Gangsta Rap: A Practice-led Autoethnographic Study in the Audiovisual Arts

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Table of Contents

List of Illustrations:

Figure 14:
Carlos Santos, *Untitled* (2019), Digital Illustration 58 x 41 cm, Group Exhibition. SUES at Liverpool John Moores University.

Figure 15:
Carlos Santos, *Potential Portrait in Process for Untitled* (2019), Digital Illustration, Private Collection

Figure 16:
Carlos Santos, *Colour Tests for Untitled* (2019), Digital Illustration, Private Collection.

Figure 17:
Carlos Santos, *Rap Portrait Database* (2017), Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 18:
Carlos Santos, *Frames from Beautiful Brokers' L.O.V.E* (2016), Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 19:
Carlos Santos, *Frames from Beautiful Brokers' Number One* (2016), Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 20:
Master P, Frame from Master P's music video *Is there a Heaven 4 a Gangsta?* (1996), Music Video, No Limit Records.

Figure 21:
Carlos Santos, *Is there a Heaven 4 a Gangsta?* (2019), Digital Illustration, Private Collection.

Figure 22:
Carlos Santos, *Virtual Test for Is there a Heaven 4 a Gangsta?* (2019), Digital Illustration, Private Collection.

Figure 23:
Carlos Santos, *Preliminary Sketches with Other Lyrics for the Exhibition* (2019), Digital Illustrations, Private Collection.

Figure 24:
Carlos Santos, Frames from Beautiful Brokers' *Rollin* (2012), Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 25:
Carlos Santos, *E 106th St & 3rd Ave on a Week Day*, Digital Photograph, Private Collection.

Figure 26:
Carlos Santos, *Hall of Fame in Harlem*, Digital Photograph, Private Collection.

Figure 27:
Carlos Santos, *Frames from Beautiful Brokers' L.O.V.E (Extended version) 1,* Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 28:
Carlos Santos, *Frames from Beautiful Brokers' L.O.V.E (Extended version) 2,* Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 29:
Carlos Santos, *Frames from Beautiful Brokers' L.O.V.E (Extended version) 3,* Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 30:
Carlos Santos, *Frames from Beautiful Brokers' L.O.V.E (Extended version) 4,* Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 31:
Carlos Santos, *Frames from Beautiful Brokers' Number One (Extended version) 1,* Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 32:
Carlos Santos, *Frames from Beautiful Brokers' Number One (Extended version) 2,* Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 33:
Carlos Santos, *Frames from Beautiful Brokers' Number One (Extended version) 3,* Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 34:
Carlos Santos, *Frames from Beautiful Brokers' Number One (Extended version) 4,* Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 35:
Carlos Santos, Frames from Beautiful Brokers' *Rollin (Extended version) 1,* Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 36:
Carlos Santos, Frames from Beautiful Brokers' *Rollin (Extended version) 2,* Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 37:
Carlos Santos, Frames from Beautiful Brokers' *Rollin (Extended version) 3,* Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 38:
Carlos Santos, Frames from Beautiful Brokers' *Rollin (Extended version) 4,* Digital Collage, Private Collection.

Figure 39:
Carlos Santos, *Preliminary Sketches for Hoodzilla* (2018) (Extended) 1, Illustration. Blue ink on white paper, Private Collection.

Figure 40:
Carlos Santos, *Preliminary Sketches for Hoodzilla* (2018) (Extended) 2, Illustration. Blue ink on white paper, Private Collection.

Figure 41:
Carlos Santos, *Preliminary Sketches for Hoodzilla* (2018) (Extended) 3, Illustration. Blue ink on white paper, Private Collection.

Abstract

Gangsta Rap: A Practice-led Autoethnographic Study in the Audiovisual Arts is formed from the original perspective, and combined role of an academic, artist, designer and practising musician. The study is based on the unique combination of the author's lived experience and academic research which consolidates the limited international scholarship in the field and significantly extends this, thereby offering important new findings.

The emergence of gangsta rap is one of the consequences from the loss of factories and jobs in America, the reduction of public investment in the poorer areas and the lack of support of workers' rights during the 1970s and 1980s in major American cities. As a music genre, it is mostly a product of black culture, although Latinos and other minorities have contributed to its development due to the similarities for these groups in living conditions and aspirations. As this music deals with issues of space and identity of poor working-class youth, it reached several countries in the world that were in a similar position to the USA.

Minority youth in rap music has often been perceived as a danger by public institutions, including police and schools. In this doctoral study, the author questions this perception and, moreover, how excessive criticism and in some cases legal actions against rappers have limited their creative practice, undermined their freedom of speech, and criminalised their artistic outputs. Furthermore, the thesis questions what positive outcomes can come out of the production of gangsta rap music and if these outcomes justify its creation.

Methodologically, this research undertakes an extensive comparison between the different theoretical works around gangsta rap, where different authors argue that gangsta rap can either promote negative attitudes towards police, women and traditional family values or promote racial harmony between listeners from all backgrounds as well as a platform to those in disadvantaged positions that are not usually heard. The historical context leads to the practice-led ethnographic research wherein the author uses himself as a case study to map the relationship between his childhood, living conditions and artistry. Finally, an extensive body of practical work by the author and artist in the arena of gangsta rap accompanies the thesis to showcase not just the final product (such as music videos, songs, and exhibitions), but also to reveal the tensions behind the artist's creative process.

Based on the author's autoethnographic research, which consolidates the cited views of other artists and scholars, rap music inspired him to express his feelings, ideas and worldview where no other place permitted the discussion of such topics. Urban culture helped him to develop certain skills that later on in life allowed him to make friends, gain a job and, most importantly, accept who he is and where he comes from. The findings from the research conclude and propose that rap music is more a reaction to social issues, inequalities, or violence than the originator of these factors.

Keywords: Gangsta rap; hip-hop; urban culture; working-class; youth.

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Declaration

Some of the theoretical and practical work included in this thesis has been exhibited and presented nationally and internationally as listed below:

Santos C. *Freedom of Speech and Creativity in Gangsta Rap*. Sofa Talk. Liverpool John Moores University. June 2018.

Santos C. *Untitled*. Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool. U.K. June 2018.

Santos C. *Hoodzilla*. A Liverpool Bestiary, ATINER 9, Annual International Conference on Visual and Performing Arts 11-15 June 2018, Athens, Greece ISBN 978-960-598-199-0, sponsored by the Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts.

Santos C. *Hoodzilla*. A Liverpool Bestiary, Impact 10, - Encuentro, Santander, Spain 1 – 9 September 2018.

Santos C. *Hoodzilla*. Birmingham City Gallery as part of 'Arts Council Collections', 21st Oct 2018.

Santos C. *Hoodzilla*. The Williamson Gallery Liverpool as part of the symposium 'The Things that Live Under the Stairs', 15th November 2018.

Santos C. *Hoodzilla*. 'The Big Draw', Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, October 2018.

Santos C. *Hoodzilla*. 500x Gallery, Texas, Dallas. USA, March 2019.

Introduction

> I would say to Radio 1, do you realise that some of the stuff you play on Saturday nights encourages people to carry guns and knives?
> (David Cameron in Gibson, 2006).

The comment above was made in an allusion to the increasing knife violence in London and how the music played by Tim Westwood every weekend in his BBC radio programme (focussing on gangsta rap and grime) could encourage young people to commit crimes. David Cameron was a professional politician, and as such, he represented a large sector of the society with similar ideas and values. His words criminalised young poor rap recording artists who, in some cases, have been a victim of violence, racism, discrimination and ultimately disfranchisement. Furthermore, one can argue that behind rap music critics, there is a belief that young people from poorer (and often less educated) backgrounds are less capable of producing certain forms of arts without being involved in real life events than white artists.

As an example, when a young 19 year-old man robbed a car and killed a police officer during a routine traffic stop on 11 April 1992 in Texas (Talerman, 1994) it was said during the trial that black hip-hop artist, Tupac Shakur's, lyrics influenced him to commit the crime. Therefore, the victim's family filed a suit against Tupac and his record label Interscope, supported by some powerful members of the U.S. government in what was a challenge to the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. This thesis argues, following a previous discussion (Poulton, 2006),

that if instead of Tupac, who was a young poor Afro-American male, the criminal had been listening to *I shot the Sheriff* performed by white musician, Eric Clapton, the music would have become irrelevant during the trial, and the media would have focused on the incident only.

Gangsta rap is a product of Afro-American culture, however, as it deals with issues of identity and space it has allowed young lower-class people from all around the world to have a voice, where otherwise they would have been muted. In my case, as a rap music artist, music video director, illustrator, white and Hispanic person I started using my own practice as a response to social inequalities, family issues and ultimately rebelliousness. However, although my lyrics were not 'edgy' nor explicitly violent, hypermasculinity has always been present on my art which received excessive criticism because of the indirect association with other artists from the same genre.

The original contribution of this thesis consists of the first-person experience of the researcher as a practitioner, the variety of methods used to deconstruct preconceived ideas linked to race and social class and the body of practical work produced and discussed related to the topic. This thesis aims to respond to the following questions:

- Are gangsta rap artists perceived as violent?

- Do gangsta rap artists enjoy from the same creative freedom that other white cinema Directors or Artists do?

- Are social class and ethnicity playing a role in the perception of gangsta rap artists?

- Are rap music artists responding to social issues, or creating new ones?

- What are the benefits of producing rap songs and music videos for young working-class people?

The literature review and more extensively Chapter One help to identify what gangsta rap is and its complex relationship with politics and modern economy. This chapter, through a critical discourse analysis, questions the perception that we have of working-class youth and working-class minorities, their contributions to popular culture and how they have been portrayed by the media without considering their previous exposure to certain environments.

Chapter One argues that Jim Crow laws, redlining policies and modern segregation in the United States followed by a long process of deindustrialisation and impoverishment, isolated and disadvantaged some communities more than others. As platforms to display their creative outcomes within those communities were limited, it encouraged gangsta rappers to find alternative ways to represent themselves and to generate revenue with their artistry.

The term ‘authenticity’, which is a heavily contested field in popular music studies, is also deconstructed during this chapter. This concept has, on one hand protected rap music from an excessive cultural appropriation, as it requires certain personal attributes to belong to the music genre, including but not limited to demographics, race and socio-economic status, but on the other hand, it has allowed the mainstream media to portray gangsta rappers as criminals by using their creative outputs as real-life events.

As a prelude to the practice-led research outputs, Chapter Two (Gangsta Rap: An Ethnographic Account) features myself as a case study, and analyses how harsh living conditions, social class and certain hypermasculine stereotypes have influenced me not just as a person, but also as an artist. In this chapter I analyse how as a working-class child, I decided to embrace my culture by opposing myself to certain mainstream traditions, and how rap music gave me a sense of belonging that I could not find anywhere else. Moreover, I continue to explore how drugs and other crimes influence young people living within certain areas, and in my case, how it shaped my music and my view of the world.

Furthermore, by retrieving some of the experiences that I had as a teenager living with my family, the research creates a comparison on how certain topics addressed in American gangsta rap, such as violence, sex and drug use, were more openly discussed in this music than school, television or other religious events that I attended, which partially explains why young people may feel attracted to this music. Finally, the thesis discusses some of the potential benefits that this music

brought me personally, but also how I was affected by excessive criticism for adopting a music style that was associated with particular social classes. Making rap music helped me to feel empowered, but also disadvantaged due to its criminalisation, and in this chapter through an autoethnographic journey, The research analyses the links between my early practice and the social context of which I was part.

Finally, Chapter Three displays numerous artworks as part of my practice-led research journey as a rapper. The chapter features three songs and music videos, and three illustration pieces, their progress, and the subsequent national and international exhibitions.

The songs (*L.O.V.E*, *Number One* and *Rollin*) were not intended to make direct references to the thesis as they were created following my creative inspiration, however, as I was documenting the creative journey and creating the music at the same time, at points I felt hyper-conscious of some of the issues that I was discussing in Chapters One and Two, which also influenced the result of the songs. The music videos came under the group name 'Beautiful Brokers', which features my partner Inda and myself as Sonny Evans. During the recording of the songs and music videos I took control over the whole creative process, from the music production, lyrics, and video direction. Another contribution to this research field is how Chapter Three reflects on some of the issues that I have experienced as a practitioner, and how or if my creative freedom has been affected by external pressures.

Two of the three illustrations, *Hoodzilla (2018)* and *Untitled (2019)*, took part in different exhibitions nationally and internationally (full list provided in Declaration, p.8), and more than gangsta rap itself, they focus on issues of identity and racial stereotypes. The last illustration, *Is there a Heaven 4 a Gangsta?,* was created for an exhibition organized by the private gallery Atkinson Gallery Millfield School in Somerset who invited research students across the country to participate. When I created the illustration, I wanted to reflect on some of the complex philosophical issues that I was dealing with, but I also wanted to test if a gangsta rap themed illustration would be accepted and exhibited in a commercial context alongside with traditional artwork.

Structurally the thesis is divided into three main chapters that also employ different research methods and approaches. Chapter One identifies why gangsta rap artists historically have created certain types of lyrics, and the relationship with their socio-political environment. Furthermore, Chapter One analyses the social response to this music compared to other art forms. Chapter Two, through a personal ethnographic account, deconstructs stereotypes associated with working-class youth, and moreover it provides this thesis with a case study that aims to respond some of the questions previously asked. Finally, a body of practical work in the arena of gangsta rap (including music videos, songs, illustrations and photography) reviews the previous research, creating an original response that challenges social inequalities and racist practices.

Literature Review

Gangsta Rap music is a product of Black American culture. It encapsulates the life in the ghetto from the perspective of a criminal. The lyrics often discuss complex relationships between the subject and its environment, where teenage boys and girls are exposed to the worst outcomes of life in poverty, such as teenage pregnancy, drug abuse and incarceration. As commented by Toop (1984) rap music was the result of imported music genres, after being processed by underground artists in The Bronx; however, the term 'Gangsta Rap' was adopted a few years later by critics who wrote about LA rap artists (Quinn, 2000a, p.195) and their way of reflecting on the effects of American deindustrialization and the later crack economy.

Gangsta rap can be understood as a battle between young ghetto artists and the establishment. When police organizations managed to get record labels to withdraw certain songs or albums, a new artist would release a new song. This happened with Ice T, when he was pressured through his record label to withdraw the song *Cop Killer*, or otherwise, the Combined Law Enforcement Association of Texas (CLEAT) would boycott his record label events and stop him from playing a role in a commercial film produced by Warner Brothers. As Ice T decided to stop 'targeting' the police in his lyrics, N.W.A, Tupac Shakur and some others continued to produce this type of themed songs.

As commented by Adams and Fuller, “music is a reflection of the cultural and political environment from which it is born.” (2006, p.936), however, to the view of some white and professional black detractors (McLaren, 1999, p.25) gangsta rap artists were just promoting illegal actions and negative attitudes against the police, driven by racial hatred, which led to the L.A. Riots in 1992.

Most early studies as well as current work focus on the potential negative effects of gangsta rap on young people as well as other issues of identity or space (Hansen, 1995; LaGrone, 2000). However, a few studies offer a more positive view about gangsta rap as a powerful tool that provides poor youngsters with a platform to express their feelings, fears and ambitions (Rose, 1991). To my knowledge, no prior studies have examined if rappers have seen their creative freedom affected by excessive criticism, or if they fear that making rap music can carry legal consequences. This question has previously never been addressed because most studies have investigated fan behaviour and the social-political background of the artists. Several questions regarding how young creative people feel when writing lyrics or producing music videos within poor marginalised areas remain to be addressed.

In terms of early literature, the poor black and Latino youngsters from the South Bronx (New York) created a new music genre (Keyes, 1984, p.143) where the DJ would articulate announcements in form of rhymes and verses over the beat. That form of musical poetry was later called rap music. The music genre, was part of a larger cultural group called hip hop, that was primarily composed by young African

American males as well as Latino (Wheeler, 1991, p.194) who incorporated graffiti, break dance, rap music and djing to this new urban cultural movement. At the beginning, the rap audience was composed mainly of American minorities from inner cities "as a genuine reflection of the hopes, concerns, and aspirations of urban Black youth" (Powell, 1991, p.245), however, as they dealt with wider social issues as "joblessness, poverty, and disempowerment" (Smitherman, 1997, p.5) they were able to break down barriers and reach out to young people across the whole country. Authors such as Nelson (1992) pointed out the oppression of minorities since the pre-American Civil War and African-American slavery period as the main inspiration for most Afro-music genres.

Scholars such as Wolfe have argued that even though rap music appeared to be distasteful for some, there is a vast ethnographical value and information in their stories, and that governments should not decide what is allowed to be discussed in a record and what is not (1992). According to Wolfe, the use of 'offensive' words (1992, p.686) helped those who were segregated to express complex ideas. Although American popular culture artists have historically used their freedom of speech to incorporate any themes to their artistic contributions, in June 1990 Miami based group, 2 Live Crew, were prosecuted and their album was declared obscene and banned from local stores (Binder, 1993, p.753).

Historically, American society has not distributed power equally among their own people, and several white politicians have been accused of providing resources based on class and race (Johnson, 1993, p.27) and not social justice. Therefore,

Johnson argued that considering the 'lower' position that black people already had in the U.S., the excessive campaign against gangsta rap was unfair as it was a music made by an oppressed minority. As an example of these feelings of oppression, Rose published numerous papers (1991; 1994b; 1994) where she uses auto-ethnographic accounts to express the experience of a young black woman in American society and her relation with hip hop culture. Rose's experiences of attending rap concerts at the beginning of the movement were marked by the hostility that security firms imposed during the events (1991). This hostility was a reflection of the tensions from several sectors of the society towards black and Latino youth trying to express themselves using this cultural movement.

Early literature suggests (Maxwell, 1991) that some films as *Colors* (1988) featuring rap songs educated the public to believe in the relationship between urban music and criminality, as if this music was the inspiration for these events. Furthermore, although some have dismissed this music as "vulgar, profane, misogynistic, racist, anti-semitic and juvenile" (Lusane, 1993, p.49) one can argue that its production required a number of skills developed by 'ghetto' intellectuals. Rap music was not just a powerful "protest music" (Lusane, 1993, p.42) against the establishment but also powerful in terms of economic benefits as it generated over $1300 million from 1990-1992 (Lusane, 1993, p.44) going from an underground music genre to gather national attention. This economic benefit "rescued some rappers from the thug life" (Smitherman, 1997, p.21) as they were able to develop themselves as artists and create a commercial product from those negative experiences linked to race and class in a complex capitalist society (Boyd, 1994).

In terms of social context, as the U.S. was becoming a safer place for a majority of people during the 1980s, homicide rates reflected the opposite for the black communities, as black on black crime between young males almost doubled (Quinn, 1996, p.65) whilst crime on white kept decreasing. This was the result of the increase in unemployment due to the lack of manufacturing jobs in most large cities, as well as the previous racial and spatial segregation due to the lack of investment in areas populated by blacks and other minorities, also known as redlining (Zenou and Boccard, 2000). Communities living in segregated areas had limited access to housing and education, and jobs were far away from them, with poor connections by public transport. Scholars as Massey (1994) found that segregation can be one of the indirect causes of crime within black communities.

From the early 1980s to late 1990s American media outlets gave excessive coverage to black-on-black crime which had an impact on their global perception. Watts points out that in most cases “the story veered away from any substantive account of poverty, unemployment, drug abuse, broken dreams and shattered hearts” (1997, p.44). As the taxpayer became more aware of this new reality that American inner cities were facing, different policies were created to tackle crime, however, they were deemed as a new opportunity to diminish Afro-American liberties, as Quinn suggested:

> With the recent "war on crime," the gains made by African Americans in the areas of civil rights and media representations are being washed away by a sea of racist rhetoric and "social re- forms" aimed at curbing crime (1996, p.71).

One can argue that during the 1990s, U.S. police brutality cases had a greater international political impact and gathered more attention than any gangsta rap song or album, especially after releasing the Rodney King tape[1] (Ritchie and Mogul, 2007, p.177). Years later, Ritchie and Mogul concluded that "The U.S. government has failed to take any meaningful action to address discriminatory effects of law enforcement practices in the United States" (2007, p.206) but, at the same time, they were prosecuting rap artists for their lyrics and the potential harmful effects they could have in society. These contradictory events indicated that gangsta rap artists had a negative perception beyond their artistry. This could be the result of a segregated society in which racial assumptions and stereotypes shaped ideas of how rap artists coming from poor economic backgrounds must be violent and wild, or as commented by Gee with different words, "[In] Traditional Americanism, black people are [still] perceived as poor, lazy, lustful, ignorant, and prone to . . . criminal behaviour" (2004, p.49) also cited in (Walker, 2010, p.581). Nelson argues that African-Americans' true freedom does not exist as, although they have made some progress they cannot access the places they want to live or work or provide their children with good education and opportunities, therefore, they are not truly free in their own system (Nelson, 1992).

In terms of censorship in gangsta rap, according to Johnson, police officers were the first group starting a campaign against gangsta rap, followed by other social

[1] On March 3, 1991, four white LAPD officers tried to stop Rodney King for drunk driving. After a car chase, King surrendered, four police officers beat him for several minutes causing him (near) life threatening injuries. Whilst King was on the floor being physically abused, a person nearby filmed it using a camcorder, but even after the tape was made public, the four officers were not criminally charged, which later triggered the LA riots.

groups, including white Republicans and Democratic politicians. These groups denounced it as:

> A form of hate speech that incites brutality against various groups, including police officers and women. It (gangsta rap) has also been blamed for fomenting and sustaining the gang wars that have decimated the ranks of young black men in recent years.
> (Johnson, 1993, p.26).

This attempt of censorship failed for several reasons, some of them legal, as it would be against their freedom of speech, but also because gangsta rap was not completely attached to radio stations and record labels and, as they were using their own underground channels to promote their music, it was difficult for detractors to identify one single 'enemy'. Although record labels were important for the promotion and distribution of the music, gangsta rap was a product of the streets and through the Black and Hispanic communities it found its own way to navigate through large networks of people. Johnson also argues that different groups fighting against gangsta rap failed because they were campaigning for different reasons (feminism, police, religion, etc.) and did not support each other. Some authors, such as Springhall, categorized as "moral panic" (1998) the position that some politicians and critics took against rap music. His research suggests that popular music has been a 'favoured candidate' for social-political pressure. According to Springhall, one of the most difficult moments for the gangsta rap movement was in 1995, when Senator Bob Dole campaigned against it for the violent and misogynistic lyrics. Some authors (Berke, 1995) believed that Bob Dole's attack against rap music was somehow hypocritical, as he never condemned homophobic lyrics or other elements of gangsta rap as their party would not be supportive for some minority communities.

In terms of gangsta rap as a lucrative music genre for the entertainment business, one can argue that if listeners of rap music are constructing its meaning, the different groups that tried to censor the music also provided gangsta rap with their own meanings. This methodological idea, or semiotics, understands that:

> The listener, then, does no longer conceive of the sound in its experiential qualities but at a symbolic level of representation, with processes of recognition and identification that replace the fullness and richness of an actual real-time experience.
> (Reybrouck, 2017, p.78).

As an example, right wing groups deemed rap music lyrics and philosophy as an attempt to destroy traditional family values, or the NPCBW (National Political Coalition of Black Women) understood gangsta rap music as a misogynistic music genre that undermines women around the world. One can argue that not many people would have complained about gangsta rap if it was kept within the ghetto, but as it increased its popularity and the level of promotion, it reached white and other middle-class families.

Quinn categorizes gangsta rap as "the most controversial strain of hip-hop" (Quinn, 2000a, p.195) compared to the other urban genres during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Due to its controversy, edgy lyrics and social tensions it ended up being the market leader (2000b, p.195). Researchers, artists and detractors of this music agree on the impact that gangsta rap had on the music business industry. As an example, N.W.A - *Straight Outta Compton* sold over three million records according to The Recording Industry Association of America. Krims identifies Gangsta Rap as both "the most lucrative" subgenre in rap music and "the most

culturally charged" (Krims, 2000, p.70), changing the name of the genre to "Reality Rap" as lyrics generally address real experiences from the ghetto (p.71). Krims also defines gangsta rap as a genre exploited by record companies in order to sell albums to young American teenagers, assuming that record labels have pressured rap artists to acquire the aesthetics of criminals in terms of dress, performance, public attitude, etc.

In terms of controversy and racial profiling, similarly to Quinn, Kubrin also introduces gangsta rap as "the most controversial type of rap music" for the lyrics and their content (2005a, p.360) connecting its roots to the 1970s and the Blaxploitation movies, as these films glorified the criminal lifestyle in the same way that gangsta rap does now. Regarding the artists' social background, gangsta rap pioneers were gang members and, therefore, the lyrics related to their own personal experiences. Regarding the accusations from the media, politicians or educators suggesting that rap music may be the trigger of violent events, Kubrin points to "Unemployment, family disruption and isolation" as key issues in the American ghettos that will be reflected in this type of music (2005a, p.362). Looking at the lyrics, Kubrin identifies American black communities as "arguably the most in need of police protection" and their "concern about racial profiling" (p.362) which would explain the high number of songs about police brutality.

Some authors, such as McIver, understand the use of abrupt lyrics and the use of the 'N' word in gangsta rap lyrics as a way to connect with a public from a certain socio-economic status. According to his research, gangsta rap music artists wanted

to be different in terms of social norms and represent their peers using a language that they would normally use in the street, as Eazy E explains in an interview:

> We just wanted to do something new and different and talk about what we wanted to talk about- like dick sucking, we wanted to talk about that. Like people say, well you can't talk about dick sucking, or this or that in order to get [a record] deal.
> (McIver, 2012, p.33).

