai technique draws upon key movements from different [ethnolinguistic] groups in Africa, along with the movements of [Afrikan] cultures in the United States, Caribbean, and South America [...] [it] continues to develop and is fluid and accommodating of new traditions and expressions.”<sup>49</sup>

*The Anthology of Rap*, edited by Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, serves as an expansive compilation of transcribed lyrics from Rappers across generations and geographies. This text serves as the comprehensive lyrical reference guide for this dissertation project, including, but not limited to, lyrics from the following Rap compositions: “Tennessee” by Arrested Development; “Blackman in Effect” by Boogie Down Productions (BDP); “Tha Crossroads” by Bone Thugs-N-Harmony; “How We Gonna Make the Black Nation Rise?” by Brother D with Collective Effort; “What Am I?” by Chino XL; “The Light” and “A Song for Assata” by Common; “Police State” and “Hip-Hop by dead prez; “Stakes is High” by De La Soul; “Now” by Eyedea & Abilities; “Vocab” by The Fugees; “Cell Therapy” by Goodie Mob; “The Message” and “White Lines (Don’t Do It)” by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five; “Virus (Del)” by Hieroglyphics; “Industrial Revolution” by Immortal Technique; “Why” by Jadakiss; “Uncommon Valor: A Vietnam Story” by Jedi Mind Tricks; “All Falls Down” by Kanye West; “What’s Hardcore?” and “My Old Home” by K’Naan; “Sound of Da Police” by

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

KRS-One; “The Breaks” by Kurtis Blow; “All for You” by Little Brother; “Hoodlum Poetry” by Mia X; “Mathematics” and “Dollar Day for New Orleans (Katrina Klap)” by Mos Def; “Everything’s Gonna Be Alright (Ghetto Bastard)” by Naughty by Nature; “Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos” and “Fight the Power” by Public Enemy; “Evil That Men Do” by Queen Latifah; “Independent Woman” by Roxanne Shanté; “Proud to Be Black” by Run-DMC; “The Ghetto” by Too \$hort; “Check the Rhime” by A Tribe Called Quest; “Grand Verbalizer” by X-Clan; and “Brenda’s Got a Baby”, “Dear Mama”, “So Many Tears”, “Changes”, and “How Long Will They Mourn Me” by 2Pac.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE THEORY OF UBUNTU RAP

#### **Hip-Hop Nommo**

The foundation of the Afrikan concept of *Nommo* is spiritually and intellectually rooted in the Ancient Kemetic ethical framework of *Ma'at*. According to Maulana Karenga, *Ma'at* provides a model for a way of living that highly esteems thoughts, actions, and spoken words emphasizing “truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order.”<sup>50</sup> However, also essential to the idea of *Ma'at* is the spiritual component. It represents a permeating essence throughout our physical and metaphysical environments as well as the divine force of creation derived from the universal creator, Ra. This same life-giving essence exists within the process of translating physical phenomena into metaphysical symbols, also known as the formation of speech. This is the foundation of the Afrikan concept of *Nommo*, that is, the generative power of spoken words<sup>51</sup>.

The “driving power that gives life and efficacy to all things [as] word and water and seed and blood in one,”<sup>52</sup> *Nommo* is regarded as a “physical-spiritual life force which

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<sup>50</sup> Maulana Karenga, “Maat.” In *Encyclopedia of Black Studies*, by Molefi Asante and Ama Mazama. 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2005. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412952538.n164>, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Adisa Alkebulan, “Words.” In *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, by Molefi Asante and Ama Mazama. 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412964623.n455>.

<sup>52</sup> Janheinz Jahn and Marjorie Grene. *Muntu: An Outline of the New African Culture*. New York: Grove Press, 1979, 101.

awakens all ‘sleeping’ forces.”<sup>53</sup> It represents the physical manifestation of spiritual energy, where “every human thought, once expressed, becomes reality.”<sup>54</sup> Various aspects of the Afrikan ontological framework maintain a spiritual hierarchy of organisms that places humans in the most elevated position by virtue of their exclusive ability to communicate with words. This unique ability, according to Dogon mythology, also presents humans with a unique responsibility:

It is the word, *Nommo*, that creates the image. Before that there is [a] Kintu, a ‘thing’, which is no image, but just the thing itself. But in the moment when the thing is invoked, appealed to, conjured up through *Nommo*, the word--in that moment *Nommo*, the procreative force, transforms the thing into an image<sup>55</sup>

[...]

For the word holds the course of things in train and changes and transforms them. And since the word has this power [...] There is no “harmless”, noncommittal word. Every word has consequences. Therefore the word binds the muntu (human). And the muntu is responsible for [their] word.<sup>56</sup>

Representing such an immense spiritual potential in each word that profoundly empowers the act of speaking, *Nommo* is a force that can be commanded by human willpower, so much so that those Afrikans who “fail to use [their] verbal power in the service of the community [and] misuse it maliciously and for [their] own gain”<sup>57</sup> are considered anti-social, detrimental influences. If one who can command word magic positively in service of community and harmony is known as a kind of “poet-sorcerer”, then a “wizard” is a specific kind of word magician who, as Jahn writes, “has succumbed to the lust for power [as they] disturb and destroy the life force of [their] fellow [Afrikans] and spread terror

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 130.

for its own sake.”<sup>58</sup> According to Dogon mythology, the recourse for such misuse of the privilege of verbal communication is clear and incredibly substantial from the Afrikan ontological perspective, as those who are deemed “wizards” are “the only muntu [human] who is not permitted to survive death [...] for [they] are not to go on existing as one departed; [they] are destroyed.”<sup>59</sup>

If, from the Afrikan ontological perspective, the sociocultural methods of justice for those who speak with harshness and abuse are significant, then how are Afrikans to know what qualifies as speech and communication that is free of/minimizes such verbal harm? Venita Kelley refers us back to the Kemetic spiritual ideal of *Ma’at* and, specifically, Ptah Hotep’s written decrees from 2400 BCE on “correct [communication] behavior.”<sup>60</sup> In their edicts, Ptah Hotep used a phrase that can be transliterated & translated to mean “Good Speech” in order to illustrate “an African infrastructure for social interaction in both the private and public realms.”<sup>61</sup> Good Speech, as Ptah Hotep describes it, “must bring about harmony and congruence between philosophy about life as well as the living of that life both for the person and for the collective.”<sup>62</sup> Ptah Hotep refers to Good Speech as “the mechanism by which societal order is achieved”; thus, as Kelley, summates, “the Good Speech proclamations that Ptah Hotep sets forth as rules for

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>60</sup> Venita Kelley, “‘Good Speech’: An Interpretive Essay Investigating an African Philosophy of Communication.” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 1 (2002), 45.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 46.

personal and societal conduct are the foundational beliefs [that] African Americans [can] access in order to respond to and shape [their surroundings].”<sup>63</sup>

The voice has long been an essential tool to the lived Afrikan experience, an instrument with a diverse array of potential uses. From communication to instrumentation, the use of the voice combined with Afrikan cultural rhythmic instincts has remained a consistent spiritual and intellectual philosophy throughout the Afrikan diaspora. As with many of its predecessors in the Afrikan oral tradition, Rap possesses an unparalleled power and ability to be utilized in service of both cultural reflection and functional rhetoric. In terms of distinct artistic categorizations, the rhythmic oratory of poetry is largely considered to be the most immediate precursor to Rap. Yet, even poetry itself receives inspiration from a myriad of other rhetorical devices from within the diasporic Afrikan cultural creative repository, including lecturing, testifying, sermonizing, boasting, and proverb telling. The “communicative traditions and discursive practices” that Rap employs in expressing “the [Afrikan] struggle for survival” while simultaneously “reflect[ing] the cultural evolution of the Black oral tradition and the construction of a contemporary resistance rhetoric”<sup>64</sup> are significant components of Rap’s spiritual and ideological genealogy. These traditions and practices include technical aspects of syllabic modification and vocal distortion (e.g., tone/pronunciation alteration, melisma, ululation, scat singing) as well as a kind of cultural grammatical fidelity that has

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>64</sup> Geneva Smitherman, “‘The Chain Remain the Same’: Communicative Practices in the Hip Hop Nation.” *Journal of Black Studies* 28, no. 1 (1997), 21.

manifested itself as a distinct Afrikan diasporic dialect known as “Ebonics.”<sup>65</sup> In both form and function, Afrikan culture has long held great reverence for verbal communication and the use of the spoken word. This reverence has persisted amongst Afrikans in the United States over multiple generations and despite the prolonged assault on the psychology of Afrika, Afrikan people, and Afrikan culture. Over time, as this reverence for rhetoric ebbed and flowed through Afrikan communities across the United States, it eventually found in Rap yet another avenue of cultural expression for contemporary Afrikan griots across the diaspora.

In the early 1970s, Nettie and Keith Campbell, originally from Jamaica, had taken residence in the West Bronx area of New York City. Nettie, like many other diasporic Afrikans at the time, had first migrated to the United States during the early 1960s in search of further education and, thus, additional financial support for her family. Although she returned to her family in Jamaica in 1966 with a nursing degree, she eventually convinced Keith and their six children to relocate permanently to New York City. Their plan was for their oldest child, Clive, to make the initial journey with Nettie prior to the rest of the family joining them — and so, Clive Campbell arrived in New York City in November 1967 with a strong accent and a stronger affinity for the energetic rhythms produced by the powerful speaker systems at the local sound in his native Kingston. Now far removed from his local sound and selector, Clive still managed to keep his affinity aflame as he ventured from his family’s apartment on East 178th Avenue

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<sup>65</sup> A long-evolving and fluid composite language, Ebonics developed as a linguistic response to the forced adoption of colonial languages and the reconciliation of foreign linguistic and societal conventions with their indigenous languages and psychosocial frameworks. Variations of Ebonics that utilize different terminology, and even rhythmic patterns, exist not only throughout the global Afrikan diaspora but even regionally within the United States.

throughout his Bronx neighborhood, eventually drawn to the rhythms and energies of the neighborhood house parties. As he studied the scene, he noticed how the timing and context of when particular records were played affected the energy and atmosphere of the environment. Soon, his affinity for powerful sounds turned into anticipation for when he could begin producing his own powerful sounds and, fortunately, his father's affiliation with a local rhythm & blues band meant that his anticipation would be short-lived, as a brand new P.A. sound system was now easily accessible.

Across New York City, a burgeoning artistic movement had begun sweeping through buildings & across trains and nearly every flat surface in public (and, often, private) view. As young graffiti writers, reinvigorated with a sense of agency and reclamation, emphasized their presence throughout the city, Clive was no exception. As the summer of 1970 came into view, Clive and his friends undertook their own creative journeys into the world of graffiti. As they developed their monikers and unique "tags", Clive decided upon "Kool" as his tag of choice. However, it also happened that Clive was establishing a name and presence for himself in another avenue of his life, as well. And so, when his peers began to notice his athletic prowess and physical abilities spanning basketball, track & field, and weightlifting, it made a great deal of sense when he was soon nicknamed "Hercules". And, when time came for Clive to finally produce emphatic rhythms and sounds of his own, Clive made a slight adjustment to his nickname and adopted his new moniker, "DJ Kool Herc". And, when a fire in his family's apartment forced them to relocate, Clive, along with his mother Nettie, his father Keith, his younger sister Cindy, and his four other siblings, temporarily took shelter in the Concourse Plaza

Hotel on the Grand Concourse at 161st Street before permanently settling into a brand new apartment building located at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue.

