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Representin' Singapura: An exploratory research into the characteristics and dynamics of Singapore hip-hop music

By

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the characteristics and dynamics of Singapore hip-hop music. The focus of this study is rap music as the most popular element of hip-hop culture. According to Jaffe (2014), hip-hop practitioners have the same ability as ethnographers to document their environment through their music. This study follows that notion by working upon the idea that music practitioners who are active in the hip-hop scene can give an insight into the Singapore hip-hop scene's progress and effort at maintaining presence in the popular music industry. The study was conducted through a set of qualitative research methods which are interviews, content analysis, and field observation. Interview participants were made up of three rappers, a music producer, and a record label and record store owner. Findings suggest that practitioners are highly influenced by American hip-hop, they also share Osumare's (2015) concept of *connective marginalities* and that there are traces of transculturation in the way that lyrics use multiple languages and are adapted to the Singapore context. Hip-hop is still a growing music genre in the Singapore popular music scene and practitioners are still trying to find their own sound rather than collaborating. There is no sign of it becoming a tool for socio-political movement in Singapore any time soon. Major challenges that hip-hop practitioners face in Singapore's controlled creative environment is censorship and regulations, which hinders the genre from becoming accepted by a wider audience.

<u>Introduction</u>

Hip-hop is a subculture that emerged from a time of political unrest and the lack of jobs for the marginalised communities of African-American and Latin-American people in 1970s Bronx, New York City (Chang, 2005). There are four primary elements in hip-hop which are: *rap*, *deejay-ing* (or DJ-ing), *breakdancing*, and *graffiti* (Ningthoujam, 2008; Williams 2011; Black, 2014; Hare, 2017) with the fifth element considered to be *knowledge* (Ningthoujam, 2008; Malone & Martinez, 2010). Out of all the elements, rap is the most popular element of hip-hop. Rap songs are characterised by the use of spoken words instead of singing and are typically accompanied by music that is neither live or original (Shusterman, 1991). In 2015, Spotify analytics showed that hip-hop is the most popular music genre in the world (Hooton, 2015).

Rap in Singapore can be traced back to 1989, when Dick Lee combined traditional Malay folk song with rap to create the song titled after the same folk song "Rasa Sayang" (1989) for his musical *The Mad Chinaman* (Kong, 1996). It became even more popular in the 1990s as media penetration increased, cable television became more popular, and the internet age was dawning in Singapore (Ningthoujam, 2008). Ningthoujam says that "Hip Hop [sic] is not an inbred culture but rather a marketable product of the MTV wave and free market capitalism." (p. 34).

Dairianathan and Phan (2002) suggest that Singapore rap has been "capitalised as a tool to deliver messages to a wide audience" (p. 105). An example to the capitalisation is Phua Chu Kang's (real name Gurmit Singh) performance of "SAR-vivor Rap" that was broadcasted on national television back in 2003 during the SARS outbreak (Dairianathan & Phan, 2002). The song encourages viewers to prevent SARS by informing prevention methods through rap.

The Media Development Authority, now called Info-communications Media Development Authority (abbreviated IMDA) also used rap in a 2007 YouTube video campaign that shows their less rigid side to the public (Tan, 2009). These examples were all initiated by a government body or authority to connect and inform the citizens by using hip-hop as the medium.

Another notion that Dairianathan and Phan (2002) suggested is that local practitioners are attracted to rap's "sonic and performative dimensions" (p. 105). In other words, hip-hop has influenced practitioners to express themselves through rap. However, rap has been associated with ghettoised eccentricities and rebellious tendencies which is antithetical to Singapore that is known to be an orderly nation. From this notion, I would like to find out: what are the characteristics of Singapore hip-hop? And what is the dynamics of the Singapore hip-hop scene like?

While Singapore rappers would not be able to relate to the marginalisation that the founders of hip-hop went through in 1970s Bronx, analysis of song contents can give researchers a glimpse into the characteristics and dynamics of the Singapore hip-hop scene. The notion is based on Jaffe's (2014) argument that hip-hop practitioners could have the same role as ethnographers and provide a more accurate observation of the society. Beer (2014) explains this notion further:

> Many hip-hop performers consider themselves to be poets of sorts; this poetic tendency is informed by a desire to reveal the conditions of urban living in various parts of the world. Hip-hop has a long and varied history, but the presence of urban poetry can be found through much of its past and many of the early hip-hop pioneers could easily be thought of as street poets — Gil Scott-Heron being one obvious

example, along with other politically orientated commentators like Public Enemy, and

we could also include the positive pro-education and anti-drug descriptions of urban

hardship created by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five or Run-DMC (all of which

can be described as indicative of the 'founding mission of rap'; see Smitherman, 1997)."

(p. 679)

Osumare (2001) introduced a concept called *connective marginalities* that is shared

by the youths of the global hip-hop community. *Connective marginalities* explain how youths

relate to the struggles of African-American and have adapted them to fit their respective

national context (Osumare, 2015). The realms of *connective marginalities* include *class*

(marker of powerlessness in stratified societies), *historical oppression* (subjugation from the

remnants of European imperialism)*, culture* (marginality that deems African culture and its

diaspora as valueless compared to European culture), and *youth rebellion* (the construct of

youth as a powerless marginal status which is ubiquitous) (Osumare, 2015, p. 8). This study

argues that even though Singaporeans live in an orderly nation, hip-hop music can still

develop in Singapore because practitioners still feel these *connective marginalities* and have

adapted them to their own context.

This study will be conducted through qualitative research methods. Both primary and

secondary data will be collected through interviews with practitioners within the Singapore

hip-hop scene, content analysis of different songs and online resources such as video

interviews and music videos, as well as field observation at a hip-hop showcase called

Baseforeword.

The findings in this study may be useful to anyone who are interested in the field of

hip-hop studies or are interested in getting to know about Singapore's hip-hop scene. The

focus that it places on Singapore also provides insight into its hip-hop music scene, which would be useful for arts managers, fellow arts practitioners, or musicologists.

Literature Review

    a. **History of hip-hop music and how it became a tool for socio-political movement**

Hip-hop emerged in the Bronx district of New York City in the 1970s. At that time, Robert Moses, a New York City official, worked on the Cross-Bronx Expressway project. The project resulted in Moses' utilisation of "urban renewal" rights to move poor African-American, Puerto-Rican, and Jewish families out of the Manhattan ghettoes (Chang, 2005). Chang (2005) describes this situation perfectly in his book of hip-hop history Can't Stop, Won't Stop: "Many had no choice but to come to the places like East Brooklyn and the South Bronx, where public housing was booming but jobs had already fled" (p.11).

Hip-hop music started out as a form of entertainment in block parties (Mattar, 2003; Ningthoujam, 2008; Malone & Martinez, 2010; Williams, 2011). Clive Campbell, or DJ Kool Herc, organised back-to-school block parties in 11 August 1973 at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, which is now dubbed as the birth place of hip-hop (Williams, 2011). DJ Kool Herc is credited to be the pioneer of dee-jaying because he introduced the two-turntable technique (Malone & Martinez, 2010) of spinning two vinyl records on two turntables, alternating between the two records to play the sections of each songs.

Masters of Ceremony (or emcees) started to speak over the beat breaks, rhyming and hyping the audience. They continued to develop this technique into what we know today as rapping. Skilled rappers are known to have a good sense of rhyme, flow, beat, and rhythm. A passage about rap in Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (2001) explains the significance of verbal prowess within rap:

Vernacular traditions had grown out of the valuation of linguistic competence within black American society. These included competitive verbal games such as the 'dozens', which traded humorous and sometimes surreal insults back and forth until one contestant conceded defeat, or the spoken narratives known as 'toast's, often stories about tricksters, folk heroes and historical events. Although the verbal fluency of African-American culture could be traced back to *griot*, or praise singing, traditions and other lyric forms of West Africa, the style of rapping that developed out of New York Hip Hop was distinctly different for its integration of words and music. (Sadie, 2001)

Other than the *griots* of West Africa, rap's history can be traced back to a decade before the block parties started (Malone & Martinez, 2010). It was in 1969 when The Last Poets got together to celebrate Malcolm X's birthday at Mt. Morris Park, Harlem. Russell A. Potter describes this in an essay:

It was a time of potent Black nationalism, and the Black Arts were a major part of that scene; the Poets took their inspiration from poets like Imamu Amiri Baraka, musicians like 'Trane and Sun Ra, and political organizations like the Panthers and the NOI. They chose African-flavored jazz rhythms as their backup, rather than R&B, consciously rejecting (at least at first) mass-media "Black" culture. Theirs was a performance art, done on the spot at late-night sessions, improvising individually and collectively, trading words just as jazz musicians traded melodic ideas, repeating them with variations, coming together with multiple voices for the climax. (Potter, n.d.)

The socio-political associations that rap has in its history shows that rap can encourage people to participate in informal political discussions. Many rappers have used rap's oratorical quality to raise arguments or awareness about events in the society. One of the examples is African-American rapper Paris in his album *Sonic Jihad* that is known to defy against the White Americans attack on Islam and Muslim under the guise of 'war on terror' (Khan, 2007). A more recent example would be Jay-Z's *4:44* album, released in 2017, that challenges the topic of racism and representation in the media.

b. Hip-hop globalisation and the dynamic of hip-hop in other countries

From the 1980s to 1990s, hip-hop became commoditised by being shown in media with the increasing use of television and the internet. Youths were at the centre of this phenomenon (Osumare, 2001). The experience of consuming hip-hop as a commercial product from the media is a shared one and "includes a sense of marginalisation, frustration, and the examination of battles against the oppression, either real or perceived" (Motley & Henderson, 2008, p. 247). Hip-hop is then perceived by the consumers as a commodity that can relate to their own experiences of being marginalised, regardless of whether they are a part of the minorities (Motley & Henderson, 2008). As these youths became practitioners in the hip-hop fields themselves, they adapt hip-hop to fit the context of their own environment and glocalises it (Motley & Henderson, 2008). This process of glocalisation is what helped hip-hop spread around the world. Glocalisation means "while the core essence and elements of hip-hop are shared by all members of the hip-hop culture, the aesthetic is adapted to suit multiple national cultures, localized conditions and grievances" (Motley & Henderson, 2008, p. 248).

These glocalisations take shape in different ways depending on the country that adopts hip-hop culture. Among others, Japan is one of the places where hip-hop has strived through the process of glocalisation. Ian Condry wrote a book that explores hip-hop's dynamics in Japan titled *Hip-hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* (2006). He came up with the term *genba* globalisation as the way hip-hop, as a global popular culture, was transformed through local performances in underground clubs.

Artists use club events to show their skill on stage and to convey their particular political [sic] and aesthetic perspectives, but their influence depends on whether they move the crowd, something that cannot be determined only in terms of what they say, but how and where they say it. This is the essence of a *genba* perspective: performativity and location. (Condry, 2006, p. 88)

In 2017, the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA) in Jeddah included local hip-hop artist, Qusai Kheder, into their array of arts programmes (Al-Jabir, 2017). A local web radio DJ and blogger Big Hass created an online magazine Re-Volt that promotes hip-hop as a positive force, motivated by the belief that hip-hop can connect people and educate them (McArthur, 2015). The case of Saudi Arabia's hip-hop shows that there is an active effort by the society to promote hip-hop as a positive force. The genre has potential to help introduce a positive image of Saudi Arabia (Raphael & Lazarus, 2017) and reinvent themselves in the international world (Pullyard, 2017). This aligns with what their crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, said in an interview with the Guardian—vowing that he will return Saudi Arabia to "moderate Islam" (Chulov, 2017).

China's hip-hop music scene is undergoing a rough treatment from the government. In January 2018, Chinese government banned the broadcasting of hip-hop music following the removal of a rapper named Gai from a popular music show called "Singer" (Zhang, 2018). China's crackdown is a result of the government's censorship. After Gai's incident, a Chinese news source, Sina reports that "the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China (SAPPRFT)—now 'specifically requires that programs should not feature actors with tattoos [or depict] hip hop culture, sub-culture (non-mainstream culture) and dispirited culture (decadent culture),'" (Quackenbush & Chen, 2018).

Hip-hop studies have been discussing extensively about the history, dynamics and influences in its original American setting. This early stage in hip-hop discourse has resulted in the creation of notable books like Tricia Rose's *Hip-Hop Wars* (2008), *Black Noise* (1994), and Jeff Chang's *Can't Stop, Won't Stop* (2005) that made hip-hop studies an interdisciplinary field. Recent scholars are shifting their focus to study hip-hop in an international scope and making sense of hip-hop scenes in one region after the other.