Although with a naked eye we can appreciate rebelliousness and disfranchisement (as in the example mentioned by McIver), a deeper analysis of the lyrics is necessary to understand rap music not just as a genre that pictures the life in the ghetto from a biographical point of view but also as an active tool to deconstruct "discriminatory and racist assumptions" (Krims, 2000, p.195) endorsed to black American and other minorities as Latino and ultimately, working class.

In terms of gangsta rap music and lifestyles, a large number of existing studies in the broader literature have examined what gangsta rap is and why it was created. As an example, Quinn sees gangsta rap as a music that fights against the establishment from poor deindustrialized minority populated areas, where the gangsta rapper talks to the audience in first person telling stories about crime and other themes relevant for their communities (2000a, p.195). Some authors, such as Canton, have also suggested that during the 1990s left- and right-wing politicians blamed gangsta rap for most of the issues affecting black and Latino communities as "drug use, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, gang violence, and high school dropouts. Even though these problems existed in the black community prior to gangsta rap" (Canton, 2006, p.244). Furthermore, Perry is one of the authors supporting the theory that although gangsta rap artists provide their

characters with positive attributes, making his or her lifestyle look desirable, the music deals with issues of space and identity that provide the audience with valuable information about the ghetto, making "a case for listeners to evaluate" (Perry, 2004, p.110). As lyrics come from reality and are not part of the imagination of a sole individual, they help to deconstruct some ideas associated with poor working-class minorities. As commented by Dyson, gangsta rap lyrics are a product of the poor and they "represent lives swallowed by too little love or opportunity." (2004, p.177).

As gangsta rap is a product of the streets, listeners expect a certain level of street knowledge and experience from the rapper. Listeners will allocate to artists different labels, as 'authentic' or 'real', when they seem to have empirical experience and knowledge in the field (Haugen, 2003, p.430). A rapper that fails in transmitting these values to the listeners, will fall into a category of commercial rap that seem to lose the connection with black and Latino communities, as it happened to MC Hammer or Vanilla Ice. Some groups, such as N.W.A back in the late 1980s, realized that they could exploit their living conditions and rebelliousness in order to generate income (Watts, 1997, p.46) selling the authentic black experience to white teenagers but keeping the music true to themselves. Although some authors highlighted the potential negative effects of gangsta rap on young people (Johnson, Jackson and Gatto, 1995), the music also brings them the opportunity to be heard in places where they did not have a voice in the past. They can discuss issues relevant for them and communicate with people from inside and outside the community, giving visibility to their problems.

As Chuck D from Public Enemy said, rap music is the CNN of the hood (McLaren, 1999, p.21). According to rapper Ice Cube (Hansen, 1995, p.44), young people in America have been heavily exposed to violence in popular culture, as for example western movies, news, etc. therefore, they now look for this type of content not only in cinema but also in music and other media.

Gangsta rap has also received some criticism from Afro-American politicians, feminist and religious groups. As an example, LaGrone (2000) sees a connection between gangsta rap and the old racist minstrel shows as they somehow show only the worst attributes of African American culture, commodifying these aspects for white families and their entertainment. Gosa (2009) also sees the gangsta rap representation as a way to misrepresent black culture to sell records to people who have not experienced life in the inner cities. Furthermore, some authors, such as Adam and Fuller, consider that gangsta rap promotes the "normalization of oppressive ideas about women" (2006, p.940) using them in music videos as objects and sometimes humiliating them in the lyrics' comments. Pinn sees the use of misogynistic lyrics as a reflection of the lack of self-esteem of young "gangsters" as they cannot see why a black woman would be interested in them (Pinn, 1996, p.28) if it is not for money, fame, etc. so therefore they have to treat them as mere objects in order to protect themselves.

There have been several incidents in recent American history that have shaped the relationship between the poorest communities and local authorities. Some of these events have also impacted on music and popular culture. One of the most

iconic cases was when the Los Angeles Police Department detained and attacked an Afro-American construction worker named Rodney King for speeding and refusing to pull over. After several minutes of a car chase, the police took Rodney King out of his car and a few police officers beat him up for several minutes. A neighbour from the area filmed the incident and the video was shown on national television. It sparked several riots known as the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion. As an example between these social events and rap music, Canton considers that cases like the one mentioned above justified the use of gangsta rap (2006, p.245) as it shows the worst face of American culture in a way that no other media outlet would.

Fuck the Police was the first song by N.W.A to generate a police response as the F.B.I tried to stopped the group from performing the song live (Johnson, 1993, p.29), but it was after the Rodney King Rebellion when several groups suffered these tensions and censorships. Another case that affected heavily the reputation of gangsta rap was in April 1992 (Talerman, 1994) when a 19 year-old African American male was driving a stolen car in Texas, and after being stopped by the police, the driver shot and killed one the police officers. During the trial, the offender said that he was acting under the influence of Tupac as he was playing the song *Souljah's Revenge* at the moment of the shooting:

> Message to the censorship committee
> Who's the biggest gang of niggas in the city?
> All you punk police will never find peace
> On the streets til the niggas get a piece, fuck 'em!
> (*Souljah's Revenge,* 1993)

During the trial, Tupac lyrics were used to justify the killing and several people, including the Police Officer's family, decided to file a suit against Tupac Shakur and his record labels.

The last case that should be mentioned, as it will later connect with the content of this thesis, was when Offord Rollins, a young black college athlete, was accused of killing his former girlfriend. The case was very similar to other cases related to domestic violence, however, on this occasion the main suspect was a college student who also wanted to be a rapper, and when the prosecutors discovered his gangsta rap lyrics, they used them in court to prove that he was the murderer. According to Fischoff, an academic that was called as an expert for this case;

> The defendant was seen as more likely to have committed a murder than had he not been presented as authoring such lyrics. Surprisingly, results also show that the writing of such rap lyrics was more damning in terms of adjudged personality characteristics than was the fact of being charged with murder. (1999, p.795) Therefore the prejudicial value of the lyrics outweighed their probative value.
> (1999, p.796).

In 1994, A CNN/*USA Today* poll (Quinn, 1996, p.65) suggested that crime was a source of anxiety for most Americans (a majority of them white) although crime number statistics showed a decreasing number for white families and an increasing number for Afro-American communities. Gangsta rap reopened a debate about the First Amendment and if rappers should be allowed to create lyrics about crime or sex in a similar way that white cinema directors do. After several trials, ranging from the protests against the Vietnam War to gangsta rap and heavy metal, the First Amendment has benefited the creative freedom of

these individuals (Talerman, 1994, p.119). For a lyric to be considered illegal, it should "incite or produce imminent lawless action is outside the scope of First Amendment protection," (Talerman, 1994, p.120) which was not the case for the cases mentioned before, or other famous cases such as 2 Live Crew and their album *As Nasty as They Wanna Be* (Blanchard, 1991), which was accused of obscenity by a judge in Florida and later acquitted. Guy argues (2004, p.44) that it is difficult to understand the different aspects of Afro-American and Latino culture from a white perspective without also understanding how they have been affected by racist policies and actions.

In conclusion, American popular culture has an extensive collection of nudism, violence and lawlessness; however, gangsta rap was different (Canton, 2006, p.245) in that the lyrics were not the creation of a well-educated middle-class male, but a product of the streets based on true events which made the music extremely popular but also intimidating for some communities. The unprecedented response to this music from different organizations led to what Johnson called "one of the most sustained censorship drives in United States history" (1993, p.25). The dislike for this music was not only a class conflict but also a generational dissonance (Brennan, 1994, p.665) that led to the prosecution of gangsta rap artists.

Martinez (1993) uses theories of Marx (1976) and De Tocqueville (1998) to explain how working-class people are likely to react against the establishment if gaps in living conditions widen too much, and that are more likely to react violently if living

conditions are deteriorated for too long. If these theories are correct, they could partially explain not just the origin of certain social events as the 1992 LA Riots, but also the creation of gangsta rap.

Methodology

Exploring the Background through a Critical Discourse Analysis.

One of the hypotheses of this research is that gangsta rap music artists do not enjoy the same level of creative freedom that artists from other disciplines generally do. Considering that qualitative research or social research is "a craft skill, relatively autonomous from the need to resolve philosophical disputes" (Seale, 1999, p.465) that can be biased towards the direction of the researcher´s hypothesis, this chapter contrasts and includes all the different lines of thinking, including those completely opposite to this theory.

Through the gathering and later analysis of the economic, political and social events related to gangsta rap music history and the poorer American communities, comparison is used to describe the social reality (Becker, 1996) that gangsta rappers have experienced, creating a link with the next chapter where I use myself as a case study, mapping my personal experiences growing up (as a practitioner) in a working-class environment and the influence that it had over my music taste and other choices that I made.

Through the study of gangsta rap lyrics, historical events, press articles about youth violence and other research papers addressing the subject, we are able to distinguish between a belief based on our perception and an informed opinion.

> The qualitative researcher as bricoleur, or maker of quilts, uses the aesthetic and materials tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, and empirical materials are at hand.
> (Stake, Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p.2).

As the literatures that are compared were created at different stages, they need to be organized prior further discussion. The events are examined from their own historical and/or contemporary context. The historical methods of this research are employed to recognized past and present issues that are still affecting people and artists around the world. Most of the data collected for the first chapter of this thesis come from secondary sources (websites, books, journals, etc), therefore there is the need for primary sources for the creation of the second chapter, where I create my own case studies using myself as an active practitioner.

In conclusion, a critical discourse analysis is employed to create a description, interpretation and explanation of the texts and historical events (Janks, 1997) cited in this chapter. Following Janks' method, the procedure consists of three consecutive parts: select a text that is relevant to the investigation, find unanswered questions and create a hypothesis, thereupon find if the hypothesis created is/are correct by finding more information in different texts. If the method is correctly implemented, it will trigger more questions about the subject that will deconstruct the real meaning of the problem (Janks, 1997, p.331).

Autoethnography as a Research Method

One of the qualitative methods that is used to conduct this research is autoethnographic research, which according to Chang "is a method that utilizes the researcher's autobiographical data to analyse and interpret their cultural assumptions" (2016). Existing ethnographic studies around a similar theme found that "contemporary popular music parallel key facets of ethnography" (Barron, 2013), therefore this method is the most appropriate and honest approach that I found suitable for my research and backed by other researchers (Wall, 2006; Custer, 2014). An autoethnographical approach (using myself as the subject under investigation instead of others) connects my experiences as a rapper with the socio-cultural context that is under examination in this thesis, the same way that Rose used auto ethnographic accounts to tell her experiences as an Afro-American woman attending rap music concerts or her experiences as a listener (1991; 1994b; 1994).

Autoethnography is a broad and rich method that helps the researcher to reflect and help others through their own experiences (Starr, 2010). In order to do so, this personal narrative differs from other "traditional rational/analytical conventions of academic writing" (Given, 2008, p. 5) as it is written in first person and focusing mainly on a single case. Traditionally it is expected that the researcher is not emotionally attached to the subject in order to analyse it in an objective way, however, auto-ethnography differs because it explores the emotions, pain, fears

and the private life of the researcher as this method focuses heavily on the self (Anderson, 2006, p.385).

This research does not provide a single answer to the different questions to which academics from criminology, psychology and other social sciences try to respond, as mentioned by Starr:

> Knowledge construction is not so analytical or linear that in answering a question the result becomes absolute, no longer worthy of further questioning. While researchers focus on the specific, the advancement of knowledge comes from the researchers' ability to relate the micro details of a study to the macro implications of ideas and concepts.
> (2010, p. 2).

The aim of this chapter is to provide a large amount of data collected through the experience and observation of the researcher that deconstructs preconceived ideas that the media has created about gangsta rappers, authenticity in music and the living conditions within working-class communities.

As commented by Carolyn Ellis (2008) and Deborah Reed-Danahay, "autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethnos), and on self (auto)" (2008 ,p. 6). The researcher's experiences are relevant when they relate to others and when they bring new knowledge to the field where is framed, in my case, gangsta rap, social class and ethnicity. I decided to use myself as a case study for my research in order to deconstruct the perception from some sectors of the society of gangsta rap as well as gangsta rappers and their/our experiences when creating music or art. This method becomes a powerful tool when the subject's experiences develop in a complex

reality, so therefore this is auto ethnography 'in action' for the purpose of the thesis rather than looking back over a life. This chapter allows me to "question internal conditions such as feelings and emotions, external conditions such as the environment and the temporal dimensions if past, present and future" (Méndez, 2013, p. 279).

This methodology challenges some empirical studies, such as those using questionnaires and focused on demographics, music preferences/listening habits, and current psychosocial functioning (Took and Weiss, 1994), that try to determine whether rap music has changed the teenagers' lifestyle which may have in many cases the limitation that participants are self-reporting to the researchers (Took and Weiss, 1994, p. 619). As an example, Johnson (1995) and others use teenagers to conduct research about the importance of this music on their lives, however, one can argue that adolescents attending counselling for example are more likely to be there for family problems and other socio-cultural aspects than music or other hobbies. Similarly, we can argue that teenagers with less academic success are attracted to urban music because of the difficulty to access or connect with their peers through mainstream channels, and not the way that has been suggested, where rap music or heavy metal have made children fail in school. In order to challenge the previous idea, we can also argue that poor academic performance comes first (Took and Weiss, 1994, p. 620) and music taste becomes subject of these experiences. If we look at some of the previous research conducted on this area, auto ethnographic research can work as an alternative to

traditional ethnography as there is unlimited access to data and contact with the subject.

Furthermore, from a psychologist's point of view, when Johnson et al. look at what they call the "deleterious effects of exposure to rap music" (1995, p. 27), they gather the information by showing some music videos to a cohort of high school students and then asking them how they feel about it. They do not really investigate the background of the samples or consider that the answers may be biased by peer pressure (for example when students try to impress others by rebelling against the establishment). Also, in order to reduce "emotional contagion" (Johnson, Jackson and Gatto, 1995, p. 30) some researchers separate the young people they use for the investigation into different groups and not necessarily from the same class. Some of the videos shown in this experiment as *Hazy Shade of Criminal* by Public Enemy address issues such as corruption and police brutality that are too complex for young people, therefore, they can select some attributes that they like (for example the fashion and the attitude of the artists) and imitate it. One can argue that if these videos are intended for an adult audience, they should not be shown to high school students.

The writing of the second chapter was also a self-healing process in many aspects, as the following section demonstrates.

Practice-Led Methodology

The practice-led part of this thesis has benefited from different methods and approaches. First, several observations have been required to complete the illustrations. As an example, *Hoodzilla* (2018) was created after a few visits to some of the poorest areas of New York city. From an ethnographic point of view, my own experiences have also been reflected as relevant for the research and the artwork produced. Many of the elements of discussion captured in the illustrations relate to my own personal experiences as a rapper, but more importantly, they deal with issues of class, race and ultimately gender.

As commented by Smith, practice-led research or creative research is:

> The training and specialised knowledge that creative practitioners have and the processes they engage in when they are making art, (and how it) can lead to specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research.
> (2009, p.5).

Therefore, and combined with other ethnographic and historical methods, the practice in Chapter Three allow us to respond to the research questions that I have raised.

Furthermore, the illustrations and later exhibitions have been employed as a method to allow me as an artist not to only reflect on the result of them being exhibited, but also the making process and the potential issues they can face for some galleries, etc. In the case of *Is there a Heaven 4 a Gangsta?* (2019), the final illustration was rejected and could not be exhibited, however, the rejection

provided me with valuable information relevant for this research and for the later deconstruction of what they (the artwork as well as gangsta rap) can represent for the public.

The last method that has been used during this research journey was the production of three songs and music videos. As this research questions whether rap artists coming from working-class and poor backgrounds enjoy the same creative freedom as do other artists, my practice was relevant as part of this ethnographic journey. The songs and music videos allowed me to explore some formal aspects of the music and its production but also more intimate relationships between myself as an artist, myself as an educator and the interaction with the public. One can argue that this self-exposure has multiple benefits as art making is known as a healthy outlet, but it can also expose the researcher to criticism from people who look at the negative sides of this music. These issues are analysed in this chapter once the practice part is concluded.

Chapter One: Background and Historical Context

Since 1619, when the first group of twenty slaves arrived in Virginia, USA, millions of healthy African men and women would follow the same path, brought in to build the economy of a new country that ignored their most fundamental rights as human beings, but also denied their contribution to the advancement of their society. One can argue that slavery did not only have a negative impact on the individuals that suffered these conditions, but also the countries where they were taken from as they were left without a great amount of young and talented individuals. Many colonists in the north thought about slavery as an analogy to their own living conditions under the British, however, business owners from the southern part of the country, thought of slavery as a vital part of their agricultural economy.

On July 4, 1776, Thomas Jefferson co-authored and issued the Declaration of Independence, in which it was said that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness", however, although America was being founded by the Thirteen Colonies on principles of 'liberty', yet the practice of slavery still continued for the years ahead.

After Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, and the later Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, where slavery was officially abolished, Afro Americans did not feel as free people. By this time, too

many families had been broken, too many African and African American slaves murdered, and their memories of rape, punishment, humiliation, and dehumanisation were too deep to be forgotten, having a profound negative impact on black psyche that lasted for the following century.

For decades, black families continued being segregated, which led to the American Civil Rights movement (from the mid 1950s to the late 1960s), which tried not to only end racial segregation in most parts of America but also disenfranchisement. People like Rosa Parks, who famously refused to give up her sit to a white person on a bus, or Dr. Martin Luther King, who led large groups of underrepresented minorities for peaceful demonstrations (i.e., the Selma to Montgomery Marches), helped to achieve crucial rights for their communities such as access to 'better' education, vote or public facilities. Communities living within redlining districts and victims of the Jim Crow Laws, which were designed to keep racial segregation legal in the southern parts of the US, also suffered the negative effects of 'informal' policies, which were more often exposed and eradicated thanks to the Civil Rights Movement.

From the early 1960s some peaceful movements evolved into the Black Power Movement, which encouraged black communities to build their own economies in order to be independent from the white establishment. Building on the teachings of black nationalists like Malcolm X, organized groups like the Black Panthers (also known as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence) encouraged black communities to be armed as they felt that police could not be trusted. Furthermore, many of

their branches played a key role providing humanitarian action and essential goods like food, clothes or books to communities that were experiencing the worst side of capitalist America, however, the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) and the U.S. Government used all the power that was available to them to dismantle the party.

In the past several decades, Afro-American activists, artists and athletes have played an important role in deconstructing negative ideas linked to the black community. As in any other democratic countries, artists make use of their freedom of speech as a fundamental part of their constitution. This freedom has allowed them in the recent past to fight against injustice and oppression but also to create real or imaginary scenarios to express their feelings, ambitions or fears. The historical events discussed in this chapter have indicated that gangsta rap has been a contradictory music genre as it can be seen as both: a legitimate style that provides the audience with a powerful combination of sound and strong content lyrics, or as a negative role model for young generations that may take part in violent incidents as a result of its influence. This chapter analyses a number of historical events suggesting that music and art are not the causes of violence, or at least not the main ones.

Although there is a large volume of published studies describing the achievements of the Afro-American community during the last century, very few studies have examined if gangsta rap artists have felt their creative freedom decreased due to the constant criticism from different sectors of the society.

Chapter One seeks to address the following questions:

- Are gangsta rap artists perceived as violent?
- Do gangsta rap artists enjoy from the same creative freedom that other white cinema directors or artists do?
- Are social class and ethnicity playing a role in the perception of gangsta rap artists?

Chapter One explores the boundaries between gangsta rap and reality, creating an understanding of why detractors think that gangsta rap should be banned from the radio stations. At the same time, this text shows historical events that explain and justify the creation of gangsta lyrics, as well as the relationship between the artists, their artwork and their political context. This research provides the reader with objective facts about the music as well as the political and social context where rap artists are framed.

Gangsta Rap Context

Gangsta rap is a product of American popular culture. It is a music genre that had its origin in rap music. There is not much argument about the beginning of gangsta rap, as both scholars and musicians agree that Philadelphia and Los Angeles were the cities where it was born (Kelley, 1996). Schooly D *PSK – What Does it Mean* and Ice T – *O.G* were the first two recognised gangsta rap songs. One of the driving forces behind the creation of the first gangsta rap lyrics was the political repression

and police brutality that black communities suffered during the last century as a result of racist assumptions. Scholars such as Chaney believe that, even before rap music, being a black male was associated with violence: “there is an extensive body of literature which suggests that Black males are viewed as the prototypical criminal” (2013, p.482). The second reason behind was the escalation of violence and gang culture that flooded all the ghettos of the main deindustrialised American cities with a special impact on L.A. (Ramsey, 2004). As we can see in Ice T´s first songs, even his early gangsta rap lyrics showed some sort of pessimism about his surrounding world:

> When I wrote about parties, someone always died
> When I tried to write happy, yo, I knew I lied
> 'Cause, I lived a life of crime Why play ya blind?
> A simple look and anyone with two cents would know I'm
> A hardcore player from the streets
> Rapping bout hardcore topics over hardcore drum beats
> A little different than the average though
> Jet you through the fast lane, drop ya on death row.
> (Ice T, 1991)

Gangsta rap was one of the consequences from the loss of factories and jobs in America and the reduction of public investment in the poorer areas, as previously commented by Wilson (2012), and re-visited by Massey:

> The number of people living in poverty areas rose by 40 percent in the five largest U.S. cities between 1970 and 1980 (and) urban poverty was most concentrated among African-Americans and Puerto Ricans.
> (Massey, Gross and Shibuya, 1994, p.425).

The individual and capitalist American mindset saw its reflection in gangsta rap, as it was heavily focused on wealth, fame and power. Kubrin labels gangsta rap as a nihilistic music style, and she links its foundations to the lack of support of workers’

rights during the 1970s and 1980s in major American cities (Kubrin, 2005a). Furthermore, as America suffered an economic transformation during the 1970s and the 1980s, communities continued to be segregated and, because of these actions, impoverished black communities dealt with a new level of drug trafficking, prostitution and the gang culture that accompanies these kinds of activities. Managerial jobs during the 1980s required a higher level of education and professionalization, and they excluded people from the poorer communities and reduced the number of industrial jobs (Kelley, 1996). Once again, the black community was left behind the progress. Gangsta rappers like Ice Cube, Tupac or Ice T grew up in this economic frame, which would explain the nihilism of their lyrics. Furthermore, as poverty and crime increased, the number of convicts and prisons went up, becoming one more element in the life of the black and Latino communities. At some point, a wide part of America identified black urban youth with gang affiliation and the police targeted hip-hop groups as if their music had the same consequences as real criminal activities (Shumejda, 2014).

In contemporary history, music has been a reflection of the lifestyle of many people, especially those coming from the poorer communities. Music has been very effective to express social problems but also to educate people from outside about their culture. As Reimer mentioned, “music is bound up with the sociological changes” (1970, p.94) that we are currently facing. Ultimately, the music industry has employed many black musicians from the ghettos around the world, giving them a platform to express their thoughts and act as a role model to the younger generations. According to Right (2010), rap music was received as hope by the

younger black communities in New York, as it would give them a voice but also, they could be part of a successful industry where they do not feel marginalized. Rap music would let them demonstrate their value as individuals and, be competitive in a capitalist society. Rap music has been used by black teenagers in America to develop a positive identity that was constantly denied in other areas (Watts, 1997, p.44). Rap music has provided us with a large amount of information about the life of black American people. It has been a reflection of their lifestyle but, more importantly, the political view of the poorer communities. However, as Ice T (McDaniels and Martin, 1993) explains, sometimes their lyrics can be a reflection of their reality but some others they can refer to fiction-based stories. In its early phase, rap music had a great influence from Jamaican ghetto culture and gang culture (Toop, 1984), especially in big cities such as New York, Los Angeles and Atlanta. Gangs helped to define the fashion and the attitude of rap bands but also shared some of their 'street rules' with hip-hop artists. Hip-hop was born in the ghettos of New York and drugs, gangs and violence surrounded young local artists, hence its influence on the creation of gangsta rap.

Gangsta rap is considered the most violent style within the hip-hop culture (Hansen, 1995). Its violence includes misogynistic and homophobic lyrics, gang culture and a nihilistic point of view of the ghetto life in America. Despite all these factors, gangsta rap is the most successful subgenre in economic terms (Hansen, 1995). As quoted in Kubrin's research (2005a), Keyes (2002) stated that gangsta rap, as well as the Blaxploitation movies, "glorified blacks as criminals, pimps, pushers, prostitutes, and gangsters" (Kubrin, 2005a, p.360). Kubrin agrees with

some other authors that criminals made gangsta rap in its origin, so it justified somehow the self-biographical use of the lyrics. Kubrin's research (2005a, p.361) never suggests that gangsta rap creates violence, however it has an impact on the identity of the artists as well as the listeners, helping to, somehow, accept violent behaviour. It did not take a long time for young rap artists to identify an increasing violent culture within the movement, therefore some members of the community tried to counter it. As an example, one of hip-hop's pioneers, Africa Bambaata, started the Zulu Nation, a community group with the aim to introduce a positive and peaceful way to understand hip-hop (Lamotte, 2014, p.692). Today´s rap music is fragmented into many different subgenres. As we can read in the following lyrics, Waka Flocka Flame, an internationally renowned gangsta rap artist, created one of his most iconic singles, *Hard in da Paint*, singing about violence, hyper-masculinity and the life of the ghettos in Atlanta. Despite the abrupt lyrics and the roughness of the video, it generated more than 30 million views on YouTube, which suggests that people from different backgrounds anywhere in the world watch his videos and listen to his music.