By the summer of 1973, Clive had spent a great amount of time and energy learning about & working with his father's professional-quality speaker system. He had acquired enough expertise (and artistic imagination) to not only throw his own neighborhood house parties, but to even serve as the DJ during his father's band's intermissions. Thus, as the summer progressed into August and Clive's sister, Cindy, needed extra funds to prepare for her upcoming school year, she knew precisely what would remedy her situation and how her brother could provide a great deal of assistance:

Cindy calculated it would cost a little more than half her [Youth Corps] paycheck to rent the rec room in their apartment building at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue. Her brother, whom [...] everyone else knew as Kool Herc, was an aspiring DJ with access to a powerful sound system. All she had to do was bulk-buy some [drinks] and soda, and advertise the party. She, Clive and her friends hand-wrote the announcements on index cards [...] If she filled the room, she could charge a quarter for the girls, two for the guys, and make back the overhead on the room. And with the profit—presto, instant [funds].<sup>66</sup>

Cindy and Clive held their “Back To School Jam” on August 11th, 1973, a date which gained increasing significance with each day that passed, until it was eventually firmly encoded within the Afrikan diasporic cultural repository as the day Hip-Hop was born.

While DJ Kool Herc is considered to be first, he was certainly not the only early force pushing break beats and looped rhythms from apartment basements to parks, street corners, and nearly any public space with access to enough electricity to power several energy-hungry pieces of sound & mixing equipment. Others also experimented with mixing in their own ways and further expanded the toolset and capabilities of a Hip-Hop

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<sup>66</sup> Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 67-68.

DJ. Moreover, as many of these DJs merged their own individual and/or hyper-local identities with their artistic expression, they developed intimate communities and formed tight-knit affiliations with dancers who could elevate the party's atmosphere (known as "B-Boys" and "B-Girls") as well as whoever was talented enough to provide a vocal accompaniment of rhymes, shout-outs, and toasts on par with the DJ's rhythmic inventions. As the late 1970s turned into the earliest parts of the 1980s, the list of DJs and accompanying vocalists (now referred to as Rappers or "MCs") considered among the earliest progenitors of Hip-Hop and Rap had expanded to such include individuals and groups as Sweet N' Sour, Grand Wizzard Theodore & the Fantastic Five Freaks, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious 5, MC Sha-Rock and her group Funky Four Plus One, Debbie D, Pebblee Poo, Lisa Lee, the Cold Crush Brothers, the Sequence, and the Mercedes Ladies. These artistic & cultural dignitaries carried with them ancestral artistic and personal inspirations that have been continuously re-interpreted and re-expressed from one generation of Afrikans to the next, from spiritually uplifting rhythms during the Maafa to the specific genres of blues, jazz, rock, bebop, spoken word, soul, and funk, and channeled them into the latest interpretation of the "tradition of reverence for rhetoric in its written and spoken form."<sup>67</sup>

### **Where Are We Now?**

As Tricia Rose aptly noted, the early MCs that held initial reverence and significance within their communities were those who, primarily, "could fix the crowd's attention [with] impressive verbal dexterity and performance skills [as] they spoke with

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<sup>67</sup> Baruti N. Kopano, "Rap Music as an Extension of the Black Rhetorical Tradition: 'Keepin' It Real'." *Western Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 4 (2002): 204–14, 204.

authority, conviction, confidence, and power.”<sup>68</sup> In its earliest forms, Rap was “a locally inspired explosion of exuberance and political energy tethered to the idea of rehabilitating community”, an avenue of self-expression for Afrikan youths living through the U.S. colonial experience that still managed to center “a love [and] a drive toward respect and mutuality that served as a steady heartbeat” despite “carrying many of the seeds of destruction that were part of [Western] society itself.”<sup>69</sup> Yet, an examination of Rap since the toasts and rhymes of its forbears reveals an overwhelming amount of Rap that lacks “these inspirational energies [that] kept [it] as a force for creativity and love, affirmation and resistance.”<sup>70</sup> This is particularly noteworthy in its reflection of the Afrikan communal existence is that is culturally defined by its prioritization of harmony, reciprocity, and balance within a matriarchal psychosocial framework. In spite of this, a substantial proportion, if not an overwhelming majority, of the contemporary Rap lyrics and aesthetics that receive the largest amounts of social and financial elevation endorse hegemonic social philosophies of xenophobia, patriarchal violence, and other forms of psychological & physical subjugation.

Notwithstanding the large swath of Afrikan listeners, philosophers, writers that have understood the importance of firmly situating Rap within “what Dr. Jared Ball calls ‘its proper context of political struggle and repression’”<sup>71</sup>, the fact of Rap’s current condition as “a stationary vehicle blaring redundant, glossy messages of violence without

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<sup>68</sup> Rose, *Black Noise*, 55.

<sup>69</sup> Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*, IX.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Asante, Jr., 4.

consequence, misogyny, and conspicuous consumption”<sup>72</sup> has, for the most part, largely been agreed upon by most who have sought to examine Rap through an Afrocentric lens. This, though, importunes critical follow-up questions, chief amongst them: if much of the Rap that is most widely proliferated and accessible is “overrun with a level of misogyny and [anti-Afrikan] violence”<sup>73</sup> but was first brought into being as “a visceral energy aimed at transforming (or at least voicing) the conditions of oppressed people”<sup>74</sup>, then when (and how) did the point(s) of inflection arise? Analyzing the conversation of thoughts particularly between the works of Tricia Rose, Joan Morgan, M.K. Asante, Jr., Jeff Chang, S. Craig Watkins, and Byron Hurt reveals two exceptionally noteworthy “crossover” events, the first occurring in 1979 and the second taking place through the mid-to-late 1990s. The combination of both of these moments was, as characterized by Parrish Smith<sup>75</sup>, the end of the era of Rap in which its overall orientation was primarily dictated by (and through) Afrikan agency amidst capitalist influences and duplicitous assurances of money, power, and assimilation from patriarchal Western corporate structures at the cost of the Afrikan cultural communal spirit.

For nearly two centuries, the spirit of anti-hegemony and Afrikan agency in the words of Frederick Douglass has remained a steadfast beacon for abolitionists and liberationists through out the diaspora. Accordingly, many parallels can appropriately be drawn between “the most commercially promoted and financially successful hip hop

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>75</sup> Also known as “PMD”, Smith and Erick Parrish are together known as the Rap duo “EPMD”.

increasingly [becoming] a playground for caricatures of black gangstas, pimps, and hoes”<sup>76</sup> and Douglass’s denouncement of minstrelsy as “the filthy scum of white society, [which has] stolen from us [...] to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens.”<sup>77</sup> The two phenomena that fed “the crisis centered around the distribution mechanisms for hip hop” did so in slightly dissimilar yet destructively complementary ways.<sup>78</sup> Whereas Sylvia Robinson’s formation of the group The Sugarhill Gang and subsequent production of the Rap record “Rapper’s Delight” in 1979 magnified & amplified Rap’s “commercial status [and] significantly raised the economic stakes”<sup>79</sup>, the “consolidation and ‘dumbing down’ of hip hop’s imagery and storytelling [into a] hyper-gangsta-ization of the music”<sup>80</sup> that took place during the 1990s solidified Rap’s “relegation to reflecting American culture [and] betray[ing] the very people it is supposed to represent”<sup>81</sup> with representations of Afrika and Afrikans that have remained “virtually unchanged from the racist stereotypes promoted before and during [the Maafa].”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Rose, *Black Noise*, 1.

<sup>77</sup> Asante, Jr., 18.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>79</sup> Rose, *Black Noise*, 56.

<sup>80</sup> Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*, 3.

<sup>81</sup> Asante, Jr., 8-10.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

From 1973 until the summer of 1979, the art of Rap was a form that still highly revered the Afrikan cultural aspect of freestyling<sup>83</sup> and was grounded in an aesthetic averse to so many formalities, with live performances that “thrived on quick-witted improvisation and call-and-response audience participation.”<sup>84</sup> Consequently, as Robinson, a former R&B singer and producer who now co-owned several corporate record production enterprises, sought to sign a Rap group to her newest outfit, Sugar Hill Records, she was “met with skepticism from Bronx luminaries like Flash” and other stewards of Hip-Hop at the time.<sup>85</sup> Although some had already begun to record their live performances onto cassette tapes in order to “circulate their music and build recognition in hip hop’s underground milieus,” these recordings were specifically intended to be intra-communal and intra-cultural.<sup>86</sup> However, Robinson’s central task was to ensure that “radio stations around the country received a copy”<sup>87</sup> of the soon-to-be completed Rap record, meaning that “when three anonymous rappers [were invited] to Robinson’s studios [in October of 1979] to cut ‘Rapper’s Delight’, they had no local expectations to fulfill, no street reputations to keep, no regular audience to please, and absolutely no consequences if they failed.”<sup>88</sup> With skillful and judicious precision, Chang provides a

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<sup>83</sup> Also known as Rap lyrics recited “off the dome”, the specific definition of what meets the parameters of a “freestyle” performance is often contested. This author maintains that, while a freestyle may receive inspiration from previously existing lyrics, the set of recited lyrics overall must be novel and improvised.

<sup>84</sup> Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 132.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>86</sup> S. Craig Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005). 13.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>88</sup> Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 129.

clear illustration of how the construction of the Sugar Hill Gang and “Rapper’s Delight” was the initial betrayal of the communal spirit of Hip-Hop that sparked a predatory & exploitative approach to Rap by Western corporations that sought to further entrench the European hegemonic philosophy of Afrikans as personal property. Chang draws a (seemingly) unintentional parallel between the condition of Rap after the epochal release of “Rapper’s Delight”, Eric Williams’s analysis of the Western socio-economic infrastructure surrounding their kidnapping and international trafficking of Afrikans during the Maafa, and Katherine McKittrick’s abolitionist social commentary regarding how “the plantation has not gone away but has rather been diffused, shaping innumerable aspects of modern life”<sup>89</sup> as he concludes the following:

The rap amateurs of the Sugar Hill Gang never had a DJ. Assembled in a New Jersey afternoon, they were a studio creation that never stepped on a stage until after their single became a radio hit. They wrote with the ears of fans, and the enthusiasm of dilettantes. ‘Rapper’s Delight’ was tailor-made to travel, to be perfectly accessible to folks who had never heard of rap or hip-hop or The Bronx. [...] The inexplicable success of the Sugar Hill Gang transformed the scene overnight. Record execs realized there were potentially many more millions of fans out there for the music. [...] For the next decade and a half, hip-hop music moved away from the parks and the community centers and the clubs and into the lab. Indie labels invested in researching and developing how to make hip-hop music, specifically rap, fit the standards of the music industry, how to rationalize and exploit the new product—how to find, capture, package, and sell its essence like a bottle of lightning. Six-man crews would drop to two. Fifteen-minute party-rocking raps would become three-minute ready-for-radio singles. Hip-Hop was refined like sugar.<sup>90</sup>

To add further insult (and exploitation) to Rap’s calamitous spiritual injuries, the sourcing and formulation of “Rapper’s Delight” lyrics themselves were even more representative of the simmering notion of lyrical falsehoods in Rap (i.e., abusing the power of the

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<sup>89</sup> Rinaldo Walcott, *On Property*. Windsor, Ontario: Biblioasis, 2021, 15.