An ongoing study at University of Bristol is focusing on three cities in the United Kingdom: Bristol, Birmingham, and Edinburgh. The study focuses on "the relationship between character of cities and their music and cultural outputs, a study of language and regional dialects, and the complex ways in which these groups and artists both adhere to and rebel against notions of Britishness" (Williams, 2017, para. 2). Williams' study shows how hip-hop studies fuses different disciplinary together with musicology and how an environment can greatly influence the quality of art that is produced within that area.

c. Hip-hop in Singapore

In the scholarship of Singapore hip-hop, Dairianathan & Phan (2002), Yasser Mattar (2003, 2009), and Ningthoujam (2008) have discussed it as a focus for their articles. While other scholars have mentioned hip-hop as a small part to their analysis of Singapore popular music (Kong, 1996; Mattar, 2007; Lum, 2015). At the time of writing this study, literature on Singapore hip-hop is still limited to linguistic studies (Kong, 1996; Mattar, 2009; Lequn, 2015) and geo-political relation between a music and "sense of place" (Kong, 1995).

Ningthoujam (2008) has questioned how hip-hop, as a subculture antithetical to the prevalent socio-political state of Singapore is sustaining itself. He suggests the answer to that question is that hip-hop has been "rid of its rebellious wing" and is institutionalised to sustain the subculture (Ningthoujam, 2008). There is an institutionalisation process of "group formation and peer review learning", allowing for more collaboration between practitioners and skill exchange. Yet, his argument only applies to the dance and graffiti elements of hip-hop and does not explain further on how hip-hop music, composed of rap and dee-jaying, is being institutionalised.

Singapore hip-hop music has distinct characteristics in the case of its lyrics and instrumentation. The characteristic of the lyrics adheres to Pennycook's (2007) theory that suggests how hip-hop localisation "involves a complex relation of class, race, ethnicity, and language use." (p. 102). This notion is demonstrated by an adaptation of American rapper Lil Pump's "Gucci Gang" by Singaporean rappers, Fariz Jabba and Yung Raja. Using the original beat for "Gucci Gang", they adapted the lyrics with codemixing (the alternation between two languages in speech). Fariz Jabba in "Kunci Gang" (2018) alternates between English and Malay and Yung Raja in "Poori Gang" (2018) alternates between English and Tamil.

For the instrumentation, DJs have sampled old Singapore music to use as the backing for rap music. An example of this characteristic is demonstrated by Fauxe (2015), a Malaysian DJ, in his beat tape that is available online on Bandcamp. He sampled old Singaporean songs into beat tapes as he collaborates with rappers Tagalog Tim, Cap'n Malas, G-Preme, and Mediocre Haircut Crew. These characteristics resonate with Kong's (1995) analysis of how "popular music conveys a sense of place and reflects a distinctively Singaporean spirit and identity" (p. 51).

Scholars have pointed out ways in which the government has also attempted to use hip-hop to send their own message to the society. Perhaps the most relevant suggestion of hip-hop's role in Singapore so far is from Dairianathan & Phan's (2002) narrative history of Singapore hip-hop, saying that "rap as a practice among Singaporean artists have capitalised on its potential for "getting the message across'." (Dairianathan & Phan, 2002, p. 105).

An article that looks at this notion of capitalisation was an analysis of a viral IMDA rap music video (Tan, 2009). Tan's findings show how the state is trying to utilise new media (the internet) to engage with citizens and received mixed responses from netizens (a colloquial term for internet users) for its attempt at connecting with the youth through rap (Tan, 2009). Another example is when 12 "Post-65" People's Action Party (PAP) Members of Parliament performed at the 2007 Chingay Parade in a segment titled "Hip enough to hop" with 300 young hip-hop dancers as an attempt to better connect with the youth (Ningthoujam, 2008).

Both the IMDA rap and the Chingay performance were met with mixed responses. Some people praised the government for their effort in portraying themselves as less rigid and others found it embarrassing that the white-collar were attempting to rap (Tan, 2009). The mixed responses suggest how citizens are still not entirely comfortable with the government's efforts at the government using hip-hop to send a message.

Tan (2009) explains that such responses from Singaporeans could have arose due to the government's method of using hip-hop as commercial product that is aimed at the youth, resulting in the appropriation (or even misappropriation) and the lack of understanding for hip-hop's potential in the socio-political spectrum.

There are, however, examples of collaborations that was more well-received between the government and practitioners. One of the examples is in a music video that shows the collaboration between Singapore's Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) and Shigga Shay and Jack Neo titled 'Book Out Day' (Ministry of Defence Singapore, 2017). An excerpt of the lyrics is as follows:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday

Thursday, Friday, Book Out Day

Memories of SAR 21

Savage with the rifle strip not 21

A little sun never hurt them, right?

Left right, left right, on to that purple light

If you *chao keng* (pretend), better look out

Sabo king (do not care for their own comrade), we can't wait to book out

Lock it down if you take orders late

Drink up, home boy, it's the water parade

The lyrics recount the experience of boys that are going through National Service while counting down to the weekend when they can book out and rest for the week before going back to camp. The video includes Singapore Armed Forces' Music and it is apparent that the Ministry of Defence would like to promote a more positive outlook on what life is like in the military.

Another point to be considered when speaking about Singapore hip-hop is that Singapore is known for being a conservative country, with its people tending to err on the side of caution when speaking about socio-political matters. Censorship applies to audio releases of Singapore music. A prominent proof of this is when Sheikh Haikel said in an interview with Dairianathan and Phan that none of Construction Sight's singles were ever released in Singapore because of the word 'fuck' that is used in the lyrics (Dairianathan & Phan, 2002). Such censorship poses as a challenge for practitioners as they must maintain a standard that complies with regulations.

Methodologies

The research methods in this study aims to understand the ambitions that drive hip-hop practitioners and how they navigate through the Singapore hip-hop scene. Approaching the study through qualitative methods of research would help delve into the thoughts and opinions of an individual or community. Mack, et. al. (2005) says that qualitative methods are suitable to exploring the "human" sides of an issue and in identifying intangible factors within a social group.

The first method is an interview with hip-hop practitioners ranging from rappers, music producers that are active in the local scene, and an interview with a music business practitioner. Face-to-face interviews were conducted on 17 and 18 March 2018, at Mosta Records LP. Mosta Records LP is a record store at Peninsula-Excelsior Shopping Centre, which was selected as the location because it provided a conducive environment for interviews. The researcher has sought out and gained the permission of the owner to use the store beforehand. The interview process itself starts with a briefing of the interview (guided by an

information sheet, see Appendix A) to the participants and on to the question-and-answer session.

The second method that was done is content analysis. Content analysis helps researchers in finding information from primary resources that are relevant to the topics such as songs and music videos as well as secondary resources such as interviews available on the internet and public domain. Information that would be taken from the songs would be on the topics, themes, languages, as well as the sample tracks or beats that are being used for the song.

The third method is a field observation was also done in conjunction with other methods. The researcher went to several hip-hop events available in the research timeframe. Field observations was selected as one of the research methods because field observations provide a direct experience for researchers to understand the environment. Observations were made on the purpose of the event, musician line-up, attendance and how engaged the audience was.

Interview questions were designed to elicit information about the practitioners' motivation in making hip-hop music, how they decide on what they write about, their interest in collaborating with the government, their hopes, and their opinions on Singapore hip-hop (see Appendix B for question list). The topics were decided based on the literature review with the hopes that participants would comment on these findings. The interviews are recorded, before being transcribed for documentation purposes.

If a potential participant could not do a face-to-face interview, they are given the option to do an e-mail interview. Upon agreeing to do the e-mail interview instead, the questions are sent, and participants can answer on their own time. The questions and answers are included in the Appendices section of this paper.

The final list of participants that responded to the interview request and followed through with the meetings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

List of Interview Participants with their age and occupation

Name	Age	Occupation
Aditya	23	Rapper
Fahim	22	Rapper
Omar	22	Rapper
Rauzan	29	Music producer
Azri	45	Independent record label & record store owner

Omar, Aditya, and Fahim are three rappers that make up the rap trio Mediocre Haircut Crew. They have been active since 2016 and released their debut EP in 2017. They were selected as interview participant because of their rapid ascent to recognition in the Singapore hip-hop scene. They have performed in some of the most popular Singapore music festivals like Baybeats, Laneway, and Singapore Jazz Festival. They also performed at Gastrobeats @ iLight Marina just the day before the interview, 16 March 2018 (see Appendix C for transcript).

Rauzan is a music producer who started his entertainment career as a child actor in Mediacorp. Aside from producing, he is also active in promoting the Singapore hip-hop scene. One of his works is *Team Highness*, an online website that gives updates and news about everything Singapore hip-hop. He was also the curator for a hip-hop show "Baseforeword" as part of an Esplanade event, *Foreword February,* that celebrates poetry and literature with

free shows at Esplanade's Outdoor Stage, happened in 11 February 2018 (see Appendix D for interview transcript).

Azri is the owner of Mosta Records LP and his opinion represents a third-person point of view on hip-hop because he is not active in the hip-hop scene. He is active in music business as he did music production before he established his independent record label and record store. His interest in hip-hop started in the 1980s and he has been closely observing the development of music both in Singapore and around the world ever since (see Appendix D for transcript).

A representative from the National Youth Council was to be selected to represent the views of the authority side. The reason for choosing National Youth Council is because they organised Shine Festival—a youth festival that has included rapper Shigga Shay in their programme line-up in 2016 and 2017. However, National Youth Council politely declined to be part of the interview. They explained that the artistes that were involved in Shine Festival were selected for their contributions to the community and that Shine Festival is not an event that promotes hip-hop.

Content analysis were done by analysing the message contained within songs. The parts of the songs that will be analysed are the lyrics as well as the instrumentation of the songs. These are the parts that will be analysed because they are the main components of rap.

Field observation was done at a hip-hop event at Esplanade. The event was called Baseforeword, a hip-hop event that was curated by Rauzan and included a line-up of rappers and deejays from both the old and new generation. "Baseforeword" was a free show that is a part of Esplanade's Foreword February, a month-long celebration of literature and poetry and included both old rappers and young rappers in the scene.

Discussion

As mentioned in the literature review's brief overview of hip-hop history, hip-hop is an African-American subculture that originates from the United States. The music industry has commoditised the genre and spread it around the world, making it a global pop culture phenomenon. Osumare (2015) described how absorption of *connective marginalities* is commonly experienced by youths and may be carried on to adulthood. Sheikh Haikel, a part of the rap duo Construction Sight that is known as 1993 champions of a music competition on television called *Asia Bagus* also acquired his inspiration from Run DMC in his youth (Dairianathan & Phan, 2002). The pattern does not just apply to the people who were exposed to hip-hop in the 1990s, but continues to those who recently discovered hip-hop too.

In the interview, Fahim, Omar, and Aditya all identified with this experience as they recount the time they were first exposed to hip-hop. Their interest in the genre started from when they started to listen to American musicians; Fahim mentioned A Tribe Called Quest, Aditya mentioned Eminem and Marshall Mathers, and Omar mentioned Pitbull and Macklemore. Rauzan was also influenced by Kanye West, but he refers to Triple Noize—a Singapore hip-hop group that was active in the 90s—as the one who first introduced him to the music genre.

Azri explains the absorption of values by saying that hip-hop managed to capture the imagination of the Singapore youth. He said "It speaks to us because just like punk, our parents don't like it. The more they hate it, the more we love it. Teenage angst and all that." (personal communication, 2018). This further supports Osumare's concept of connective marginalities where youths are more receptive to hip-hop. The *connective marginalities* spirit extends even to their audience. As Omar and Fahim mentioned in the interview, the people

that come to their shows are usually people who do not fit in the society, or "misfits" (personal communication, 2018).

Another part that shows how *connective marginalities* play a part in Singapore youth's interest in hip-hop can also be found from the ethnic backgrounds of the practitioners. Hip-hop is practiced mostly by the minorities of Singapore, with the majority done by those of Malay descent. Azri explains that in a way, punk rock and hip-hop is similar to one another and in how they appeal to the minorities. He said "It's considered from the streets, undignified, low class because in my opinion the proponents of it probably comes from lower income people, disenfranchised, basically the poor. Mostly minorities like me." (personal communication, 2018). The profile of Singapore hip-hop in the 1990s and 2000s were pre-dominantly Malay with rap groups like Construction Sight, Triple Noize, and Ahli Fiqir. The profile of current practitioners—although still dominated by the Malay ethnicity—is now more mixed, with the addition of Chinese and Indian rappers like Shigga Shay, THELIONCITYBOY, and Yung Raja.

As Dairianathan and Phan (2002) mentioned, their interest comes from the sonic and performative dimensions of hip-hop. Fahim proves this point by saying:

…my music influences started with like, punk rock and heavy metal. I was never like a rap guy. I was mostly into like, the lyrics, the lyrical content of like, heavy metal and punk rock. Like…that appealed to me—the whole lyrical content. And then it went from punk rock to lighter music, lighter music, and it went to like old school hip-hop…yeah. And it started with A Tribe Called Quest. That was like my first love for hip-hop. And that really tied the whole thing together with me because like, I was starting

to get like, into poetry and everything and it was like poetry on a beat. (personal

communication, 17 April, 2018)

Even Rauzan, who is a music producer, found inspiration from Kanye West's music

arrangement techniques—which were the reason for his career into music production too.