> I go hard in the motherfucking paint, nigga
> Leave you stinking, nigga
> What the fuck you thinking, nigga?
> I'm gon' die for this shit or what the fuck I say
> Front yard, broad day with the SK
> See Gucci, that's my motherfucking nigga
> I hang in the 'Dale with them Hit Squad killers
> Waka Flocka Flame, one hood-ass nigga
> Riding real slow, bending corners, my nigga.
> (Waka Flocka Flame, 2010)

During the early/mid 1980s, hip-hop was mainly listened to by Afro-American youth (Kuwahara, 1992). Later on, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the genre expanded to a large number of subgenres that included positive rap, rap funk, jazz, etc. Data shows (Samuels, 2004) that the number of white listeners increased over the number of black listeners and gangsta rap became the bestselling subgenre within hip-hop music. Having a wider market to sell records, gangsta rap was also a popular mainstream style, having its own Afro-American CEOs and its particular fashion that included the display of jewellery, cars, expensive clothes, etc. Rose (1991) understands that gangsta rap lost its violent meaning to become a fashion trend. It is worth mentioning that the first rap artists from the early 1980s did not have political links; it was not until the late 1980s when "a good portion of rap became highly political, often radical in its contentions" (Zillmann et al., 1995, p.2). Research suggests that this transformation also had an influence on the way gangsta rappers complained about the political situation in North America for the black community (Rose, 1991, p.276).

Rap artists from the slums of New York created not just the genre but also helped to set the 'authenticity´ rules that posterior artists had to follow. In that matter, an artist would be judged not only for his music but also for his background and honesty. As an example, *the Beastie Boys* were a respected group of three white rappers that were raised in different parts of New York by middle-class families. Although they knew the slums of New York very well, they never claimed to be real gangsters nor to have struggled to survive in the childhood. Their honesty made them succeed, as they were perceived as authentic (Hodgman, 2013). In

music, authenticity can be used "in a socio-economic sense, to refer to the social standing of the musician. It is used to determine the supposed reasons" (Moore, 2002, p.211) for composing the songs. The antithesis would be a rapper who lies about his/her childhood and gang affiliation only to get recognition in the industry. Using a 'fake' reputation can ruin the artistic career of a gangsta rapper immediately. It is important for gangsta rap consumers (majority teenagers) to support artists who are cognisant with their lifestyle. In that matter, as mentioned previously "blackness and Latinoness are inextricably linked to urban class poverty" (Hodgman, 2013, p.403). Furthermore, Hodgman explains (2013, p.405) how white rapper Eminem gained reputation using his real life experiences and being from a poor area of Detroit with a majority of Afro-American population. These life experiences entitled Eminem to participate in the rap game as a Black or Latino person.

Rap music commodified some aspects of the life of the black American people; in other words, large record companies were interested in selling the 'real' black experience, and to do so, they required authenticity from their musicians. Research suggests that black music educates white people in black history and culture (Chuck, 1999). Researchers seem to agree that gangsta rap, among the different rap subgenres, has been the most lucrative so far. According to Krims (2000), a definition of gangsta rap or 'reality rap' would be a description of *"*the life in the ghetto from the perspective of a criminal*"* (Krims, 2000, p.70), meaning that the gangsta rapper has to be involved in the stories that he is rapping about or he is first-hand witnessing the events in order to get recognition. There are

some examples of rappers giving a description of violent situations that black people can experience in the ghetto (e.g. Gang Starr – *Hard to Earn* or Stop the Violence Movement - *Self Destruction* among others), however, they cannot be considered gangsta rappers as they don't participate in the stories, or use them to gain social status as gang members. As we can read in the following lyrics, Kool Moe Dee raps about the consequences of violence, giving a detailed description of different scenarios where a black American person must deal with this type of negativity. Furthermore, the artist encourages black people to remember what they have been through to gain the freedom they have now and to use it on their advantage:

> Took a brother's life with a knife as his wife
> Cried 'cause he died a trifling death
> When he left his very last breath
> Was "I slept so watch your step"
> Back in the sixties our brothers and sisters were hanged
> How could you gang-bang?
> I never ever ran from the Ku Klux Klan
> And I shouldn't have to run from a black man.
> (Stop the Violence Movement, 1988)

According to Ramsey (2004) the 1990s were a great decade for Afro-American people and this included basketball players, actors, entertainers and musicians. As an example, Michael Jordan signed his first commercial deal with Nike back in 1984 (which is still active), and according to the online *Forbes* magazine, Michael Jordan earnt $80 million in 2013 just in royalties (Badenhausen, 2013). Considering hip-hop's commercial success, the moral panic behind rap music (understood as the fear from different sectors of the American society of the growth and expansion

of a music that was originally linked to poor neighbourhoods and dislocated communities and that is now mainstream and has access to radio stations and TV channels) was a unique phenomenon. Although international companies provided the clothes for rap artists and fans (e.g. Nike , Adidas, Tommy, Polo, etc.), the public would perceive that people who dress according to this fashion were delinquents as “sneakers are understood to be the shoe of choice for athletes, teenagers, and street criminals” (Rose, 1991, p.277). This negative perception of black American youth is related to an excessive coverage of the crack cocaine epidemic that was highly exposed in the media as a problem that originated within the black ghettos. According to Rose (1991), Young African Americans are perceived as a danger by public institutions, including police and schools among others. This perception can explain why some organizations, such as Parents´ Music Resource Center, Focus on the Family and the American Family Association, tried to censor in different ways gangsta rap artists and rap related events, where a high number of Afro-American teenagers get together to express themselves through music, graffiti and dance (Rose, 1991). As some incidents during rap music concerts were extremely publicized, insurance companies stopped providing their services for this type of events, and young black artists had very limited access to booking venues during the late 1980s (Rose, 1991). The media did not inform about the events from a neutral point of view as they focused on the negative incidents (Ravo, 1987). One can argue that the main effect that this had was that it encouraged right-wing politicians to continue the criminalisation of gangsta rappers and hood film actors, by pressuring record labels to cease the distribution

of certain albums or songs, as it was the case for Death Row, Interscope and Time-Warner (Beaver, 2010, p.112).

Authenticity in gangsta rap is deemed as necessary as white and black fans were looking for the real black experience (Quinn, 2000b). Police brutality and social disparities are discussed in gangsta rap in a different way than in political rap. The artists speak directly to the audience using the street language, but also, gangsta rappers usually have an active role in the stories they tell. If Public Enemy asked their listeners to fight for their rights and freedom, Geto Boys explained to their listeners that they would do whatever it takes to preserve their pride and dignity:

> Oh Mr. Officer, crooked officer, what's happenin?
> You beat another black man's ass and now you're high cappin
> Friend, do I have to move to River Oaks
> And bleach my fuckin skin so I can look like these white folks?
> Just to get some assistance
> Because the brutality in my neighborhood is gettin persistent
> Cause you wanna harass me
> Yeah, and if I talk back you wanna bust my black ass, G
> Just like Rodney King
> But if you try that shit with me, it’s gonna be a different scene
> Try to pull me over on a dark road
> But I'll be damned if I don't grab my nine and unload
> Until every blue shirt turns red
> You heard what I said
> I want all you crooked motherfuckers dead
> (Geto Boys, 1993)

The dramatic content of their lyrics expressed the social tensions that black people had to face in America, and also, the pressure that young black males suffered as many of them were expected to behave according to the street rules and social codes of their neighbourhoods. Furthermore, gangsta rap was used to explore the limits of the freedom of speech in America. As mentioned in Ice Cube's biography (McIver, 2012, p.17), rapper Easy E stated that during the creative process of their early songs, they tried to be different by using explicit language as a new way to connect with the audience on the basis that many people speak in the same way when they are in a relaxed environment.

Gang Culture and Popular Music

Gang culture became one more part of the lifestyle in the poorer black American neighbourhoods. As an example of its impact on rap music, the first time that Chuck D and his group Public Enemy played in L.A in 1987 was also the first time that the venue hired security staff with metal detectors at the main entrance (Chuck, 1999). Gang culture had an influence on gangsta rap and gangsta rap fed back to gang culture. Scholars such as Chuck argue that young Americans would adopt some aesthetics of Gangsta Rap lifestyle, as they would not take any accountability for criminal actions that real criminals do, but at the same time, young Americans can benefit from the rebelliousness and social reactions that this aesthetic promotes (1999). For the same reason, Chuck D stated in his biographical book that although "gangsta rap is a legitimate because it talks about certain aspects of life", most gangsta rappers are not criminals in real life (Chuck, 1999,

p.248). He also considers that white youngsters use black music and gangsta rap to learn about black people. It is mentioned in Right's publication (2010), and according to Kuwahara (1992), that during the late 1980s and early 1990s rap music and gangsta rap was listened to by all American teenagers but slightly more by black teenagers, however, black and white listeners would feel attracted to rap music for the same reasons, e.g. attraction for danger, opulence, rebelliousness, etc. (McDaniels and Martin, 1993). It was also a common belief that gangsta rap should report real events and that the rapper should be honest and 'keep it real' by backing his lyrics with real facts. In some way, detractors thought that gangsta rap was forcing teenagers to act violently in order to get access to this trend, however, it has been shown that many successful artists were able to establish themselves without the need for being criminals. According to Right (2010), commercial success would be identified as 'real' by the young audience. Furthermore, record labels and music television channels would help to create the 'real gangster' image around rap artists. Although it seems to be a contradiction, gangsta rap fans, as suggested in Right´s (2010) publication, appreciate the commercial success of the gangsta rapper as a victory of his art over his opponents.

What does it mean to be a 'real gangster´? It seems to use three main components (Cutler, 2003; Wright, 2010): to be true to yourself, meaning that you should only respond to your own political ideas and ethics, even when it can be against the law or the public opinion; to belong to a certain city, as big capitals tend to have bigger neighbourhoods across the different economical levels and status; and last

but not least, to have experienced criminal life as a criminal or as someone close enough to be able to talk from a personal point of view. Gangsta rappers can perform many roles, from a hustler to a killer (e.g. Cassidy – *I'm a Hustla*). Quinn (2000b) sees the relation between gangsta rappers and pimps, not only because of the imagery and opulence, but also for the philosophy behind. Gangsta rappers have been accused for being sexist and objectifying woman (Kubrin, 2005a), but after reading some lyrics (e.g. Jay Z – *Big Pimpin' Featuring UGK*) it is suggested that the rapper admires the competitive mind of the pimp and how he can get what he needs from anyone by being smart, and by working outside the law. The philosophy behind the lyrics show that they learnt the rules of capitalism and took it to the extreme, where there is no room for compassion or kindness.

According to Kubrin's research (2005a), for a young ghetto male, being a victim is not an option and therefore any signs of disrespect from others will be seen as a weakness. This mindset has similarities with gangsta rap, where the rapper has to be proactive, and use his lyrics to warn other people about the consequences of dealing with him. For a similar reason, lyrics about women have negative connotations, as the rapper cannot afford to look weak in front of the audience, even when it is about love. Gangsta rap has been widely criticized for its misogynistic lyrics and the image they project about women. Words such as 'bitch' and 'whore' are normally used to describe women so often, that even female gangsta rappers describe themselves as 'bitches' and males as 'niggas' (e.g. Trina's debut album *Da Baddest Bitch*):

I'm representin' for the bitches
All eyes on your riches
No time for the little dicks
You see the bigger the dick
The bigger the bank, the bigger the Benz
The better the chance to get close to his rich friends
I'm going after the big man
My g-string make his dick stand.
(Trina, 2000)

As commented before, Krims (2000) considered that gangsta rap has been orchestrated by record companies in order to sell albums to teenagers. This research considers this information to be incorrect for all cases, as many rappers have witnessed and experienced violence and ultimately expressed it on their lyrics. As an example, hip-hop mogul, Master P, lost his younger brother Kevin Miller as a result of gang violence. In an interview published on 28 February 2016, (Vlad, 2016) Silkk the Shocker explains that the death of Master P's brother became part of their music during their beginnings. Furthermore, some researchers considered that record companies 'forced' artists to adopt a more violent direction on their art, as this would ultimately benefit the sales (Neal, 1997). During the whole history of art, music and cinema, the clientele has had an impact on the artwork and the art direction. However, rap music in general seems to be always more vulnerable, as it can easily be undermined by the people who support it as well as the people and institutions that fight against it. As an example, some rappers, such as Tech N9ne, have been criticized for losing their links with the ghetto. Tech N9ne commented in an interview (Clarke, 2018) that he used some collaborations with different Afro-American artists to be able to reconnect

with the black audience. Tech N9ne also commented that his connection with white metal artists, separated him from the black urban youth.

As mentioned by Anderson (2013) and Kubrin (2005a), young black people within the poorer communities will gain street reputation by breaking social rules. According to previous research, the use of violence and illegal activities can improve the social status of an individual, which can be translated in power and opportunities. Living in a context where the police and law enforcement are not seen as supportive "the gun becomes a symbol of power and a remedy for disputes" (Kubrin, 2005a, p.362). The gangsta rapper, who can be either a person who has experienced the ghetto experience, or someone who has studied the ghetto life, knows "the rules of the street" and takes them to the music industry. As an example, a gangsta rapper would publish images or videos of him acting violently in order to get this social status. There are hundreds of videos and press articles about the 'beef' (understood as a personal confrontation between two or more individuals) of rappers and gangs. Furthermore, new technology and social media is giving tools to gangsta rappers to communicate between them. As an example, there is a video published in Instagram and *The Daily Mail* where rapper, Soulja Boy, calls Chris Brown for a boxing fight (Mail Online, 2017). The two artists never fought together, but there was a long process of videos and publications where the two artists tried to demonstrate their 'street wisdom' in front of their audience.

Springhall (1998) analyses different gangsta rap artists including Tupac Shakur, and says that their audience was mainly composed of white teenagers who had never experienced the black-ghetto life or black teenagers motivated by anger and rebelliousness. As mentioned in this research, record labels and consequently marketing campaigns had a massive influence on the perception of hip hop culture. As an example, Springhall criticised both: first the rappers for the content of their lyrics and second the government for not helping in a positive way as:

> Censorship of gangsta rap could not begin to solve the problems of poor black youth but diverted the attention away from more substantive threats posed to women and blacks by a Republican-dominated Congress. (Springhall, 1998, p.151).

As will be expanded later on, research suggests that white politicians complained against gangsta rap once it reached white neighbourhoods and white teenagers started to listen to it.

The 1990s were the years when hip-hop became really popular, and according to Guthrie's research (2004), it had its presence across the media, including TV, radio, magazine, fashion, film, etc. It was so popular that "even when hip-hop culture is not found, its absence may also be understood as a reaction against it" (Ramsey, 2004, p.164). Hip-hop was one more element to the education of millions of teenagers across the world, and according to Tricia Rose (1994), it was used to create an alternative identity. One can argue that this was a typical demand in Postmodern society because identity is now felt to be mutable and something that one can form rather than something that is intrinsic. Corporations then use this all the time to make extra money as they can 'sell' multiple identities in their products

and therefore benefit from multiple markets E.g. (Gottdiener, 2019, p.136).Big corporations like Nike and Adidas benefited directly from the hip-hop culture by making the stereotype of what a black male should look like. For the same reason, Hollywood and the cinema industry accepted “Hood Films” as a new genre (Watkins, 1998, p.172) mainly because they would be able to sell cinema tickets to teenagers. Some of these films were a simple glorification of violence; some others were a political reflection of their identity.

The post-industrial decline of the United States had a negative impact on the life of millions of people, especially in the urban areas which were highly populated by black people. However, if gangsta rap was born as a response to that society, not long after, it would be affiliated with ‘corporate America’ and it would share the same values of greed, wealth, power, etc. Hood Films have also contributed to the creation of a black male that is real only if it responds to this stereotype. As these movies were sold as an authentic black experience, Ramsey (2004) explains how Hood film directors used characters that usually were hostile to women and this would affect the education of teenagers who believed that these films represented the ideal of blackness. Ramsey made some exceptions, for example with Spike Lee, who was able to use rap music in his films as well as ghetto-centric characters and his stories had an intellectual message to offer.

Hip hop has been represented since its origin mainly by black male rappers who adopted some aspects of the poorest American ghettos in their art and music. According to Hodgman’s research (2013), when we try to identify a rapper as

authentic, we will be questioning his/her race as well as class. Furthermore, Hodgman (2013) suggests that class is gaining importance over race, so a white rapper can potentially gain the respect of the audience by claiming a poor social class background or being real to his/her social and economic background. If class is important for the audience, this investigation suggests that Afro-American people are more likely to be perceived as poor for the wider audience. For this reason, more Afro-American gangsta rappers have gained recognition over white rappers. Many white rappers use their background to take part in the rap scene. Paul Wall, a respected artist from Texas, was able to do multiple collaborations with other famous rappers as he was considered authentic. In the following lyrics, we can appreciate his links with the lower American working class:

> In my life, I went from a straw hat to a crown
> I been through a few up's, and a whole lot of downs
> I take the good with the bad, however the ball bounce
> And lately, I've been walking on dangerous ground
> It feels like my own partnas, don't want me around.
> (Paul Wall, 2004)

If we look at the American history and analyse the available census data, black people have always been in clear disadvantage compared to other ethnicities (Watkins, 1998). In relative terms, there is a higher percentage of Afro-American people sent to prison than white people. Moreover, unemployment affects intensively this American minority forcing them to live in the poorest neighbourhoods of the country and being socially more vulnerable than their white neighbours. This is the social background where many gangsta rap artists come from, with generations that have been nothing but victims of drug dealers,

pimps and political repression. Post-industrial America reinvented their own capitalist rules, and with the migration of factories and loss of less skilled jobs, neighbourhoods were racially segregated, making very difficult for black minorities to access to legitimate jobs, good quality schools, etc. The way the housing market, economy and resources were managed in America during the 1970s can be interpreted as a type of favouritism for white people as they were the less affected by the deindustrialised economy, having access to more high management roles, better houses, etc. (Holloway and Wyly, 2001). Compton, Bronx and the Calliope Projects were the ashes of a deindustrialized America and also the place of birth of a few of the most successful rappers and producers such as Dr. Dre, Fat Joe and Master P. As Black people and Latino populated the parts of America with fewer jobs and opportunities, they also became a target for large capitalist corporations (Watkins, 1998) interested in selling overpriced goods as cars, sports clothing, jewellery, etc. Growing up within this culture explains the aesthetics of gangsta rap music videos. If jobs were taken away, these communities kept the creative freedom as a skill, and many of them used it to turn it into profit (Ross and Rose, 1994).

Is gangsta rap responsible for the negative perception of the black American ghettos? According to Heaggans' research (2009) Jim Crow laws were created not just to segregate people in America but also, to lynch and create a negative view of Afro-Americans. Heaggans ridicules hip-hop comparing it to the old minstrel shows, where black people were treated as lower class human beings. Although hip-hop has had a positive impact on the Afro-American artist community, it has

also given them a platform to advertise their skills, leading to many rap artists to continue their careers in cinema and television. The public frequently feel a conflict when listening to rap music, as derogatory lyrics against women are used to make a rap song, however, research suggests (Krims, 2000) that a number of record labels have asked rap artists to continue with the use of this type of lyrics in order to increase the selling. There is also a tension in the way that rap artists are allowed to use certain words to describe their black peers, but white people are not allowed to use them. Some authors (Heaggans, 2009) describe the use of these words as a self-hatred tendency that gangsta rap is somehow supporting. However, some politicians and educators see the potential of rap music to impact positively on youth experience, and research suggests that even nihilistic lyrics can have a positive impact on the young people's self-perception and others. Is it fair to expect guidance from rap artists? According to Heaggans (2009) we should only expect entertainment. Although most retractors do not agree with censorship in music, some of them would like to change rap lyrics and stop the usage of the 'n' word. If "What you see in the hip-hop videos is what they are subject to becoming or/and imitating", (Heaggans, 2009, p.20) then we are excluding other factors of the society as parent guidance, school education, from being influential.

Social and Political Impact of Gangsta Rap

As gangsta rap used violent and derogatory lyrics against police, women and minorities, it had its detractors. Reverend Calvin Butts and Delores Tucker condemned the message of gangsta rap lyrics in multiple debates with politicians and artists. Chuck D commented that the main difference between Calvin Butts and Delores Tucker and other white politicians was that the first ones were trying to protect the black community attacking in many occasions the white executive ruling record companies who benefited directly from the movement (Chuck, 1999, p.252). On the other hand, Calvin Butts and Delores Tucker have suggested that hip-hop had a positive impact when joining the community and providing the youth with intellectual tools to express their thoughts, feelings, etc. However, authors such as Baker believe (1995, p.673) that even when Tucker showed support for hip hop music, she did not fully understand its implications in Afro-American society.

When Ice Cube, one of the gangsta rap originators, talks about his beginning as a musician, he expressed not only the importance of N.W.A for popular music but also the social impact that their music has had in America (McIver, 2012) by bringing awareness against racism and police discrimination towards black and poor people. It is especially relevant for the topic of this research, to analyse the police reaction when the group launched the single *Fuck tha Police*. As rap music was also a fashion trend, young people started to listen to N.W.A across the country, and their lyrics were used to make merchandising, graffiti, etc. Ice Cube

explains in his biography that the police and the F.B.I reacted to this situation by denying security for N.W.A concerts and blaming the group for encouraging people to act violently and disrespectfully against them (McIver, 2012, p.52). It was believed that the overreaction of the police against the group was an anticipation for potential riots or violent protests against them. Los Angeles and South Central were, during a few decades, a place with tensions between the black and Latino communities and the police. Ice Cube later explained that this censorship was the precedent of later riots. The most intense event occurred four years after the release of the single *Fuck tha Police* in 1992, when the LA Police beat Rodney King after a car chase incident. This event reflected a clear social problem followed by other cases such as O.J. Simpson trial and others across the nation:

> Fuck the police! Comin' straight from the underground
> A young nigga got it bad 'cause I'm brown
> And not the other color, so police think
> They have the authority to kill a minority
> Fuck that shit, 'cause I ain't the one
> For a punk motherfucker with a badge and a gun.
> (N.W.A, 1988)

The F.B.I sent a letter to the group N.W.A demanding a change in their message towards the police and asked them to stop promoting and performing the song *Fuck tha Police*. We can say that the police actions empowered the group as they gained credibility from the audience. Ice Cube justified the lyrics and the message behind as 'necessary' to reflect the reality they were facing in the ghettos (McIver, 2012, p.53). Cube said that part of the audience did not feel comfortable with their

lyrics because they talk about things that American people do not normally suffer; these can be poverty, police brutality, gang violence, prostitution, etc. For Cube, these experiences are part of the life within the American ghettos. Ice Cube expressed in his biography, that they (N.W.A), decided to avoid big record labels as they could potentially censor their lyrics, and said that this 'honesty' was the main condition of the group when making music. Some groups from the east, for example KRS-One or Public Enemy, decided to be proactive against the violence in the ghetto. N.W.A decided to do the opposite: they made songs and music videos where they glorified gang violence and culture and inspiring a whole generation of artists to follow their steps. Another relevant topic of discussion for this thesis is the use of the word 'nigga'. The word, which according to the *Oxford Dictionary* (2010, p.1199), has been used as "a contemptuous term for a black or dark-skinned person" meant something completely different for N.W.A. For them, this word formed part of the vocabulary of their neighbourhoods and it helped to develop positive relationships. For that reason, they decided to disregard the censorship that this word has in America and use it in their music by and within the black community only.

Kubrin understands that the causes of violence are both "socio-structural and situational" (2005a, p.361). Poverty and its negative impact on the everyday of the poorer American people is the main cause of violence according to research. The poorer the population is in one area, the more isolated they are from the 'mainstream' areas of the cities, and isolation creates nothing but more inequality. This isolation is the fuel for 'outlaws' who created their own rules and culture

according to their values. In poor areas, the job offers tend to relate to non-legitimate businesses and the vision from the neighbours towards the police and politicians can be negatively affected. As commented in Kubrin's research, "Residents of disadvantaged black communities are arguably the most in need of police protection" (2005a, p.362), however, a long history of disputes and tensions with the police, does not encourage people to rely on them. Gangsta rap as well as hood films, tell black and Latino viewers not to trust the police, and it delivers a nihilistic message, which says that society is not fair for young black people. As mentioned before, gangsta rap can be just a glorification of violence, but it can also be a reflection of the capitalist society where the artists grew up. Furthermore, gangsta rap helps to understand violence and its consequences. The proactive approach that gangsta rap uses to identify possible solutions for situations, helps us to understand or analyse the way we feel in respect to many aspects of life. Although many of us think we prefer to read and watch positive news, Trussler and Soroka (2014) concluded after an empirical experiment that we feel attracted to bad news; 'Individuals tend to select negative and strategic news frames, even when other options are available' (Trussler and Soroka, 2014, p.2). This study links up with the negativity bias, or negativity effect theory, as 'the principle, which we call negativity bias, is that in most situations, negative events are more salient, potent, dominant in combinations, and generally efficacious than positive events.' (Rozin and Royzman, 2001, p.2001). Considering that we use negative events as a learning resource, young people use the negativity from rap lyrics to understand their reality, even when positive events happen around them. As we tend to give more importance to 'bad' experiences, it is easier to engage

with someone that has gone through a difficult situation. This theory explains why teenagers use gangsta rap as an educational tool. On the other hand, parents are also more aware of this form of negativity as it poses a danger to more standard family values.