<sup>90</sup> Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 132-134.

spoken word in service against truth, harmony, and congruence) that would soon come to fully erupt during the 1990s. Henry Jackson, whose performed under the moniker “Big Bank Hank”, was the first “member” of the Sugar Hill Gang: as Robinson was searching for willing participants for her group, she ultimately considered Jackson, who was the manager of the Cold Crush Brothers at the time, after hearing him recite some of his group’s lyrics as he was working in a local pizzeria. Were the initial deceit not enough, many of these and other lyrics penned by Curtis Brown found their way into “Rapper’s Delight”, with Jackson’s malicious use *Nommo* for his own gain a pivotal contribution to the abduction of Brown’s being. Most disappointingly, Jackson even goes as far as to confirm the abduction of Brown’s identity. Brown was more well known throughout the community as “Casanova Fly” or “Grandmaster Caz”; although Jackson was performing under the moniker “Big Bank Hank”, the first words he speaks on “Rapper’s Delight” are, “Check it out—I’m the C-A-S-N, the O-V-A and / the rest is F-L-Y”<sup>91</sup>. These early perversions and exploitations of Rap’s original intra-communal and harmonious intentions foretold, if not manifested, the lynched forms of Rap lyrics and performances that began to grow seemingly exponentially during the mid-to-late 1990s, arresting generations of Afrikans within what “Alice Walker dubs [the] ‘prison of image,’ whereby society’s stereotypes function not as errors, but rather forms of social control.”<sup>92</sup>

This inability to consider the agency and autonomy (or, perhaps, the ability to ignore it) of the Afrikan mind, body, and spirit at both the individual and communal levels soon magnified from a spark in the fall of 1979 into a ferocious conflagration in the

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<sup>91</sup> Adam Bradley and Andrew Lee DuBois, eds., *The Anthology of Rap* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2010), 97.

<sup>92</sup> Asante, Jr., 16.

1990s and early 2000s. The “commercial potential at which ‘Rapper’s Delight’ only hinted significantly raised the economic stakes”<sup>93</sup> and its financial success formally introduced Rap to the all-too-familiar “American golden rule: those with the gold make the rules.”<sup>94</sup> The increase in Rap lyrical content endorsing and venerating psychosocial notions corresponding with the Eurocentristic hegemony that took place during this second, more prolonged crossover/inflection moment in Rap’s history “directly parallel[ed] [Rap]’s sales ascendance into the mainstream record and radio industry.”<sup>95</sup> Given that the location and orientation of a Rapper and their lyrics, respectively, are informed by the combination of their worldview and lived experiences, it is important to note the difference between nuanced reflections “that emphasized being trapped by gang life and spoke about why street crime had become a ‘line of work’ in the context of chronic black joblessness” and an explicitly self-antagonistic, culturally destructive oratorical approach.<sup>96</sup> Thus, the promotion and advancement of Rap lyrics devoid of an Afrikan-centered identity and working in direct opposition to the agency and wellness of Afrika and her peoples by corporations with vested interests in the well-being of the Western global imperialist project are less of a recognition of the distressing conditions that those within a subjugated class must endure and far more intentional attempts to continue propagating those conditions.

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<sup>93</sup> Rose, *Black Noise*, 56.

<sup>94</sup> Asante, Jr., 25.

<sup>95</sup> Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*, 3.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

Lyrical expressions about the plagues and ills of the Afrikan experience in the United States were by no means a novel phenomenon in Rap at the end of the 1980s and into the beginning of the 1990s. In fact, the aforementioned Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five are perhaps most renowned (aside from their spiritual and social contributions as Rap progenitors) for their 1982 Rap record titled, “The Message”. In it, Melvin “Melle Mel” Glover and Edward “Duke Bootee” Fletcher alternate in providing vivid reflections and sharp, striking commentary on a wide range of plights, from intellectual & economic disenfranchisement (“[I] got a bum education, double-digit inflation / Can’t take a train to the job, there’s a strike at the station”<sup>97</sup>) and a lack of autonomy (“Rats in the front room, roaches in the back / Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat / I tried to get away but I couldn’t get far / ‘Cause a man with a tow truck repossessed my car”<sup>98</sup>) to spiritual & psychological frailty:

Don’t push me ‘cause  
I’m close to the edge  
I’m trying not to  
Lose my head [...]  
It’s like a jungle, sometimes it makes me wonder  
How I keep from going under<sup>99</sup>

Yet, whereas much of these earlier kinds of lyrical opining were more Afronographic in essence, a different energy and intention soon replaced and undermined the autonomy of the Afrikan body, mind, and spirit as the center of Rap’s self-expressive nature. The canon was soon referred to as “gangsta Rap” and became most closely associated with a number of social & artistic movements in California and the United States’s West Coast.

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<sup>97</sup> Bradley and DuBois, 74.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

Even compared to Melle Mel's depictions of "being used and abused [and] served like hell / [until] one day you [were] found hung dead in a cell,"<sup>100</sup> gangsta Rap "was much more strident in tone and graphic [and] it became, for some, the unfiltered voice of a generation of angry and alienated young black men who inhabited America's abandoned ghettos."<sup>101</sup> But, because the same sociocultural hegemony that has sought to psychologically reinforce anti-Afrikan perspectives through various doctrines and religions over multiple millennia was also in increasingly firm control over the largest & most influential avenues of Rap's promotion, distribution, and creation at the time, gangsta Rap soon transformed into "a meticulous pose [and] a shrewd, market-driven performance that craftily exploited America's fear of poor, ghetto youths."<sup>102</sup> Artists like Tracy "Ice-T" Marrow developed personas from caricatures and groups like Death Row Records (with a great deal of financial and social support from the multinational mass media conglomerate Time Warner) created Rap records that "did all of the things that [Eurocentric corporate media empires] needed [them] to do and more [in] form[ing] a definitive musical direction for the label while providing the financial momentum necessary for stability and growth."<sup>103</sup> This meant that where the dominant psychosocial notions bolstering Europe's physical, mental, and spiritual subjugation of Afrika were

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>101</sup> Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 45.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 51.

rooted in male-female antagonism, homophobia, misogyny, xenophobia, greed, and exploitation, so too was gangsta Rap similarly rooted:

[T]he danceable grooves and hummable hooks that made Death Row's music a favorite among radio programmers also smoothed over the deeply ingrained misogyny and sexual violence that throbbed throughout the music. Even as the producers of gangsta struck a rebellious pose that threatened to unleash its wrath on the dominant culture, it was often women, and especially black women, who bore the brunt of its wrath. Gender and sexual tensions have always existed in popular culture, but the gangsta sub-genre took hip hop's misogyny to the extreme.<sup>104</sup>

The desire to see Rap's *Nommo* used to venerate and imitate the Eurocentric hegemony is an exceptionally dangerous threat to the safety and well-being of the Afrikan diaspora. Lyrics produced through "this process of white consumerism, which is age-old" are the result of the hegemonic insinuation that there are "hefty profits to be made by living *down* to white expectations."<sup>105</sup> Consequently, the internalization and reinforcement of this insinuation that rapidly proliferated throughout the minds (and actions) of so many Afrikans thereafter is perhaps the most resounding aftereffect of this second crossover/inflection moment in Rap's artistic & spiritual history: "'Yo, I'll kill you nigga...I'm moving kilos of coke...I'm strapped with AKs, semis, Glocks, shit from Russia...yaddy, yaddy, yah' [...] Negativity. Drugs. Guns. Bitches. There really is not an alternative. You either rap like that or you don't sell."<sup>106</sup>

Currently, an overwhelming amount of post-gangsta Rap lyrics are the product of a Western industrial focus on negativity, patriarchal violence, and anti-Afrikan destructiveness in Rap. Rap now finds itself in a Diopian kind of psychological and social

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 50-51.

<sup>105</sup> Asante, Jr., 26.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

“zone of confluence”, in which the intrinsically Afrikan-centered social structure of Rap’s most primordial form has been severely impacted by “the imposition of Western [colonial frameworks] that are fundamentally male-centered and antithetical to the well-being of Africa and her people and, for that matter, all humanity.”<sup>107</sup> When analyzed through Dr. Dove’s discussion of Kemet’s Mother-Centered Matrix and her characterizations of the core idiosyncrasies of Afrikan culture, the relationship between the impact of the forced migration of Afrikans to and throughout imperialist Western nation-states upon the Afrikan cultural communal psyche and the ruinous Eurocentristic sentiments predominant throughout post-gangsta Rap’s approach to lyrics becomes clearer. Whereas “culture is embedded so deeply in a people that their human identity as people and individuals is shaped by it [and that,] for a people to maintain culture, it is necessary to preserve cultural memory through their historical knowledge, language, and psychology,” various physical, psychological, and social manifestations of capitalism, colonization, and neocolonization have weakened, if not entirely eliminated, Rap’s cultural memory.<sup>108</sup> Although there exists a significant degree of variation in the aesthetics and lyrics of post-gangsta Rap as a whole, to examine the lyrical expressions of the post-gangsta Rap that has the greatest amount of psychosocial resonance is to realize that the intrinsically Afrocentric spirit of Rap “is gravely ill[, for] the beauty and life force [...] have been

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<sup>107</sup> Nah Dove, “Defining a Mother-Centered Matrix to Analyze the Status of Women.” *Journal of Black Studies* 33, no. 1 (September 2002): 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002193470203300101>, 6.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

squeezed out [and] wrung dry by the compounding factors of compounding factors of commercialism, distorted racial and sexual fantasy, oppression, and alienation.”<sup>109</sup>

Afrika, where humanity began, produced mother-centered societies. As Dr. Dove notes, the cultural foundation of the United States, as the creation of descendants of Europe, is the result of the development of a “patriarchal state structure”, wherein the “ensuing patriarchal domination was devastating [to the] essentially mother-centered” indigenous sociocultural frameworks.<sup>110</sup> In service of this structure, the Eurocentric machination responsible prioritized specific kinds of mental and physical assaults upon the mother-centered Afrikan culture in order to fracture and dismantle Afrikan matriarchal societies & cultural tendencies as they sought to kidnap and traffic Afrikans throughout the world. The European cultural hegemony linked binary definitions of human biological sex with the gendering of social roles & phenomena; as a result of such occurring through the patriarchal, male-centered cultural framework borne of societal philosophies from the northern cradle of civilization, a socio-cultural hierarchy with an extreme predilection toward men, maleness, and masculinity formed. The psychological conditioning of the Afrikan communal consciousness to be intolerant of a reciprocal and balanced perspective and dogmatic in its relegation of women, womanhood, and femininity is an especially insidious psychological lynching that endangers the safety and wellness of Afrika and her peoples. Ergo, Dr. Guy-Sheftall’s analyses regarding Afrikans that biologically identify as males and the psychosocial ramifications of doing so within a European colonial hegemonic societal framework are particularly noteworthy. For

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<sup>109</sup> Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*, ix.

<sup>110</sup> Dove, “Defining a Mother-Centered Matrix”, 9-10.

Afrikans in the United States who biologically identify as male, the aggressive and systematic internalization of the debasement of women and other humans (as well as other species) resulted in harmful and destructive psychosocial approaches to gender and gender-based interactions antithetical to an Afrocentric way of living. This created a fracturing of the Afrikan psyche and a social and political circumstance in which Afrikan women were not only further ostracized and considered to be a distinct caste separate from both the global community of women and the Afrikan diasporic community, but they were also designated by the Western colonial imperialist machination to be the specific recipients of particularly heinous and extraordinarily vicious forms of physical and spiritual subjugation.