This was the Kanye before the crazy Kanye, right? So, it was this mixtape called "The

Freshmen Adjustment" right? Uh…1. So, I heard this song called "Keep the Receipt"

featuring O.D.B. from the Wu Tang Clan. Oh my God, that production was fantastic!

You know last time Kanye West used to, like, produce and he likes to use these vocals

and then he would up-pitch it to make it sound like chipmunk? That kind of sound

actually got me, you know? Really into like "Oh, how did he actually do this?"…

(personal communication, 2018)

Even though they take inspiration from Western hip-hop music, they make songs that

relate to their personal experiences living in Singapore. The adaptation of foreign forms of

music to fit the context of the environment is called transculturation, which is defined as an

interchange between cultures (Kong, 1996) and also characteristic in Singapore's popular

music scene.

Transculturation is done in different ways. One of those ways is to alternate languages

in one song, or code-mixing (Pennycook, 2007). Aside from the use of other languages like

Tamil and Malay as described in the literature review, Singapore rappers also include Singlish

in their songs. An example of this is "*Sialah*" by Mediocre Haircut Crew's Fahim and Omar

(2016). This is an excerpt of the hook: "*Sialah*! I'm so hungry got no money how like that /

Sialah! Winston reds left one stick now I got no pack / *Sialah*! Girls call me *sachok* (handsome) but never call me back / *Sialah*! Boi sudah *pokai* (broke) so cannot upsize Macs"

In the interview, Fahim and Omar said that they are known as the "*Sialah*" guys and a lot of people in the audience are still asking them to perform the song (personal communication, 17 March, 2018). The response on this particular song shows that the use of Singlish helps rappers relate more effectively to the Singapore audience. Mattar (2009) has discussed how the use of English language in songs can be perceived as a signifier of authenticity and quality, suggesting that consumers perceive songs that use Singlish in their lyrics to be less favourable. By looking at the interest shown in "*Sialah*", however, it seems that the Singapore audience is more receptive to rap songs performed in Singlish.

Perhaps the use of Singlish in hip-hop can be viewed in the same light as Singlish for films. Gomes (2015) says that "Singlish is used in films as a way to relate audiences to narratives and characters", "to cope with migrants and resistance against autocratic government", and "is an unconscious collective expression of civil disobedience, which Singaporeans—as well as the local film industry—have come to realise is powerful" (p. 172). The notion of Singlish as a form of indirect rebellion to the government in Gomes' statements is similar to the *connective marginalities* of hip-hop where people can express political issues. Thus, Singlish is received well in hip-hop because it is a way for Singaporeans to feel that sense of unity among one another.

Another possible reason for hip-hop's tendency to use other languages is because the use of other languages signifies the rapper's skills. Rap is, after all, the element of hip-hop that is heavily influenced by linguistics and a sense of showmanship that is demonstrated by the performer's attitude and confidence. Interchanging languages or using different languages allow the rapper to show off their abilities and deliver message directly to an

audience that can also understand the language. Shusterman (1991) said that this deliberate act of showing off verbal virtuosity is important to rap because of its roots in African culture and *griots* (respected poets and storytellers in the African culture) whose verbal prowess demonstrate their knowledge. An example of the combination between showing off verbal skills can be observed in the song "Tamilan" (2017) by Yung Raja. This song mixes English and Tamil together with the majority of the song performed in Tamil. The song acts as a demonstration of his rapping skills in Tamil and the rapper's self-introduction. The translated excerpt of the song lyrics is as follows:

> All these motherfuckers tryin' to copy
>
> Tryin' to rip what I have
>
> You can rip what I have, take a sip from the glass
>
> Tryin' to change the way they look at a brown man with plans
>
> Man, I got the whole world in my hands
>
> 21's taking hands
>
> I'mma go get everything I want
>
> Tamil rap's what I want, put the culture on my back

Transculturation can be detected in the choice of song instrumentation as well. This is exemplified by Fauxe, another music producer that is active in the scene. He sampled old Singaporean music in his multiple beat tapes (2015a, 2015b, 2015c), a project that had the objective of being done in 24 hours or less, and the songs that he sampled includes those made my Siglap 5, Western Union Band, The Cyclones, Reyes Sisters, etc.

When discussing the relationships between the practitioners in the hip-hop scene, Mediocre Haircut Crew and Rauzan had similar views about collaboration, which is that they believe Singapore hip-hop practitioners should collaborate more with one another. Rauzan views the collaborations as a way to sustain Singapore hip-hop for the next ten years. On the other hand, Fahim, Omar, and Aditya seems to view collaborations as a way of gaining more opportunities.

However, Aditya said that the people active in the Singapore hip-hop scene are still trying to find their sound, meaning that they are still establishing themselves as full-fledged artistes. This, he thinks, halts practitioners from being able to collaborate with each other. For the three-year rap trio, this line of thought was reasonable as they were still in a career stage where they are still developing.

On the other hand, Rauzan thinks that there is a gap between the two generations of hip-hop artistes in Singapore. He felt that the young rappers did not know enough about the rappers before them and vice versa. As a music producer, he has the ambition to bridge the gap between the two generations:

> I want this newer generation to know who did it before them and what was the process like. Versus now...what—what you have now is basically...if you have a music right...you have a song...okay, let's just put it on YouTube then get your ten friends to share it. Last time it wasn't like that, last time you have to like...print out CDs, you know? Some of them if they have the money, right, they will print out vinyls. You know, that kind of stuff. The hustle was real, you know. Now it's like zero cost? Making music is a zero cost. Yeah, marketing is zero cost. So...I'm trying to get the older generation also to learn from the new cats on how to put out their new music. So, it's a sharing

process of just trying to blend this two together so we have a brighter future *lah*,

basically. (Personal communication, 18 April, 2018)

Rauzan's desire to bridge the gap is fuelled by his experience in Singapore's hip-hop

scene back in the 1990s. When asked about the present state of hip-hop in Singapore, he said

it is "positive" in the way that people are collaborating with one another more, in comparison

with the past time. He said:

Everyone um, is beginning to work with one another. Versus back then—uh…watching

how the older generation of the hip-hop runners do their thing, right, uh…they are not

so…acceptive [sic] towards other people's music. So it's like, if you're from that camp,

I'm not going to listen to you. You know, something like that… (Rauzan, personal

communication, 18 March, 2018)

From his recount, it seems that the older generation of practitioners were more

competitive than the younger practitioners. The availability of the internet may contribute to

this mind set. Social media is readily available and almost everyone owns accounts in at least

one type of social network service. Connecting with other practitioners becomes easier

because they can just send direct messages to one another through either Facebook or

Instagram.

Another notion that Omar raises in the topic of competition and collaboration is that

the scene is so small to the point that everyone knows one another. When they are

performing, most of the audience are made up of hip-hop practitioners as well. The hip-hop

community is so small that the audience are the practitioners. From this viewpoint, we see that hip-hop is not mainstream.

The highly-regulated environment of Singapore presents different challenges to hip-hop scene. The first challenge is the existence of a strict guideline on the release of audio materials by IMDA (see Appendix F) and the second challenge is the regulations placed on arts entertainment events.

Audio releases are restricted by regulations that IMDA has established. Because of the restrictions, artistes tend to turn to the internet to release and share their music. The availability of online music services like Soundcloud, Bandcamp, and Spotify has changed the way musicians produce music and share them. As Sen (2010) says, "The convergent communications technology has upset the apple cart and has made music production and distribution more democratic and participatory at the grass roots level." The internet gives them the freedom to release whatever content they please without the filter of the Singapore authority.

Another effect of these restrictions in their creativity is that if musicians want to be more popular and be heard by the general audience, it is either they follow to the rules that are available or stay within the confines of underground venues. Omar, Fahim, and Aditya talked about this restriction as they spoke about how they had to be very careful with their words on-stage during their performance at Gastrobeats @ iLight or they would be fined.

Despite all the restrictions, hip-hop musicians are quite open about expressing their dissatisfaction about challenges within the society. When asked if rappers should address social matters in their songs, all the participants agree that such matters should be addressed. However, Azri made a point to say that:

Hip hop [sic] generates interest because it's in your face, most of the time. Seldom a

hiphop [sic] song is about something they don't complain about. There is always

something to complain about. But because of this, it Is [sic] not everyone [sic] taste.

(personal communication, 9 April, 2018).

What he is trying to say is that most of the time, hip-hop musicians in general tend to

speak about their dissatisfaction and that is what makes hip-hop interesting. However, that

also poses as a challenge, because not everyone will be welcome to the messages that are

being delivered through hip-hop.

An example of the way that rappers express their dissatisfaction can be found in a

song by Subhas, another up-and-coming Singaporean rapper, in his song "The Red Dot" (2017).

The song title gives listeners a foreshadowing to the song's content, as 'Red Dot' is a nickname

for Singapore. In Subhas' song, however, 'red dot' also refers to 'zero targets' that are used

for firearms. One of the verses refers to some distinctly Singaporean objects: "… and this

concrete never had a heartbeat. / And more than these decks are void. / When the red dot is

aiming right between your eyes, / I never even had a choice." (Subhas, 2017). He speaks

about void decks that are common in Singapore HDBs and further questions the state of living

in Singapore under the control of the authority throughout the rest of the song.

Still, songs that intend to voice out their dissatisfaction of restrictions are not common.

From the content analysis that has been done, the researcher has only managed to find two

songs that raise such social matters. There still seems to be an aspect of self-censorship that

is practiced by the practitioners. Borrowing on Aditya's notions, maybe practitioners are still

trying to find their sound. There is no time for them to think about social matters when their

objective is just to express themselves creatively. Thus, it seems that the notion of Singapore hip-hop becoming a medium to voice out social matters will not happen any time soon.

Another challenge that Azri points out for Singapore hip-hop is how to really make hip-hop known and accepted by the public. He gives some input about what the hip-hop scene should try to do. He suggests that practitioners of hip-hop should be more mindful about what they are really trying to do instead of continuing to imitate the American hip-hop style or to include excessive expletives in lyrics just for the sake of it. He said:

> If it is really alive, then people like me who are disinterested need to get woken up. But it is not my responsibility. It is the hip hop community [sic] job. And it is tougher for this genre because it is simply looked at as a genre with more swag than substance. And with no inclination to incorporate ethnic music into it, nobody will care, It [sic] might die. Sorry if it's doom and gloom, except for a few people jumping around in a club, who cares about hip hop locally. Really. That's the problem now. And if it's considered dangerous, then hiphop [sic]will suffer. No one want their children listening to the word fuck said 40 times in a song. If you can't find ways to express yourself without cursing not cussing, then it speaks volume of your intellect. It's easy to get impress [sic] by a person who rhymes with precision and speed of thought but with cursing, being where we are, that will never get the respect. (personal communication, 2018)

Rauzan expressed his wishes for Singapore hip-hop to grow and to be known more by the society. His active work in the hip-hop scene is a testament to his ambition. However, he also said that hip-hop practitioners have not yet reached the stage of knowing how to market

themselves, and that there needs to be further promotion of Singapore hip-hop. Following this notion, he suggests that there needs to be more people who can help market the hip-hop music scene around the region.

In response to this, Rauzan has been active in the scene. *Team Highness*, which is an online website that focuses on Singapore hip-hop belonging to Rauzan himself, has been giving updates about new songs on their Instagram page and is in the midst of re-constructing their website. *Team Highness* is also associated with *Base Online Radio*, where Rauzan interviews local rappers and plays their songs through Mixcloud's radio-streaming service. In line with this notion, Mediocre Haircut Crew also suggests that arts organisers provide more opportunities for up-and-coming artistes to perform instead of those that are already well-known so that more people would know about the hip-hop scene in Singapore.

Conclusion

This study was aimed at understanding the characteristics and the dynamics of the Singapore hip-hop scene. The study was done through qualitative research that was done in the form of interviews, content analysis, and field observation. Findings suggest that practitioners are influenced by American rappers whose music is popularised through commercialised media and that to them, hip-hop is means of creative expression.

Characteristics of Singapore hip-hop music includes the use of different languages in the languages and the incorporation of Singapore context, which is also known as transculturation. Another characteristic is that just as Osumare (2015) explained, *connective marginalities* is present in Singapore hip-hop. The notion can be seen in the way that Singapore youth identify with the feeling of 'other', that the hip-hop audience being identified as mostly "misfits", and that the profiles of practitioners are mostly made up of the minorities.

The challenges in Singapore hip-hop is censorship and regulations, which apply to audio releases and arts entertainment events respectively. Censorship and regulations restrict practitioners in expressing themselves freely. This results in the difficulty of making hip-hop more known to a wider experience because in order to reach mass recognition, the practitioners need to censor themselves. As they fulfil their need for creative expression however, they turn to social media and the internet to release their music.

Findings also suggest that there is no indication of Singapore hip-hop becoming a socio-political tool any time soon. However, it is difficult to say at the current time. Hip-hop's development in Singapore should continuously be observed because it is just beginning to make moves again.