Popular music has been the focus of interest for many politicians and members of the community as a result of what Springhall calls “moral panic” (1998). If rock and roll, gospel and rhythm and blues suffered different levels of censorship, one of the most intense campaigns against gangsta rap happened in 1995. U.S Senator Bob Dole, did not approve the message of the late 1980s early 1990s gangsta rap artists for their misogynistic and violent lyrics. As commented in *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*, gangsta rap groups gained recognition and became a big player in the rap industry. This growth attracted the attention of the media as well as politicians as it was not a music style for the American ghettos but from the ghettos to the rest of America (Springhall, 1998) similarly to the Trickle Up theory (McRobbie, 1992) where an upper class is influenced by a product originated by a lower class.

Regarding the violent lyrics, Springhall (1998) believes that some kind of extreme violent lyrics should be condemned; however, Senator Dole as well as other members of the black community did not condemn the lyrics against gay people for example. This denotes that some of them tried to use the gangsta rap debate to make political gains, which did not contribute to a fairer society. In a debate between gangsta rapper Ice T and Reverend Butts in the late 1980s, Reverend

Butts asked Ice T to ‘stop’ making gangsta rap music and to move to a more positive approach, nevertheless Ice T wondered if Butt’s concern was sincere or if he was using it to make a political campaign (McDaniels and Martin, 1993). During the interview mentioned before, Ice T commented that he plays different characters when making music as well as acting, but he received most of the criticism towards his music. As an example, the media or American politicians did not try to censor *Trespass* (1992), a movie directed by Walter Hill in which Ice T plays the role of King James, the head of a gang that kills and extort enemies. The movie, directed by a white artist, was seen as a fictional story and it was not treated as a menace to young people. On the other hand, when Ice T released the song *Cop Killer* (1992), which was based in a fictional character (as well as the movie), it was massively repudiated by the American society. It indicates that the origin of the artist did influence the perception of the public.

> COP KILLER, better you than me
> COP KILLER, fuck police brutality!
> COP KILLER, I know your family's grievin' ... FUCK 'EM!
> COP KILLER, but tonight we get even.
> (Body Count (1992)

Hansen (1995) contrasted a few different experiments where young white and Afro-American teenagers were exposed to violent music videos in order to see the behavioural effects of gangsta rap on them. Hansen used gangsta rap music for the experiment as lyrics often show antisocial, violent and sexist content to determine if it is true that the music can affect the behaviour of American teenagers. Furthermore, as gangsta rap has been “targeted for criticism” by parents, politicians and different members of the community (Hansen, 1995,

p.43), it was the perfect challenge to either reassure or dismiss the bold statements they made. Hansen suggests (1995, p.48) that gangsta rap music videos can help white teenagers to sympathize with Afro-American culture and at the same time, it can take them away from more extremist white supremacist ideologies. In addition, Zillman et al. commented on one of the experiments that he conducted, where white and Afro-American teenagers that watched a collection of gangsta rap music videos were interviewed about the subject area, suggesting that gangsta rap "has no effect on Afro-American youth and potentially could be beneficial for promoting attitudes of racial harmony among white youth" (Hansen, 1995, p.48).

Members from the mainstream media as well as Afro-American community considered gangsta rap as a negative form of music. Although there are some indications that gangsta rap was one of the most popular music genres for young Afro-Americans within the poorer communities, there is not enough evidence that this music has influenced people to commit a crime. Hansen argues in her paper (1995) the case of the North Carolina housing project shooting, where a firearm used to kill a police officer had the letters N.W.A written (Niggas With Attitude) on the side. This unfortunate event triggered one more time the debate about the freedom of speech in music and art. This research focuses on gangsta rap and the social pressure that some artists suffered to restrict the thematic of their songs. However, it is worth mentioning that research suggests (Hansen, 1995, p.45) that other music genres, such as rock, suffered the same type of political and social pressure for different reasons.

Some authors mentioned “blackness” as a form of commodity used by corporations to generate profit, however, gangsta rap was not the first black American art to be exploited (Watkins, 1998), for example, R&B and soul. The industry will always try to sell a product that is easy to consume and that can satisfy the needs of the target. This is the perception of many black activists that consider gangsta rap music as a negative music genre that diminishes black culture and creates a negative view of it. It is worth mentioning that most CEO’s of American record companies are white and male. Gangsta rap and hip-hop in general have been described sometimes as a movement, but movements normally have political aims (Watkins, 1998) and rap music is more about the individual. If gangsta rap has an economic or ideological philosophy it would be a capitalist one, as it is the system that provides them with wealth when they succeed, but it is also the system that oppresses them when they come from the ghettos of America. Furthermore, previous investigations suggested that some businesses took advantage of the criminalization of black communities in different ways, from the entertainment industry (including cinema and music) and the real estate industry, with the creation of prisons and security companies. According to The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, “Today, the United States makes up about 5% of the world’s population and has 21% of the world’s prisoners” and “African Americans are incarcerated at more than 5 times the rate of whites.”(NAACP, 2015). As an example of life in prison and gangsta rap, the famous rap duo Capone and Noreaga met in prison during the 1990s and their first

album was partially recorded with one of them (Capone) still serving his sentence (Reeves, 2017). Their lyrics were a clear reflection of their lifestyle:

> I'm outside on the streets, just holdin it down
> (I'm in jail pumpin iron son, and readin books)
> I'm in the studio, droppin sixteen's wit hooks
> (I'm in the yard in the cypha, just smokin my sticks)
> I'm in Queens Coliseum, just coppin new kicks
> (I hit the law library, hope to come home soon)
> I just finished up the album, fin' ta drop in June
> (Yeah, yeah, yeah)
> (Capone-N-Noreaga, 2000)

The 1980s and 1990s were two important decades for urban culture, having a positive impact in rock and rap music with dedicated channels as MTV, but also there was an excessive media coverage about Afro-American crime that damaged the perception of black youth in America. The crack cocaine problem (Watkins, 1998) was seen as an Afro-Americans' fault and this perception was translated to other art forms. Hip hop and gangsta rap were not, at least initially, a movement as it did not represent a collective but individuals. When gangsta rap became identifiable, it was able to succeed in the industry. Afro-American people have suffered from the same issues for decades, but after the 1980s the media gave them a voice. For many lower class teenagers and young adults, gangsta rap was the best way to communicate with the rest of the nation. Moreover, research suggests that popular music and black cinema (between other disciplines) helped to create understanding between cultures in America and it diminished racism (Watkins, 1998). Professional Afro-American athletes and artists have been role models for many American teenagers across the nation, so at this early stage, they

become a powerful tool against preconceived ideas about black people, urban myths, etc. along with musicians.

From the late 1980s, gangsta rap had a similar version in cinema; this genre was so-called 'hood' films. The genre was partially fictional/reality-based and told stories about gang violence, police corruption and offered a nihilistic view of the life in the ghetto. Hood movies, as gangsta rap, suffered from some creative repression during the 1980s and 1990s. Hollywood producers thought that drama films about the Afro-American struggle could potentially upset or be "too scary" for the white audience (Watkins, 1998). However, black cinema directors had to develop some strategies to see their films released. As an example, some drama movies (as most of these films contained dramatic stories) were tagged as comedies, and some directors as Spike Lee refused to show a copy of the movie to the producers until it was finished. A film that was particularly relevant for Afro-American cinema (and for American cinema in general) was *Do the Right Thing* (1989a). Paramount Pictures was too afraid about the possible consequences of the movie as it could potentially incite black people to riot. Research suggests (Lee, 1989b) that a part of Afro-American artists felt that the American right-wing was using the media to justify the censorship of black artists vilifying them.

Hood films like *Do the Right Thing* (Lee, 1989a), *Boyz 'n' the Hood* (Singleton, 1991) and *New Jack City* (Peebles, 1991) were very popular during the 1990s with a high demand from people who were already listening to gangsta rap. Although the revenue generated was significant, the criticism was high. This research finds that

part of the audience that consumes these type of films, also listen to gangsta rap and hip hop music in general, however, there is no evidence that youth watching these movies would commit a crime or become more violent influenced by the images or narratives shown (Hansen, 1995, p.48).

Gangsta rap music and hip-hop music in general never had an easy access to the industry. One of the more relevant cases was the censorship that rap music suffered by the Music Television Channel. MTV decided to not include rap music artists for two reasons: firstly, they did not want to lose the rock audience, and secondly, according to Watkins (1998), they did not want to include non-white musicians. It was not in their plans to include groups like N.W.A, Ice T or Public Enemy on their daily playlists. Although some rap music groups gained importance in the music industry in terms of commercial success, MTV opted for primary white rock groups and excluded black groups with the excuse that they would not match the consumers' taste (Watkins, 1998). After a time, rap music became a giant in the industry, especially for white American youth who wanted to learn more about the American ghetto culture and the lower class society, so MTV started to include rap groups as they were sharing the same target. It is also believed that, apart from the commercial success of gangsta rap, the decision to include black artists in MTV was also influenced by the popularity of some Afro-American artists in popular culture (Watkins, 1998). The first rap video included in the MTV's playlist was the single *Rapture* (1980) by the white pop artist Blondie.

Many white and Afro-American educators and politicians understood gangsta rap as a lack of moral values from the perspective of the artists and they attacked it to protect the 'authentic' American ethics. They were never interested in the voices of the young male artists who represented the historical moment that the people from the ghettos were living (Watkins, 1998). Although the music was directly inspired by everyday events of the segregated and deindustrialised American ghettos, gangsta rap artists were criticised for their negative influence over teenagers, women, etc. Gangsta rap music was more than just lyrics about the rage and the struggle of young Afro-Americans. Its sound, which was different to other related genres (e.g. Soul, Funk and Jazz), represented the conversion to electronic music and its presence annoyed more conservative parents who were not used to their approach. As an example of the huge influence that gangsta rap had on the music industry, the first N.W.A album *Efil4Zaggin (Niggaz4Life)* (1991) was the number one album in record chart ranking magazine listing, Billboard 200, during the second week of its debut (Grow, 2016). It is believed that young black teenagers who lived in dislocated areas would use gangsta rap as a way to have a job and also to obtain social and economic recognition. However, Watkins (1998) believed that politicians looking for an easy target to boost their careers would pick on these artists as they were less likely to obtain protection and legal advice.

In the academic area, there are some scholars partially opposed to the freedom of speech in gangsta rap or, at least, they do not see any benefits of this type of music. One of its detractors is Heaggans who attacks hip-hop and gangsta rap for failing to do what he expects from them: to contribute to a social and political

movement that works on behalf of the Afro-American society (2009). Heaggans also sees a relation between hip-hop music videos and old racist American minstrel entertainment in which white actors covered their faces with black paint to play different Afro-American stereotypes. Although it is true that gangsta rap music videos use constantly images of women and men in a sexual, consumerist or violent context, it is understood by its detractors that they (gangsta rappers) only show the negative side of Afro-American people and it is detrimental to the perception of them as a community. Another common aspect amongst rap music detractors is the blame for young people's actions. They believe that young people will imitate the gangsta rapper attitudes from the videos and that they can take it to real life not realizing the damage it can produce. Detractors often avoid comparing this music to cinema industry and other art forms as gangsta rap is seen as reality (Heaggans, 2009). For the same reason, female rappers are subject to criticism from both sides (Afro-American community and white conservatives) when they rap about their lifestyle and sexual life:

> I used to be scared of the dick, now I throw lips to the shit
> Handle it like a real bitch
> Heather Hunter, Janet Jacme
> Take it in the butt, yah, yazz wha
> I got land in Switzerland, even got sand in the Marylands
> Bahamas in the spring, baby, it's a Big-Momma thing
> Can't tell by the diamonds in my rings
> That's how many times I wanna cum, twenty-one
> And another one, and another one, and another one.
> (Lil Kim, 1996)

One of the labels used by Heaggans to categorise gangsta rap is "Unconscious" hip-hop, as if there were another conscious or political hip-hop that works on

behalf of the Afro-American community (2009). His speech shows some contradictions, as he believes that 1990s rappers do not realize the advantages they have in society and therefore they should be grateful for what they have. Heaggans does not approve of hip-hop when it is about the personal achievements of the gangsta rapper. Furthermore, several detractors agree that young people should make profit using their intellectual skills, however they see as almost as 'illegal' the way some gangsta rappers achieved wealth by being creative and using their position within the music industry. Moreover, detractors consider that gangsta rap artists do not need the use of intellectual skills to construct their lyrics, dismissing the complexity of the music, direction of the music videos and the audience taste (Heaggans, 2009). Another contradiction that was found within some detractors' speeches is that they blame gangsta rappers for not giving a 'real' description of what being black means or how living in the Afro-American community looks like, however, they would ignore two fundamental factors: the creative freedom of the artists to represent imaginary or real scenarios and the experience of some gangsta rappers expressed through their lyrics in first person. Furthermore, detractors understand that the commercialisation of hip-hop music disrupted their social consciousness, and white managers from record companies would push artists to stop talking about social equality and similar things in their lyrics.

If gangsta rap is changing somehow the perception of blackness, it is because of the audience not considering that the artists are creating a fictional space for the lyrics. Rappers are trying to look real to "back up" their lyrics, but the audience do

not know how the rapper behaves during their private life. As previously mentioned in this text, rappers are generally treated differently than cinema directors. Although it has been suggested that record companies are pushing rap artists to look more violent in their lyrics and performance, we have to consider that many of them are just using this style and sound as a concept to engage with the listeners. “Many hip-hop artists may be achieving wealth but not using their influence to wield political power for all black” (Heaggans, 2009, p.33). When a person coming from a minority or a poor background succeeds (e.g. artists, athletes, entertainers among others), it is socially expected that there will be a payback to the community. Sometimes this payback can be in form of cash, social or political actions. Some politicians as well as some educators would like gangsta rappers to change their lyrics or the concept of their music to contribute to their community. One of the bases of music and art in general is the freedom of the artist to be true to their artistic concepts. Traditionally speaking, we cannot expect from an artist to change the direction of his/her artwork after the success of their previous art, as it would damage the relationship between the artists and the audience. If political hip-hop has been criticized for creating tension between different sections of the society (Heaggans, 2009, p.34) gangsta rap has been also used by people interested in climbing the political staircase. Gangsta rap artists often blame parents for allowing children to purchase their albums as it is not allowed the sale of these albums to minors in the U.S. For some authors (Heaggans, 2009, p.36), teenagers just accept gangsta rap videos as a reality and act according to what was represented on the artwork, however, research suggests that people even at a young age, can differentiate between what is real

and what is a representation for artistic purposes, and that other factors such as drug use, family issues and mental health problems, can be more decisive than music for children and teenagers to act violently:

> Children who are already at risk for suicide or violence may increase their risk by heavy use of music extolling those themes. However, for children without pre-existing risk factors, or for those who have a number of protective factors, music with themes of suicide or violence is likely to have little short-term effect.
> (Roberts, Christenson and Gentile, 2003, p.160).

To conclude, the current chapter found that the creation of gangsta rap was linked to its political and social context. Furthermore, the post-industrial decline of the Unite States had a negative impact on urban areas, especially those populated by minorities. Black people have been in clear disadvantage compared to other ethnicities. It can thus be suggested that Afro-American youth started using this music during the 1980s as a tool to demonstrate their value as individuals, as it helped them to create an identity. Rap music was sometimes a reflection of their reality and personal circumstances, but for some others, it was just completely fictional.

Gangsta rap music is considered the most violent style within the hip-hop genre, however, it is also the most successful in economic terms. For that reason, international record labels were interested in commodifying certain aspects of the Afro-American life. Furthermore, the 1980s and 1990s experienced a 'boom' of Afro-American celebrities (athletes, entertainers, artists, etc.), however, one of the issues that emerges from these findings is that the black community suffered

from an excessive media coverage of the crack cocaine problem, having a negative impact in the perception of the whole black American youth.

The current study, also based on previous research, found that gangsta rap exposes the reality that young people experience in the American ghettos, where being a victim is not an option for a teenager who wishes to be integrated with his/her peers, therefore ghetto teenagers can obtain social recognition by breaking social rules. At some point in hip-hop history, race became something less important than class, so white rappers were also perceived as authentic if they are honest with their background and context. Hip-hop can diminish racism and help to deconstruct preconceived ideas about black people. On the other hand, some scholars blame gangsta rap for creating a negative perception of the black community. The subgenre has its pros and cons as people can see as negative the use of derogatory and misogynistic lyrics, but at the same time, it provides young people with intellectual tools to express themselves. Furthermore, Ice Cube and other gangsta rappers think that their music helped them to show some of their community problems such as racial discrimination and police brutality.

After analysing gangsta rap and its background and historical context, no direct evidence was found on the association between gangsta rap and youth violence, however, in some occasions right-wing politicians and some conservative members of the community, pressurise rap artists to censor the content of their lyrics, making more difficult for gangsta rap artists to represent real or imaginary scenarios as they will be judged. Therefore, when an Afro-American artist reaches

fame, it is expected that there will be some sort of payback to the community, which might include acting as a role model for the younger generations. Empirical research suggests that rap music videos do not make white or black people more violent. Overall, these results indicate that the causes of violence are both "socio-structural and situational" (Kubrin, 2005a, p.361). The most obvious finding to emerge from this chapter is that music and art do not have the same level of impact of isolation and social exclusion.

More research is needed to determine if gangsta rap artists find themselves limited when creating rap lyrics and music videos, as previous historical events show the possible negative impact that it may have had on their careers and lives.

Chapter Two: Gangsta Rap, an Autoethnographic Account

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the socio-cultural context has a great impact on the decision making of young people in terms of leisure time, hobbies, tastes and interests as well as social life. Numerous papers (Arnett, 1991; Zillmann et al., 1995; Laiho, 2004) have investigated the relationships between urban music (as well as TV, heavy metal and other genres) and young people from different perspectives. The categorical bold conclusions of some papers often suggest that there is important information missing. The missing information can be related to the individual's living conditions, the social environment, new social tendencies and the list can continue, as human behaviour is a complicated subject. As an example, previous investigations of this music and its relationship with young people often suggested that popular music and television are social determinants of physical and mental health as well as behaviour. This ethnographic study will challenge those studies that position the influence of music on human behaviour above formal education, parental guidance or the socio-cultural environment. An example of a previous investigation that this thesis challenges is a project conducted by Wingood et al. during a 12-month period where a group of young people from poor American areas shared the number of hours they spent watching rap music videos and their social and sexual habits. Based on the data they collected, the researchers determined that:

> Compared with adolescents who had less exposure to rap music videos, adolescents who had greater exposure to rap music videos were 3 times more likely to have hit a teacher; more than 2.5 times as likely to have been arrested; 2 times as likely to have had multiple sexual partners; and more than 1.5 times as likely to have acquired a new sexually transmitted disease, used drugs, and used alcohol over the 12-month follow-up period. (Wingood et al., 2003).

Although it is difficult to say which is 'the chicken or the egg', ethnographers collect data from the subjects to investigate human living conditions as a result of the social context where they live, the politics that dictate their living conditions and equally important, the life experiences that take people to one place or another.

During the early phase of this thesis, it was planned to interview international rap artists and create different case studies in order to understand why rap artists choose this music to express themselves and what is the connection between the music and their political and social background. During the time I was writing the socio-cultural context of the thesis I found two issues. The first issue was that I was doing a practice-led investigation, and that the case studies should reflect on the practice I was making (music, illustrations, etc.) and vice versa, therefore, the most appropriate sample for the case study was me. Secondly, the responses from previous music interviews and papers suggest that many artists may not be suitable for this academic research as their answers could be heavily conditioned for the status they have to maintain as artists. As discussed in the previous chapter, authenticity, which is a highly contested work in popular music studies, is important for consumers, as it can represent for rap music fans an “authentic representation of life in poor black urban neighbourhoods” (Wright, 2010, p. 10) as well as how much the artist relates to the stories he or she is telling. By

interviewing prestigious artists, their real-life experiences sometimes can benefit their reputation but sometimes can contradict the content of their lyrics, having a negative impact on the perception of their fans. Authenticity cannot be guaranteed through autoethnography either as we use memories and experiences that can be subject to our perceptions, however, those memories can be analysed from multiple points as we also have access to the surrounding circumstances and historical context. I qualify as a good subject for investigation as I have participated in this culture as a rap artist, I have an extensive discography, and I also come from a socio-political background that is relevant for this research.

In 2017 I had the opportunity to meet in person one of the most relevant artists that participated in the creation of rap music, Lawrence "Kris" Parker (KRS One). After my conversation with KRS One, I thought about the impact that a highly influential artist like him could have on my research, however, after our conversation I quickly noticed that KRS One has had the attention from the media and the research community for over the last three decades. His opinions have been published multiple times through the different channels, he has published his own books and participated in numerous documentaries, therefore nothing new would be contributed to this research if his comments were included here. One of the aims of this chapter is to help other young artists through my own experiences, and as a relatively unknown underground rapper, this research will have a greater impact on this research category and bring more original data for further analysis.

Background Growing Up in the 1980s

I was born in Seville in 1985, ten years after the Franco's dictatorship and just after seven years of the first national elections of the current democracy. The country was in the same recovery process that many other countries were going through by that time, and the middle class did not have many of the privileges or freedoms that we now have.

I grew up in my grandparents' house with my mother, my two uncles and grandparents on the tenth floor of a flat tower of the outskirts of the capital, a similar place to what Americans call projects (Crump, 2002). I do not have many memories of me playing with other children during the pre-school time, as my grandparents did not allow me to play outside, as there was a high number of drug dealers as well of drug users in the area. The needles on the floor and the stories about robberies and fights made them feel insecure about the area where I was living. When I was a baby, my mother was raped in the lift of our building, and even though my family did not want me know about what happened, children are curious by nature and I more or less knew about it at some point by overhearing their conversations. This event, as well as many others, made me feel that I was living in constant danger, and made me perceive the world as a non-friendly place to live in. Young people are extremely sensitive and although you do not know what a sexual assault is, you can perceive the negative effects of those events. According to my family, the man who attacked my mother was caught by the police sometime after abusing other women in our neighbourhood. My family

discovered that the last victim of this man was the wife of a police officer that lived in our area, which could lead to a more intense police search. One of the thoughts that I had many times during my childhood was that what would have happened if the guy who attacked my mother and other women did not attack the wife of a police officer? Would he still be free? Did the police back in the 1980s take all cases with the same degree of intensity or interest? My mother commented me that when they attended the trial there were numerous victims waiting to testify, so I still wonder if the police could have done more to prevent the serial attacks. This was a formative time in terms of my concerns about social justice.

When I was five years old, I joined a Catholic school close to the city centre. My family thought that as they were not able to move out, this would bring a good opportunity for me to meet other children and have a better education. I was commuting every day from the area where I was living to the school, and it felt that I did not belong to any of those two places. On one hand, I was not feeling attached to my neighbourhood, as there was nothing there for me apart from my family; on the other hand, the school I attended had a mixture of children from different parts of the city but mainly from the city centre, which was considered one of the richest parts. The school continued some of the traditions that were created during Franco's dictatorship and children had to give military salutes [Figure 1] and participate in religious celebrations that were traditionally associated with higher right-wing communities. Sooner than later, social class became a part of the discussions between pupils, and the values from the better-positioned families clashed with the working-class ones. One of the moments I

realised that the place where I was living was a non-desirable area was when the school teacher asked us for our home address, just to double check that he had the right information. When I said mine, some children joked about it and asked me if my family were criminals, which made me feel ashamed but also made me reject the place where I was from. Later on in my second year of school, I invited some peers to my birthday party, which was taking place in my grandparents' house, however, some of them were not allowed to come. I never knew their reasons, but my family speculated about their parents not wanting them to come to our neighbourhood.

If America had incredibly harsh conditions during the Reagan-Bush era (Kelley, 1996), the living conditions in Spain were not much better. The lack of manufacturing jobs within the less educated areas of the city created a wider class distinction, not to mention the devastating effect of the crack cocaine and heroin problem across pretty much all the western countries including Spain (Gamella, 1997). Growing up around this problem made me reject drugs as I could see its deleterious effects. Every day, drug users knocked on our doors asking for money or food, and many times my family recognised them as youngsters who grew up in our areas. As I mentioned before, my family lived on the top floor of the building, which was the 10th floor, and I spent a good part of my childhood avoiding the lifts and using the stairs, as drug users used to use them to consume their drugs. My family and the others increased their contribution to the service charge and finally paid for outside bars in order to keep drug users outside of the property,

making it feel like a prison. Drugs had a negative impact on my perception of the world from the very beginning.

My parents, who were living separately as my dad was still living with his previous family, used to meet during the weekends to do social activities, some of which often included high levels of alcohol consumption. My mother, who also had psychological problems, was affecting our lives due to her lifestyle. As a child, I never knew in what mood was my mother going to be on the same day, so when I was old enough to be outside on my own, I used to avoid being at home for too long so I would not have to listen to my parents arguing, etc. Movies and music were my refuge point to avoid my parents when they were together. As a child, I remember feeling angry, and based on my own experience, those situations affected my self-esteem and my perception of the world, the family and anything else. One can argue that the harsh living conditions within poorer areas could decrease the self-confidence of my young friends and myself during that time. Furthermore, psychological issues were a stigma associated with failure, so my mother never sought professional help, which led to more self-medication and fewer job opportunities, etc.