The relationship(s) between thought, speech, and action are foundational in many ways to Afrikan culture and an Afrocentric consciousness, emphasized often as the foundation of *Nommo* while also serving as the philosophical underpinning of *Ma'at* and even the Kemetic communication system of *medu neter*. Thus, lyrical content that endorses, promotes, and/or condones intentional and violent harm against women, womanhood, and femininity are not only in alignment with the patriarchal European hegemony but directly contribute to the longevity and severity of the oppressive physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual subjugations that Afrikan women and womanhood continue to face. Furthermore, with the success of “the hip-hop industry (as opposed to the hip-hop community) [in] framing an authentic [Afrikan] identity that is not intellectual, complex, creative, educated, or diverse, but a monolith of violence (only against other Blacks!) and sexism”<sup>111</sup> that also perpetually reinforces what Europe/

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<sup>111</sup> Asante, Jr., 24-25.

Western culture wants Afrika and Afrikan culture to represent, the resonant sound of post-gangsta/contemporary Rap can be understood to be the result of “white teenage boys, [as] the primary [purchasers] of rap music, spend[ing] billions of dollars on images and music produced by white corporations that reinforce these stereotypes” and “corporations, [fixed on meeting bottom lines,] leverag[ing] their excessive amount of capital and power to produce, perpetuate, [and] promote whatever’s on sale—thus employing a disproportionate influence on” the minds of Afrikans who, despite not being primary purchasers, are still the primary consumers and producers of Rap.<sup>112</sup> To this end, when poet Saul Williams stresses that, “right now, we are unable to imagine peace [...] because our imaginations have been stolen from us,” Ubuntu Rap seeks to imagine Rap as a verbal expression of peace and psychological, physical, emotional, and spiritual healing, individually and collectively for the entire Afrikan diaspora.<sup>113</sup>

### **The Need for Ubuntu**

The theory of Ubuntu Rap serves to emphasize the need for a very specific form of Afrocentric creative expression that addresses a very specific crisis. There is an intellectual and spiritual yearning (conscious and subconscious) throughout the Afrikan diaspora for a framework of communication that is wholeheartedly and emphatically grounded in community, harmony, and sustainability. Karenga’s in-depth analyses of *Ma’at* clearly affirm of community, harmony, and sustainability as essential values that are core to the spirit of *Ma’at* as a universal cosmic force and an ethical guidebook.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 25-26.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 32.

Karenga underscores that “the Maatian person is[,] above all[,] a person-in-community”<sup>114</sup> and that

it is through membership in a moral community and rightful social participation in that community that one learns to be a person of character and flourishes as a result of it[, f]or it is in community that we develop our sense of the moral self: learn to honor our obligations, cherish our relations and do our duty in correspondence to our conception of moral worthiness.<sup>115</sup>

To positively maintain the self is to positively maintain community and vice versa: healthy individuals beget a healthy community just as a healthy community begets a healthy individual. As Karenga notes, “Self-development [is] a communal act, an act rooted in activity for and of the community.”<sup>116</sup> In accordance with this, Karenga presents harmony as practical guidance for being in community and an imperative ethical approach:

One must not only be innocent of large offenses (causing hunger, pain, suffering) but also sensitive enough to avoid what seems to be small offenses (making another cry), for each represents damage to the social and moral fabric of community. One should always do what strengthens community, friendship and fellow human sensitivity and then one can always draw from the rich treasure of positive and reciprocal relations. Again, the lesson is one must build the community in which one wants to live.<sup>117</sup>

The key and continuing concern is for ‘harmonious attunement’ to the order of things and the practice of Maat was thus the way of wisdom and human flourishing. To act virtuously is to act in harmony with Maat. [...] And to act viciously, is to act against the very nature of things and against one's own higher will out of lack of insight or lack of restraint.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Karenga, *Maat, the Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt*, 326.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 272.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 257.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 329.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 253.

Ultimately, Karenga links this spiritual approach to harmonious interactions in, with, and for community to the Afrocentric reciprocal relationship with nature that permeates many aspects of the Afrikan cultural experience. The notion of humans internalizing a responsibility for the stewardship of nature based on a spiritual (and intellectual) connectedness to the natural environment is an Afrocentric idea of sustainability deeply rooted in the Kemetic ethical framework of *Ma'at*:

Maatian ethics will, of necessity, direct moral attention to the welfare of nature which means respect for and defense of its integrity, diversity and stability. In such a conception, the question of necessity arises of the place of humans in the world. Surely, as noted above in the discussion of human dignity, humans have a special status, but it is not a strict hierarchy of being which promotes disharmony and domination pursuits by humans. On the contrary, the ethical imperative is for humans to live in harmony with nature, respect other modalities of beings and to find in them a site and sense of the sacred.<sup>119</sup>

The cultural significance and social relevance of Rap affords it the capacity to be a potential vector for this direly needed framework of self-expression and communication dedicated toward community, harmony, and sustainability. Rap's immense capacity for transmitting information, thoughts, and feelings across vast spans of time and geography means that the appropriate utilization of Rap lyricism could successfully transform this potential energy into a kinetic movement toward a global liberation from a European cultural hegemony. Thus, the theory of Ubuntu Rap maintains that Rap lyricism orienting its use of *Nommo* toward a Ma'atian ethical framework is a pivotal development in the "relocation", or anti-dislocation, of the contemporary Afrikan psyche and Rap's intrinsic Afrocentric essence.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 387.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ROOTS AND INTENTIONS OF THE UMFUNDISI TECHNIQUE

#### **Kariamuwelsh-Asante’s Umfundalai**

Where the Umfundisi Rap Technique seeks to establish and affirm a path toward “artistry [that] draws from the calabash of African Diasporan aesthetics,” its framework and methodology receives direct inspiration from Kariamuwelsh-Asante’s Umfundalai technique for the learning, and teaching, of Afrikan dance.<sup>120</sup> Just as “teaching the Umfundalai technique of African dance requires a working knowledge of history, aesthetics, pedagogy, and the human body”, the ability for any Rapper to be able to utilize both steps of the Umfundisi Rap Technique to avoid the production of Lynchcapped Rap and generate Ubuntu Rap lyrics requires a working knowledge of the history of the Afrikan Diaspora (both pre-Maafa and post-Maafa), Afrikan aesthetics (including oratory and rhetoric), Afrocentric pedagogy, sociology, and human psychology.<sup>121</sup> Similarly to the Umfundalai technique’s cultural and artistic mission, the Umfundisi Rap Technique also seeks to be “a dynamic and holistic [Rap] tradition that engages [Rappers] in African culture.”<sup>122</sup>

The Umfundisi Rap Technique was constructed to also be a “Pan-African contemporary [Rap] technique and was developed as a means to access and utilize [rhetorical] traditions” derived from *Ma’at* as the Afrikan universal cosmic force and

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<sup>120</sup> Kariamuwelsh and C. Kemal Nance, eds., *Iwé Illanan “Step by Step”: A Umfundalai Teacher’s Handbook* (Lulu.com, 2017), 1.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, ii.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

central spiritual and ethical organizing principle.<sup>123</sup> As a Pan-Afrikan synthesis of artistic phenomena, localized cultural expressions, and spiritual philosophies, the Umfundisi Rap Technique draws from Afrikan communities in the Caribbean, the United States, Europe, Asia, and across the continent of Afrika in order to establish a “codified [Rap] technique that speaks to the African and Diasporan aesthetic sensibilities and sensitivities.”<sup>124</sup> Moreover, “by taking the most distinctive and distinguishing” Afrikan cultural aesthetics regarding rhetoric and ethics, the Umfundisi Rap Technique centers the theory and praxis of community, harmony, and sustainability and frames them “as exercises [in preparing] to be the ultimate, creative voice [for the] expression” of Ubuntu Rap.<sup>125</sup> Fundamentally, the Umfundisi Rap Technique considers Rap to be “a transformative agent [that] helps to bring an entire universe into focus.” As a “conduit to the spirit world, [Rap] is [an] enabler of ceremonies” as it “[provides] insights [into] death, herald[s] of birth and [is] the intoxicant at celebrations.”

Even in naming, the Umfundisi Rap Technique strives to establish particular artistic and cultural standards and intentions in a manner analogous to Umfundalai. In Afrikan culture, the act of naming brings an abstract concept into a spiritual and physical actuality through the generative power of *Nommo*. Furthermore, names themselves are “are chosen for their special meaning, power, and source [...] and can serve as an indicator of destiny [as] an edifying emblem.”<sup>126</sup> As such, Afrikan culture maintains that

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>126</sup> Afe Adogame, “Naming,” in *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, ed. Molefi Asante and Ama Mazama, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412964623.n275>.

“a name is perceived as meaningless if it [...] has no links to a spiritual source, does not evoke a narrative, and is not linked to any historical events or landmarks.”<sup>127</sup> Thus, the intentional naming of the Umfundisi Rap Technique aims to represent the illumination of a methodology for Afrikan cultural expressions rooted in Afrocentric pedagogy. Specifically, the Umfundisi Rap Technique intends to serve art, and act, of Rap in a manner comparable to how the Umfundalai technique serves the artistic and cultural discipline of Afrikan dance. Welsh-Asante notes *umfundalai* is a Kiswahili word with an English translation meaning “essence” and that the significance of the technique’s name was its reflection of “the goal [...] to excavate the essence of African dances in their multifarious forms.”<sup>128</sup> To that effect, *umfundisi* is an isiZulu word with an English translation meaning “teacher”. This is representative of both of the Umfundisi Rap Technique’s goals: firstly, to unearth and spotlight the Afrocentric pedagogical potential of Rap and, second, to provide a methodology for Rap practitioners (a.k.a Rappers) to act upon such potential and serve beneficially as community knowledge-sharers and storytellers dedicated to harmony, sustainability, and balance.

With such a theoretical and practical relationship between both techniques, the Umfundisi Rap Technique also recognizes a few potential drawbacks that are similar to those in to Welsh-Asante’s Umfundalai. In particular, Welsh-Asante discusses how it is possible to consider that “the very nature of [the] spontaneity and energy, and the context of ritualism and ceremonialism seem[s] to discourage a technical approach to” Afrikan

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<sup>127</sup> Welsh and Nance, 7.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

artistic expression.<sup>129</sup> Likewise, the development of a theoretical framework and 20-item Likert type scale for Rappers to apply to processes that often command increased veneration for spontaneity and improvisation may also seem antithetical. However, it is a “confusion and ignorance as well as [an] ethnocentrism surround[ing] the perception” of Rap that would consider intentionality and forethought to be contradictory with instinctiveness and intuition.<sup>130</sup> Mirroring the Umfundalai technique’s “form[ation of] a technical base for students, teachers, and choreographers who wish to work in the African dance vernacular,”<sup>131</sup> the Umfundisi Rap Technique arranges for a practical guide for Rap’s verbal choreographers and students of rhetoric to learn to understand and appreciate its context of Afrikan values, spirituality, and philosophical reflection while using their voices as vehicles of expression.