In hindsight, Singapore hip-hop is still merely active underground, and the practitioners are continuously trying to promote themselves to the public eye. But if hip-hop stays in their rebellious ways, would they ever really be successful in Singapore? To quote Azri's apt description of the 'struggle' in Singapore hip-hop, "the real struggle have always been freedom of speech and whether you can say anything you want without destroying the social construct. And if they actually get that freedom of speech, will rappers abuse it in the context of our Asian sensibilities and sensitivities?" (undocumented personal communication, 2018).

Of course, there are limitations to this study. The participants of this research do not represent the whole community of hip-hop practitioners in Singapore. Views that are still missing from the list of participants include older hip-hop practitioners, deejays, hip-hop listeners, and public officials. Thus, this study do not provide the most comprehensive view of Singapore hip-hop scene. Further research could be done on Singapore officials' views and opinions of hip-hop music and Singaporean's views on hip-hop music in Singapore. Research

could also be done on the events that are promoting hip-hop, as we still do not know how

effective they are at spreading the music genre.

Words: 7,793 words

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Appendices

Appendix A – Information Sheet

INTERVIEW INFORMATION SHEET & CONSENT FORM

Working title of research:

Representin' Singapura: Does hip-hop music act as a mouth piece for the youth?

Purpose of research:

This research project is conducted by Kania Alisjahbana for the requirement of partial fulfilment of the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Arts Management programme at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, validated by University of Essex.

Invitation:

You are invited to participate in this interview because you are an active musician in the Singapore hip-hop music scene. The insights and opinions that you express in this interview will be valuable for the research.

Intended audience:

- This research paper will be assessed by the faculty members of Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) and University of Essex for grading purposes.

- The research paper will be placed at the Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple Library, NAFA Campus 1 from June 2018. In this circumstance, the audience will extend to members of the public who gain access to the Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple Library collection. This includes members of the NAFA faculty, NAFA alumni, NAFA students, and visitors who pay for membership.

Interview process:

You will be asked a series of questions that is related to your personal experience and opinions as a musician in Singapore's hip-hop scene.The interview will take approximately 1 hour and will be conducted at Mosta Records LP: 3 Coleman Street, #02-21, Peninsula Shopping Centre, Singapore 179804.

Participant's rights:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.

- You are free to say as much or as little as you want.

- You have the right to decline answering any question in the interview.

- You have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the interview any time without providing a reason.

- There will be no penalty if you choose to stop the interview or withdraw from the interview.

Documentation:

The interview will be recorded in an audio format that will only be accessible by the researcher after the research is published. A transcript of the interview will be documented in the Appendice section of the final submission to be assessed.

Confidentiality:

Your first name, age, and occupation will be disclosed in the material that is published and your words will be quoted accordingly in the paper's discussion. However, you will be given the opportunity to review and approve any material you provided before the final document is submitted.

Additional contact:

For any additional information or enquiries, please contact the researcher, Kania

Alisjahbana, through +65-8307-5015 or by e-mail at kanialisjahbana@gmail.com

Agreement

By signing this form,

- I understand all the information about the research and my rights as a participant.

- I understand that first name, age, and occupation will be disclosed in this research paper.

- I understand that my words will be quoted accordingly in the paper's discussion by the researcher.

- I understand that I will be given the opportunity to review and approve any material I provided before the final document is submitted.

- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers.

- I agree to participate in this study and to answer to the best of my knowledge.

Participant's Signature & Name,   Researcher's Signature & Name,

_____   _____

Date:

Appendix B – Question List for Practitioners

1. How did you get into hip-hop music?

2. What drove you guys to make hip-hop music?

3. What is the demographic of your listeners?

4. When you make music or write lyrics, how do you guys relate to your audience?

5. What do you think about the state of hip-hop in Singapore right now?

    a. Are there a lot of events that are supporting hip-hop?

    b. How competitive are the artistes with each other?

    c. Are there a lot of collaborations among the practitioners?

    d. Is it just popular because of its commercial value?

6. Has there been any restrictive factors that affect the way you make music?

    a. How has that changed you in how you make music?

    b. How do you go against it or go around it?

7. Rap has been known to be one of the methods in raising social matters back in the day, are there any social matters in Singapore that you guys are concerned with?

    .   Would you ever want to try to address them in your songs? Why or why not?

8. Do you think hip-hop musicians should address these matters? Would you?

9. There are some instances in which the government has tried to "connect" with the youth via hip-hop music (examples: Phua Chu Kang, Book Out Day, IMDA Rap). What do you think about it?

10. Is there anything that you think the government or arts organisers should or can do more for hip-hop?

11. What do you wish to see or hear more from the Singapore hip-hop scene?

Appendix C – Interview Transcript with Mediocre Haircut Crew

KANIA: First question is…how did you guys get into hip-hop music?

OMAR: I think we all have different interpretations of how each of us came into hip-hop so maybe…Fahim first lah, and then we'll go along.

FAHIM: Like how did we get in together or like, individually?

KANIA: Individually. Like how did you start knowing hip-hop music?

FAHIM: Okay…I actually started, like, my music influences started with like, punk rock and heavy metal. I was never like a rap guy. I was mostly into like, the lyrics, the lyrical content of like, heavy metal and punk rock. Like…that appealed to me—the whole lyrical content. And then it went from punk rock to lighter music, lighter music, and it went to like old school hip-hop…yeah. And it started with A Tribe Called Quest. That was like my first love for hip-hop. And that really tied the whole thing together with me because like, I was starting to get like, into poetry and everything. And it was like poetry on a beat. [**OMAR**: What a romantic guy] Yeah. So hip-hop to me at the time when I first started liking it was like poetry on a beat. Yeah, that's how I started.

ADITYA: I have like less glamorous beginning in hip-hop. Um…like straight up lah, the first ever rapper I listened to was Eminem ah. And yeah, I listened to all like, uh…I think I was like what? In primary school? When I was listening to the whole Marshall Mathers LP And things like that. And like, I remember my relatives were so disappointed in me because the language that he used… [**OMAR**: Explicit…] …yeah, it was extremely explicit lah. Then from there it slowly, um, I started to just listen to more songs and more artistes in that vein.

OMAR: For me also, I guess…not as poetic as Fahim is and I'm not as white as Aditya is. Actually no *sia*, I'm the most white one because I got into hip-hop because I was always like the Top 40 guy. I only listened to what was on the radio. And then my dad was like "Son, you have to listen to Journey and Queen." And I'm like okay…so I kinda appreciate the classic rock stuff. But then I realise, "Yo, I need to find something that like…I want to find my own like, thing I can get to—listen to lah" So I'm like—okay, fine…I'm gonna start listening to ah, I really like Pitbull at that time. I was really into Pitbull, Mr. 305. So I wanted to be like…I was like… "Yo, this guy…*hotel, motel, party in here.*" [**ADITYA**: *…holiday inn…*] …whatever lah! Okay, so that's why I didn't become Pitbull. And then this kinda opened up my eyes to like…and like, five years ago Macklemore just came out with "Thrift Shop" so I was like "Wow! This guy is cool, man." And that's like actually more white than Aditya lah. So like…dude, that was so super cool and I was like, yo…so I went on Google, and I searched "the best rapper in the world" and Kanye West came out. Then um…hand in hand, "My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy" was recommended to me on Google. So I was like "Fine, let's go for it." and then I fell in love with it ever since and I was like, "Yo, if this guy can do…I also can do lor…" then "Let's go for it."

KANIA: Okay. Cool! Alright, uh…then…what drove you guys to make hip-hop music? Now, like, together…how did that kinda, like, start?

ADITYA: It's a funny story ah…

OMAR: Is it?

ADITYA: It's quite a funny story ah…

OMAR: How is it a funny story?

ADITYA: It's hilarious, dude. Okay, our first rap song was about how the three of us didn't have any foreskins lah…

KANIA: Huh?

ADITYA: *Foreskins*…yeah. So that's a bit explicit lah.

OMAR: Because we're all circumcised.

ADITYA: Yes, that's…that's how it happens.

FAHIM: Yeah, it was sort…sort of a joke. Like all of us were just like joking around.

ADITYA: We were in the back of the class. We were scribbling rhymes on our notebooks about how we didn't have any foreskins while there was a lecture going on but we were just ignoring the entire thing. Uhm…and then we took it from there lah, and I think Omar's been a bit more serious about it than Fahim and I.

OMAR: Because they made fun of me. They said, "Yo, your rap sucks." …we were talking about a stupid subject matter and then they were like "Hey, bro…you…" That's all, like "You gotta write properly." And then I took that to heart and I was like "Nah, man…I'mma be like, I'mma work on this." You know? So yeah…then after that we continued…

KANIA: So you were kinda the serious one?

ADITYA: Yeah.

KANIA: Okay, okay.

OMAR: We all just butt head from the beginning.

KANIA: Okay. Alright. Um, okay. Now…what is the demographic of your listeners? [**OMAR**: Interesting, interesting…] Like okay…do you know like maybe, who usually listens to your music or comes to your shows? Like age…about?

FAHIM: Okay, I think…

ADITYA: I'd say there's a whole mix of people lah… [interrupted by **FAHIM**]

FAHIM: …but I think the majority's late 20s.

ADITYA: Late 20s? Really?

FAHIM: Yeah. Like, like, why I say late 20s and 30s because how I, how I look at it is that—I look at who buys our beat tapes and our EPs on Bandcamp. So the people supporting our EP, like people actually paying money to support us are like people in their late 30s, late 20s. They are people actually putting in money to support us. I mean…I guess young people listen to us, they go for shows that's free and everything. But the people who actually putting in money? Those guys are like late 20s, 30s.

ADITYA: Yeah. But in terms of, I think, the crowd that we have in the shows. It's really, just a huge mix of people lah.

OMAR: We don't have kids also. No kids come to our show.

FAHIM & ADITYA: Yeah, yeah. No kids.

OMAR: Just for sure.

ADITYA: We try to keep them out of it lah.

KANIA: Do you mind…like, kinda just mentioning a few of the races that might come to your show?

ADITYA, OMAR, FAHIM: Whoaaa!!

KANIA: Sorry, but yeah…

OMAR: No, no. It's okay…

ADITYA: That's a good question, I guess. Um…

FAHIM: I'd say majority Malay, honestly.

OMAR: Malay? Yeah. Malay.

ADITYA: I'd say a lot of like…Chinese people also have.

OMAR: I…okay. The Chinese people…but then…wow like…dude, they're like the cool Chinese people.

ADITYA: Yeah, I think like compared to all of the other crews or whatever, like…they usually have more of a Malay listener-ship.

OMAR: Yeah, but the…I guess like the people that come to our shows doesn't really like…most of them are brown-ish.

KANIA: Mhm.

OMAR: And um, but the—the people that do come to our shows also…they're like…they're like a certain kind of people. They're not like…they're not like…they're like a race of their own, you know? They're all weirdos.

FAHIM: Yeah…they're all weirdos.

OMAR: And because that's why they like…

FAHIM: You know, skaters…punk rockers…people who don't feel accepted.

ADITYA: They're all misfits lah…

FAHIM: Yeah, misfits basically.

ADITYA: I suppose that's the demographic we're going for.

FAHIM: Just—I mean…just like us, just like the lyrics we put out, the song content we put out. It's all just like things that don't fit in in society.

ADITYA: And we try not to take ourselves too seriously also when we write. Like we…we don't write about "Oh, one day I'm gonna, you know, drive a Ferrari, I'm gonna have hella bitches…" and stuff like that…okay, maybe in some songs lah. But yeah, I think we just try to keep it very goofy and very natural lah, a lot of the time.

KANIA: Which is…my next question. When you make music or write lyrics, how do you guys relate to your audience?

ADITYA: We don't lah, I feel.

FAHIM: Yeah, we don't. We write music for ourselves, actually. So, the whole process of making a song—Omar makes a beat, and then we all come together, and then we ask "What's the theme of this song?"

OMAR: Wah, this was such an annoying question. Because right, every time we ask this type of question. Some people—I won't mention names—will say things like "Uh…what's the theme? Theme titans."

ADITYA: And that's why…one of the songs on our EP is called "Theme Titans".

OMAR: Yeah, so look out for that lah…

ADITYA: Better put that joke to rest ah, Fahim?

FAHIM: Yeah so…we are, we are getting away from the question.

OMAR: Where are we?

ADITYA: Oh yeah…

OMAR: Wait, wait…go back to the thing…um…wow…

KANIA: I mean like, do you try to use Singlish? Never? Or…?

OMAR: Ah…no.

KANIA: No?

ADITYA: We did.

FAHIM: Initially we did. Like, we tried to like—so we have songs like "Sialah" to try and appeal to the whole like, Singlish audience and everything. It didn't work out. It wasn't like, our thing.

OMAR: No. Because the—the point of us making "Sialah" in the first place was just to test water. Test the water and like, see like…because "Sialah" is essentially a song making fun, or poking fun at a certain lifestyle that people follow. "Oh shit, I have no money now…but I still have to buy cigarettes…I still have to…oh yeah, my girl never call me back because I have no more prepaid." Just poking fun at the culture.