During my primary school years, I spent a lot of time watching action and violent movies where the main character was a hypermasculine man, using physical force to be respected. As an example, one of my favourite movies was *Rambo* (Kotcheff et al., 1982). According to Sweeney, “Rambo movies are filled with ideology, American myth, and character representation that, consciously or not, appealed

to a wide range of people" (Sweeney, 1999, p. 63). In my case, *Rambo* was appealing as it represented everything that I wanted to be: a peaceful man who would do anything that the situation required to keep myself, my family and friends safe. If my perception of the world was conditioned by the place where I was living, I wanted to have a role model to make me believe that I could be safe if I found the right way. After *Rambo*, other movies and video games had the same subject matter, and they inspired my childhood in different ways.

Experience as a Teen

When I was twelve, I was aware that those movie characters that I used to watch were not real and I started looking up to other people as boxers, basketball players, graffiti and hip-hop artists. All of them had something in common: they generally came from a place like mine (or worse) and they were able to succeed. They were not people who had an expensive education, or access to training facilities to practice some high-class sports; they were just regular people, and they were proud of it. The first American gangsta rap album that I had was *Criminal Minded* by Boogie Down Productions (1987) and I thought that for one time, to be the outsider was positive. Rap music was the product of hard living conditions and gave people from this class the opportunity to belong to something that mattered for them. Rap music united youth from around the world and was the soundtrack of basketball games, graffiti documentaries and one of my passions, boxing. I remember Tupac Shakur and Mike Tyson before and after the fights together as they belonged to the same urban culture. They were also fighting together against

the establishment and earning large amounts of money being themselves. Those images of rappers and boxers in Las Vegas made me think that working-class people had to be proud of themselves and their environment to have a chance to succeed. In 1998 [Figure 2], I started painting graffiti with a couple of friends and I remember feeling very proud of myself coming back from school to my neighbourhood, looking at my own graffiti around some factory walls.

As rap music popularity grew, religious organizations tried to stop teenagers from listening to this music from different places. As an example, our school did not allow us to play these songs during the music-related modules and tried to dismiss it in multiple ways. We can arguably think that this censorship attempt probably encouraged even more people like myself to listen to this music. I remember using almost any occasion [Figure 3] to show my passion for this music and to express myself, but it had a personal cost as it would make me an easy target for teachers and other authority figures, especially in school which was trying to mute other traditions outside of Catholic religion, and popular mainstream traditions. Attending a Catholic school, I did not have any kind of support to express my feelings or to talk about what was going on around me. I started using this music privately to connect with myself and to feel that I had a voice. It is important to know that some Catholic schools and communities gained power during Franco's dictatorship (as it was a fascist-Catholic dictatorship) and they were not supportive of new non-traditional life styles (Mar del Pozo Andrés and Braster, 2006).

Knowing that our school was not supportive of our new music passion, a few school friends and I secretly exchanged music cassette tapes every week and as we did not understand the lyrics, we used to translate what they said using the English dictionary. It was a challenge to know the meaning of some of the American lyrics, as some of the words were not officially translated. As an example, it took us time to understand the exact meaning of KRS One's song *9mm Goes Bang* (1987) but the sound and the delivery of the music was often enough to connect with and understand the content.

> Me knew a crack dealer by the name of Peter
> Had to buck him down with my 9 millimeter
> He said I had his girl, I said "Now what are you? Stupid?"
> But he tried to play me out and KRS-One knew it
> He reached for his pistol but it was just a waste
> Cos my 9 millimeter was up against his face
> He pulled his pistol anyway and I filled him full of lead
> But just before he fell to the ground this is what I said...
> (Productions, KRS-One and La Rock, 1987)

Rap music's popularity grew strongly worldwide during the late 1980s but specially during the early 1990s (Kubrin, 2005) when I was a youngster, and youth from all different backgrounds and colours empathised with the stories that those African American and Latino artists were telling. Similar aspects of the lifestyle in the American ghettos had their correlation on the other side of the Atlantic. Rap music (as well as many other music genres and artistic disciplines) promotes a form of informal education between teenagers, as it can address many different subjects such as identity, sex and violence (Kubrin, 2005, p. 434). These subjects were not taught in Catholic schools and therefore we had to find the information

somewhere else. Sex was discussed from time to time only in religion class (which was taught by a priest) and the information was vague and often misleading.

Some artists do not use an appropriate language or theme for young audiences, as it can lead young people to misinterpretations of the contents, therefore validating the necessary use of parental advisory sticker and age category on the front cover of music albums. Copying the music from tape to tape did not allow our parents to know what music we were playing in our Walkmans. After Boogie Down Productions, many other hip-hop groups, documentaries and hood films arrived in the late 1990s and we were obsessed about the music genre, the fashion and lifestyle. I felt that this part of the American popular culture was more connected to my reality than most of the Spanish music and cinema that my family used to consume. Even though my friend and I were not black, we felt that social class was the equivalent to race in our living conditions and therefore we wanted to be able to combat it. The film *Do the Right Thing* (Lee, 1989a) addressed many of the questions that we asked as teenagers and Spike Lee gave us something that we could relate to. A positive contribution that rap music gave me was the sense of belonging, not just to the music genre, but also to my own living conditions. When I started secondary education (when I was 12 years old), I started feeling proud of my neighbourhood, as I felt that working-class people were the toughest and the most decent community. In addition, coming from the place where I was from, gave me a 'status' that I could use in front of my peers and other teenagers in high school. "Another prevalent notion of hip-hop authenticity is adherence to "street" values. Consequently, representing one's neighbourhood and expressing

a commitment to street values, often including hustling and any other activity that can be explained by the all-too-common phrase “keepin’ it real,” is connected to conceptions of authenticity.”(Williams, 2007, p.8) When I was listening to rappers from the Bronx or Compton, I thought of my neighbourhood as the same type of territory.

An event that marked my adolescence was my first (truly) violent experience when I was thirteen years old. A friend and I went for a walk to look at some graffiti walls in his neighbourhood after school, as we used to do every other day [Figure 4]. As I was a hip-hop fan, I was always wearing a thin gold chain that my family bought me when I did my First Communion. The chain was very special for me for different reasons: firstly, it had a Jesus cross that I thought of as protection, and secondly it had a small gold Sevilla Football Club medallion next to it to show everyone that I was a Sevilla fan. During the walk, we noticed that one adult man was chasing us, so we decided to go through different streets to leave the person behind, and when we reached a tranquil open space, the person found us. I recognised him quickly as he was the mature friend of an older boy of my school, and he said that he wanted to talk to me. A few seconds of silence later, the man, who was likely to be over 18 years old, let my friend go, beat me physically and stole the chain from me. The fact that a person was able to hurt me and steal from me the way he did made me feel very vulnerable, and looking at other hip-hop artists’ lyrics and interviews, I understood that although people from the poorer areas are perceived as dangerous to other people, they are the first victims of their own living conditions. Unfortunately, this was only the first of many other similar

experiences that I had growing up in the late 1990s. Some researchers (King, 1988), also mentioned in (Took and Weiss, 1994), suggested that urban music styles are not the main influence for teenagers to consume drugs or act negatively, however, it is also mentioned that it can contribute to the behaviour. Based on my own experience, situations like the one I just mentioned had a deeper impact on my perception of the world than any other music or cinema that I could consume. Music did not change the way I was acting as much as real events. The negative experiences that I had because of the sociocultural context where I was living promoted more anti-social behaviour or disfranchisement than music, graffiti or popular culture. Even though Hip-hop songs make references to drugs and alcohol (Primack et al., 2008) it never made me feel interested in drugs as I had a negative perception of them beforehand. However, after some negative events, I remember feeling anger and rebelliousness against the establishment that I expressed with music and not drinking or smoking.

Even though everyone producing rap song was part of the hip-hop community, gangsta rap was considered a micro scene at the beginning of its creation, as the ideology, aesthetic and attitudes were different to the larger hip-hop scene (Harkness, 2013). Furthermore, rappers used their gangs as a powerful network to promote their art practice. It has never been clear if gangsta rappers participated in gang culture, or on the contrary, they simply reflected their community's life experiences through their music as sensitive individuals who were able to express their thoughts in a musical way. According to Harkness (2013), gang members also provided security and support during the music events. Graffiti artists also joined

some of the gangs in exchange for protection, paying the membership by tagging the name of the brand across their neighbourhood and rivals'. For my peers and I, gangsta rap was an excuse to connect our music to our living conditions and to be able to produce art without using the more accepted mainstream channels. Considering that we attended a Catholic school, most of the workshops they offered in after school provision were religion-orientated (Mar del Pozo Andrés and Braster, 2006, p.114) and gangsta rap was about sex, consumerism, rebelliousness and violence, which was much more appealing for us as teenagers. It was also important to do something that contradicts the people that we considered to be in power, such as school teachers, priests, family, etc. It felt good to differentiate ourselves from other children who followed the paths that the school was creating for them. As we did not have the conditions that better positioned families had, we wanted to be as different as possible.

At some point during our adolescence my friends and I wanted to be perceived as dangerous because somewhat contradictorily, we rejected violence, and we thought that if we could project the appearance of a gang, maybe we could get away without getting involved in real violence or street fights;

> Anecdotal evidence suggests that young people's offending behaviour can be inspired by the desire to emulate the lifestyles of American hip-hop musicians, the so-called "gangsta rappers", who are known for their material wealth and are often associated with weapons.
> (Fitch, 2009, p.14).

We adopted some elements, in terms of fashion and attitudes, of gangsta rap gangs [Figure 5]. Hagerdon (2008) also commented by Harkness (2013, p. 152) considers that gangs influenced the creation of gangsta rap at the beginning, but

at this current moment that we are living in, gangsta rappers and urban artists have a greater influence on gang members, especially in terms of aesthetic. As an example, the perception that we have of a gang member has been given to us through rap music and films. Rappers like The Game or Easy E have influenced the aesthetic of real criminals that also wanted to be perceived as authentic or dangerous. In an interview between Harkness (2013, p. 153) and Black Soldier, the interviewee mentioned that Afro-American gang members use the music as form of expression, to release the pain that they experience living on those hard conditions, so this projection of toughness and masculinity can be also understood as a lack of self-esteem. In my case, we used fashion as a way to claim our social class, cultural preferences and ideology.

The Danger of Being Misunderstood.

Scholars such as Martinez (1997) and Kubrin (2005a) described hip-hop as a left-wing inspired music genre that tries to heal the division between the black community and the people in power but also a music genre that creates lyrics against women, gays and other minorities. Growing up listening to this music, I was able to differentiate between real violence and a creative expression, however, I always felt that rap music should have been used to fight oppression or to compete against one's peers. I never understood why some rap lyrics were against women or homosexual people, as it felt unfair and unnecessary, however, during my whole childhood I remember how some words were adopted to express negativity (Lalor and Rendle-Short, 2007, p.148). As an example, the word 'gay'

was used to express disappointment or rejection. If a friend was wearing a shoe that one do not like, then one would use the adjective 'gay' instead of ugly. As we grew up, we stopped using certain derogatory words or using words in derogatory ways as we focused our rebelliousness against the establishment and not the people around us. As a teenage gangsta rap fan, I was able to pick the positive outcomes of the music and the good messages that some artists where offering and rejected those that I perceived as simply bullying.

During the late 1990s I thought that even if I was not a violent person and I did not support 'real' violence, I was entitled to make rap music because, as if there were some unwritten rules to belong to the hip-hop culture, I met all the requirements apart from being black. I made my first rap song when I was 14 at my friend's house, and I remember having a difficult time trying to rap my lyrics as his mother was around and I did not want to give her a bad impression. Rap music was not as popular as other music genres, however MTV and Viva were broadcasting gangsta rap and heavy metal videos daily and the older generations perceived those styles as dangerous and negative. For that reason, I felt judged when making rap music and wearing rap style clothes during the late 1990s. When I recorded my first song on a tape called *The Hard-core Master*, I made a few copies of the tape and I gave them to my friends. Soon after, I had a mixture of opinions about my music. Some people thought that making music was a positive activity and they liked what I was doing, however, some other people felt that I was not entitled to make this type of music as I was not a gangster or an Afro-American male. I remember dressing

as my favourite rappers whenever I had a chance [Figure 6], sometimes as an adolescent joke, but some others to feel different and noticed.

My first lyrics were not edgy or violent; they were just rhymes about my talent as a rap artist and about me claiming myself and friends as successful people. The music was so heavily associated with violence and gun culture that some people (family, teachers, etc.) felt that I should not express myself using that style. The same opposition and censorship that rap music had in America during the early 1990s (Kubrin, 2005b, p. 433) was also present in some countries in Europe, showing their aversion to lyrics reflecting on certain aspects of society such as poverty or working-class disfranchisement. As an example, the school where I was studying had strong links with the right wing and their traditional values, and they would deem as negative, almost any form of expression that questions traditional family values.

As a teenager, I was living in a society full of contradictions; on one hand, Spanish television was full of nudes and sexism, but at the same time, music should not be used to talk about sex or fantasies. After the dictatorship in Spain, there were two period of times, “transición democrática” (1977-1982) and “democracia” (1983-) (Alonso, 2011), when cinema makers featured multiple scenes of sex and nudity as they were not creating in a politically repressed context any more. However, although music included political messages, it was difficult to find lyrics about sex and violence during this time. One of the most iconic groups that we used to play in order to break dance was 2 Life Crew, which also was quite rare to find in record

stores. The group, which was taken to court under obscenity charges for performing songs with sexual lyrics (McFadden, 1990), were later on cleared of all charges. *As Nasty as They Wanna Be* (1989) sold 1.7 million albums while *As Clean as They Wanna Be* (1989) sold only 200.000 copies (Powell, 1991) which clearly showed what version of the album was more appealing for youngsters. According to Johnson et al. (1995) and Sherman and Dominick (1986), by the mid-1980s more than 20 million families had the Music Television Channel in their house, and potentially available for their children. "Because these videos tend to be replete with images of behaviour such as rebellion against parental authority (…) such behaviours seem desirable and commonplace" (Johnson, Jackson and Gatto, 1995, p. 28).

Rap music lyrics have been used on numerous occasions (Steinmetz and Henderson, 2012) without considering the context or the creative approach, generating a negative image around the artist, which might affect their individual experiences. As an example, Lil Jojo was a famous gangsta rapper from Chicago. When he was assassinated, police investigated his lyrics as well as other rappers from his area looking for evidence (Harkness, 2013, p. 152). Furthermore, the result of the investigation included videos from YouTube, and social media posts, as they (rap artists) were using these platforms to claim their territory and their influence in the music business. One can argue that, although on some occasions social media posts or even lyrics can help the police to resolve a case, rap music lyrics have often been used to criticise the lifestyle of a person. Most gangsta rappers' achievements have been belittled because of the content of their lyrics,

and a good example of this was the criticism against rapper Common for visiting the White House, as critics considered that he represented a negative lifestyle, ignoring the most remarkable part of his career where positive lyrics have been more frequent (Steinmetz and Henderson, 2012, p. 160). As a young person I felt that society would never value my achievements as a music artist or illustrator (my illustrations were also linked to rap music themes) as the genre that I chose was linked to a poor working class. Being creative under these conditions will require more peer support and will widen the gap between rap music artists and mainstream channels.

Artists have been always linked to the areas of the cities where they come from, and sometimes it helps them to be perceived as authentic. My friends and I used to go to areas of our neighbourhood that were not necessarily dangerous but looked like the images that we used to see in American gangsta rap music videos for inspiration. These surroundings promoted our imagination and inspired us to create our lyrics. According to Harkness (2013), rappers from L.A have benefited from this association as pioneer gangsta rappers were also gang members. According to Harkness they used music to create “cinematic landscapes” of the life in the ghetto, which later on was reflected in so-called ‘hood’ films (p. 155). Some researchers, such as Bowman (1992, p. 36) and also mentioned in Johnson, Jackson and Gatto (1995), suggest that listening to gangsta rap may influence black people to kill police officers or act violently to sort problems out. According to these researchers, the influence of rap music seems to be more decisive for

committing a violent crime than police brutality, racism, bullying, discrimination and ultimately the space where they lived.

I remember growing up watching the news with my family. I used to perceive criminals as poor people, and they used to look like the people from my neighbourhood. Altheide and Snow (1991) mentioned that after being exposed during a large period of time to violent news, we expect criminals to look in a certain way. Furthermore, societies have been teaching to their members what to worry about for a long time; it could be through religion, popular culture and more recently through media. The content we watch on the news is actually affecting the relationship that we have with our world, and therefore, we act according to that perception. According to Altheide (1997), because of the exposure to violent news, we are misperceiving the reality. As an example, some of the safest neighbourhoods in America are also the most armed. Research shows (Gunter, 1987) that the perception of danger can also change the lifestyle of some people, pushing them to isolate in their houses where they are safe and getting worse as the media will reinforce these ideas of fear and vulnerability. As I mentioned before, rap music fashion generated this rejection from my teachers, and older people around me. It also affected the way we were treated when we attended concerts and exhibitions [Figure 7] but more importantly, how the police or security treated us. “What we may be seeing in the unbalanced heavy metal and rap groups are merely behaviours associated with being an adolescent male.” (Took and Weiss, 1994, p. 620).

The Beginnings of an Artistic Practice

There have always been two main scenes within hip-hop: one that is socially and politically aware and the other one that is nihilistic and negative. As a teenager, I felt more attracted for the negative one as it spoke about issues that I experienced with my family but also gave me that sense of belonging that as a teenager I was looking for. The content of the lyrics and the negative portraits described in rap music did not lower my confidence or the self-esteem of teenagers from poorer communities (Allen, 2001) as it is commonly believed (Conrad, Dixon and Zhang, 2009). The criticism against gangsta rap also existed within the hip-hop community, and often, other rappers criticised us not only for our lyrics (which never were against minorities or women but competitive against other rappers) but also for our fashion and the way we dressed as it was inspired by Afro-American hip-hop culture. We understood that as artists, we would receive some criticism, as every other artist in history has received eventually, however, we felt that making rap music would put us in a vulnerable position as the public would be more willing to scrutinise our lyrics. When I made my first few songs, I felt that some people did not realize that I was performing and that therefore my lyrics should not be taken as real statements. As an example, after six or seven years of making music, I produced my first music video *Cual es tu problema* that translates as *What's your problem?* (2008). This song received attention nationally as there were not many Spanish rappers producing videos at this particular point. The song was an attempt at creating a stereotyped gangsta rap party song that talks about

flirting with women, driving expensive cars and wearing branded clothes, however, it received criticism from different perspectives.

The song was introduced by a distorted voice that I sampled from Lil Flip's single, *Sunshine*:

> I need a lady in the streets but a freak in the sheets (x6) (Lil Flip, 2004)

After the voice, it was followed by the heavy bass of the instrumental, and my first part which translates as:

> What's your problem G? I am a hustler
> You copy my clothes, while I am making money
> I move slowly but no one can stop me
> The difference between you and me is that I am an enthusiast (…)
> That good-looking girl calls me daddy,
> In the club they never run away from me,
> My dirty south style got me here,
> Come on baby, I played my cards right and won (…)

The music video was published on social media (MySpace was the main distribution channel), and the main Spanish hip-hop websites published it allowing people to leave comments. The video received positive comments in regards of the music production and delivery of the lyrics, and negative comments about the contents as well as the aesthetics used. Some users commented that as a white-Spanish person, I was not entitled to produce a song in the same manner and style that Afro-Americans do [Figure 8]. Moreover, they criticised that the lifestyle that I was representing on my lyrics was not part of the everyday of a Spanish person, and therefore that I was giving a false representation of my life. After reading the

positive and negative comments I had the impression that I was being criticised for being a rapper, or for showing the neighbourhood that I was from and not really for the music itself. I thought that using a different approach to express myself (through painting or traditional filmmaking) I would have received a more positive response from regular people. Some people also thought that even though the lyrics were not directly violent, the aesthetic of the video and the delivery would be not appropriate for certain audiences, which limited the projection of our group and opportunities to play our music at some events.

At the early stage, rap artists used to stand against the commercialization of rap music (Lena, 2006, p. 487), however, the criticism from rap artists slowly decreased for different reasons. One was that fans perceived economic success as a form of authenticity (if authenticity was required to be a successful rapper, having a successful career in economic terms would reinforce that perception and help to create the imagery through expensive music videos, clothes, cars, etc.). Furthermore, rap music artists stood against the anti-establishment concept, which was trying to take livelihood from them. In our case, my friends and I thought that unless you have a record deal, paid events and funding to produce the music and the videos you would not be perceived as authentic, therefore, we understood that to be a successful rapper there was no need to be a criminal but to use intelligence to enter in the music industry;

> Authenticity is invoked around a range of topics that include hip hop music, racial identification, the music industry, and social location. Profanity and slang are often used to support claims of authenticity.
> (McLeod, 1999; Wright, 2010).

We always tried to produce the videos and the songs to a high standard in order to be recognised as authentic, and as some other rappers did, we introduced some other music elements, such as rock or heavy metal, in some projects to reach a wider audience [Figure 9].

As I recently mentioned, a discussion that was always taken in consideration when making music was the idea of authenticity. Based on my own experiences over the last ten years, and alongside the growth of social media platforms, music labels and managers have started to pay the same attention to music and aesthetics. As an example, in 2009 we sent some music to an international label A&R (Artists and repertoire) manager, who after listening very briefly to our music, became more interested in having a good body of artwork and pictures [Figure 10] and groups' names, etc. than the actual music and lyrics. Being authentic, or being perceived as authentic, would almost guarantee a successful career as rapper, which can be as a local-underground artist or as an international rapper. Jay Z is an example of a successful entrepreneur who tried to maintain a balance across his lyrics and lifestyle to be perceived as authentic (Sköld and Rehn, 2007). Some critics from the black community criticised Jay Z and other rappers for providing white youngsters with ghetto black experience as it can reinforce their preconceived ideas. When I started making my first music project, I wanted to be perceived as authentic (Harrison, 2008, p.1794) in that I was one more person from ´the hood´ but also I wanted to be perceived as intelligent and capable of acting, singing and creating stories. As I mentioned before, rap music was the perfect candidate for criticism, as it can be ´too real´ for some, it can be a form of cultural appropriation

for others and of course an attempt against traditional family values. Based on my own experience, these critics limited my creative freedom, as I did not want the music to affect my personal life or my relationship with others. As an example, a rapper can make a song and a music video about speeding in a car or doing a wheelie on a motorcycle, and the video will be online forever. My perception as a musician is that potential employers or colleagues can potentially judge a rapper for the actions in the music videos as if they were taking place in real life. Making a song about something does not reflect one's personal taste or behaviour; however, every time that I make a song, I feel that if I was using a different music style, the content of the music would not be linked to my real persona, whereas it is if performed as rap.

Hip-hop represented a section of the society that felt marginalized. For many decades in America, minorities have been affected negatively by criminal justice policies with higher incarceration rates for those living within those communities (Steinmetz and Henderson, 2012, p. 157). Those experiences have been widely addressed in hip-hop music, unlike the mainstream media that has historically used the crime between minorities to generate revenue. These experiences can relate to the living conditions of many other countries, therefore the creation of the urban evolution of dancehall in the Caribbean islands or grime in the U.K. Many researchers have been so focused on trying to find the negative 'effects' of gangsta rap on young groups that they have ignored important factors as the political, social and economic context of the young people they used for their research. Took and Weiss (1994) were very sensitive in one of their studies as they suggested

that even though “heavy metal and rap listeners will be in more adolescent turmoil than will non-heavy metal and non-rap listeners”, heavy metal and rap music could be “just another sign of adolescent turmoil (1994, p. 615). Took and Weiss called “precipitating factors” those that can arise even before teenagers develop a taste for music, related to the family and cultural context where those subjects live.

According to Altheide (1997, p. 648) images of criminal acts have been part of popular media for a long time and those images have distorted the perception of social life within the population. As Devji acknowledges (1996), fear has become somehow the driving force of western countries, as they have created a lifestyle in order to protect their investments, their integrity, their culture, etc. Looking at the existing literature assessing the negative repercussions of gangsta rap and the suggestions (many of them from the black community) that gangsta rappers should be contributing to the improvement of their community, one can argue that black people as well as lower class communities are going to be more observed, judged and potentially censored when making art. On the contrary, critics seem to understand that cinema directors, writers, painters and any other visual artists should be separated from their creation and look at these art pieces as representations and not reality. As an example of this dichotomy, many horror movies go unnoticed as the cinemas normally allow viewers from a specific age (usually 16 or 18), however, if a gangsta rapper created the same story in a song, it could be treated as irresponsible or as a negative for the community.

The “desire for wealth” that is discussed in Conrad’s research (2009, p.135) can be found not only in rap music lyrics but in American and western culture in general. This glamorization of sex and power is employed by the gangsta rapper to tell the story from the villain’s perspective. As young rapper I remember being accused for being socially insensitive and censored for making a music style that could be arguably ugly for some, but not against any groups in particular. Even some researchers avoid looking at rappers as artists who intelligently and artistically look for a reaction from the listener. My lyrics were not explicitly violent, but the delivery of the music as well as the aesthetic led people to think the opposite. Anti-rap music authors, such as Bork (1997), also discussed in Lena (2006), see gangsta rap music as ‘pointless’ and as an easy way for the music industry to generate revenue. This research, however, finds that gangsta rap is not the easiest vehicle to generate money in the music industry, as there are many other pressures that gangsta rap artists suffer in their real lives. I also argue that there is a lack of evidence in Bork’s research, as there is not comparison to other music genres in terms of sales, revenue or fandom. This research argues that rap music is not necessarily easier to sell than other music genres as artists are exposed to other political pressures, therefore some venues and music labels are more reluctant to get involved in this type of music. As a recent example, in 2010 rapper Giggs launched his debut album in the UK. When the artist and record label were prepared for his tour;

> Giggs' tour was cancelled on the advice of the Metropolitan Police. The police argued that the tour posed a risk to public order and public safety because of the audience it was likely to attract. […] The police not only counselled against the tour; it was reported that they even rang record companies, discouraging them from signing him.
> (Street, 2012, p.580).