### **Ruth Reviere’s Afrocentric Research Methodology**

In establishing a methodological approach to the scientific discovery, emphasis, production, and retention of knowledge & information, Ruth Reviere outlined the five Afrocentric criteria that any and all research endeavors should seek to abide by to combat “interpretations [that] are inevitably colored by European views [and] investigate pertinent research questions legitimately and effectively (that is, truthfully and inclusively).”<sup>132</sup> The Umfundisi Rap Technique and the theory of Ubuntu Rap are undergirded by the notion that to Rap is to research and reflect. That is, the act and art of

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Reviere, 709.

Rapping involves, if not requires, the interrogation of one's own physical and/or social circumstances and reveals one's worldview through the conscious and subconscious signaling of their psychosocial location. As such, the framing of the art and act of Rapping as a form of social science research is an additional theoretical outcome of this project's construction of the Umfundisi Rap Technique. Moreover, the resulting conclusion of considering Rap to be a form of social science research through introspection and sociocultural reflection is that, by utilizing *ukweli*, *utulivu*, *uhaki*, *ujamaa*, and *kujitua* as a methodology, "the [Rapper, as an] Afrocentric researcher, [is able to] harmonize diverse African values and experiences into a coherent and comprehensive [...] Afrocentric place [and] perspective that allows the researcher to put African ideals and values at the center"<sup>133</sup> of their personal and societal inquiries that inform the development of their lyrics.

Reviere's first criteria, *ukweli*, is of significant importance to both the methodology of this project and to the Umfundisi Rap Technique's methods. Representing "truth in intellectual inquiry [...] grounded in the experiences of the community," *ukweli* serves as a critical point of emphasis in its essentiality to the theory and praxis of the Umfundisi Rap Technique. Not only is community, along with harmony and sustainability, one of three core Afrocentric ethical values at the center of the Umfundisi Rap Technique's philosophical orientation but the scientific notion of accountability that *ukweli* underscores is the primary practical objective of the accordingly named Ukweli Grounding. As the first step of the Umfundisi Rap Technique, the Ukweli Grounding is meant to provide opportunity for introspection and intention-

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 712-713.

setting (especially compared with the Utulivu Check-In as an opportunity for retrospection). By preceding one's lyrics with the isiZulu phrase "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*", the initial generative power of a Rapper's *Nommo* is used to imagine, actualize, and venerate their symbiotic connection with the Afrikan cultural communal consciousness and the reciprocal relationship between the Afrikan individual and the collective Afrikan community. Moreover, the vulnerability of establishing intentions through verbal commitment in the Ukweli Grounding subsequently demands that a Rapper "open oneself up to critical self-examination and self-reflection" and, consequently, honor the value of the Utulivu Check-In's retrospection and accountability.<sup>134</sup>

Characterized as "the concept of justice required for legitimate research," the Afrocentric research convention known as *utulivu* also substantially informs the methodology of both this dissertation project as well as the Umfundisi Rap Technique.<sup>135</sup> As Reviere notes, abiding by the concept of *utulivu* "requires that the researcher actively avoid creating, exaggerating, or sustaining divisions between or within communities but rather strive to create harmonious relationships between and within these groups."<sup>136</sup> Thus, as a theoretical philosophy, *utulivu* epitomizes *Ma'at* in many significant and intricately meaningful manners. In addition to Reviere's definition directly calling upon and referencing two of Karenga's Seven Cardinal Virtues of *Ma'at* in justice and harmony, it also incorporates the essence of two additional delineations of *Ma'at* in

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 715.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 717.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

describing the necessity for an approach to scientific research grounded in balance and reciprocity. This emphasis on the methodological importance of justice, harmony, balance, and reciprocity is an indispensable foundational element to the intentions and purposes of this dissertation project, with the concept of harmony in particular serving this project's primary intellectual and social beacon as well as another one of the three core Afrocentric ethical values at the center of the Umfundisi Rap Technique's philosophical orientation. Ultimately, the magnitude of value and relevance of *utulivu* to this project and the Umfundisi Rap Technique is highlighted most prominently by the Umfundisi Rap Technique's Utulivu Check-In. As the Umfundisi Rap Technique's second step and the retrospective complement to the Ukweli Grounding's initial intention-setting aspect, the Utulivu Check-In provides Rappers with the space to reflect on the actual (and potential) psychosocial impacts of their lyrical expressions and critically interrogate their lyrics' alignment with the Afrocentric ethical values of community, harmony, and sustainability. Despite this project considering all three ethical values of similar weight in terms of importance to the wellness of Afrika, her people, and the Earth itself, it is also noteworthy to consider the centrality of harmony itself to the Afrocentric praxis of care and stewardship that informs the overall Afrikan cultural (and spiritual) approach toward community and sustainability. In the same manner, harmony also can be considered as the philosophical purpose, intention, and function of *Ma'at*: the notions of truth, justice, balance, order, reciprocity, and propriety serve as spiritual and societal guideposts toward a harmonious existence between all physical and metaphysical entities.

In fact, Reviere's presentations of *uhaki* and *ujamaa* as two additional Afrocentric research conventions further reinforce the intellectual importance of both community and

harmony. This intellectual reinforcement thus bolsters this project's determination of community and harmony as two of the three core Afrocentric ethical values. For "the recognition and maintenance of community [to be] a requirement of Afrocentric research"<sup>137</sup> as *ujamaa* calls for means the prioritization of a community-oriented approach to being; that, according to *uhaki*, the Afrocentric researcher must "always [remain] cognizant of the interests of other[s] [...] and strive for the encouragement and maintenance of harmonious relationships"<sup>138</sup> is to specify harmony as the philosophical and practical frame of reference for an Afrocentric, community-oriented worldview. In conjunction, *uhaki* and *ujamaa* characterize the Umfundisi Rap Technique's groundedness in the reciprocal, care-based notion of *Ubuntu* while also representing this dissertation project's community-oriented intentions in constructing a kind of rhetorical approach that reinforces Afrocentric considerations of community, harmony, and sustainability.

The *kujitoa* principle, as the fifth of Reviere's methodological requirements for Afrocentric research, embodies the need for the researcher themselves to appropriately reckon with the influence of their own contexts and past experiences. It is a solicitation for "the researcher's being aware and honest about how one's own beliefs, values, and biases affect the research process."<sup>139</sup> As Reviere contends,

objectivity is an impossible ideal[.] [Thus,] the researcher should present sufficient information about herself or himself to enable readers to assess how, and to what extent, the researcher's presence influenced the choice, conduct, and

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 719.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 720.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 716.

outcomes of the research. The inclusion of the personal is therefore necessary for Afrocentric research.<sup>140</sup>

With regard to the Umfundisi Rap Technique, *kujitua* enhances the methodological integrity of the Ukweli Grounding and the Utulivu Check-In and reinforces the validity of their results/data. By engaging with both steps of the Umfundisi Rap Technique in a way that values authenticity and credibility and eschews the need to construct inaccurate, unreliable, and/or non-culturally relevant personal narratives throughout the introspective and retrospective process of lyrical formation, a Rapper imbues additional veracity into their Umfundisi Rap Technique praxis and further increases the utility of the Ubuntu Rap Theory.

As it pertains to this dissertation project and the overall development of the Ubuntu Rap Theory and the Umfundisi Rap Technique, *kujitua* also provides added rationale for the exposition of my own location/personal contexts as the primary researcher in this scientific endeavor. As it were, many factors have played a part in the forming of the ideas and sentiments that eventually led to this project's creation. Some of my earliest musical influences involve passive/secondary exposures through my immediate family and surrounding community, including: varying sub-genres of R&B, funk, and soul from my mother, Fuji music from my father, Southern/"Dirty South" Rap and 2000's-era Nigerian R&B from my older siblings as well as late-1990's/early-2000's American pop music from my younger sibling, and an assortment of 2010's-era & contemporary Nigerian Rappers from several aunts. In addition, conventional media distribution sources, including FM radio, video games, and television, also introduced me to particularly memorable influences that resonated especially significantly, including

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 714.

songs like “Mr Wendal” by Arrested Development, “They Reminisce Over You (T.R.O.Y.)” by Pete Rock & CL Smooth, and “Changes” by 2Pac as well as local Go-Go artists such as Chuck Brown & The Soul Searchers, Experience Unlimited (E.U.), Junk Yard Band, Rare Essence, and Critical Condition Band (CCB). As adolescence brought forth slowly increasing levels of autonomy, the beginnings of my active musical research/discovery phase in the mid-to-late 2000s saw my library expand to include works within the “Backpack Rap” sub-genre (featuring those by artists such as Lupe Fiasco, Wale, Kanye West, J. Cole, Childish Gambino, Kendrick Lamar, and Chance the Rapper) as well as a widening gamut of other individuals, including Los, Snow Tha Product, 2 Chainz, and Lil Wayne. Crucially, the documentary film *Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap*, directed by Ice-T and released in 2012, was perhaps the most significant and consequential singular contribution to the development of my musical interests, in terms of both quantity and (perceived) quality: entire discographies of Rap artists and groups such as Rakim, Mos Def, KRS-One, Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, Common, A Tribe Called Quest, Wu-Tang Clan, and Missy Elliott were incorporated into my ever-expanding repository and began to define the boundaries of my core preferences. These core preferences served as foundation for the experimentation and exploration that took place during the initial chapters of my adulthood that involved my own forays into lyrical composition along with additional pilgrimages through the handiwork of Noname, Black Thought, Big K.R.I.T., Rapsody, Vince Staples, Rico Nasty, Migos, Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion, ScHoolboy Q, Warren G, Nate Dogg, EPMD, Tierra Whack, GoldLink, D Smoke, Camp Lo, De La Soul, Jean Grae, OutKast, EarthGang, Kamaiyah, Leikeli47, 21 Savage, Stormzy, Digital Underground, Damien Marley, Lil Baby, People Under The

Stairs, Monie Love, Ladybug Mecca, Naughty by Nature, YZ, and Little Simz. All of these influences, combined, have resulted in a predilection and contemporary yearning for the likes of a specific selection of individual Rappers and Rap groups, including Little Brother, Arrested Development, Gang Starr, Bahamadia, Jungle Brothers, Digable Planets, Pete Rock & CL Smooth, Tobe Nwigwe, Jeru the Damaja, Heavy D & The Boyz, Souls of Mischief/Hieroglyphics, and Freestyle Fellowship. Ultimately, such yearnings were the underlying driving force behind my intentions to imagine Ubuntu Rap as a particular canon/sub-genre of Rap grounded in Afrikan cultural ethical notions and construct an Afrocentric research project that envisions the Umfundisi Rap Technique as a valid practical approach to the production of Ubuntu Rap.

### **From Lynchcapped to Umfundi to Ubuntu**

The primary intention of the Umfundisi Rap Technique is to provide a functionally relevant methodology for a process of forming and expressing Rap lyrics that is rooted in *Ma'at* and, to accomplish this, the Umfundisi Technique is composed of two exercises. Firstly, the Ukweli Grounding establishes that the intentions of one's lyrics as they express them are grounded in a truthful approach to self-expression that seeks to use *Nommo* in service of the health and well-being of their Afrikan cultural heritage. Whereas the Ukweli Grounding preemptively centers one's intentions on Afrocentric ethical values of community, harmony, and sustainability, the Umfundisi Technique's second exercise, the Utulivu Check-In, allows for a follow-up opportunity to reflect upon the ethical values expressed in one's Rap lyrics and hold one's lyrics accountable to the Ukweli Grounding. It also provides a more detailed and intentional means for a Rapper to gauge the Afrocentric ethical orientation of their lyrics according to three categories of

Rap as put forth by the Ubuntu Rap Theory: “Lynchcapped Rap”, “Umfundi Rap”, and “Ubuntu Rap”.