FAHIM: But it's also relatable.

OMAR: It's relatable. That's what we wanted to do. And then we knew that if we put in like, a silly word like "Sialah", everybody will be like "Eh! Sialah" you know? So it's uh…very catchphrase-y. And then it never s…some people…some people still know us as the "Sialah" guys but…yeah lah…that's just one thing ah.

KANIA: So does that mean they…kinda—uh, what is it?—responded to that well? That song "Sialah?"

OMAR: They surprisingly did.

ADITYA: Yeah, they did. They always ask for us to play "Sialah". There's at least like, one guy in the audience who shouts "Sialah". Right?

OMAR & **FAHIM**: Yeah.

ADITYA: Even last night, there's a guy.

KANIA: That's interesting.

FAHIM: Yeah, last night, I suppose.

ADITYA: Yeah, but I think we really try not to restrict ourselves ah. If Singlish fits, then we will put it in the song.

OMAR: Yeah, but we never go out of our way, to actually like… [**ADITYA**: pander…] "…oh, this song *needs* a Singlish word." It's always like—yo, if it calls for it, it calls for it. Then…yeah.

KANIA: Okay. Cool. Alright, so…okay. What do you think about the state of hip-hop in Singapore right now? This one you can do one by one.

FAHIM: Omar? You wanna go first?

OMAR: It's great. It's really, really, really great. Because right now I feel like…in Singapore…in the world ah…hip-hop is becoming like, the new rock. No one says…okay, there are people who still want to be rockstars. Like…but…now hip-hop is like…pop, you know? Every single song has like…has a little hip-hop [**FAHIM/ADITYA**: featured…] peppered into it. Yeah like…the Migos…is featured in every song. So that I feel like…this gives way to people coming in and saying stuff like "Yo, I can be the next rapper." and it doesn't take a lot to be a rapper, honestly. Because being a rapper is um…very simple…until—but uh, you'll hit a ceiling. Because um…a lot of people—I can give anyone like a…a set of lyrics, and a beat…and I tell them "Yo, this is how you do it. Just recite these words over the beat and just follow the tempo." They can do it. Are they considered rappers though? Yeah. So…that's like—it's too accessible right now, especially in the internet age—but…this also gives way to a lot of…um, a lot more hip-hop to choose from in Singapore. There are people like…like last time you needed like a, a proper studio, you know? But now…it's like—yo, you can do everything at home, you know? Just working out of like a…small bedroom with no noise. And um…so basically, I feel like the state of hip-hop right now is very good because there are so many people doing it. And it's become more of a culture. There are like 17 year old boys doing it and it's, it's crazy.

[interview pauses because owner of Mosta Records LP comes in and they all greet one another]

OMAR: Ah..ah…let me think. Okay…so yeah! Basically—the state of hip-hop is great because so many people are getting into it and it's becoming a culture of its own. And like…last time it was such an exclusive thing like "Yo, you're a rapper but…" Bro, now you tell people you're a rapper, bro, they're all like "Oh okay…" you know? Because it's so saturated! [**ADITYA**: Yeah, it's quite commonplace] It's so common now. Like, last time like—"Yo, you rap ah? Eh bro, that's so cool." But now is like—*but* that really does give way to a lot of dope people coming out but also the not so dope people coming out lah. So…yeah.

KANIA: Okay. Alright…do you think there are a lot of events that are supporting hip-hop right now?

OMAR: Nope.

FAHIM & ADITYA [in unison]: No.

FAHIM: Not enough lah.

ADITYA: Not enough for the amount of people that are coming out. Yeah.

KANIA: How competitive are the artistes, like, with one another? Actually.

FAHIM: Hmm…okay, I'd say for the hip-hop community, there's a lot of love. Yeah. There's a lot of support from each other like—different crews come to watch different crews' shows. Like…it's not very exclusive, there's no beef among each other.

OMAR: But that's the problem also cause…

FAHIM: Yeah, that's the problem. There's no competition anymore.

OMAR: There's no competition, and also when you perform a show—the audience is the next band, is the next group, you get what I'm saying? Like…oh, like say I'm performing a show and then the next guy will be in the crowd like "Ayyeeee" then after that he'll go on stage then we vice versa. It's very…there's no support there lah.

KANIA: Wait, you mean…so…the audience are the rappers…or what?

OMAR: Yeah, I mean like um…it's a…it's becoming like a cycle…like you realise that the people that go for the shows are all the people that perform also. [**KANIA**: Oh…okay, okay, okay] So it's like where are the people that just come to listen?

FAHIM: Like…where are the fans?

OMAR: Where's the fanbase—listeners?

KANIA: Okay, okay. Got it. Well, with that also…are there a lot of collaborations among you? I mean among the practitioners, all the musicians?

FAHIM: Collaborations…

ADITYA: Not…not a lot actually. [**OMAR**: Yeah…] I think everyone's just trying to focus on their own stuff for now because I think the people that you hear nowadays are all relatively new to the scene, people putting out records now, I think they're all relatively new so I think they all wanna just find their own sound, first and foremost. And I think once that happens, there'll definitely be a lot of collaborations ah like…even we are thinking of collaborating with like…a whole range of musicians, but we still want to find our independent sound, first and foremost.

OMAR: And uh…I think our collaborations will never actually just stick to like hip-hop. We'll always branch out to like… "Yo, that guy can play the bass, that guy can play the saxophone. That's so cool." You know? Let's do that lah.

ADITYA: Yeah.

KANIA: Okay. Cool. Um and…do you think right now hip-hop is popular because of its commercial value? Like…because, because the fact that—you know how Kanye is now also like famous and all the Western artistes also famous. Do you think, in Singapore now, it's just because of that then it's also popular here?

FAHIM: I think…hip-hop has evolved into like a lifestyle, like a trend. Like it's not just like a genre of music you listening to, it's more like the whole look, the lifestyle—cars, bitches, money. [**OMAR**: Don't say bitches] It's, it's, it's—yeah, it's really the whole shallow lifestyle of hip-hop. So…yeah, wh-what do you guys think?

ADITYA: ...are we allowed to swear by the way?

KANIA: Yeah, it's okay.

FAHIM: Oh…okay.

OMAR: Oh…I'm gonna, I was gonna say 'fuck'…okay cannot lah, no. But…yeah, dude. Hip-hop…is popular lah. That's the baseline lah. Like…everywhere got hip-hop, you know?

ADITYA: Like y-you even listen to like…a Taylor Swift song and there's like a Kendrick Lamar feature on it. Like…like why?

[**OMAR** & **FAHIM** agreeing in the background]

FAHIM: Yeah. Now the rap verse of the song is the new guitar solo.

ADITYA: Yeah.

OMAR: Wow, that was good, that was good. [**ADITYA**: Yeah, that was nice] I bet you heard that in a different interview.

FAHIM: I did, actually. I did. I stole that from someone else.

OMAR: It's okay, it's okay. It looks good. Sounds good, sounds good.

KANIA: Okay. Alright. Cool. Uh…well then…has there been any restrictive factors that affect the way you make your music?

FAHIM & **ADITYA** agree in unison: Yes.

ADITYA: …that we cannot curse.

FAHIM: MDA.

OMAR: NS.

ADITYA: Yes. Oh, and National Service too.

FAHIM: National Service…

ADITYA: Basically the government…

KANIA: Oh, okay.

OMAR: But we're not gonna get into that because it's a very touchy subject.

FAHIM: Are we allowed to—do you want us to get into that, though?

KANIA: Kind of. Yes. [**OMAR**: Oh, yeah!] Which is cause, cause…

FAHIM: We'd love to share that.

OMAR: We'd love to share.

KANIA: This is like…my research is kind of going into that as well.

FAHIM: Okay.

OMAR: Wah, beautiful.

KANIA: Yeah…okay, yeah. What did you—what did you say about NS? Like how did NS kind of restrict you?

ADITYA: Because we like, took a two-year break. And we were like in our prime, I think, when we took a two-year break. Like we just came back from Shanghai. We had, like, a really good send-off show. And all the big names of Singapore hip-hop were at this show. And like…I think things were really blowing up for us. Uh, we had just released the EP, and then immediately like, we took like a… [**OMAR**: Two a…] …one and a half year hiatus. Yeah.

OMAR: You know? We suddenly like…fell off.

ADITYA: So we just disappeared. And like even when we put out music sometimes like…it will just be a Soundcloud release.

OMAR: And it's always like…at that point during NS, like…we like, never actually had a time to like, sit down and like, bond and like—we always…we always hang out because…as…as a group we were always friends first. It was never about the music at the start. So, we don't want to make this into like a business thing. Never. You know? So, it's like…we always hang

out. And sometimes you know, after toiling in the…in the rain, in the mud, in the storm—you're just sick, you're just tired, and you just want to go home, and just hang out with your boys then go back to sleep, you don't want to think about rapping and everything. So like…it took a toll on us. And it really took a toll on our um…our relevancy to a certain extent. But like…I really feel like…thank God for the listeners ah. The people that like…effs [sic] with us.

ADITYA: You can say it.

OMAR: Ah, it's okay. I don't, I don't feel comfortable. Ah…yeah…but because they are like the cult following for MHC. Like, dude, like…why do they still listen? That's crazy. You know, it's still humbling to this day. T-to have people like…e-mail us beats and like—"bro…" and then I'm like…wow! They don't have to do that, you know? Yeah.

KANIA: Um, actually like…could you also talk a little bit about how MDA restrict you?

FAHIM: MDA. Okay. So, yeah…I mean Singapore is a super conservative country…and when we make a song and we come up with lyrics. Sometimes the lyrics dive into like, taboo subjects that you don't talk about in school, the teachers don't cover, like your parents don't want to listen about like—sex, drugs, alcohol.

OMAR: Stalin.

FAHIM: What?

OMAR: Stalin.

ADITYA: Communism.

ADITYA, **OMAR** & **FAHIM** [in unison]: Communism.

FAHIM: Things like that, I mean…

OMAR: Yeah, a lot…a lot of those stuff.

FAHIM: I mean…I mean things that people think about, but they never talk about. So when we put it in our music, and we wanna perform it live, and we have to send our lyrics, MDA will run through your lyrics. And they will be like—"No, this song cannot. No, this song cannot." I'll be like "Why?" And they're like, "Oh, this song is too explicit. This song covers the subject that we don't want you to perform." Or "This song has one cuss word which we don't like." And you see? So like…it's already hard enough to put out our music since we have like…time restrictions. And when we do put out our music, we can't even perform like half the songs. And that's why we're still kind of underground. The places we perform still has to be like dodgy-ass clubs. Or like bars…places where we can swear and talk about things that no one will care about because MDA won't be there. And we played festivals like yesterday Gastrobeats, we played Laneway, we played Sing Jazz, we were super careful about what we were saying because anything we say wrongly, MDA will fine us. And we'll probably gonna be on like…some black list. We won't be able to say curse words anymore.

So, we have to be super careful, and that's the whole irony of it because the whole reason of us making music is to express ideas. And…you know, we never condemn the audience to interpret our music in a certain way. And when we have to censor ourselves for MDA's sake, it just…takes away the whole purpose of us making music in the first place.

ADITYA: It compromises the message ah.

FAHIM: Yeah…so…that's one of the biggest restrictions…first.

OMAR: True that, true that. Word up.

KANIA: Well…I mean you guys have like um…songs on the internet like Spotify, Soundcloud, and even Bandcamp right? Is that how you kinda go around MDA? Or…or…is there also—do you still have to go through MDA, too?

OMAR: No. No. We just release that…shit. [**ADITYA** & **FAHIM**: No] Like we…just go for it lah.

ADITYA: I think it's mostly for live shows where we really have to be careful about what we say.

KANIA: Oh…live shows. [**FAHIM**: Yeah.] Okay. Okay.

OMAR: But also when we rap our lyrics, we also just kinda…try to be careful still lah…because you don't wanna…

ADITYA: We try not to over-use cuss words like, for the sake of it.

OMAR: We also don't like people who like, you know like…you know like…ah, uh…American rappers, they be like—[rapping] "*Yeah, I killed this guy…with a glock nine.*" Then after that… bro…you're sabo-ing yourself lah. You're just snitching on yourself. So don't—don't do that lah.

KANIA: Okay. Okay, cool. And uh…rap has been known to be one of the methods in raising social matters back in the day. Are there any social matters in Singapore that you guys are concerned with?

OMAR: Wow…goddamn…goddamn, goddamn.

ADITYA: I think probably censorship ah. We have a song called "Zelda is the Princess" where we really get into like, how we do not want to be censored. So, I think that's our main fight lah…just like an all-inclusive avenue to do what you like with the people you love. Just have less restrictions and more love lah…I think.

KANIA: So basically you've done—you *have* addressed that in your songs, right?

ADITYA & **OMAR**: Yeah.

KANIA: Okay.

ADITYA: We should address it more though, I think.

KANIA: Do you think you will address it more?