Using rapper Giggs as an example, making gangsta rap can lead to higher levels of censorship rather than cinema or theatre (as they may also include subjects as violence, sex, etc.), and can have a negative impact on people's perceptions as even political entities suggest the connection of this music with real life events.

Being a Rapper and an Educator

When I started this autoethnographic journey, I was aware of its self-disclosure elements. Once again, I establish the question of why cinema directors or writers can discuss certain themes without being hugely criticized, but making a rap song about sex or violence can change the perception they have of one as a person. My practice does not involve misogynistic lyrics or explicit violence, however I include references to sex and power, that due to the association with other artists from the same genre, may be deemed as part of the same group. One can argue that due to the heavy association between this music genre and its connection with a lower social class, it is infrequent to read academic papers made by practitioners, therefore this is where the originality in this thesis lies. In this section I include several examples of how other artists have been previously accused.

Why do some people feel attracted to gangsta rap? If we link this research to previous investigations about news and fear:

> First, there is an absence of the ordinary; second is the openness of an adventure, outside the boundaries of routine behaviour; third, the audience member is willing to suspend disbelief.
> (Altheide, 1997, p. 652).

Young people are often criticised for their hobbies, fashion or personal choices. When hip-hop was criticised for its violent and misogynistic lyrics (Steinmetz and Henderson, 2012, p. 156) many consumers of this music ignored the negative message against their groups and continued listening to the music, just as one can watch horror movies, or read violent stories in books.

Children and even teenagers do not have the necessary experiences to understand how certain aspects of adult life work (including sex, love, violence, corruption, etc.), therefore, rap music as well as heavy metal records are labelled with a parental advisory warning (Mariea and Andrews, 2006, p.123) in order to prevent children from listening to this music without supervision. This issue has created a great amount of stress for rap artists, as they have been accused of influencing children negatively (these accusations include the testimony of highly influential people, such as American President Reagan) even when those records were intended for adult audiences (Binder, 1993, p.762). When I decided to conduct this research, I was aware that hip-hop is a music attending to adult themes. Although this investigation appreciates the benefits of publications examining the possible effects of this music on underage people, this research tries to deconstruct preconceived ideas that people and artists have and their implications within the social and political context.

Scholars like Steinmetz and Henderson (2012), consider that hip-hop lyrics contributed to an increased acceptance of misogynistic attitude towards women. Furthermore, through the viewing of music videos, youth had developed a major tolerance to violence and negative stereotypes. When scholars argue about rap music and youth violence, it is important to consider the "connections between acceptance, commission and willingness to commit violence" (Steinmetz and Henderson, 2012, p. 159). Reading a discussion about misogyny in rap music, Conrad (2009) used the song *Nasty Girl* and its music video as an example of when rap music changes from violent to misogynistic. Part of the lyrics can be considered sexist in that they speak about women as less intelligent or independent than men, however, Conrad mentions Nelly's part of the music video in which I read and understand the lyrics as sexually explicit but not as negative towards women as other rappers collaborating in this project.

> Ok ma what's your preference
> Nice and slow
> Or fast and breathless
> Pull your hair girl, bite your necklace
> Let me show you what a nigga from Louis blessed with
> Hey, I'm exprained to leave
> When I'm done I flip the mattress
> Change the sheet (Gotta change them)
> I'm like a radical one
> I vibrate a little more than your mechanical one
> (From your titties to you thong)
> Either way mama I'm a make you do it or do it
> (Girl I'm about to make you come)
> Guaranteed when you fuckin with me
> ('Cause I go on and on and on, on and on and on, on and on and)
> Ladies if you feel me
> Grab them Thangs fo Biggie
> (The Notorious B.I.G. featuring Diddy, 2005)

After analysing Nelly's lyrics, we can say that they are sexually explicit; however, research suggests that other art forms, such as cinema or theatre, would not have their content linked to real life issues as they try to create a creative environment for their stories, fantasies, etc. Regarding the video, some authors, such as Kubrin (2005b), commented on the relationship between gangsta rap and women. Research found that other genres also portray women as less intelligent or capable than men. Furthermore, Kubrin sees three major influences or motivations for gangsta rappers to use derogatory lyrics: "larger gender relations, the music industry, and local neighbourhood conditions" (2005b, p. 5). These factors also influence the other subjects' areas, such as hyper masculinity and gang affiliation.

There is a shared responsibility for misogynistic and violent lyrics as the music industry has been more willing to sign record deals with gangsta rappers who portray a hard-core stereotype (Krims, 2000) than other rappers who are more focused on social and political problems. As discussed by Davis (1991), the music can affect the perception that white people have of black people, poor and other minorities, however, one can wonder if politics and education are not more relevant in terms of social and class relationships. Johnson quotes from *Newsweek* that it is "now more likely for a black male between the age of 15 and 24 to die from homicide than it was for a U.S. solider to be killed on a tour of duty in Vietnam" (Berke, 1995, p. 33). Music and art sometimes are treated with the same severity as real violence and poverty-related issues.

Some authors, such as Altheide, see the mass media as a “problem-generating machine” (1997, p. 647), as they generate content in a negative way instead of looking for solutions or a wider view of the issue. Sometimes the media can generate a problem that maybe is not as important as other social or political events, however if it increases the number of viewers, they will use these problems and even prolong the duration of the coverage. Kubrin (2005a) also believes that rap artists want to please the industry with provocative lyrics as they help to promote their albums. It is known in popular culture that artists get exposure and visibility by getting involved in controversies. In rap music in particular, some cases were used during the 1990s by record labels to generate income. The best example was when Slick Rick was arrested for attempted homicide and Def Jam used the images to promote his album (Bernard-Donals, 1994). However, later on we have seen companies using the same strategy but using smaller offences.

Young rap artists are taking a risk when making music, as the perceptions of people will change and therefore it will affect their lives. Rudman and Lee (2002) came to the conclusion that after listening and watching rap music videos, people are more likely to identify black people and other minorities in a more negative way than white people. This exposure triggered some of the underlying perceptions that we may have about black people and other minorities and that I perceived as a young urban artist. Rudman and Lee use as an example how an employer could have been listening to rap music before a job interview and that this therefore might affect their perception of a black applicant (2002, p. 134). These underlying

perceptions make rap music a difficult genre to judge as we can watch a violent movie without our friends thinking that we are violent people, however even rap music fans seem to adopt some of the rappers' social attributions.

Rap music, and more specifically gangsta rap, can be understood as a music that mainly focuses on materialism and misogyny. Some authors (Conrad, Dixon and Zhang, 2009, p.134) expect women in rap music videos to be portrayed as "objects of sexuality". Furthermore, Conrad's research suggests that rap music is not a simple portrayal but a promoter of negative behaviour. On 29 September 2009, CBS news interviewed horrorcore rapper Mars, in relation to a multiple homicide committed by a teenager fan. During the interview, Mars was asked several times if he took any responsibility for the criminal offence, but Mars commented that his music is just entertainment, and as well as Stephen King and other horror authors, he was trying to shock his audience, but not to materialise his lyrics. He also commented that he was being treated differently than other artists for being a rapper of this subgenre (Miller, 2009).

Lena (2006) cited McAdams (1991) to emphasize the existing discomfort between anti-rap scholars and the record industry. McAdams argues that record labels put ethics on the side in order to generate sales, however there is no criticism towards the white middle-class teenagers who buy the records. There is very little conversation from anti-rap scholars about the relationship between gangsta rap and the American film industry or their political context, and how they (rappers) relate to a cultural frame that promotes capitalism, individualism and gun

ownership. Lena (2006) describes the music industry as an oligopoly, where a few multinationals control the music that we listen to and also decide what is trendy and what is not. Is there a shared responsibility between the rappers and the record companies? According to Rose (1994), companies like Def Jam also re-shaped some young artists to meet the product that young people were consuming: rap music with a more violent approach, therefore this theoretical and practical work aims to address some of these gaps.

To conclude, according to Quinn (2005b) and Kubrin (2005b) rap music listeners (many of them white and young) are looking for the authentic black experience, and actually, they end up consuming a stereotype of the black experience in the ghetto. Based on our own experiences, young people growing within poor and working-class communities can relate to some of the lyrics and experiences that gangsta rappers express in their songs and use this music to express ourselves. Gangsta rap also worked as an informal source of information, where one can discuss topics such as sex, class division and violence. Although many scholars objected that the use of misogynist and violent lyrics were unnecessary (Kitwana, 1994; Kelley, 1996; Kubrin, 2005b), we have to consider the possibility that many rap music fans may be able to ignore these negative messages and use the more positive attributes that this music brings them. As Alridge argues (2005). and also mentioned by (Steinmetz and Henderson, 2012), gangsta rap has served the community as a way of communication when other more socially accepted forms have been denied; therefore, gangsta rap is a complicated subject.

After the 1950s rock and roll music, heavy metal and rap have been the most criticised music styles (Took and Weiss, 1994) by religious groups, politicians and parents organizations. Different aspects of these types of music have attracted criticism, in terms of the lyrics and the political ideologies to the aesthetic and attitude towards the mainstream. Attending a Catholic school after a long dictatorship in Spain, this type of music as well as many other types of cinema were not well received in my country. As an example of the large international impact of this music in popular culture we can mention that in 1995, the USA Democratic Senator, Joe Liberman, joined other politicians and educators to protest against Gangsta rap (Lena, 2006, p.480), as they thought it was a negative form of entertainment, especially for the younger ones. The political actions against rap music affected its perception worldwide as international labels were generating a large part of the revenue in the U.S. According to previous research (Jones, 1991, p.79), Senator Joe Liberman among others "skyrocketed 2 Live Crew's record sales during this time" as this censorship made these records more appealing to youngsters. It has been suggested that the parental advisory disclaimer sticker on record label can also contribute to more revenue (1991, p.78). However, based on our own experience as young artists, this censorship attempt made it more difficult for young underground artists to get access to venues or funding to play this music.

This chapter presents data that reopens the discussion on whether rap music artists' behaviour is the result of exposure to the music, or of life experiences and the environments where the person has been raised. After the writing of this

chapter, I come to the conclusion that although it is true that our hobbies and interests can reshape our personalities and influence our decision making, life experiences given by the political and economic context, family and formal education has a much greater influence on the subject as it starts from an early stage and continues during the most vulnerable years of the development of the personality (Reich et al., 1997). Furthermore, popular culture traditions linked to poor people and minorities have been censored and belittled more frequently than other forms of expressions dealing with similar subjects, in order to develop political agendas. On many occasions, these censorship attempts have not only oppressed people that are already oppressed but have also contributed to the marginalization of youth.

Chapter Three: Practice-Led Research

One of the aims of this research is to identify factors impacting on the creative freedom of rap artists and if it is affected by social-political pressure or excessive criticism from some sectors of the society. Furthermore, I look for responses as to why are gangsta rappers more likely to be criticised than artists from different genres and races. This research finds poverty as a common issue across developed countries in Europe and especially North America (the cradle of gangsta rap) and therefore explores the experience of being a gangsta rap artist from a working-class background as a global experience more than a circumstance attached to a certain location.

As a rap artist, music video director and illustrator, it was relevant to use myself as a case study as I have been making music for over the last two decades and have seen my creative freedom affected due to external factors. For this practice-led part of the research, I have created several artworks from different disciplines (music, performance and illustration), in order to create a dialogue between my practice and my personal experience.

One of the first conclusions that I came across through my practice and research was that rap music is treated differently to cinema, theatre or other music genres. As a rap artist who works in the education sector, I started to interrupt my practice, although I wanted to continue it, fearing that it would be somehow

contradictory to my role of working with young people and started to feel uncomfortable publishing songs and music videos.

Sex, money and power are recurrent themes in popular culture, however when they are treated in rap music, from the public view it seems that the artists adopt those themes into their real life unlike white cinema directors or fine artists. My previous research in Chapters One and Two suggests that this association is due to social class and race more than the content of the lyrics or the artwork. Certain races and certain economic backgrounds make the audience feel more confidence that the artist is capable of doing an intellectual exercise when creating stories, however rap music artists are more likely to be perceived as violent or sexist as they generally come from a poorer and more violent environment. The following practice deals with some of the themes mentioned before, bringing a new contribution to the field where it shows how I deal with the pressures associated with the practice.

Hoodzilla (5x Exhibitions).

Hoodzilla [Figure 13] is a digital illustration created for the group exhibition *A Liverpool Bestiary*. My Liverpool John Moores University colleague, Neil Morris, who curated the exhibitions alongside Hannah Fray, described the bestiary as a:

> Medieval collection of stories providing physical and allegorical descriptions of real or imaginary animals, along with an interpretation of the moral significance each animal is thought to embody. Whether the beasts or stories are familiar or exotic, these creations usually are symbolic of human beings or of human traits.
> (Morris, 2018).

Hoodzilla (2018), the piece I created for this collection, has been exhibited [Figure 12] in the following galleries:

· Santos C. *Hoodzilla*. A Liverpool Bestiary, ATINER 9, Annual International Conference on Visual and Performing Arts 11-15 June 2018, Athens, Greece ISBN 978-960-598-199-0, sponsored by the *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts*.

· Santos C. *Hoodzilla*. A Liverpool Bestiary, Impact 10, - Encuentro, Santander, Spain 1 – 9 September 2018.

· Santos C. *Hoodzilla*. Birmingham City Gallery as part of 'Arts Council Collections', 21st Oct 2018.

· Santos C. *Hoodzilla*. The Williamson Gallery Liverpool as part of the symposium 'The Things that Live Under the Stairs', 15th November 2018.

· Santos C. *Hoodzilla*. 'The Big Draw', Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, October 2018.

· Santos C. *Hoodzilla*. 500x Gallery, Texas, Dallas. USA, March 2019.

This artwork was created after a research visit to New York in 2017. During the visit, I performed a number of observations in different parts of the city in order to identify different aspects of the living condition of minorities and their potential relationship with rap music and my personal background as a rap artist and as a working-class youngster. As this research is also an auto-ethnographic account, I

was looking for similarities between the living conditions in working-class American neighbourhoods and my personal experiences growing up as a child. I quickly discovered that in the US the economic re-distribution from the higher class to the poor is more limited than in Continental Western Europe (Alesina, Glaeser and Glaeser, 2004) and that poverty, social class and segregation have a similar look across the western world (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005).

The first experience that I had in New York was right at the airport before collecting our bags. My partner (who is also Spanish) and I took a flight with a British airline from Manchester to JFK. Once we arrived at the airport, all of us were queuing to get our passports checked. Most of the people coming from Manchester with us were white and British, and pretty much all of them went through security without a problem; however, when the person in the security control noticed that our passport was from Spain, they started to ask questions and took our passports to a different room. We had to wait for a few minutes to get in a different room, which had another three families waiting to be interviewed by border police officers. I was surprised to see that we were the only white people in the room (although we are Spanish and surely, we could enter in a non-white category for their system) and we felt that they separated us from the group of passengers only because of our names and nationalities. The officers conducting the interview were mostly black and friendly and treated us with respect, although it does not change the fact that I felt undermined for my race and nationality. Shattell (2008) attributes an underlayer of racism behind the police actions. Although these policies have been justified under the “war on terror” policies

(2008, p.542) I felt like a second-class citizen, which is something that fortunately I had not experienced for a long time.

Once we arrived at the city, I started to look for the places in which I wanted to conduct my observations and the first area that I visited was East Harlem [Figure 24]. Before going to New York, I read some research articles on demographics (Tripp, 2007) and crime in New York (Sampson et al., 1995) as well as some of New York rap music artists' background (Price Jr, 2005), and I felt especially interested in this neighbourhood, as it is located in an area heavily populated by low-income Afro-American and Latino families, associated with crime and Hip Hop culture. As an example, one of the most representative rap music groups of this area during the late 1990s was Dipset (Bisnoff, 2014, p.7), a group created by Cam'ron and Jim Jones. As an example of their commercial success and impact on American popular culture, Cam'ron's record *Purple Haze* was certified as gold by the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America). On the other hand, Cam'ron has been often criminalised for his lyrics and the potential negative impact on American youth. Cam'ron has been asked multiple times to change the contents of his lyrics and to avoid discussing certain themes. Furthermore, some television programmes condemned some of his music videos as dancers can be seen performing as strippers, in a similar way that some Hollywood films use them as an environment for the stories. From a technical point of view, Cam'ron music videos are very similar in terms of themes and execution to many films that we have seen before, as we can compare *Casino* (Scorsese, Pileggi and De Fina, 1995) to his famous music video *What Means The World To You* from the award winning album S.D.E

(Arafat Payne, 2008, p.135). In his music album, *Sex Drugs and Entertainment*, Cam'ron and other artists explain how "killers" from inner cities of America are products of poverty and disfranchisement. Yet, some critics understand that Cam'ron's lyrics are just glorification of violence (Johnson, Jackson and Gatto, 1995).

Another factor that I found relevant prior to the observation of East Harlem was the fact that this area is changing as part of the city's development, and what used to be considered as a non-desirable area for middle-class families, now seems to be a good location for housing investment (Brueckner and Rosenthal, 2009, p.725). Through observations of the social housing and short interactions with local people, I wanted to experiment with what it is like to walk around the area and if it has really changed in comparison to its old reputation of 'dangerous' during the 1980s and 1990s.

Hoodzilla, the artwork that I created following this observation, represented the unknown beast that the media has insisted to shape as a Black or Latino and that can destroy not only the welfare system but also the personal safety of most citizens [Figure 11]. Inspired by the film *Godzilla* (1954), I created a character that looks tough and dangerous, and as with most beasts, it shares some animal features. This illustration looks for a response from the public, and as it has been exhibited in different countries, I was hoping to deconstruct these complex ideas of danger linked to certain communities (as the ones for Harlem for example) by exposing the character to the public.

Hoodzilla does not only look like the stereotype of an Afro-American gangsta rapper but also a boxer. As previously discussed in Chapters One and Two, rappers and athletes have represented minorities in the United States for a long time, and boxers have been sometimes the real working-class heroes. Oscar de la Hoya represented for Mexicans in East L.A. the same values that Mike Tyson (at the beginning of his career) represented for black people: self-belief and ambition, and therefore this explains the use of boxing gloves for the character "If boxers are primarily motivated by the intrinsic enjoyment that they gain from the activity, we would expect that they would be evenly distributed throughout all the socioeconomic classes" (Dixon, 2001, p.328) therefore, the sport is associated with poorer communities looking for economic opportunities.

The technique selected for this artwork is a digital print produced in Adobe Illustrator and printed on Arches Moulin Du Gue Paper, 15% linen, 85% cotton white.

Untitled (2x Exhibitions)

In May 2019 I was invited to participate in an exhibition organized by Dr. Emma Roberts [Figure 14] to celebrate the partnership between two Universities, LJMU and SUES Shanghai. The idea behind this exhibition was to show artwork related to academic research from two different cultural backgrounds. After my visit to New York a year before [Figure 25], I had multiple photographs and notes about

gangsta rap in western culture, and I was ready to challenge the public by creating a stereotype of a gangsta rapper using a database of images I created [Figure 17].

Racial and social stereotypes have been part of this society for a long time. As an example, the high rate of incarceration of people of colour in America (Hurwitz and Peffley, 1997, p.376) and the excessive media coverage of black and Latino crime (Entman, 1992) have had a negative impact on people's perception of minorities. One of the perceptions that the public may have is that working-class youth making rap music (as they are mostly black or Latino) are more likely to act like criminals, or that young women making this music or performing in the music videos are hyper-sexual (Weekes, 2002, p.251). By adopting these preconceived ideas, we would be ignoring their freedom of speech and the right of everyone to be creative in a free world. If there is not a direct association between white film directors and the characters they create for their movies, why should young rappers be associated with crime and antisocial behaviour? Are they not able to create fictional scenarios to express their ideas without acting as their character in real life? As an example after several critics' comments to Spike Lee for his film *Do the Right Thing* (1989a) he responded to some of his detractors by saying "Are we to conclude that only whites are intellectually and morally endowed to tackle an issue as complex as race relations in New York City?" (Lee, 1989b, p.6).

The perception that black youth participating in music (through fashion, attending events, or making music) are likely to be involved in real violence is a global perception, not just in the U.S. As an example, a report created in England in 2018

showed that the police created a database hoping to stop youth from participating in gang activities. Although the evidence was that “Three-quarters of those convicted of youth violence were white; nine out of 10 individuals on the Manchester gangs list were black or minority ethnic.” (Clarke, 2018) This report suggests that young people involved in urban music (Grime music would be the equivalent in the U.K.) are likely to be seen as criminals, although they are performing in a music video. On the contrary, according to Clarke, three quarters of those who committed a crime were white but did not enter in the database before committing the crime, which suggests that our society and the law enforcement did not see them as criminals, possibly for race association as familiarisation. As I mentioned before, this issue is global, even in the way we use language to refer to young black and Latino people. As previously mentioned by Smiley “The use of the term “thug” by President Obama became the zenith of the word's use to characterize primarily individuals and groups of Black males” (Smiley and Fakunle, 2016, p.350) referring to an altercation when a group of black males looted a supermarket after the death of a black male (Freddie Gray) in police custody in Baltimore, U.S.

To create the stereotype of a gangsta rapper [Figure 15], I created a database with the portraits of over 100 commercial rap artists in the form of a photographic contact sheet, to use their features, tattoos and fashion accessories to develop my characters. Some of the rappers that I used for the creation of *Untitled* have committed a crime in the past, for example Gucci Mane, but many of the other rappers have not. As it happened in the U.S during the 1980s and 1990s, police in

Los Angeles created a database called CalGang, where they could add individuals who are likely to commit a gang-related offence. However, the large number of young people added to the list suggests that police were likely to add someone to this list based on what they look like and where they are from. As an example, in 2017, *LA Times* released an article (Chabria, 2019) to tell the story of Brian Allen, a dance instructor from Sacramento who was added to CalGang for being in a car with a local rapper, who had a criminal record, in his own neighbourhood, which was seen as a gang territory. I found this event to be relevant for my research and practice, as lower-class people suffer these associations in different countries. I remember as a teenager being treated unfairly for being from a working-class poor neighbourhood and not for my actions. As an artist, I find it difficult to express these social contradictions through my illustrations without using text, which is why my characters challenge the audience with a dangerous look that remind us of boxers, TV criminals and rappers.

Hypermasculinity is also open to discussion in this composition as the character refuses to adopt any attributes that could be deemed as a sign of weakness. According to Spencer:

> In response to chronic sources of fear, individuals may cope by adopting psychological postures that diminish the possibility of being victimized. For males, these coping strategies include maladaptive aggressive and hypermasculine behaviors.
> (2004, p.237).

Lastly, I wanted to give to the character in *Untitled* a proud look [Figure 16], as people from lower class often choose to embrace their communities and give value to the straggle of their living conditions, looking at themselves as working-

class heroes. The title *Untitled* reflects the injustice that some young black and Latino people must face for what they look like or where they are from and not for who they are.

L.O.V.E and Number One (Songs and Music Videos)

I made my first rap song when I was 13 years old. As mentioned previously in Chapter Two, I used music as a tool to express my ideas and rebelliousness associated with the age, but also to feel empowered in a society that was denying opportunities to us constantly. As an example, the school that I attended used to decide for their students the educational path that they should follow after secondary school. The school used to encourage students from wealthy families to continue their education towards university, but I remember our teachers asking the poorer students, a majority from working-class families and neighbourhoods, to enrol in a more 'manual' course that would allow us to jump straight into work after secondary school. They offered me to enrol in a free welding course, which I rejected in my mind automatically for two reasons: I wanted to be an art student if I had the funding, and because my father was a welder. I remember my father coming to see me with work-related injuries almost every week. Furthermore, money was always an issue in my family, so I could not see how doing a welding course was going to be beneficial for my personal development, considering my interests and personal circumstances at that time.

Outside school, sports had their own ways to segregate young people, as some clubs required a subscription fee and sometimes a reference letter from a current member. Although many other children in school practised tennis, martial arts, or attended a language school, I could only relate to football players or boxers, as they were our working-class heroes. Once I developed a taste for music, the selection process was similar: due to our similarities, I could relate more to rappers than other musicians, as I could identify myself in their lyrics and did not feel that I had the same access to formal music education as other peers did. When I started producing my own songs and lyrics, I used it to claim my place in society and feel empowered. In a similar way to a boxer, I was trying to obtain respect and social recognition without ignoring or denying my roots. As I started to feel more confident about myself, I was also able to deconstruct how the society works in terms of opportunities, and I decided that I was going to challenge my schoolteachers (they represented the authority to me at that particular moment) and continue my education in two different ways: the official one, through an art school and university and at the same time using music and personal relationships with other artists.

Since 1999, I have produced more than ten rap and RnB albums for different artists, and produced two solo albums, as well as two albums and two singles with my group Beautiful Brokers; furthermore, I became a music video director in 2012 and all these experiences provided me with some of the skills that I use in my current job as an educator. The group, Beautiful Brokers, was founded in Spain in 2003 alongside Inda when I attended the Art School in my hometown. I was 18

and I had my own home-recording studio equipment, which allowed me to create music in an independent way under my own rules. Most successful rappers claimed the importance of 'keeping it real' by keeping the music true to themselves and being independent, so we did not approach any record labels at that particular time and organized all the concerts and the music production on our own.