As a form of lyrical expression in Rap that fuels & is fueled by the exploitation of Afrikan culture and the eradication of Afrikan physical, mental, and spiritual agency, Lynchcapped Rap represents especially dangerous threat to the wellness and safety of Afrikan people. The production and expression of Lynchcapped Rap requires a manipulation of Nommo (the generative power of the spoken word) in service of the international European colonial imperialist project. The term “lynchcapped” itself is a combination of the two kinds of texts produced by Afrikans that have been robbed of their cultural communal consciousness and remain distanced from an Afrikan-centered identity. Ergo, Lynchcapped Rap, as a psychosocial location, is rooted in an ethical orientation expressed through Rap lyrics that embraces anti-Afrikan cultural values and, functionally, is a rhetorical praxis that strives to omit or obscure any Afrikan cultural roots. As it correlates to the Utulivu Check-In, Lynchcapped Rap is the lyrical expression of enthusiastic dissent from/opposition to Afrocentric ethical notions of community, harmony, and sustainability. Moreover, while this project proposes the Umfundisi Rap Technique as a tool for use in the future, it is crucial to the imagination of Ubuntu Rap and Umfundi Rap as well as the prevention of Lynchcapped Rap to consider/evaluate some bodies of work that already exist. As such, this project offers “Gangsta Gangsta” by N.W.A. and “Country Grammar (Hot Shit)” by Nelly as songs that contain Lynchcapped Rap lyrical precedents.

On the opposite end of Rap’s ethical expression spectrum is Ubuntu Rap, which is the intended artistic objective of the Umfundisi Rap Technique. It is the most ideal use of

*Nommo* in Rap, thoroughly embodying a “trueness of voice” rooted in fundamental Afrikan cultural values. Ubuntu Rap is emphatic in its Afrocentric orientation and grounding in *Ma’at* as the fundamental organizing principle of the universe, connecting all things and beings. Functionally, Ubuntu Rap is a rhetorical vehicle dedicated to the self-expression of Afrikan culture, grounded in an Afronographic approach, and oriented toward *ukweli*, *utulivu*, *uhaki*, *ujamaa*, and *kujitoa*. As the desired result of both the Ukweli Grounding and the Utulivu Check-In together as the Umfundisi Technique, Ubuntu Rap is a lyrical canon that establishes community, harmony, and sustainability as its central intellectual and ethical tenets. The relevance of *Ubuntu* as a Bantu spiritual and social concept (and, thus, an extension of Ntuology) to the Umfundisi Technique is readily apparent in the Ukweli Grounding’s verbal affirmation and commitment to the philosophy, as the illocutionary use of *Nommo* actualizes the Afrocentric spiritual connection between the Afrikan individual and the Afrikan communal consciousness. This project suggests “Blackman in Effect” by Boogie Down Productions (BDP), “Police State” by Dead Prez, and “How We Gonna Make The Black Nation Rise” by Brother D with Collective Effort as songs that contain Ubuntu Rap lyrical precedents.

Situated between Lynchcapped Rap and Ubuntu Rap, Umfundi Rap is a category of acknowledgement of the rose of Afrocentric intention beginning its journey of growth and discovery through the jagged, scabrous concrete that is Europe’s centuries-long effort to physically and psychologically subjugate Afrika and her people. Umfundi Rap represents the start of the unlearning process of the kind of internalized anti-Afrikan notions that result in Lynchcapped Rap, particularly concepts that exist within/support psychological frameworks that intend to devalue Afrikan culture and strip agency from

Afrikan people. Functionally, Umfundi Rap is an artistic canon that is, to at least some degree, grounded in an Afronographic approach to the construction of Rap lyrics. While still exhibiting certain symptoms of the ills of living as an oppressed peoples within the colonial framework of Europe's cultural hegemony, Umfundi Rap is a form of lyrical expression centered in an Afrikan identity with an increasingly tightening grasp on the fundamental right to physical and psychological agency for all throughout the Afrikan diaspora, regardless of gender, ability, sexual orientation, or economic status. The category of Umfundi Rap receives its name from the term in isiZulu that, translated into English, means "learner". Whereas the Umfundisi Technique intends to inform Rappers of an ideal ethical framework to be expressed lyrically, expressions that are categorized as Umfundi Rap indicate the existence of progress in such efforts to inform oneself in service of a personal psychosocial reorientation toward an ethical framework grounded in *Ma'at*. This project offers "Everything's Gonna Be Alright (Ghetto Bastard)" by Naughty by Nature and "Why" by Jadakiss as songs with Umfundi Rap lyrical precedents.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE UMFUNDISI TECHNIQUE, PART ONE - UKWELI GROUNDING

#### Psychological Spaces and Located Places

Location theory, as put forth by Dr. Asante, is this project's most indispensable theoretical underpinning and provides the greatest amount of methodological buttressing for the argument of a psychological relationship between a person's speech & actions and their cultural (and spiritual) grounding. At its core, location theory maintains that there are intentional and unintentional indicators in one's speech and actions that reveal one's worldview/philosophical orientations. Consequently, sociological analyses of phenomena through a framework grounded in location theory result in opportunities to examine & interrogate the "distance" between a person's expressed worldview and psychosocial orientation (i.e., their location) and their cultural center. Location theory holds that, for an artist to be "centered", "the principal conscious references of the artist should be those of the congruent culture, that is, the culture out of which the artist has [their] history,"<sup>141</sup> and, contrarily, that "dislocation" arises when "a person is unable to see his or her own cultural basis"<sup>142</sup>. When applied in service of the contextualization of the history of the Afrikan person and Afrikan culture, location theory subsequently defines Afrikan cultural centeredness as an "understanding of continuity with Africa in terms of philosophy and mythology [that does] not deny the contextual immediacy of the African American

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<sup>141</sup> Molefi Kete Asante, "Location Theory and African Aesthetics," in *The African Aesthetic: Keeper of the Traditions*, ed. Kariamuwelsh-Asante, Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies, no. 153. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1993, 60.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

aesthetic experience, but rather present[s] the African American aesthetic in the tradition of its African origin.”<sup>143</sup> This also means that, as a result of “individuals and entire groups of people [being] misoriented through propaganda and lack of factual knowledge about their own history,”<sup>144</sup> Afrikan psychosocial dislocation manifests primarily as a “discontinuous, corrupted and distorted”<sup>145</sup> spiritual and intellectual connectedness with Afrikan culture.

With location theory in tow, the process of examining such indicators and psychological signposts begins to reflect “a process of explaining how human beings come to make [and express their] decisions about the external world which takes into consideration all of [their] attitudes and behaviors.”<sup>146</sup> The benefit of a person being culturally centered in the approach to making and expressing their decisions is that

the person closest to the center of [their] culture is better able to utilize all of the elements of that culture for the presentation of an idea, that is, the creative production of the idea. [...Thus,] the centered person is most capable of producing an artistic product that is congruent with [their] core culture.<sup>147</sup>

Creative expression from an Afrikan centeredness that is also congruent with an Afrocentric orientation produces ideas, designs, and ingenuities that reaffirm Afrika as unquestionably relevant and bountiful wellspring of intellect and art. This kind of creative expression is what this project seeks to affirm in its definition of Ubuntu Rap, which seeks to combat the “oppression and exploitation [that] may dislocate and disorient but

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 60.

can never destroy the archaic, ancient, deep structure of the myths and symbols”<sup>148</sup> as well as the “sporadic discussions of the nature of African aesthetics [that] have been informed by either bad historical or poor philosophical insights.”<sup>149</sup>As it relates to Rap, these discussions reflect “certain antihuman behaviors by some individuals [and] a flood of images and ideas about how nihilistic we have become[,] the realities of violence and other destructive behaviors” and are greatly amplified through countless media channels that seek to reinforce the European cultural hegemony.<sup>150</sup> To this end, this project constructs the canon of Lynchcapped Rap, defining it as the manifestation of these dislocated, poorly informed, and ahistorical representations of Afrikan aesthetics in/through Rap lyricism & imagery. Lynchcapped Rap represents the Afrikan griot that “[has] been moved off [their] own platforms”.<sup>151</sup> It also serves as an illustration of Rap being forced to “exist in borrowed space”<sup>152</sup> in a way that reduces the Afrocentric identity of Rap (“the force that created Malcolm was the same force that created hip hop—a visceral energy aimed at transforming (or at least voicing) the conditions of oppressed

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>150</sup> Asante, *Afrocentric Idea Revised*, 7.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

people”<sup>153</sup>) and prevents Rappers from “standing in [their] own cultural spaces”<sup>154</sup> as they interrogate their experiences and navigate their surroundings:

How can one, for instance, dialogue progressively about gender issues within a space dominated by sexism and phallocentrism? Or take seriously notions of cooperative or participatory economics within a space that espouses guerrilla capitalism? Or talk seriously about the end of war—over there and right here—within a space that promotes violence?<sup>155</sup>

### **The Ukweli Grounding**

As the first exercise in the Umfundisi Rap Technique, the Ukweli Grounding represents the beginning of the ideological and functional processes that ultimately result in a Rapper producing Ubuntu Rap. It is an illocutionary act, one that both foreshadows and actualizes an Afrocentric ethical orientation grounded in *Ma’at*. It serves to establish a rhetorical foundation for the lyrical veneration of community, harmony, and sustainability in a manner that contends with the hegemonic discrediting and rejection of Afrikan culture and intellect. The Ukweli Grounding is accomplished by verbally declaring, “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”, prior to any given set/full arrangement of lyrics. The words that constitute the Ukweli Grounding are an isiZulu phrase, with an approximate English translation of “a person is a person because of other persons,”<sup>156</sup> but often presented alternatively as, “a person is a person through other people” or, perhaps most notably, “I am because we are.” As an axiological philosophy known as *Ubuntu*,

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<sup>153</sup> Asante, Jr., 10.

<sup>154</sup> Asante, *Afrocentric Idea Revised*, 8.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>156</sup> Munyaradzi Felix Murove, “Ubuntu,” *Diogenes* 59, no. 3–4 (2012): 36–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192113493737>, 37.

this concept has long since spread beyond any linguistic boundaries to exist as a truly Pan-Afrikan “insight [...] based on the idea that[,] as human beings[,] we depend on other human beings to attain ultimate wellbeing.”<sup>157</sup> It serves as an “expression of a harmonious community way of life in which one’s happiness is linked to the group’s happiness”<sup>158</sup>; thus, to acknowledge that “a person is a person through other people” is to acknowledge “the reality of [people’s] dependence and interdependence with each other.”<sup>159</sup> To the extent that this reciprocal relationship between the individual and the collective also requires a certain praxis,

Ubuntu means humanness – treating other people with kindness, compassion, respect and care. These virtues are usually referred to as the summation of Ubuntu or humanness. [...] Hence, failure to act humanely towards other people is thus considered as a lack of humanness or lack of Ubuntu.<sup>160</sup>

Thus, the Ukweli Grounding is an intentional verbal affirmation of “the attention [with] which another person gives to another person [...] an attitude of kindness, courtesy, consideration and respect”; especially through its incorporation into the art/act of Rap, the Ukweli Grounding seeks to situate the lyrics that are to be expressed afterward firmly within a liberatory Afrocentric artistic functional purpose.<sup>161</sup>

The Ukweli Grounding establishes a Rapper’s intention to align their lyrics in accordance with an Afrocentric ethical system rooted in *Ma’at* and oriented toward a

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Serges Djoyou Kanga, “Cultural Values as a Source of Law: Emerging Trends of Ubuntu Jurisprudence in South Africa,” *African Human Rights Law Journal* 18, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.17159/1996-2096/2018/v18n2a9>, 626.