OMAR: No. I mean…we will always evolve into different, different messages lah. It will never be just one. We don't want to be the guys—"Hey! The censorship guys are coming!" Nonono! I don't want. I want to be like—yo, the guys be like…that and that. Like yeah, we're gonna branch out lah…eventually.

KANIA: And do you think other hip-hop musicians should address this matter?

OMAR & **ADITYA** [in unison]: Of course.

FAHIM: Yeah…totally.

KANIA: Okay. Um…and then—there are some instances in which the government has tried to connect with the youth via hip-hop music. Like…for example, do you know Phua Chu Kang?

ADITYA & **FAHIM** [in unison]: Ah!

OMAR: Okay, the Phua Chu Kang song is dope.

ADITYA: The…the "SARS Rap", is it?

KANIA: Yeah, the "SARS Rap"…and then also do you know the song "Book Out Day"?

FAHIM: No…

ADITYA: By…Shigga Shay? [**FAHIM**: Oh yeah…]

KANIA: Shigga Shay. Yeah.

OMAR: That one, I have um…no qualms about that song because it is about book out day and I'm okay with that. But uh…it could've been done a bit better. Yeah, of course. Like every other song in the world. This is a very…uh…this is a very… [**ADITYA**: Wow, very impartial] …politically incorrect answer.

KANIA: Okay. Umm…how about the "MDA Rap"? Do you know about that?

OMAR: What?

KANIA: "MDA Rap"

ADITYA: Which one is that?

KANIA: Okay, I'll show you a bit.

OMAR: Oh my God, yes!

[Interview pauses because they were shown the "MDA Rap" music video]

ADITYA: I think we got the gist, man.

KANIA: But yeah…but what did you guys think of that? Like…the fact that the government kinda tried to connect….

OMAR: Okay, wait…straight up…

ADITYA: I thought that was pretty well done actually.

OMAR: …no, that was dope!

ADITYA: Yeah.

OMAR: That's like a certain aesthetic sia.

ADITYA: And like—they didn't take themselves too seriously at all. Like, they knew it was just a joke so…that's what made it funny.

FAHIM: Yeah…this is what? 10 years ago? [**KANIA**: Uh…yeah.] Ahead of its time sia.

KANIA: Yeah…2006-2007, I think.

OMAR: Yeah, but the problem is like if they did it now…Singapore is a very close-minded people.

ADITYA: Yeah, I think they'd get shat on ah…

OMAR: They'd get shat on…
KANIA: Wait…I think at that time as well they were also kinda being criticised.

OMAR: Oh, people were making fun of them for doing this? [**KANIA**: Yeah.] Well, that's not nice.

KANIA: Like…like…there was also a research done on this actually… [**FAHIM**: Hm…] …and the reaction that happened.

OMAR: Whoa.

KANIA: Okay. So yeah, okay. Cool! Alright. You guys can watch it on your own at like…your own time. [**OMAR**: Sure…] Then…is there like, anything that you think the government or

arts organisations should or can do more for hip-hop? Like…government…or arts organisation…

FAHIM: Hmm…do you want to talk about NAC Grant?

ADITYA: Yeah…

[Inaudible discussion among **FAHIM**, **ADITYA**, and **OMAR**]

OMAR: …but we haven't even applied for funding. So we don't know…the ins-and-outs. So we talk about something else, because we haven't experienced it yet. So we talk about things like…I guess we can talk about um, how…maybe they can organise more events. Not necessarily just for hip-hop. But just for everything—e-enough of having the top-tier of entertainment lah, playing the same shows everywhere, you know? Why not branch out to the kids? Like yo, these kids can do a song for your…see, instead of getting the people that you know to do a song for like—say NEA wants to do a song…you don't get some employees from NEA to do it. You get like…people that work hard and like practice and shit lah. So you can get like kids…the up-and-coming singers…things…okay, maybe hold up more competitions like…see…

ADITYA: Just get more involved lah.

FAHIM: And notice how there's no more Singapore Idol anymore? It just stopped after Sezairi.

OMAR: Bro, you know why or not, bro? Because the next three here already.

FAHIM: I mean like…Singapore Idol was…I think…okay, as corny as it was…it was a good thing going on because it was promoting music on like—television…commercial TV. That was great. We don't see this type of competitions happening anymore.

OMAR: Shout-out Hadi Mirza, man.

FAHIM: I mean-I mean I guess the government's doing things like Scape Invasion kind of things where like you have like rappers and singers, big names going around schools, promoting music.

OMAR: Oh, that's dope, that's dope.

ADITYA: That's a good start, yeah…

FAHIM: That's dope and they're being funded by the government for that kind of stuff. I think take that to a next level where you involve the kids who don't have a voice yet. The up-and-coming, you know? Enough of like the big names. Enough of—we don't want to see Shigga Shay every month. We don't want to see THELIONCITYBOY every month. It gets very like saturated, you know? And that's not promoting growth…that's not pushing kids to like challenge themselves because they're seeing the same guys every single time. If they see

kids their age performing, doing a song for NEA, they'd be like—"Whoa, that guy's my age and he's doing a song for NEA…I can do something as well."

OMAR: Yeah, and maybe he'll be like "Yo, I won't litter anymore." You know?

FAHIM: Yeah. "Maybe I'll stop throwing my cigarette butts on the floor." You know like…

OMAR: And he's like…fourteen!

[A little laughter]

KANIA: Well, if like…if any of the government bodies like, approach you guys to do it, would you guys do it?

OMAR: We'll do it.

FAHIM: Depends…

OMAR: But…we will do it. But on our own terms, bro!

FAHIM: Yeah, okay, yeah…depends how much creative control we have on the song.

KANIA: Oh okay, okay cool. Okay, so last question is just…what do you wish to see or hear more from the Singapore hip-hop scene?

OMAR: I want to hear more…Deliciious. I'm only kidding. No, but that guy is…that guy is up-and-coming. Ah…I wanna hear…more music in general lah…just like, people that…ah! I don't want to hear people doing the same thing. Like everybody's doing this whole trap stuff [**FAHIM** hums in agreement]. Like, dude, we get it…it's fun. I used to want to do trap stuff but…

ADITYA: But I think it's easy lah, you don't really challenge yourself.

OMAR: Yeah, just kinda like…set yourself apart.

FAHIM: Okay, I think what we want to see is more originality from the kids. [**OMAR**: Yeah.] Enough of being influenced by the whole Western rap scene.

ADITYA: Yeah, try to establish your own identity.

FAHIM: Yeah, establish your own Singapore ideas. So that people all over the world will be like "Hey, I want a Singapore sound." Maybe we should do a Singapore sound. Why not we develop that thing 'cause the US is like a…

ADITYA: Yeah, you're not gonna be more famous than like the Migos or Travis Scott doing trap, you know? [**FAHIM**: Yeah] So why not do…yeah, they're like the OGs of the whole

genre. So why not do something that you can be original with in, you can really be invested in and passionate about.

FAHIM: Shout-out to Singapore.

KANIA: Yeah! Singapore.

ADITYA: Shouts out [sic].

KANIA: Okay, that's actually all of my questions. [**OMAR**: Yeah, nice...] So we're done. Thank you so much for coming.

ADITYA, **FAHIM**, and **OMAR**: Thank you for having us.

KANIA: Thank you so much for doing this also.

Appendix D – Interview Transcript with Rauzan

KANIA: How did you get into hip-hop music?

RAUZAN: Uh…how I got into hip-hop music. As in locally or internationally?

KANIA: Both. Anything. Both

RAUZAN: Okay…let's just focus on Singapore hip-hop, right. So, um, when I was a lot younger I used to act in MediaCorp, right, for this show called Kids United in Kids Central. So I was introduced to this group called Triple Noize, they were doing Talent Time back in 2002. At that point of time I was so active in MediaCorp that I will see them frequently along the hallway, you know, and that kind of stuff.

One day, I decided to say 'hi' because at that moment I didn't know what was hip-hop, I thought it was a fashion thing, right. So they were the… *[stutter]* one of them, his name is Shafi, he's the F2—he's one of the rapper from Triple Noize, he was the one who actually introduced me to hip-hop.

Before this, my sister used to have cassettes of Tupac, Bone Thugz N Harmony, right. So I when I was a lot younger I didn't know what the [fuck] are they saying, right. Everything, everyone was just so angry, you know? In the cassette tape lah. So actually the person who actually guided me was Shafi lah, from Triple Noize, and that's how I became in love with hip-hop music, and I did my own research, and yeah, until today lah. I'm still learning.

KANIA: Yeah, that's cool. But what drove you—you're a producer, right?

RAUZAN: I am a music producer.

KANIA: And also a rapper.

RAUZAN: Uh, *used to*. I don't rap as much anymore.

KANIA: Oh, you're not? Okay, okay. But, like, what drove you to start making music?

RAUZAN: Kanye West.

KANIA: Really?

RAUZAN: Really—no, no, no. This was the Kanye before the crazy Kanye, right. So it was this mixtape called "The Freshmen Adjustment" right? Uh…1. So I heard this song called "Keep the Receipt" featuring Odb from The Wu Tang Clan. Oh my God, that production was fantastic! You know last time Kanye West used to, like, produce and he likes to use these vocals and then he would up-pitch it to make it sound like chipmunk? That kind of sound actually got me, you know really into like "Oh, how did he actually do this?" and he was, like, sampling from vinyls.

KANIA: [inaudible]

RAUZAN: Yeah…triple vinyls. Yeah, and it's not only that. It's, actually, there are more and more tracks that he actually sampled from vinyls. And he was actually the first rapper to actually use autotune—it wasn't T-Pain. So, I think the way he, um—not only his production side, but the way he raps, the way he writes—yeah, he's special lah. Until today, I don't know what happened to him, he's more into fashion, more into art. And art people are a bit weird so—yeah.

KANIA: So basically, he inspired you to make music.

RAUZAN: He inspired me to make music lah, basically, yeah. The first, uh, beat, that I actually made for, in Singapore, was for Akeem Jahat. He was the first rapper that I actually produced for. Yeah, the name of the track was "Take it Easy".

KANIA: Okay, that's cool. Do you know, like, what is the demographic of your listeners or audience?

RAUZAN: Uh, in Singapore. The demographic is a bit uh…actually—the matured crowd we have, you know, like back from 1999—they are still listening to hip-hop. But currently, the younger generation, uh, I think we have a good number for, of listeners in Singapore. It's a mixture of young and old. I don't know the exact numbers, but the reach is great.

KANIA: Do you mind if I ask, uh, like, what are the races of your audience?

RAUZAN: It's a mixed crowd like I said. It's a mix now. You know, back in the day, it used to be, like, Malay-driven kind of culture or scene. But now, ever since, like, you have, like, uh, THELIONCITYBOY, you have Shigga Shay, you have Mediocre Haircut Crew—they are mixed. The three of them are mixed; one Indian, an Arab guy or Malay guy, and uh, another Indian. So yeah, it's a good mix of crowd now. Uh, people has like…starting to, you know, accept hip-hop because of the hype, maybe? Because of the fashion, because of Hypebeast, and because of that, it plays a huge influence in the, uh, hip-hop scene in Singapore lah. Not only because of the music, because of the fashion as well.

KANIA: Then, when you make music or write lyrics, how do you—uh, relate to your audience? Kinda like…how do you decide the topic or what language you use, or…you know.

RAUZAN: Okay…uh—I think, uh, when—the process of making music, hip-hop is always about feelings, emotions. So, every time when I make music, right, it's always about like—at that moment what do I feel? Like, basically, like uh…sometimes it'll be about politics—but you can't go too deep into politics. But just keep it general, so that your listeners would be able to understand the topic that you are trying to, you know, relay.

But yeah…I think it's usually—I don't know, I don't plan it beforehand like "Eh, maybe tomorrow I want to do a song about *this* girl." You know, for me lah, at least—it's not like that. It's always about like—okay today…let's just sit down in front of the computer, let's

open up Ableton Live, find some samples, let's play some beats on the keyboard, and we see how or where it will take us. So usually, it will always be at that moment what do I feel? Or maybe before that, what happened? Okay maybe uh—*alamak*, this guy irritating lah, you know? Watching about politics, *alamak* GST go up! Okay, let's write a bit about that lah. Yeah, so it's usually the process, for me, is like that.

KANIA: Okay. In relation to that, like, you are a producer so you work with and collaborate with other artistes and rappers, right? So how do you actually like...not choose, but how do you start collaborating with these people? Who do you...you know, approach, usually?

RAUZAN: Usually, I would just follow them on Instagram, right. So I would just ask them "Eh bro, any new tracks that is coming up?" and they would say "No lah, bro. I'm working on this album or this EP." then I would just ask lah—"Eh, is it okay if I send you a beat tape?". So a beat tape consists of like, 5 beats, and you pick from there lah which one you want to use. Sometimes some rappers would pick all of it and it would turn into an album or an EP for them. That is usually the case, because my relationship with the—I've been in the scene for more than, like, 18 years. So like, everyone knows everyone in the scene. It's a very small scene, you see? So everyone knows everyone and it's easy to reach out to everyone. That's *if* they are open to, you know, to like "Okay, let's do it". Some of them are like "no, it's okay...I've got other producers to work on." So...yeah, it's okay! It's a give and take kind of thing. But that is usually how I approach people lah. I don't have to be "Eh, this guy is famous, let's attack this guy!" No. Even though like, he's new in the scene, let's give it a shot, you know? Let's work with this person. Actually the first person—like recently, uh...have you heard of Yung Raja?