During the time I was completing my university studies in Granada (Spain), I was also very active as a music practitioner, and continued playing in venues and recording songs in the studio. Most of my songs were shared online and my peers had immediate access to my music, which I also enjoyed. As an art student, I felt much respected as a musician as people around me knew that my music was just a performance and that not everything that I said on my lyrics or music videos should have been taken seriously. As an example, I made multiple love songs talking about some imaginary woman, although I had a partner, and all my friends understood that it was just a song. However, when I completed my art degree and was doing my Master's in Education, the situation was different. As I was not an art student any more, and I was being trained to teach young people, there was an extended belief that as a teacher, one should be a role model to the students, and rap music as well as other forms of expressions from working-class communities did not seem to fit. I remember my new peers in the Master's course asking me about my rap lyrics and that if it would be somehow contradictory to continue my practice if I decided to teach.

When I started my job in the School of Art and Design, I was once more working with other art practitioners, and again, I felt that I wanted to continue my music career, however I started to be afraid about what students would think about me as a professional if they knew that I was a rapper or if they knew about my background, so I started to feel less interested in making music. I did not want to be seen as a criminal for making rap music, and I did not want to offend anyone in the workplace for something I could say in my lyrics, although I knew that my lyrics are not edgy or negative generally.

When I started my research about gangsta rap and how young people are often criminalised for making this music, I decided to produce two songs and two music videos with my group, Beautiful Brokers. As this research is an ethnographic account, I thought that maybe I would feel differently about making music for a research purpose. *L.O.V.E,* as well as *Number One,* deal with issues of identity, social class and rebelliousness. During the recording experience, I felt very self-conscious and inhibited, however, I tried to be as bold as possible as in my previous rap lyrics. As an example, my chorus in *L.O.V.E* says:

> I got Jesus on my neck
> Inda got my back
> I'm a public enemy
> I don't give a f…
> (I don't give a f…)
> I control the game
> From Spain to England
> She drops it like it hot
> Blowing up the Kingdom
> (Blowing up the Kingdom)
> (Beautiful Brokers, 2016)

My chorus relates to different aspects of my traditions as well as my passion for this type of music. I agree with Lusane when he says that “rap is the voice of the alienated, frustrated and rebellious black youth who recognise their vulnerability and marginality in post-industrial America” (1993, p.41). As mentioned before, religion played an important role during my childhood, and I expressed how the use of icons (such as the Christian cross) could be used for protection. Inda, who is the female artist singing with me in this song, is also included in this part of the song as support. I express that I am a Public Enemy for two different reasons: the first one is how society has treated young people from working-class communities and minorities for many years, and how they have been deemed as dangerous because rap music started to succeed and enter every home due to its commercial success. Furthermore, it pays tribute to Public Enemy, a group that has been surrounded by controversy since their origins for their political lyrics against the establishment, but at the same time, to their contribution to the black and Latino pride of some communities that have suffered during many years. The real importance of Public Enemy was in the way they used rap music as an alternative broadcaster for poorer communities. “Public Enemy rap songs, such as "Don't Believe the Hype," "911 Is a Joke," "Can't Truss It," and "More News at 11," express the group's desire to broadcast news and information to their hip hop constituency not readily available on and through mainstream channels” (Decker, 1993, p. 61). My lyrics show rebelliousness in that they do not look for mainstream approval. Although my lyrics are thought of as just lyrics and made for a song, I find difficult to curse or express some messages, as I expect the social scrutiny that they go through, and coming from a working-class family, I am hyperconscious

that it is important to be socially accepted to be able to compete in terms of career opportunities, etc.

Number One, the second song and music video, which shares many of the attributes of *L.O.V.E,* had fewer accents of Caribbean music, and a bigger influence of American R&B music and musicians, such as R. Kelly and T-Pain, amongst others. The lyrics focus more on love, sex and relationships, hoping to increase the self-esteem of the listener. One of the benefits of rap music is that it is a music genre that allows discussion about any subject, including love, and other kind of informal relationships. As an example, the main chorus says:

> Baby you and me,
> Let's get out tonight,
> You can be my lover,
> You can be my number one,
> I just want to see your body droppin' down like that,
> You know what I want,
> (You know, you know) what I want,
> What's up!
> (Beautiful Brokers, 2016)

There are three main inspirations in the instrumental part of my songs: 1990s hip-hop, Rhythm and Blues (R&B) and Dance Hall. As mentioned in Chapter Two, 1990s Hip-Hop provided me with a platform to express my feelings, something that it was constantly denied in other areas. Although Hip-Hop is and was a product of the black community, it shared many positive values with other communities, such as Latino, Hispanic, and nowadays, communities from everywhere in the world (e.g. Cambodian rappers in Los Angeles, etc.). As explored by Flores (1997):

> Rap in the early days was »a street thing«. That is the consensus phrase which emerges from conversations with some of the Puerto Rican participants of that time (…). When it was still in the streets, rap was marked off not so much racially but in terms of class, geography, age and, though they tend to make little reference to it, of course gender.
> (Flores, 1997).

Although I am not black nor grew up in a black neighbourhood, the experiences that I went through as a working-class Hispanic child were similar to what some Afro-American rappers have experienced in their lives, therefore, rap music was always a natural channel to express my feelings.

In terms of music production, rap music has been an accessible medium for poorer communities as it does not require a large investment. Nowadays young people can produce a commercially successful album with just a laptop and a microphone, although it is known (Blair, 2004) that large record companies play a crucial part in the marketing and exposure of rap artists, and in most cases a professionally produced album is not enough to be part of this industry. For the production of *L.O.V.E* and *Number One* I used a Korg Triton keyboard and some of the classic instruments from the Roland TR-808 drum machine, which is one, if not the most used drum machine in hip-hop music since its first famous use by Africa Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force (Chapman, 2008, p.164). As a hip-hop artist, it is important to me that the music I produce can be recognised as part of a music genre or movement, therefore the instrumentals are full of connections with other artists from the urban genre. For *L.O.V.E* I used a classic Jamaican dancehall beat structure, combined with layers of synths and arpeggiators. On one hand, the instrumental is heavily influenced by American producer, Timbaland: I agree with King's description of Timbaland's music production when he says that;

> What's most striking about Timbaland's work is the dense, polyrhythmic layering of his drum track. (…) Because keyboards are traditionally a form of percussion, his music is very much focused around the power of the beat (always in relation to groove).
> (2001, p. 432).

So, as Chapman commented about traditional hip-hop and R&B production, "looping of breakbeats from 1970s funk and soul recordings, (was) the approach that characterized most hip-hop produced between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s." (2008, p.156). As I wanted to differentiate myself from other producers, I played all the instruments for my own songs. Starting from the beat, and having the Caribbean accents of dancehall music, the rest of the instruments and voice will adapt to the beat in order to complete the song as it is reflected in most of Timbaland's productions.

In terms of music videos, and according to Bryant;

> Critics, clergy, parents, and concerned citizens believe the imagery and lyrics in rap videos have negative influences on youth. Specifically, the negative images in rap videos may adversely affect attitudes toward male-female relationships among youth.
> (2008, p.359).

Based on some of the preconceived ideas that we may have around rap music videos, I decided to produce two music videos for the two different songs. *L.O.V.E* music video [Figure 18] explores the male-female relationships that have been under criticism for more than two decades, empowering both artists without denying its hip-hop aesthetics. As *L.O.V.E* is a song that is directly inspired from Caribbean dancehall music and hip-hop, I directed and produced the video, almost entirely in the studio environment. As rap music as well as any other music genres are a creative representation, the use of chroma key and green screen

technologies would allow me to create a virtual environment to create this imagery. During the entire video, I combine the use of primary-coloured backgrounds with drone footage images of Los Angeles, in order to create a similar experience to what we expect from Dancehall videos. As we recorded the music video in Liverpool, the weather would not had been as good as to emulate the lights of certain countries; therefore, the green screen provided us with the extra creative freedom.

Number One's concept for the music video was different to *L.O.V.E* in that it aims for an urban look, using lights in a low-key environment instead of the clean and steady result that music video directors obtain in the studio. The camera movement and the performance become darker for *Number One* and scenes change following the rhythms of the beat. Gangsta rappers, such as Wacka Flocka Flame, but also in the U.K.'s urban genre, Grime, inspired *Number One's* music video [Figure 19]. Hip-hop is arguably the music genre of the oppressed and marginalised youth, and their music videos represent an inhospitable part of the city where the rules are made differently. Gangsta rap music videos (as *Number One*) are often inspired by gangster films and use the city and its lights to transmit these tensions to the public. If we compare rap videos to gangster films, "…gangster films, present the gangster as a local hero who dies a sacrificial death brought on by a primal loyalty to the ties of neighbourhood." (Shannon, 2005, p.49). Although Shannon refers to Irish-American gangsters in particular in his article, all types of communities have represented this sense of belonging to a particular place in films and music videos, from Italian-Americans to Afro-

Americans and Latinos. Rap music has done the same but has been often accused of glorification of violence (Ro, 1996).

During this phase of the research, the pre-production, direction and editing of the music videos provide me with an inside look of the personal benefits of music making, but as I mentioned before, when I was producing the songs, I felt hyper-conscious of the criticism that rap music can be exposed to sometimes, which limited my enjoyment and artistic freedom. I have been a rapper since I was a teenager, and rap music was my way to escape social and family issues and it was one of the healthiest ways available to feel empowered and increase my self-esteem. On the contrary, since I work in academia and read conversations about music and issues related to social class daily, I have become more conscious about the negative scrutiny that this music goes through. I felt that I could be judged for making music, as sometimes this genre represents negative attitudes towards women or other people. I find this situation the greatest contradiction that I face as a practitioner, as rap music has represented to me an opportunity to be heard, but I also sympathised with some sectors of the society that have been undermined for many years and unfortunately have been targets of some rap lyrics in the past (as minorities, LGBT, feminist groups, amongst others). Rap music was not the creation of well-established record labels but "Instead it emerged from the streets of inner-city neighbourhoods as a genuine reflection of the hopes, concerns, and aspirations of urban Black youth" (Powell, 1991, p.245) and therefore it should be treated as a response or reflection to social issues and not the creation of them.

Is there a Heaven 4 a Gangsta? (Exhibition)

Is there a Heaven 4 a Gangsta? (2019) [Figure 21] is an illustration created for a group exhibition that was rejected for an unknown reason after being invited to the Atkinson Gallery Millfield School, Somerset. For this exhibition, I created a composition where a stereotype of a gangsta rapper can be seen in heaven, wearing some of the fashion accessories that normally are associated with gangsta rappers (as facial tattoos, designer clothes, jewellery, etc.). Below the character, a coffin questions if there is a possibility for the character to access heaven or if, on the contrary, his actions will not allow him to access a peaceful rest. I applied to be part of this exhibition after they sent the invitation to my Director of Studies. Although I knew that this gallery had a long tradition of commercial artwork, I wanted to test if gangsta rap music (or a representation of it) would be allowed to be next to more traditional artwork.

The inspiration for this illustration comes from an interview produced by CNN in 1996 featuring Master P [Figure 20], in which a group of young males carry a coffin with the dead body of a friend into a local bar for a last drink. The person in the coffin was another young male associated with drug dealing and gang culture from the Calliope Projects, which, according to Whiting (2014), was one of the poorest areas located in the "murder capital of the United States" (p.10). During the time that the young males carry the coffin from the local church to the bar, they could be heard singing one of the most iconic songs of local rapper and entrepreneur

Master P, *Is there a Heaven 4 a Gangsta?.* In the lyrics, we can listen to Master P saying the following:

> The ghetto got me crazy, I smell daisies
> But I can't die tonight my old lady's pregnant with a baby
> Tupac said there's a heaven foe a G
> But I wonder if there's a restin place for killers and gangsta niggaz like me
> (Master P, 1996)

Some of the elements shown in the interview video, as well as my illustration, connect with the Catholic traditions that we learn in working-class neighbourhoods, where a supreme god will ultimately judge our actions. On the coffin, I added a Catholic cross and the face of the rapper has a Catholic tattoo on the forehead. Although it can be seen as a contradiction by an outsider, the fact that a gangsta rapper is carrying images that remind us of an ethical code of practice, they (gangsta rappers) will justify the use of religious imagery as a way of self-protection, partially based on religious beliefs, popular culture and ultimately, fashion. During the research phase prior to the execution of the artwork, I explored some of the most famous Latino and Afro-American religious symbols in popular culture and the cross, hands praying, Jesus and Madonna are amongst the most popular choices.

In terms of the character, I decided to use for this exhibition a black young male as it is inspired by Master P's music career and his terrible life experiences [Figure 22], which can be used as an example of why gangsta rappers create nihilistic lyrics in their music:

> By identifying the prevalence of racism, discrimination and nihilistic behaviour in the African American community as a means to expose the influence of underlying power relations therein, rap music artists (…) give voice to those socially isolated individuals whose voices have previously been muted.
> (Stephens and Wright II, 2000, p.35).

Although Afro-American people have often used rap music to share their negative experiences, Hispanics have also contributed to the development of this music and imagery. My illustration questions if there is a moment in life for working-class rap artists, especially those coming from minority backgrounds, when they can enjoy their success in the music or cinema industry without questioning the social impact of their artwork, the relationship of the individuals with gang culture, and therefore their criminalization. Heaven can be also understood as a point of commercial and social success.

For the character's clothes, I decided to incorporate a designer's brand on the t-shirt. The brand I selected for this composition was Louis Vuitton, as one of the most iconic clothing lines that rappers have been wearing for the last 10 years as a sign of status and recognition. According to Lewis (2013):

> Fashion leaders continued to challenge societal dress codes by adopting a more sophisticated, tailored look that contrasted its urban roots but signified the entrepreneurial success of some of hip-hop's iconic celebrities.
> (2013, p.230).

As an example, a Louis Vuitton or Gucci top can cost from £350 to £900 according to the official websites, so for a young rapper who comes from a poor background, fashion is an easy way to demonstrate success and buy social recognition. I have memories from my childhood when even though most families could not afford

branded trainers or shoes for their children, wearing non-branded shoes to school could result in bullying from other children. Maintaining a certain social status, even between people from the same economic area, seems to apply for all the social classes: “Representatives of institutional authority enforce dress codes and construct a regime of stylistic conformity codified in school rules, police profiling, and legislation that bans particular styles of dress” (Baxter and Marina, 2008, p.103) therefore, rappers will use brands and clothes associated with upper classes combined with elements of gang culture (e.g. tattoos, jewellery, etc.) to express their values and somehow contradictorily, fight against the establishment.

One of the aims of my illustrations is to provoke a reaction in the spectator. Are they going to accept that the portrait of a contemporary gangsta rapper must feature a black person? Are certain aspects of fashion and working-class youth associated with gang culture? Any reaction, including the lack of it, from the audience will be appreciated as essentially the acceptance of my artwork means in some way that the spectator is accepting the content as valid. Furthermore, I try to break stereotypes associated with minorities and poor youth by creating a stereotype; which is why for this illustration I created a black character and not a Latino or white like myself.

Finally, one of the aspects that I want to reflect on my illustrations is the idea of hyper-masculinity that society has somehow embedded to some minorities and in their cultural expressions. Most of the characters that I create are masculine, athletic and challenging [Figure 23]. Once again, this is part of the process to break

the stereotype that has been heavily associated with some minorities and social classes. As an example, toughness has not been necessarily associated with Al Pacino, the actor, although he has played some tough characters, however, it has been suggested that black and Latino artists are often pushed to be tough under the influence of rap music and street culture (Fried, 1999, p.705). I remember growing up in the 1980s, that hyper-masculinity was not only present in gangsta rap, but also in sports, TV, fashion, school and often in religion. As a working-class youngster, I remember being taught that (as Iwamoto says), I "should not display openness, vulnerability or emotional expressiveness (and that) a real man should be tough, aggressive, daring and have physical strength" (Iwamoto, 2003, p.45). Unfortunately, for an unknown reason, my artwork was not shortlisted for this exhibition, as I expected due to its theme and content.

Rollin' (Song and Music Video)

Rollin' [Figure 24] was a song and a music video created in 2012, just before I started my job as an educator and before I enrolled in this doctoral programme. I decided to incorporate this piece as a part of the discussion as it represents the beginning of the end of my career as a rap artist.

This song was created after I finished my Master's degree alongside my partner, Inda, and my friend, Sergio. It was made a few years after the 2008 recession, when Spain was still recovering, and youth unemployment was affecting almost one in two people under thirty. My dream was still there: to become a successful

rapper and make a living from my music, however, the lack of funding and job opportunities made life conditions harder for most of us, making rap music the perfect outlet to express my feelings and ambitions. Coming from a poor working-class background as a child, and having completed a BA and a Master's degree, I feared that the economic recession could take us back to the same place where I grew up: where opportunities were constantly denied, as having less to share meant fewer opportunities for working-class communities. Once again, rap music made me feel valuable, empowered and independent. Even during the hard times, I still had a voice, and after finishing my album with Inda, *World Money,* we decided to produce this music video and continue with our practice.

A few months after finishing the song and the music video, I moved back to England (as I had previously been here as a student with a grant and making music videos) to try to make use of my Master's degree in teaching. When I arrived, I started working as a graphic designer, and continued looking for jobs in the education sector. I remember having the same interest in music during the first few months, but as I was having more success in the creative industry, something changed. As commented in Chapter Two, I saw rap music as a reflection of my poor working-class background and I thought that somehow, it would make me an easy target for criticism, so I started to feel less and less free in making my lyrics and music videos. In some way, it was difficult for me to imagine a successful career for someone whose hobby is to make rap music, due to the associations between the genre and certain social backgrounds and attitudes.

Rollin was a song that celebrated life, healthy relationships and made me feel good as a person, but it was also the last time I felt free as a rap artist.

To conclude, as this project is partially based on my journey as an artist, this chapter provides some answers to the questions this thesis asked at the beginning: Are gangsta rap artists perceived as violent outside their artistry? Do gangsta rap artists enjoy from the same creative freedom that other white cinema directors or artists do? Are social class and ethnicity playing a role in the violent perception of gangsta rap artists?

First, rap music is a product of black culture. Although white and Latino rappers have contributed to the development of the genre, Afro-Americans have been heavily criminalised in popular culture and media, as previously analysed by Oliver:

> This analysis (on realistic portrayals of crime) revealed that the majority of white characters in the programs (61.6%) were portrayed as police officers rather than suspects, but that the majority of black (77.0%) and Latino (85.9%) characters were portrayed as suspects rather than police officers. (Oliver, 2003, p.7).

The same treatment that black people have received for years, has also expanded to other minorities as Latino and ultimately working-class from poorer communities (Cervantes and Menjivar, 2018, p.183). As there is a common belief that perceives black people or Latinos as dangerous, someone from these communities making lyrics about violence will be perceived as violent too. This relationship has not affected most white cinema directors, actors or artists, as they seem capable of making something up for the stage and then be able to conduct themselves in a different manner in real life.

As a practitioner, I feel I am in the middle of two worlds. I come from a low-income working-class family from a deprived area of Spain, but through hard work and dedication, I completed a Bachelor's degree and a Master's and now I work as an educator helping young people to fulfil their potential. When I make rap music or illustrations, I expect my artwork to be analysed and create a positive discussion around it, but I do not want to be associated with negative attitudes in the same way that the media creates these relationships between some artists and their creative outputs (songs, music videos, interviews, etc.). As a Hispanic rap artist, I find it very challenging to be creative as I am hyperconscious of the potential criticism that sometimes the media or even art institutions create around rap music. When I look at colleagues and other artists from other disciplines as painting, photography or performance, they seem to find it to be more acceptable to discuss certain themes, which suggests that their media outlets are associated with mainstream/intellectual white culture.

The rejection of rap music from the media also denies the existence of racism, racial segregation and social inequality in our society, and although some behaviours shown in rap music videos should not be played in front of children, they often reflect a social reality instead of creating a new one as some detractors have suggested, for example, the obscenity trial of the rap music group 2 Live Crew (Binder, 1993). As an example, the tensions reflected in rap music videos between minorities and different authorities have been blamed sometimes on the artists instead of looking at this as a social issue that originated well before the creation

of gangsta rap. This research suggests that rap music is more a reaction to social issues, inequalities, violence, etc. than the originator of these factors. Based on my own experience, rap music allowed me to express my feelings when no other place allowed me to discuss certain topics. Urban culture helped me to develop certain skills, that later on in my life, allowed me to make friends, get a job but most importantly accept who I was and where I come from. The practice developed for this research has allowed me to question again how I feel about making rap music at this stage of my life where I have other channels to express my ideas and if I am willing to be criticised as a person for something that I perform as an artist. Answers remain contradictory.

Conclusion

The extensive comparisons in Chapter One demonstrate that gangsta rap was a product of its environment, as data shows how some ethnicities have been at clear disadvantage for decades. Black people, and often Hispanic communities, have seen how job opportunities were taken away from them during the deindustrialisation of the USA, how the government allowed discriminatory housing policies for years, as redlining and other racist policies that kept neighbourhoods segregated, devaluating house prices making almost impossible to sell their properties and move to find a job, and how some minorities in desperate need of police protection became victims of police brutality.

Gangsta rap originated in low income working-class neighbourhoods that often received excessive media coverage on their drug, prostitution and violent incidents, which affected their global perception. After the creation of the music, which addressed many of the issues they were facing as a community, international record labels commodified the 'authentic black experience' by selling albums to white teenagers who would feel attracted to the rebelliousness of this music, which brought the attention of conservative politicians who tried to censor and mute the music genre, as it was seen as an attack to traditional family values. The late 1980s and early 1990s were followed by a 'boom' of Afro-American and Latino celebrities which helped to deconstruct racial stereotypes linked to black and Hispanic people, however, as racial discrimination and police

brutality practices continued, they triggered social responses, such as the Rodney King Riots, and the subsequent gangsta rap songs against the establishment.

Although there have been multiple debates about the intellectual and personal benefits of making rap music, there is a common belief that the use of violent, derogatory and misogynistic lyrics and aesthetics can have a negative impact on youth behaviour. However, the results of this research support the idea that if white directors and artists have been allowed to write, sing and film about (almost) any subject without being censored, this should be common ground for rap artists too. Nonetheless, this research highlights the necessity for an age-based system, to stop young people from accessing adult content, that often deals with complex issues that may not be appropriate for underage people.

In Chapter Two, through a range of ethnographic methods, and after using myself as a case study, this thesis has provided a deeper insight into the socio-cultural environment of rap artists and how it does have an impact on the artists' taste and style. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that rap music is more a reaction to social issues, inequalities, or violence than the originator of these factors. As the research explores deeply in Chapter Two, most difficult circumstances appear before the person develops a musical taste, therefore it challenges previous theories and often accusations from academics, politicians and educators, suggesting that rap music creates social issues, and promotes negative racial stereotypes.

Another factor that this thesis explores is how minorities and lower socioeconomic communities need to create new (or break old) pre-established social rules to generate opportunities. Isolated communities experience fewer benefits following mainstream channels than other groups, as they are in clear disadvantage in terms of education, job opportunities and health and safety (as an example, the disparity in incarceration rates, etc.). The 'hood' has its own rules, and therefore rappers gain social recognition by being authentic to themselves, representing the values of the place where they come from, and using their art to report injustice. Furthermore, the rapper often uses his/her lyrics to project fantasies, which can relate to sex, money and power. An initial objective of the project was to identify the benefits of producing this type of music, and as was discovered in Chapter Two, rap music can help to deconstruct the perception of some communities, create awareness and improve racial harmony between listeners, but also provide with a healthy support network for young people to develop new skills, improve their relationship with other peers and embrace their culture and traditions.

The last section, Chapter Three, reflects on the practice that I developed as an artist, and the barriers that I have faced during my journey. An initial objective for this project was to identify if rap music artists enjoy from the same creative freedom as do other white artists. In the current study, comparing previous examples of censorship in American and British gangsta rap followed by an exploration of my own practice, I find that race, as well as social class, can affect the artist in terms of opportunities, support, etc. As an example, I created a number of illustrations for different national and international exhibitions, aiming

to deconstruct preconceived ideas of identity and perception of gangsta rap artists, however, one of them (*Is there a Heaven 4 a Gangsta?*), was rejected for an exhibition to which we were invited, despite that the artwork from other colleagues being accepted having a similar media, but not sharing the same theme. A possible explanation for this might be that considering the socio-political implications of this piece, the gallery decided to not take the risk and select other less controversial pieces. However, although the exclusion of my artwork did support some of my previous hypotheses, these results should be interpreted with caution.

Finally, the rap songs and music videos featured in this section highlight some of the positive benefits that the music brought me personally. As an example, the use of this music made me accept some of the negative experiences that I had related to the area where I was born and develop a pride and sense of belonging as other rappers and professional athletes from similar backgrounds were able to succeed coming from a similar place. Moreover, rap music gave me the opportunity to be heard, and develop a positive identity as well as an additional set of skills that was required to produce this music. Living in a community where manual jobs were the main option, the music provided me with some intellectual tools to understand the social reality that I was experiencing and empowered me to continue fighting for my rights and my future.