<sup>159</sup> Murove, 37.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 45.

reverence for community, harmony, and sustainability. To this end, the invocation of *Ubuntu* and the notion of interdependence provides further Afrikan cultural relevance and intellectual context for how a rhetorical emphasis on community, harmony, and sustainability is beneficial to humans' interpersonal affairs as well as the well-being of Earth itself and all of its inhabitants. From a redefined mindset toward economics, finance, and wealth:

*Ubuntu* is based on the idea that material equality rests on the principle of sufficiency. The individual thrives for sufficiency because s/he regards others as brothers and sisters whose needs are to be met in equal measure as one's own. People helped each other on the understanding that the present predicament of the other person is my predicament in the future,<sup>162</sup>

to necessary reconsiderations of Western “human-environment segregation” phenomena:

*Ubuntu* disengages from western ways of knowing about human–environment interactions, as it is predicated on promoting the many links between humans and nonhumans. [It argues for] harmony between human beings and physical nature, as practices of individualistic, excessive extractions of nonhuman nature are discouraged, and human–nonhuman relationships based on respect, solidarity, and collaboration are celebrated<sup>163</sup> [...] Instead of extractive, capitalist logics, *Ubuntu* and its strong respect for other beings and all of nonhuman nature can help justify morally and ethically shifting away from infinite wealth accumulation for the benefit of people and planet,<sup>164</sup>

*Ubuntu* offers an expansive repository of liberatory social, cultural, and political remedies that “could help organise effective dialogues to [better] [...] resolve disputes and conflicts

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>163</sup> Mathew Bukhi Mabele, Judith E Krauss, and Wilhelm Kiwango, “Going Back to the Roots: Ubuntu and Just Conservation in Southern Africa,” *Conservation and Society* 20, no. 2 (2022): 92, [https://doi.org/10.4103/cs.cs\\_33\\_21](https://doi.org/10.4103/cs.cs_33_21), 92.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 99.

and protect the interests of vulnerable community members based on gender, income, (dis)ability, and intergenerationality.”<sup>165</sup>

The Ukweli Grounding initiates a Rapper’s lyrics into a particular kind of rhetorical undertaking: the utilization of the generative power of the word (i.e., *Nommo*) through an Afrocentric praxis of care and collectivity in a manner that recognizes the value of community, harmony, and sustainability to the past, present, and future of our Earth. The notions of community, harmony, and sustainability are themselves intricately interwoven and interdependent in many ways. Most fundamentally, they each nourish, and are nourished by, an Afrocentric “worldview of relationality” calling for “us to exist within a perpetual state of symbiosis with others in the past, present, and future.”<sup>166</sup> This is the psychosocial benefit of *Ubuntu* to the art, and act, of Rap: as “an ethic of care predicated on the practices of mutuality and sharing” and the “[articulation of] the human interconnectedness and dignity which an individual has toward other beings,” *Ubuntu* is a framework that unceasingly reaffirms the reciprocal relationship between an individual and their environment (physical and spiritual).<sup>167</sup> Thus, the Ukweli Grounding is an intellectual grounding in an Afrocentric ethical framework as well as an opportunity to manifest an Afrocentric praxis of care and collectivity through Rap.

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Murove, 37.

<sup>167</sup> Mabele, Krauss, and Kiwango, 96.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE UMFUNDISI TECHNIQUE, PART TWO - UTULIVU CHECK-IN

#### Kingdom of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index

Dr. Asante's inquisitions into the psychosocial predispositions and philosophical objectives of an author through Location Theory raised further key questions: if an author's language, attitude, and direction can be interpreted and/or inferred based on their expressed proximity to/distance from an Afrocentric psychology, could there then be a way to quantifiably measure "location"? Moreover, what might "signals" look like and, also, how exactly might "signposts" (i.e., "words") and the manner of one's use of language relate to their underlying attitudes and directions? On an even grander scale, such readings of Location Theory could also call into question if even the expression of *Ma'at* itself, as a kind of psychosocial well-being, could somehow be measured?

In support of this study's attempt to address, if not answer, such queries, the Kingdom of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index provided a significant theoretical framework for "a scientific tool [intended] to convey more fully the colour and texture of people's lives"<sup>168</sup> while also attempting to "orient the people and the nation towards happiness, primarily by improving the conditions of not-yet-happy people."<sup>169</sup> Especially crucial is the inclusion of both "harmony with nature [...] and concern for

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<sup>168</sup> Karma Ura et al., *An Extensive Analysis of GNH Index*, (Thimphu: Centre for Bhutan Studies, 2012), 5.

<sup>169</sup> Karma Ura et al., *A Short Guide to Gross National Happiness Index*, (Thimphu: Centre for Bhutan Studies, 2012), 1.

others”<sup>170</sup> into a multi-faceted, holistic working definition of “happiness” as a kind of doctrine that “should be pursued as a common public good [and] viewed not only through the lens of economics but also from spiritual, social, cultural and ecological perspectives.”<sup>171</sup> This stated goal for the GNH Index to, “through public action, expand the wellbeing and true happiness of its people” stemmed from a core philosophy at the intersection of society, history, culture, and policy held by those responsible for the governance of Bhutan that maintained that, “if the government cannot create happiness for its people, [then] there is no purpose for the government to exist.”<sup>172</sup> Thus, from both a theoretical and a practical (i.e., functional) perspective, the GNH Index represents a quantitative valuation (and evaluation) of a kind of physical, spiritual, and cultural wellness, which contributed greatly to this project’s capacity to imagine a healing/wellness calibration tool for Rap lyrics rooted in *Ma’at* and oriented toward *Ubuntu*.

Furthermore, certain components of the GNH Index’s underlying methodology, namely the Alkire-Foster (AF) Method, supplied this project with a starting point regarding the nature/design of the Utulivu Check-In and the specifics of its procedure. As an oft-employed approach to the quantitative measurement of societal concepts/phenomena with high degrees of nuance and interrelatedness, the Alkire-Foster Method is a “simple, rigorous and decomposable methodology [...] that can be used to measure poverty or wellbeing.”<sup>173</sup> Although the Alkire-Foster Method itself is comprised of a

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<sup>170</sup> Ura et al., *An Extensive Analysis of GNH Index*, 8.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 27.

meticulous and intricate series of calculations, formulas, and procedures, a number of its individual steps/components are fundamental for preserving the accuracy and validity of any scientific attempt to quantitatively measure psychosocial perspectives and other phenomena usually examined strictly through a qualitative framework. Four of the Alkire-Foster Method's early procedural steps served as examples of how to initially approach the structuring of the Utulivu Check-In as a valid and accurate quantitative tool. The first step calls for the determination of the measurement tool's unit of analysis; for most measurements employing the Alkire-Foster Method (including the GNH Index), the unit of analysis is often the individual person. For the Utulivu Check-In, the unit of analysis is the individual, self-contained work of composed Rap lyrics known as a "song". The second step involves the determination of the measurement tool's dimensions. As it pertains to the GNH Index, "the core dimensions are regarded as [the] components of happiness in Bhutan."<sup>174</sup> To this extent, the GNH Index is designed with the intention that "'happiness' [means] having sufficient achievements in each of the nine dimensions."<sup>175</sup> Accordingly, the Utulivu Check-In's three core dimensions of community, harmony, and sustainability are considered the central and most essential defining characteristics of the Afrocentric ethical essence that connects *Ma'at* and *Ubuntu*. The third and final step that contributed to this project is the establishment of sufficiency cutoffs. The sufficiency cutoffs as applied in the GNH Index make it so that "it is possible to distinguish between those people who have attained a 'sufficient' level

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<sup>174</sup> Sabina Alkire, "Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index: Methodology and Results," *Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI)*, OPHI Research in Progress, no. 5a (2008), 3.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

of achievement and those whose attainments fall short of sufficiency.”<sup>176</sup> Given the inherent subjectiveness of certain aspects of this project’s development, it is especially important to note, as the developers of the GNH Index do, that “the level at which the sufficiency cutoff is set is a value judgment [...], but the fact that it may be difficult to set an exact cutoff should not obscure the reasonableness of setting some sufficiency cutoff.”<sup>177</sup> These considerations informed the approach to response valuation and the categorization of Lynchcapped Rap, Umfundi Rap, and Ubuntu Rap that this project employed and is discussed in further detail later in Chapter 4.

### **Obasi, Flores, and James-Myers’s Worldview Analysis Scale**

As the structure and functional design of the Utulivu Check-In developed, Obasi, Flores, and James-Myers’s Worldview Analysis Scale (WAS) greatly contributed to this project’s ability to quantifiably measure a person’s proximity to an Afrocentric location by providing a model for “an instrument designed to assess the way in which people perceive, think, feel, and experience the world.”<sup>178</sup> Ultimately, that is the Umfundisi Rap Technique’s purpose and functional aspect: what routes can Rappers draw to navigate their way across the map of language & human speech toward a kind of *maa kheru*, or “trueness of voice”, designation? On top of that, the Worldview Analysis Scale also addressed several additional research questions that arose throughout this project’s development: if it were possible to measure a person’s psychosocial attitude and

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ezemenari M. Obasi, Lisa Y. Flores, and Linda James-Myers, “Construction and Initial Validation of the Worldview Analysis Scale (WAS),” *Journal of Black Studies* 39, no. 6 (2009): 937–61, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934707305411>, 937.

direction, then could there be a way to gauge what kinds of cultural notions an author's location is nearest to? Precisely how does language translate into attitude and direction? Can proximity to (or distance from) an Afrocentric psychology be determined based on language? By providing insights and resolutions toward these inquiries, the Worldview Analysis Scale greatly assisted this project's ability to construct and examine "measurable dimensions of worldview associated with an African and European worldview orientation, such as perceptions of the universe, spirituality, immortality, communalism, knowledge of self, reality, and indigenous value systems."<sup>179</sup>

The process of item selection for the Utulivu Check-In was aided by the nature of the Worldview Analysis Scale's investigation into "the way in which people are socialized to perceive, think, feel, and experience the world."<sup>180</sup> As an "articulat[ion of] the basic philosophical assumptions, values, and beliefs underlying culture and expressed through various structural or institutional manifestations"<sup>181</sup>, the notion of worldview can be further delineated "into five philosophical constructs: cosmology (nature of the universe), epistemology (theory of knowledge), ontology (connection of psychological facts with reality), axiology (science of values), and teleology (theory that things act for an end purpose)."<sup>182</sup> These philosophical constructs, both separately and in conjunction with each other, informed the Umfundisi Rap Technique's ability to provide "information

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 939.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 937.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 937-938.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 939.

that is reliable, valid, and applicable for those interested in providing culturally congruent” Rap lyrics.<sup>183</sup>

### **The Utulivu Check-In**

The Utulivu Check-In<sup>184</sup> is a 5-point Likert-type scale for the self-assessment of a body of Rap lyrics for an ethical orientation grounded in Ubuntu Rap’s three central principles: community, harmony, and sustainability. The 20-item Utulivu Check-In provides a means for Rappers to not only gauge the use of their verbal power as it relates to their expressed intentions from the Ukweli Grounding, but to ultimately hold themselves accountable to the standard of “good speech” and “no harmless words” that is central to the art/act of Rap’s Afrocentric essence. Of the 20 items, 13 were adapted from items in the Worldview Analysis Scale. Those 13 items<sup>185</sup> were further categorized to represent a pool of 7 items pertaining to the Afrocentric ethical notion of harmony<sup>186</sup> and 6 items pertaining to the Afrocentric ethical notion of community<sup>187</sup>. The 7 additional items (6 items pertaining to the Afrocentric ethical notion of sustainability<sup>188</sup> and 1 more item pertaining to harmony<sup>189</sup>) were generated utilizing an Afrocentric abolitionist lens

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 956.