KANIA: Yes.

RAUZAN: Yes. So he was the rapper...like at that point of time, nobody wanted to work with him. So I just call him up. Because I always see him at Canvas, he's usually MCing at Canvas. So I said "Eh, come up to the studio lah, let's see what we can work." And then we came up with "Tamilan" lah. Uh...which is one of the tracks on Spotify.

KANIA: Oh...you did the beat?

RAUZAN: I did the beat. [**KANIA**: Ooh!] "Tamilan" and "Bounce".

KANIA: Um, so...what do you think about the state of hip-hop in Singapore right now?

RAUZAN: Uh...I think it's positive. Everyone um, is beginning to work with one another. Versus back then—uh...watching how the older generation of the hip-hop runners do their thing, right, uh...they are not so...acceptive [sic] towards other people's music. So it's like, if you're from that camp, I'm not going to listen to you. You know, something like that. But now, we are in that stage where everyone listens to everyone, everyone shares, everyone collaborates with one another which is positive. We need that to happen, because the scene is so small. You can't be like "Eh, I don't support you, you don't support me." I mean—oh my God, you're not...you're not in pre-school. So it's beginning to be...uh, I think it's—yeah! I

think everyone accepts hip-hop right now. And they are willing to work with one another. So I think the state of hip-hop in Singapore is pretty good.

KANIA: But are there a lot of—do you think there are a lot of events that are supporting hip-hop right now?

RAUZAN: Uh…events? Yes! Yesterday—I mean, I don't know when is this is coming up but Radikal Forze, the RF Jam happened yesterday, iLight featured a couple of rappers. Uh…yes! I think for this year there's been a couple of events that already like, you know, featured hip-hop.

KANIA: And it's only March, right?

RAUZAN: Yeah…and it's only March, right? So yes.

KANIA: Are, but are…do you think there are some artists, I mean…how competitive are the artistes, like, with one another?

RAUZAN: Hmm…competitiveness in Singapo—I think there is, uh…lyrical-wise. But uh…sales-wise, I think the scene is still too young for that. Not as in the rappers. But…the way, the mindset of "Okay, I have a music…what am I supposed to do with this music? Am I just gonna put it out on YouTube and just let it, you know, on auto-pilot? Or am I going to start planning on music videos? Put it on Spotify? iTunes? Sign with COMPASS? Get royalties payback?" So to me…personal view, uh…in Singapore hip-hop, we are still young when it comes to business, people are still not that knowledgeable in a sense where: how they're gonna sell their music? Where they're gonna sell their music? Who they need to approach? So…yeah.

KANIA: Um…you already mentioned this, so…is it…do you think [hip-hop]'s popular just because of the commercial value—I mean, you mentioned it just now—but do you think it's just because of that or…?

RAUZAN: Uh…okay. If you…uh, if you're listening to…currently, if you're listening to what's playing on the radio, or be it—I'm sure you've heard of Migos, I'm sure you've heard of all these other rappers that has been doing it. And…what made them special is basically, right—it's…the sense of, I think to me lah, personally yeah—it's the fashion. So these people, even though they don't rap nice, but they look nice and it's hype, and it's Supreme, okay…then I'll listen to your music.

So currently, okay, we have a good number that truly supports hip-hop, who knows how many elements are there in hip-hop, what are the subcultures or sub-elements of hip-hop. Like we have the b-boy, the DJs, we have the graffiti artists, we have the the writers—which is the rappers, the subculture, we have the beatboxers. So we have the people who knows the education side of hip-hop, we also have a big chunk of people who are just there, either for the fashion or just hype. So…yeah, that's how I feel lah, basically.

KANIA: Okay. Well, um…has there been any restrictive factors that affect the way you make your music?

RAUZAN: Ah, so far so good. Uh…nothing. I mean, I don't know about the rest but for me, personally, no. Um…it's just our computer…we can write whatever we wanna write about. I don't know lah, maybe the police is uh…listening lah, but I don't touch on topics that are too deep. Uh, I know how to you know, balance myself. But yeah, so far so good, Singapore has been great…uh…we are not like China. Yeah, they are, you know. They are trying to ban hip-hop. Like *how are you going to ban hip-hop?* So Singapore has been great.

KANIA: But then, also…rap has been known to be one of the methods in raising social matters back in the days. Like, you know, The Last Poets…and all that. Are there any social matters in Singapore that you are concerned with?

RAUZAN: Hmm…uh, I mean…I'm not really into politics. I mean, I do watch the—uh…the budget debate which happened recently. It was a bit uh…crazy. Like a…but…I don't think I will have any problems or issues pertaining to this question because uh…I don't really write too deep and most of my—what I do is basically the beats and the music. The lyrics goes to the rappers so I have no comments about this lah.

KANIA: Um, do you think hip-hop musicians should address these matters though? Like other hip-hop musicians…

RAUZAN: Of course. I think, um…hip-hop, I mean—rap is the source for the younger generation to listen to these kinds of issues lah. Maybe they're not educated with what's happening around but when they listen to you know, just rappers that they look up to, so-called look up to, they will get the gist of it. You know, like, "Oh? It's actually happening ah these kinds of stuff?" So I think, yeah…yeah, I guess. They should.

KANIA: Also there are some instances which the government has tried to connect with the youth via hip-hop music, like for example like—do you know Phua Chu Kang?

RAUZAN: Yes.

KANIA: Do you know the song, Book Out Day?

RAUZAN: Do you know how to—can you give me an example of it?

KANIA: Oh my God, yes I can. It's actually a collaboration between the Ministry of Defence and Shigga Shay.

[**KANIA** shows a music video of the song]

KANIA: And also…I don't know if you know about the MDA rap? They also did a rap that you can maybe, see it on your own time. But…yeah, what do you think about that? You know, like…that the government is kinda…

RAUZAN: …using hip-hop to reach out to the youth, right?

KANIA: Yes.

RAUZAN: Uh, I think it's good. It's alright. But if you were to ask like, the real people who follows hip-hop. Some of them might say like—"This is crap. Why are you using our, you know, our culture to do all this kind of stuff?" But to me, personally, it's fine. If it helps to reach out to the masses easier by rapping cornily. Then okay, do it. But yeah, I mean…I'm okay with it. It doesn't matter at all. I mean…everybody can rap. Like you know there's a term where people use before like recently—"everybody's a DJ." So now *every*body's a rapper. So, I think it's alright.

KANIA: In relation to that as well, is there anything that you think the government or arts organizers should do more for hip-hop?

RAUZAN: Uh, I think you—we can't really blame the government, because they don't have people who are working inside who is into hip-hop. You know, maybe, what they do is just—"Oh, you have this project, okay here's a few bucks—go and do it." So I think it's our responsibility to actually—if you want to do something for hip-hop—write to the government. Like we have this NAC grant, we have a couple of grants, even COMPASS gives out grants for you to do events and stuff, right.

So, it goes back to the answer just now about how young we are in business sense for hip-hop in Singapore. I think we don't have many people who organise gigs, who actually fight for events for hip-hop. The only people I know is basically Felix from RF, he did the—every year, lah—is the RF Jam thing. Last time we used to have this person called Imran, he used to run Beat Society. Imran Jimain. So he moved to KL now, so nobody looks after. We used to have this person called Freakeezy. He used to run 65andHope.

So, you see, I think the reason why they stopped is because they don't see the potential of getting paid from whatever they do. Because the process of doing an event is so tedious—I'm sure you know, right? So…I think it comes to the point where they just can't do it anymore because they don't see the monetary side versus what they've been doing. But now, if we read—if we look up on the website, the government actually gives you money. Even if you wanna do an album right, they'll give you a certain…okay—"how much is the album? We will pay, like at least 60 or 50 percent of the cost"—which will help you a lot. And most of the rappers in Singapore, they have friends who make beats, it's basically—"Bro, I pay you 50 dollars lah, you make for me." So now versus the government giving you like 10 grand, 11 grand, which you can book a studio where you can do your thing. So um, yeah, we have like a…the government actually support whatever we are doing it's just that the proposal that you are going to write to them—has to be you know, you have to reach out to the multi-racial, to the youth, the positive message must be there—you understand right, how it works? So yeah…I think they *have* been supportive. Like a…it's just our responsibility to just reach out or ask for help.

KANIA: Right. So it's from the hip-hop scene itself?

RAUZAN: Yes. We need to work for it. Yeah…yeah…

KANIA: Now what do you wish to see or hear more from the Singapore hip-hop scene?

RAUZAN: I mean, the content side of hip-hop like making music, releasing music, music videos. We have the people who does all that, we have the rappers, we have a lot of producers, upcoming producers, upcoming rappers. What I really want to see is the people who actually promote these group of people. Like yeah—we have a lot of contents but we don't have a lot of people promoting. You know, I would like to see like schools, like maybe people like you, right—to actually share the music or have a—I don't know uh…a magazine or whatsoever to give out. You know, like something like that. Or an e-mail blast to your school like—"Hey, I know you don't care but actually we have these group of people who just…" you know? We need the support in that sense. Like…content-wise…ugh, everybody can make music, everybody can DJ, everybody can…you know? So we just need the push basically. People like a…I don't know, I can't name—none currently.

I think uh…we used to have people like Liquid magazine. Like they actually printed out magazines and it's 100% hip-hop inside, Singapore hip-hop. I mean we know we have like uh…other sources to find regarding to the hip-hoppers like Migos and all that. But the scene in Singapore, we don't have enough push…exposure. So I think we need more of that kind of groups.

KANIA: Actually, what happened to that Liquid magazine?

RAUZAN: It just died down lah, I guess.

KANIA: It just stops?

RAUZAN: Because there wasn't any like a government funding. It's not funded. It's basically from their own pockets. So I think the group just decided to uh—enough lah. And I think at that point of time, everyone converted into digital. Everyone is subscribing to newspaper. Nobody reads the physical paper anymore right? So I think yeah—we need like group of young and energetic people to actually front or run this thing. Uh…keep it 100% hip-hop or even Southeast Asia hip-hop. You know. Not just Singapore hip-hop so that we could share with people in Indonesia—"Wah, that's happening in Singapore? Why, that's cool!" and "Wah, that's happening in Indonesia…"—you know, something like that. We don't have that right now.

I think the only person who is doing it uh…you know Joe Flizzow right? He's doing that 16Baris. Yeah, that is awesome and it's amazing because he features like people from Indo, Brunei, Singapore, so yeah—we need more of that. But the thing about Joe—he has money. So, it's easier for him to reach out to people like—"Okay…how much is a ticket from Indonesia to Singapore okay maybe 80…"—you know something like that and just pay for it, but for us to do that—uh we will have like…a lot of steps to it actually.

KANIA: Actually, in your 18 years of, you know, being active in the scene—what are, kind of, the challenges that you have faced so far? I mean 18 years is a long time, so that's like—woah, you know?

RAUZAN: My fight for the scene right now is basically to get everyone working together because back then we don't have that, like I said. We don't, we…when I first started, social media wasn't a thing. So how we share our music is sometimes…I don't know if you've heard of this uh…before there were torrent, it was actually Kazaa, Limewire, uh…MySpace, Friendster, right? That's my era lah. We don't have like uh…Facebook where you share one time and ten or thirty of your friends are sharing the stuff. So basically, back then we didn't have social media and we don't support one another's project. So like I said, "If you're part of this camp or this family—hip-hop family, then you're on your own, we are on our own."

So now…what I'm trying to do is…the reason why I did Base Foreword is basically to bridge the gap—the older generation, which you saw. It was Elemantical Fury, X'Statix, these are the people who did it before…like back in 2000.

So…in Singapore we don't have the basics. Like…we don't know who actually started this hip-hop thing. Uh…it was Sheikh Haikel—that was the spark lah basically. *Asia Bagus*, *Construction Sight*. And because of that—and Najip Ali, he actually pushed the scene. So…this newer generation, they don't know like…how did it come? "Oh maybe it was Migos lah, maybe it was Phuture lah, maybe it was…"—but it's not. We have our own people who actually pushes the scene. Like people like Sheikh Haikel, the Godfather. He calls himself "The Godfather of Hip-hop" which is…he is! Because he is one of the few people who actually did it, right?

So uh…it's just bridging the gap, currently, the fight is that. I want this newer generation to know who did it before them and what was the process like. Versus now…what—what you have now is basically…if you have a music right…you have a song…okay, let's just put it on YouTube then get your ten friends to share it. Last time it wasn't like that, last time you have to like…print out CDs, you know some of them if they have the money right? They will print out vinyls. You know, that kind of stuff. The hustle was real, you know. Now it's like zero cost? Making music is a zero cost. Yeah, marketing is zero cost.

So…I'm trying to get the older generation also to learn from the new cats on how to put out their new music. So it's a sharing process of just trying to blend this two together so we have a brighter future lah, basically. So I'm trying you know…I'm like the MP of the hip-hop scene right now, no lah. I'm just trying to like…mix these two up. And uh, stop that mindset of "You're from that fam, I don't want to support you." No. It's not the time anymore. We have to share one another's music because the scene is so small. If you are starting to like…have that kind of mind set then you are not gonna help the scene at all and it won't…it won't grow.

And it's a process you know? It's like after 10 years right…the scene will die. It's been happening a lot of times already. This is…this is not the first. This is…like, it's in…okay the last few years…it's like after every 10 years, the scene will die. Then people will get into EDM, people will get into Reggaeton, people will get…okay, Reggaeton is hip-hop lah but—

the music change. Then 10 years later…so now we are in the phase of the newer hip-hop era. So this is the next 10 years lah, so let's hope that everyone can work together so that we can sustain for the next 50...30…you know, even 5, 10 more years.

KANIA: So you mean it's like…hip-hop is now just starting out again.

RAUZAN: Yes. It's the rebirth.

KANIA: It's the rebirth of hip-hop.

RAUZAN: It's the rebirth…again.

KANIA: And before that, was it like…indie?

RAUZAN: Oh my God, before—we just entered the 2018 lah. We just entered the new phase of that drought lah. Before this, it was trap music, it was EDM, everyone listens to EDM, EDM, EDM. So now it's back to hip-hop again. So we'll see lah, then it will go back to a little bit of reggae—which what…uh…*afrobeats*—which what Drake is currently doing like—[imitates afrobeats drum beats]. So before this, it was reggaeton, now it's afrobeats, and then we'll go back to electronics, then we'll go back to hip-hop again, so it's that cycle.

KANIA: It's a cycle.

RAUZAN: It's a cycle. It will never end. And 18 years…exact same thing happen over and over again.

KANIA: Okay, I think one more question. Like…how did Base Foreword actually happen? Like…did you approach Esplanade or…?

RAUZAN: Oh no. It was funny, actually. So, we started the rebirth of OCK. So OCK is this group of people who actually…hangs out over at Far East. So we have people like Elemental Fury, the older generation of hip-hop lah, Radikal Forze, yeah everyone used to hang out at Far East so there was an Old Chang Kee in front there, right. That is OCK lah…so basically…that's the hang out spot—OCK. Then uh…eh, sorry, sorry, what was the question again? Can I just—really quick.

KANIA: How did um—did you approach Esplanade or did Esplanade approach you?

RAUZAN: Um, so we did a rebirth of OCK at Canvas. So we wanted to film that event so that we can propose to Esplanade. So, what happened was that—after that show right, straight away Esplanade contacted me randomly. So I was like "What happened?" So and then I told them like "Eh, I actually did this event at Canvas to actually prepare a marketing or proposal bits for you to actually call us to perform but actually I don't even have to do it now" because it's like…random. So it was random. Because they were promoting poetry. Uh…spoken word week. So uh…they told me like they have always wanted to work with me like since last time. It's just they couldn't find the right time. So, that's how it started lah. And my fight was to actually blend the two generations together right, so it's a great

opportunity. So it was…wah, it's quite cool ah. Yeah, so next year I'll be doing it again. Baseforeword 2019.

Appendix E – Interview Transcript with Azri

1. **What do you think about hip-hop music in general?**

I can put Hip Hop in different timelines. The past, as in 70's -90's, from mid 2000 to 2007. Then, from 2007 forward to now.

The past. Original, different and innovative. The mids, Different, experimentation, different sphere and innovative. 2007 to now. Jarring, repetitive , repetitive , repetitive, you get my point.

No one can claim that they know hip hop in it's entirety. Anyone who claims that are either read a lot of things hip hop, form on opinion after reading it and believe in what he is saying. Another who listen to a lot of hip hop, then form an opinion of it and believing what he is saying. Another is the one who listen to one kind of hip hop , change to another form , because of a friend and believing in that. Another who still stuck in the old ways and never consider new hip hop is the shit and he probably have a point and believing in it. Another are those who like everyone else follow what's his friend listen to and just follow it until he forms an opinion, believing in it even though he didn't believe it in the first place. That's hip hop for you out there, conviction. Believing in a form of music who vicariously took from some other forms of music that was taken from some other forms of music by another culture, by the white Americans from the African Americans, made their music popular and now taken back to the black community through hip hop. In some ways full circle. Now the disparity is whether this forms of music is legitimate. Enjoyed by many doesn't mean respect for the form. The way I see hiphop. A bastard child of disco, punk and rock. It have no rules to speak of. The only rule is the beat.

Hip hop. Caught the imagination when I was young. You hear people speak over music. That is what it feels like. It was in the eighties. I heard Sugarhill Gang rappers Delight. Even though they were not considered pioneers in this genres but it caught everyone attention worldwide. After many years then you would know about Cool Herc and GrandMaster Flash in magazines by relatives who came back from the states. There were no internet. I can't stress this enough. Because the were no internet, all our information came late. But when it strikes you it strikes you.

Later on LL Cool J, Run DMC came into the fore.

The beat have always been important. Breakdancing is part of hiphop, always have been. A kind of dance nobody in what I considered academic dance would understand. It was not like what it is right now. What is considered urban dance or hip hop dance is mainstream right now. There is no separation. Acceptance is easy. It's considered cool now to be associated with hiphop. Before in Singapore breakdancing is considered dangerous because the authorities don't understand it like rock, metal and rock and roll before them. It's considered from the streets, undignified, low class because in my opinion the proponents of it probably comes

from lower income people, disenfranchised, basically the poor. Mostly minorities like me.

It speaks to us because just like punk, our parents don't like it. The more they hate it, the more we love it. Teenage angst and all that. Hip hop, through the years have grown in different ways, Good and bad. Music from hiphop have basically blurred the lines between stealing and paying homage to music from a different era. I am talking about sampling of course. A blasphemous word I think locally but an accepted practice in the west. It is even respected. Again this is my opinion. There is skills involved here. Sampling is a huge part of hiphop whether you like it or not. Everyone starts that way.

Hip hop generates interest because it's in your fact, most of the time. Seldom a hiphop song is about something they don't complain about. There is always something to complain about. But because of this, it Is not everyone taste.

Early hiphop is almost always about partying. Only a few will swim in political statements. But as the 80's grew, people like Public Enemy start preaching through their songs. Whether or not it was a good move depends how you see it. Because while you riling about the government and defending the poor, you are seen in videos wearing shoes , clothes and jewellery that is expensive to say the least.

Whether hiphop is about generating discussions on a topic remains to be seen. It can easily get clouded by the obvious misogyny. Women are second class in this. They can't deny it. It is easy to say it will change but if people want to say that hiphop is about making a statement, then they need to have a cold hard look in the mirror. There is no running from it.

What always get people attention though is still the music. Whether it incorporating disco, jazz, rock and edm nowadays or even using an orchestra or a full band, the music always gets people attention. And the beat. You will know it when you hear it. An indescribable feeling. You know this beat can turn into hiphop anytime. Hiphop in general, is like a sponge. It will absorb everything and then swipe clean any excess of the previous things on a plate and make it new.

2. **Have you heard of any hip-hop artistes in Singapore before? Name them.**

Construction Sight, Sheikh Heikel and Ashidiq. I listen to them. They were in my era, probably age group. The rest comes and go. Sleeq, Once upon a time and a catchy group who was in Singapore talent show. Triple Noize was really good. But they were criticize by having a local accent on that that show. I thought they were robbed of the first place. Funny because nowadays everyone here wants to rap like an American. But local stuff not up to scratch

3. **How much do you know about Singapore's hip-hop music?**

I know a bit, but just like everyone else it stays underground. It always stays there because it's not mainstream cool. Just like hardcore punk for example. And especially if profanity is in your DNA, really, look where you are living. It's ok underground. You know there is a law about the middle finger here. That's real. So

how far do you think this can go when you want to be something out of a music genre people don't really care or respect.

It's like an accompanying act to the main act. That's what I think of hiphop here. And recently listening to people in hiphop, who wants to stay true to their original expletives ways because it would give them some street cred, also talk about working with the government body. It's very confusing what they are trying to do. Is it about the music or the statement and at the same time do not want to be accused of selling out. You can't have the cake, you know the rest. In all that I don't see anyone talk about the music. Is it a political movement? A social commentary? Or is it about music?

There is something to say because you are young and responsibilities haven't bite you yet? Or do really have something to say. Or you have something to say just so you have something to say.

What is it with local hiphop?

If it is really alive, then people like me who are disinterested need to get woken up. But it is not my responsibility. It is the hip hop community job. And it is tougher for this genre because it is simply looked at as a genre with more swag than substance. And with no inclination to incorporate ethnic music into it, nobody will care, It might die. Sorry if it's doom and gloom, except for a few people jumping around in a club, Who cares about hip hop locally. Really. That's the problem now. And if it's considered dangerous, then hiphop will suffer. No one want their children listening to the word fuck said 40 times in a song.

If you can't find ways to express yourself without cursing not cussing, then it speaks volume of your intellect. It's easy to get impress by a person who rhymes with precision and speed of thought but with cursing, being where we are, that will never get the respect.

Example, if you rap, then making say, a statement about your cause or what you think is your cause, then you you say fuck like a machine gun, in that particular community will say that is art. He or she is expressing themselves.

Say I got angry at someone who disrespect me, who stole from me for example, so I went on a tirade of obscenities and my tirade was nuance and rhymes too, but because there's no beat, then I am just saying the fuck for the sake of the word, even though I have a point. He just lost it, people will say. He did not rap. So to put that in general context., people will regard what I do and what the rapper do is the same. The difference is that he's on stage or doing rap battles.

So the respect people craves in this part of the world for hip hop, that is way far off. Where we are is important. You have to look where you are and consider this, are willing to get arrested for your art, albeit something that had been here for a long time but have always been on the sidelines. Maybe I'm old.

4. **What messages do you get from these songs?**

Messages? None. HDB, government, freedom of speech. Same shit different color.

   a. "Tamilan" by Yung Raja: Not bad, message still same

   b. "Lion City Kia" by Shigga Shay: Bad as in never want to hear it again no matter how popular people say he is. Shit is shit. Putting so call famous local people doesn't soften what is essentially a pop song

   c. "Red Dot" by Subhas: Different music, but doing what the west is doing? Beat is good though. Same message.

   d. "Alive" by Big Getta: Good flow, beat but I'm over the kid voice chorus. More personal.

5. **What do you think after listening to all these songs?**

I don't feel anything. Most of the voice I heard more imitate than original. Nothing catch my attention. You get bored real fast.

6. **What do you think of the government and authorities connecting with the youth via hip-hop music? (e.g. Phua Chu Kang, IMDA Rap)**

My answer, commendable but lame. Too late. It is the homogenization of the youth to become what they want hip hop to be here. Obvious and crude. Pathetic is more appropriate

7. **Do you think there's enough support for Singapore hip-hop music?**

No and I think there will never be the kind of support people expect. But I might be wrong in the future

8. **Would you listen to more Singapore hip-hop?**

The polite answer is maybe. But not necessarily.

9. **Is there anything you wish to see or hear more from the Singapore hip-hop scene?**

I do wish the arrogance of it will go away. If from far people don't want to be around you, you have a problem. And they have to reconcile what they want to become. Music or attitude, statement or star.

Appendix F – IMDA Guidelines for Audio Materials

GUIDELINES FOR AUDIO MATERIALS

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1   Covers should be vetted in the same way as posters and calendars. When vetting songs, consideration should not only be given to the lyrics but also the mood conveyed and the voice-over effects.

2   Audio recordings are more stringently censored than printed words as they can be performed "live" and played in music stores. Decisions on songs are based on their lyrical contents and voice-over effects.

3   Audio recordings are disallowed if they contain:

(a)   Objectionable songs

        Lyrics are objectionable if they contain:

        i)   Obscene sexual connotations
                Songs containing sexual descriptions, references to sex organs and lengthy lewd sounds are disallowed. Those which express the singer's sexual desire or homosexual love are also disallowed.

        ii)   Excessive Swearing
                Songs containing excessive vulgar words are disallowed.

        iii)   Themes which could offend religious sensitivities
                Songs with themes which could offend followers of major religions in Singapore are disallowed. These include songs which attack a particular faith, depict religious figures in a negative light or as objects of sexual desire. Songs which encourage the worship of Satan are also disallowed.

        iv)   Themes which encourage drug taking and anti-social behaviour
                Songs with themes which encourage drug-taking are disallowed. These include songs which depict drug-taking as a relaxing form of activity and those arguing for the legalisation of drugs. We also

disallow songs encouraging anti-social behaviour such as anarchy or suicide.

(b)   Album Covers

Album covers are treated as stringently as posters and calendars as they can be displayed. Those depicting topless women, frontal nudes or exposing pubic hair are disallowed.