<sup>184</sup> Table 1.

<sup>185</sup> Items 1-13

<sup>186</sup> Items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 10, and 13

<sup>187</sup> Items 3, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12

<sup>188</sup> Items 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20

<sup>189</sup> Item 14

**Table 1**  
**Utulivu Check-In**

**Directions:** Respond to each prompt as truthfully as you can by marking your level of agreement or disagreement with the prompt’s description of your composition’s lyrics. Please provide only one response to each prompt.

<u>“Through these lyrics, I express that…”</u>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
1. I feel like a spiritual person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. In a way, everything in the universe is joined together by spiritual forces	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Being involved in a community is very important to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Learning about my Afrikan cultural history improves my mental health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Spiritual, mental, and physical health affect one another	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. My spirit will continue to be alive even after my physical body ceases to exist	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Knowledge of my Afrikan cultural history is very important to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. The achievement of my community is more important than my personal achievement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. There are people in my community that I treat like family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. It is possible for some people to learn from spiritual entities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. My ultimate goal is to improve my community’s current condition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. I feel spiritually connected to my ancestors who have paved the way for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Table 1 (continued)**

<u>“Through these lyrics, I express that...”</u>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
13. Some people can cure diseases with words uttered from their mouth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Every person should have full autonomy over their own body	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. I seek to give of myself in a way that reciprocates what I receive from others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. I have a responsibility to care for Earth and its inhabitants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. Reciprocity is vital to the health of a society	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. My individual wealth should accumulate, regardless of the impact on other people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19. My individual well-being is more important than the well-being of the Earth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20. The Earth provides me with endless resources & materials to consume; I do not need to replace what I take	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Scoring:**

Each response has the following value:

Strongly Disagree = -2

Slightly Disagree = -1

Neutral = 0


Slightly Agree = +1

Strongly Agree = +2

To determine Utulivu Check-In results, write the sum of the 20 response values\* in the box to the right and circle the corresponding category

\*For item 18, multiply the response value by -1 (i.e. “Strongly Disagree” = +2, ..., “Strongly Agree” = -2)

Total Sum of Response Values:



Lynchcapped (-40 to 0)

Umfundi (1 to 38)

Ubuntu (39 to 40)

soundly entrenched in opposition to the European hegemony's destruction of the natural environment and abuse of the Earth's finite resources.

The Utulivu Check-In assigns a value to each of the responses ranging from -2 = *strongly disagree* to +2 = *strongly agree* (with 0 = *neutral*). Upon completion of the Utulivu Check-In, the values of the selected responses are added together to determine the Rapper's degree of congruence with their Ukweli Grounding and the proximity of their lyrics to an Afrocentric ethical orientation grounded in *Ma'at*. An Utulivu Check-In with a response value sum from -40 to 0 indicates a production and expression of Lynchcapped Rap. Utulivu Check-In response value sums equal to or greater than 1 but no greater than 38 indicate an artistic canon that is grounded in an Afronographic approach to the construction of Rap lyrics and is in the process of unlearning anti-Afrikan psychosocial notions, which are the parameters of the Umfundi Rap category. Response value sums of 39 and 40 represent the Ubuntu Rap category as the ideal use of *Nommo* in Rap in its veneration of Afrikan culture & agency and its enthusiastic expression of Afrocentric ethical notions of community, harmony, and sustainability. Despite the distribution of sum values across the three categories initially appearing to be heavily skewed toward an extremely limiting minimum requirement for the "Ubuntu" category, this serves to prevent the ability for any lyrical expression categorized as Ubuntu Rap to also "strongly disagree" with any aspect of an ethical framework grounded in *Ma'at* and oriented toward community, harmony, and sustainability.

## CHAPTER 6

### UBUNTU RAP AND THE AFROFUTURE

#### **Future Implications**

While this project brings forth the Umfundisi Technique as a methodology for the construction and production of Ubuntu Rap, a great deal of this project's potential for intellectual, social, and cultural contributions resides in its future iterations and broader applications toward a communal reclamation of Afrikan culture and a socio-political Afrocentric ethical consciousness grounded in *Ma'at*. As the project exists in its current iteration to serve the particular theoretical and scholarly needs of a doctoral dissertation, there are two developments to this project that, together, serve both as epilogue to its current form and prologue to the project's future. The first development is to expand the analysis of the Umfundisi Technique's socio-cultural impact and the depth of its Afrocentric functional aspect through collaboration with other Afrikan individuals involved with the production, promotion, and dissemination of Rap lyrics as well as various sample populations of Afrikan diasporic consumers of Rap. This development would be framed as the "Umfundisi Functional Aspect Call", a combination of filmed interviews and recorded conversations with an assortment of Afrocentric individuals experienced in producing & distributing Rap on the practical feasibility of the Umfundisi Technique and the creative benefits of Ubuntu Rap, and the "Umfundisi Functional Aspect Response", which would feature documented focus groups on the differing psychosocial ramifications of listening to Ubuntu Rap lyrics versus Lynchcapped Rap lyrics. With regards to the advancement of this project's creative and methodological

approaches, the Umfundisi Functional Aspect Call and Response, through both naming and procedure, underscores the essential Afrikan cultural connection between individual creative expression and the communal cultural consciousness. Moreover, the recorded procedures and catalogued results of the Umfundisi Functional Aspect Call and Response would also form the foundation of a documentary film and serve as the cornerstone of multimedia research approach. Documentaries present unique opportunities to construct dynamic narrative experiences and introduce and/or dissect nuanced topics in ways that are digestible to a variety of audiences. For the theory of Ubuntu Rap and the Umfundisi Rap Technique, the ability to deepen the communal imagination and contribute to the realization of “alternative modernities”<sup>190</sup> through an informative storytelling approach would maximize this project’s presence in the actualization of an Afrocentric futurism (i.e. “Afrofutur”) in which Afrika and her peoples have full agency “to contribute to their own imaginary futures [and] dare to imagine a world and a future absent of [Eurocentric] domination or its residual impacts.”<sup>191</sup>

The second planned development for this project involves widening the scope of lyrical sources that this project uses in aggregating the body of existing Rap lyrics used to demonstrate instances of Lynchcapped Rap, Umfundi Rap, and Ubuntu Rap. Specifically,

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<sup>190</sup> D. Soyini Madison maintains that alternative modernities are “ruptures and mediations that create something new or uphold tradition through deliberation and conscious choice [and] question how the past works upon the present and how the past and present merge to create certain consequences and representations of reality.” D. Soyini Madison, *Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511675973>, 43.

<sup>191</sup> Lehasa Moloi, “Chapter 3: Afrocentricity’s Afrofuturism and the Significance of Asserting African Agency in the Pursuit of African Future,” in *Afrocentricity in AfroFuturism: Toward Afrocentric Futurism*, ed. Aaron X. Smith, (University Press of Mississippi, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.7762593>, 87.

the incorporation of copyright-protected Rap lyrics according to appropriate legal and fair use conventions other than those already cited from Bradley and DuBois's *The Anthology of Rap*, including a larger selection of Rap lyrics produced by individuals who reside outside of the United States, would further broaden the project's reach while also presenting more diverse and increasingly refined lyrical examples and representations. Although the United States is an exceptionally prominent leader in the defense and spread of the European cultural and political hegemony, the oppressive conditions and restrictions that seek to subjugate Afrika and her peoples are truly international phenomena. Thus, individuals like the Ugandan-based Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu (also known as Bobi Wine) and Claude "MC Solaar" M'Barali (born in Senegal to parents of Chadian descent before migrating to France) and how they represent diasporic/localized variations of Rap's intrinsic Afrocentric elements could serve future iterations of this project by emphasizing the Pan-African spirit of Rap. Nonetheless, a broader, more international sampling of Rap lyricism would expand the scope of this project's work and impact. Overall, the ability in general for future versions of this project to sample from Rap lyrics not already transcribed in *The Anthology of Rap* would alleviate several of the project's creative restrictions and copyright-related constraints. Essential lyrical works not featured in *The Anthology of Rap* but still possessing considerable theoretical contributions to illustrating the characteristics of Ubuntu Rap include, but are not limited to: "Latifah's Law" by Queen Latifah, "La Femme Fetal" by Digable Planets, and "Hope" by Jadakiss (featuring Anthony Hamilton). Other Rappers with seminal works also excluded from *The Anthology of Rap* include Arrested Development, Bahamadia, D

Smoke, Freestyle Fellowship, Heavy D & The Boyz, Jungle Brothers, Lupe Fiasco, Noname, Rapsody, and Vince Staples.

### **Other Applications**

As it exists in its current form, this project (specifically, the Utulivu Check-In) implies that it is beneficial for Rappers to have the ability to not only examine their present lyrics, but, as they create additional lyrical compositions, to also evaluate how factors such as time, physical environment, and other independent variables might impact/have impacted the results of any given Utulivu Check-In. This project's unit of analysis is the self-contained work known as the song; thus, Rappers consistently utilizing the Utulivu Check-In are able to compare and contrast their Utulivu Check-In responses on a song-to-song (or even, albeit a bit more complicatedly, an album-to-album) basis and reflect upon the nature of their lyrical, and ideological, journey.

Additionally, this project also hopes to serve as reference point for a multitude of varied applications and iterations. One of the most apparent conceptual projects/endeavors is the incorporation of the visual component. The adjacency of the visual alongside the auditory, or the seen alongside the heard, as well as the cultural significance of visual imagery, symbols, and motifs is of great practical and theoretical relevance to the Afrikan person, from the association of *sankofa* and the notions of cultural reverence & reclamation with imagery of birds and motifs of flight to the 'Red-Black-Green' motifs that came to symbolize Pan-Afrikanism and Afrikan liberation. With this in mind, this project puts forth two initial considerations regarding the extension of its scope to include analysis of visuals: firstly, a technique that incorporates a song's accompanying music video (when applicable) and takes into account any influence on the direction and/or

depth of the lyrics' interpretation(s) and, secondly, an approach that endeavors toward some kind of visual representation of *Ubuntu*, that is, how to symbolically communicate the notion of “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” through a particular visual aesthetic or motif. On a more ambitious level, one of the most ideal potential applications for this project in the future involves concerts, block parties, and other communal events and bringing Ubuntu Rap to life in the most organic of ways. There is a great deal of theoretical and practical alignment between Ubuntu Rap and the intentions of community action organizing and other physically & emotionally safe spaces for Afrikan communal joy, healing, and wellness. Furthermore, as contemporary and future technologies increase access and the ability to transverse space and time, there is an increased amount of potential in the metaverse and other digital/pseudo-physical environments that can be utilized to connect people across geographies and generations.

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