Afterword

The author's perspective, formed from the rare combination of being an academic, an artist, designer and practising musician, has enabled a more complex understanding of Gangsta Rap and its role and implications to be revealed. This ongoing research will be continued by contributing to journal articles related to urban youth, music and criminology; by exhibiting original artwork, producing music and engaging in public engagement activities to raise awareness on social injustice inside and outside of the entertainment industry. It is worth noting that authenticity within the gangsta rap music genre, has its limitations when it comes to creating certain types of exhibitions, books, publications, and events. This leads to the 'paradox of authenticity'. As the music genre has been built around the ostentatious image of the (commercially successful) gangsta rapper, producing events to encourage young people to participate or simply engage can prove difficult as it is expected a certain standard from the audience. The paradox comes as the genre used to be a part of every poor working class neighbourhood in North America and many other places around the world, but now it is commonly perceived as 'authentic' when it is produced or curated to a high standard and within a certain location.

Furthermore, it is intended that the original findings of this thesis as manifested in the body of practical work, songs, music videos and illustrations - alongside the autoethnographic journey and theoretical discoveries - will benefit future researchers in this emerging field.

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Nas (1996) *It Was Written.* Columbia Records / Bad Boy Records. U.S.A.

O.F.T.B. (2011) *Damn Near Dead*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

Odd Squad (1994) *Fadanuf Fa Erybody.* Rap-A-Lot Records. U.S.A.

Ol' Dirty Bastard (1995) *Return to the 36 Chambers: The Dirty Version*. Elektra

OutKast (1994) *Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik.* LaFace Records. U.S.A.

OutKast (1996*) ATLiens*. LaFace Records. U.S.A.

OutKast (1998) *Aquemini*. LaFace Records. U.S.A.

Paul Wall (2004) My Life. *Chick Magnet*. Paid in Full Records. U.S.A.

Pete Rock & C.L. Smooth (1992) *Mecca and The Soul Brother*. Elektra Records

Public Enemy (1990) *Fear of a Black Planet*. Def Jam/Columbia Records. U.S.A.

Puff Daddy (1997) *No Way Out.* Bad Boy Records. U.S.A.

Raekwon (1995) *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx.* Loud/RCA Records. U.S.A.

Redman (1992) *Whut? Thee Album.* Def Jam Recordings. U.S.A.

Redman (1996) *Muddy Waters*. Def Jam Recordings. U.S.A.

Sam Sneed (2011) *Street Scholars*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

Scarface (1991) *Mr. Scarface Is Back.* Rap-A-Lot Records. U.S.A.

Scarface (1993) *The World Is Yours.* Rap-A-Lot Records. U.S.A.

Scarface (1994) *The Diary.* Rap-A-Lot Records. U.S.A.

Scarface (1994) *The Diary*. Rap-A-Lot Records. U.S.A.

Silkk (1996) *The Shocker.* No Limit Records. U.S.A.

Silkk The Shocker (1998) *Charge It 2 Da Game.* No Limit Records. U.S.A.

Smif-N-Wessun (1995) *Dah Shinin'*. Wreck Records. U.S.A.

Snoop Dogg (1998) *No Limit Top Dogg.* No Limit Record. U.S.A.

Snoop Dogg (2000) *Dead Man Walkin'*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

Snoop Doggy Dogg (1993) *Doggystyle*. Death Row/Interscope Records. U.S.A.

Snoop Doggy Dogg (1993) *Doggystyle*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

Snoop Doggy Dogg (1996) *Tha Doggfather*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

Snoop Doggy Dogg (2009) *Death Row: The Lost Session Vol. 1.* Death Row records

Soulja Slim (1998) *Give It 2 Em Raw*. No Limit Records. U.S.A.

Souls of Mischief (1993) *93 'til Infinity*. Jive/BMG Records. U.S.A.

Spice 1 (1993) 187 *He Wrote*. Jive Records. U.S.A.

Stop the Violence Movement (1988) Self-Destruction. *Self-Destruction*. Jive

Tha Dogg Pound (1995) *Dogg Food*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

Tha Dogg Pound (2002) *2001*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

Tha Dogg Pound (2012) *Doggy Bag.* Death Row Records. U.S.A.

The 7 Day Theory (1996) *The Don Killuminati - Makaveli*. Death Row Records

The Beatnuts (1994) *The Beatnuts: Street Level*. Relativity Records. U.S.A.

The Lady of Rage (1997) *Necessary Roughness*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

The Notorious B.I.G. (1994) *Ready to Die.* Bad Boy Records. U.S.A.

The Notorious B.I.G. (1997) *Life After Death*. Bad Boy Records. U.S.A.

The Notorious B.I.G. featuring Diddy, N., Jagged Edge and Avery Storm (2005)

The Pharcyde (1992*) Bizarre Ride II the Pharcyde*. Delicious Vinyl Records. U.S.A.

The Roots (1999) *Things Fall Apart*. Geffen/MCA Records. U.S.A.

Trina (2000) Da Baddest Bitch. *Da Baddest Bitch*. Atlantic Records. U.S.A.

TRU (1995) *True.* No Limit Records. U.S.A.

TRU (1997) *Tru 2 Da Game.* No Limit Records. U.S.A.

Twista (1997) *Adrenaline Rush.* Creator's Way/Big Beat/Atlantic Records

UGK (1996) *Ridin' Dirty*. Jive Records. U.S.A.

Various artists (1994) *Murder Was the Case*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

Various Artists (1995) *Down South Hustlers: Bouncin' & Swingin'.* No Limit

Various artists (1996) *Christmas on Death Row*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

Various artists (1996) *Death Row Greatest Hits*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

Various artists (1997) *Gang Related (soundtrack)*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

Various artists (1997) *Gridlock'd (soundtrack)*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

Various Artists (1997) *I'm Bout It Soundtrack*. No Limit Records. U.S.A.

Various Artists (1998) *I Got the Hook Up Soundtrack.* No Limit Records. U.S.A.

Various artists (1999) *Suge Knight Represents) Chronic 2000*. Death Row Records

Various artists (2000) *Too Gangsta for Radio*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

Various artists (2006) *15 Years on Death Row*. Death Row Records. U.S.A.

Various artists (2007) Death Row) *The Singles Collection*. Death Row Records

Various artists (2009) *The Ultimate Death Row Compilation*. Death Row Records

Various artists (2012) *20 to Life: Rare and Dangerous Vol. 1.* Death Row Records

Various artists (2012) *20 to Life: Rare and Dangerous Vol. 2.* Death Row Records

Waka Flocka Flame (2010) Hard in Da Paint. *Flockaveli*. Warner Bros. U.S.A.

Wu-Tang Clan (1993) *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers).* Loud/RCA Records

Yaki Kadafi (2004) *Son Rize Vol 1.* Death Row records. U.S.A.

Young Bleed (1998) *My Balls & My Word.* No Limit Records. U.S.A.

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https://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/18/us/dole-in-shift-says-refund-of-gay-gift-was-staff-mistake.html

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Available at:
https://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/hip-hop-and-violence-i-have-to-ask-myself-did-i-help-promote-violence-407335.html

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http://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/
[Accessed: 17 November]

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Available at:
http://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/26/nyregion/1-killed-5-injured-and-16-arrested-at-rap-concert.html

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https://massappeal.com/capone-noreaga-war-report-anniversary/

Appendices

Appendix 1. Music Videos – Links to Online Content

Beautiful Brokers was a group formed by Carlos Santos Barea, founded in Spain and produced a series of recording albums and music videos from 2003 to 2016.

The following links present three music videos produced as part of the practice-led research of this thesis.

Beautiful Brokers
Rollin' (2012)
Beautiful Brokers Records (Spain/U.K.)

https://ljmu-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/g/personal/lsacsant_ljmu_ac_uk/EQkhItFJ9JNGm2aPLOtyEk0BRauCkcbOYnz6EMf5EAexfQ?e=PD3Pq9

Beautiful Brokers
L.O.V.E. (2016)
Beautiful Brokers Records (Spain/U.K.)

https://ljmu-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/g/personal/lsacsant_ljmu_ac_uk/EfAvJMI9GpFJhFrzh_QEAIgBhf0ygmbNNXDlAoma_C-eyg?e=gKEAc6

Beautiful Brokers
Number 1 (2016)
Beautiful Brokers Records (Spain/U.K.)

https://ljmu-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/g/personal/lsacsant_ljmu_ac_uk/EQV9fjaJHodJufiigf3GVrYBuo1fqnfgtwwd-CrSz3rtuA?e=XDblyH

Appendix 2. Music Videos Frames

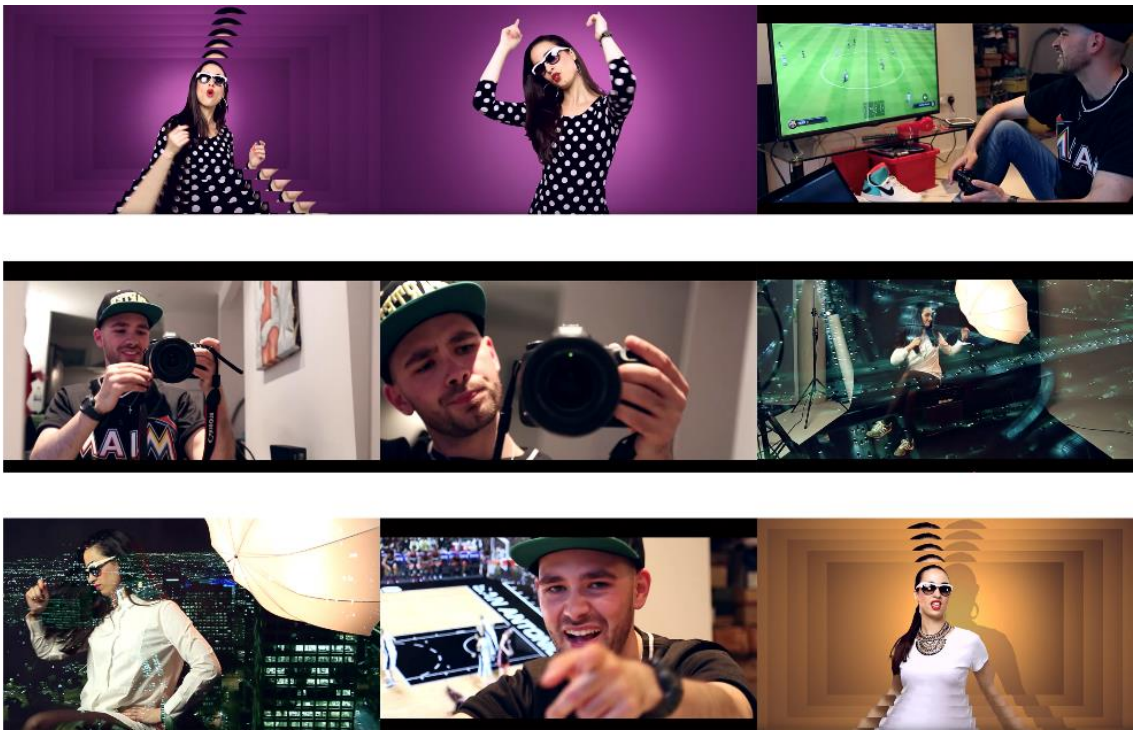


Figure 18:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' L.O.V.E (2016)
Digital Collage
Private Collection

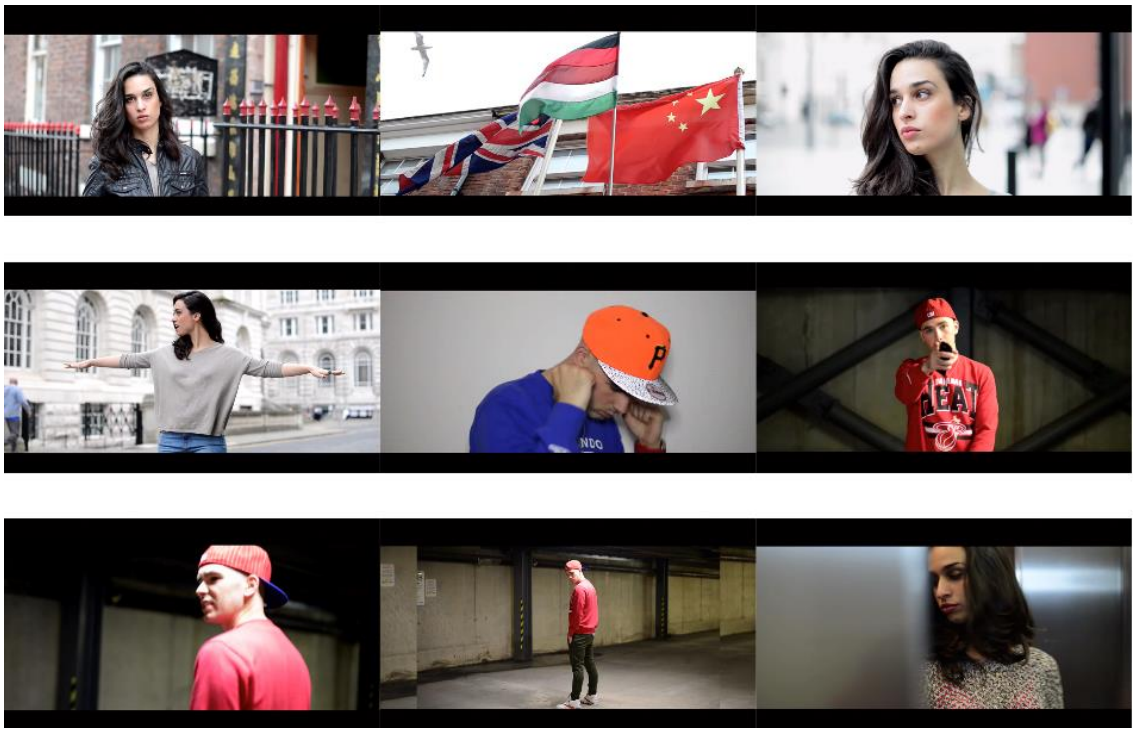


Figure 19:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' Number One (2016)
Digital Collage
Private Collection

Figure 24:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' *Rollin (2012)*
Digital Collage
Private Collection

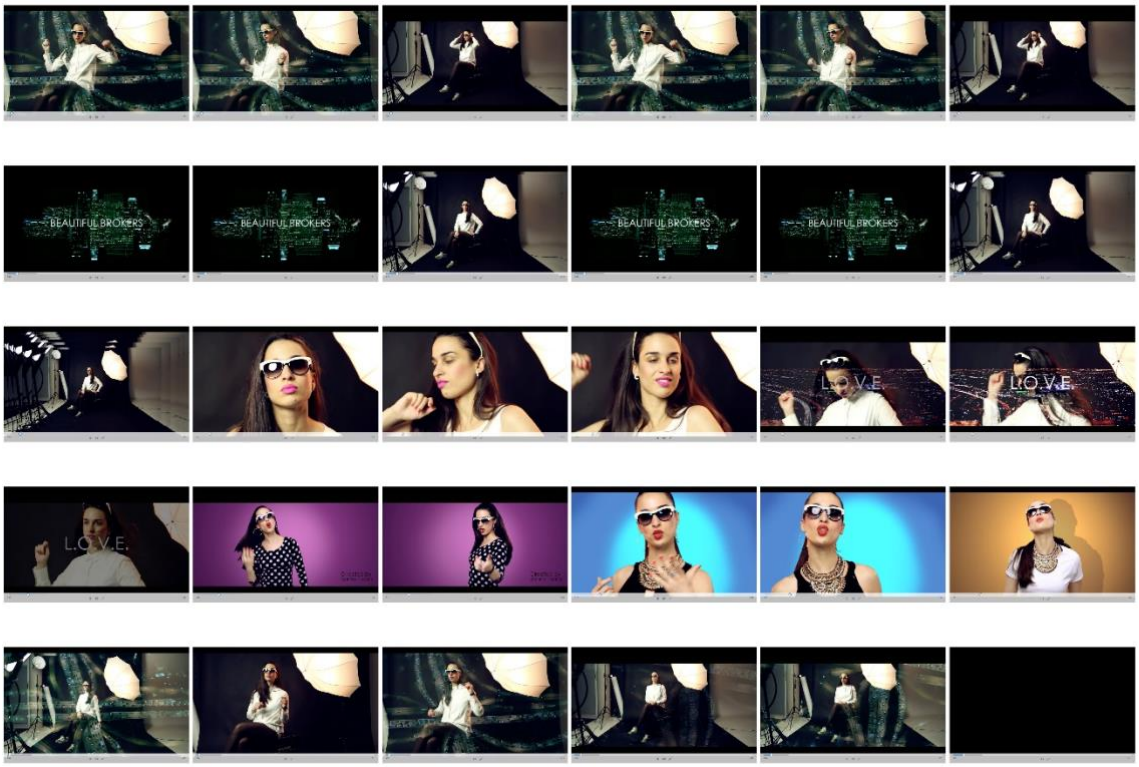


Figure 27:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' L.O.V.E (Extended version) 1
Digital Collage
Private Collection

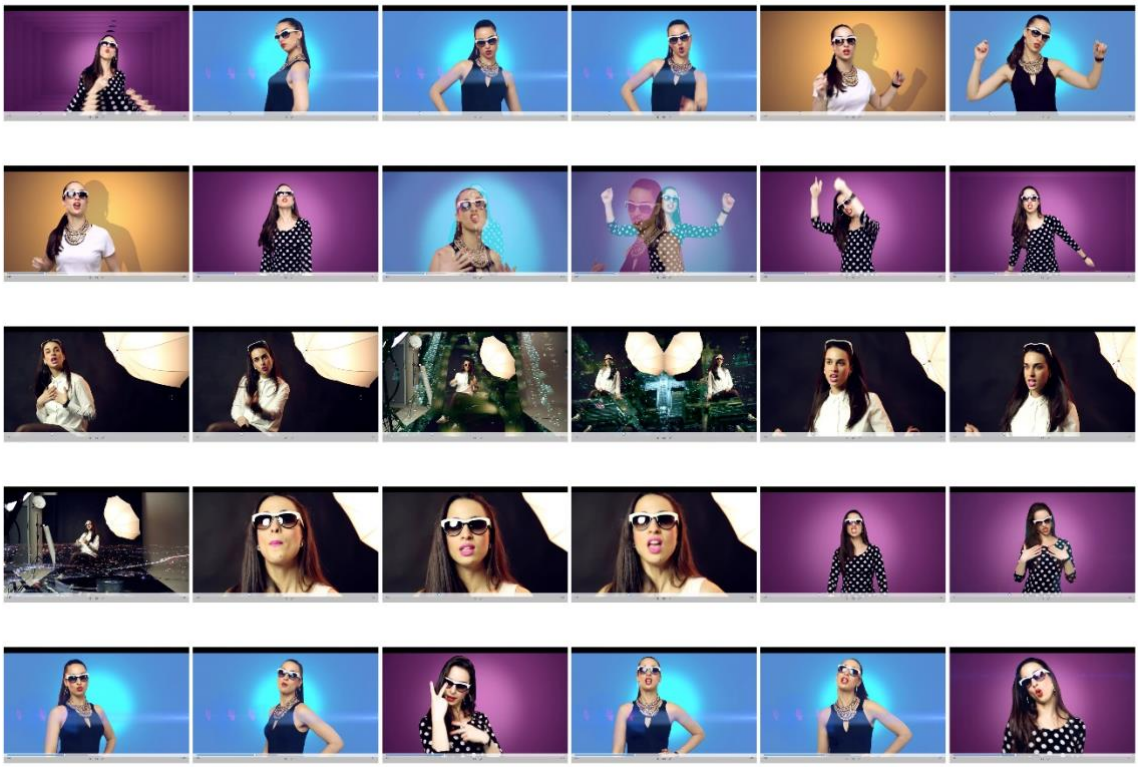


Figure 28:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' L.O.V.E (Extended version) 2
Digital Collage
Private Collection

Figure 29:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' L.O.V.E (Extended version) 3
Digital Collage
Private Collection

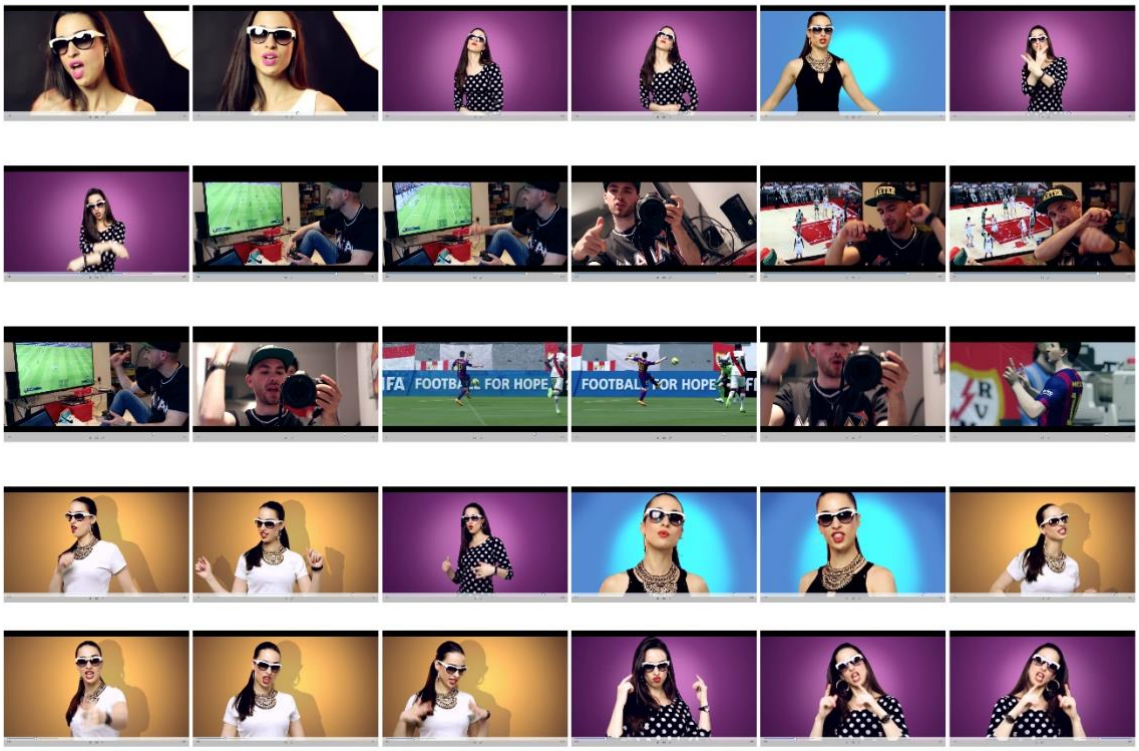


Figure 30:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' L.O.V.E (Extended version) 4
Digital Collage
Private Collection

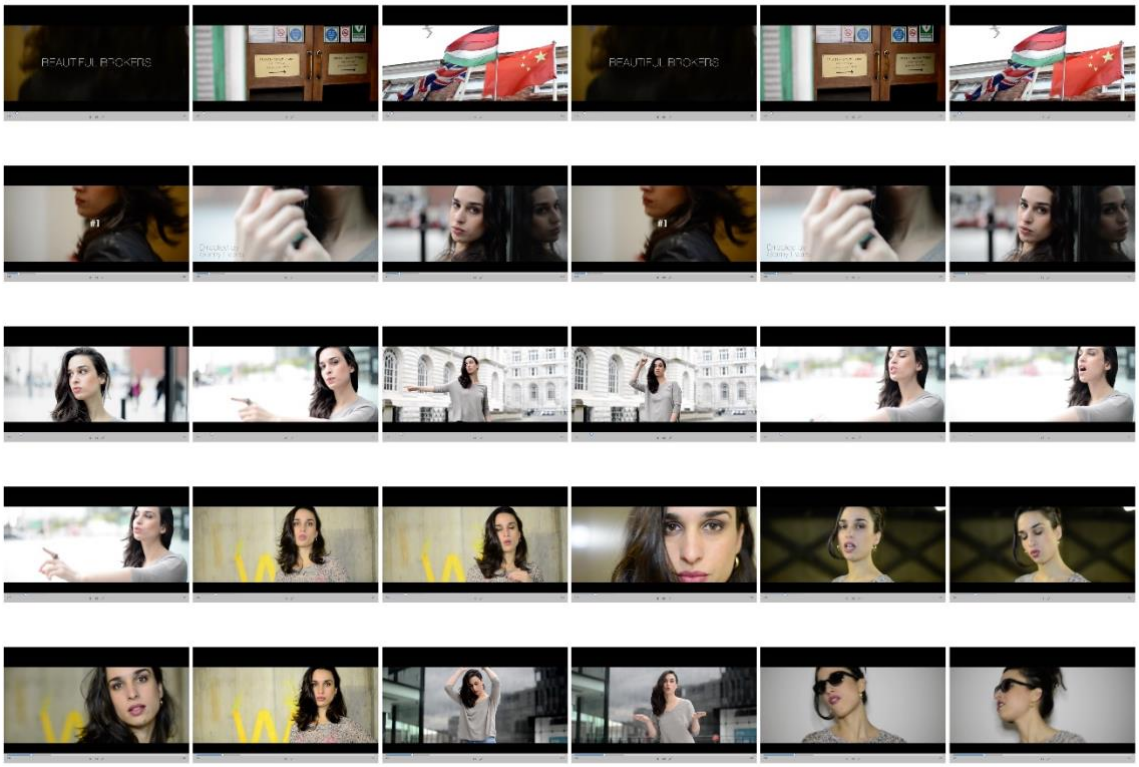


Figure 31:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' Number One (Extended version) 1
Digital Collage
Private Collection

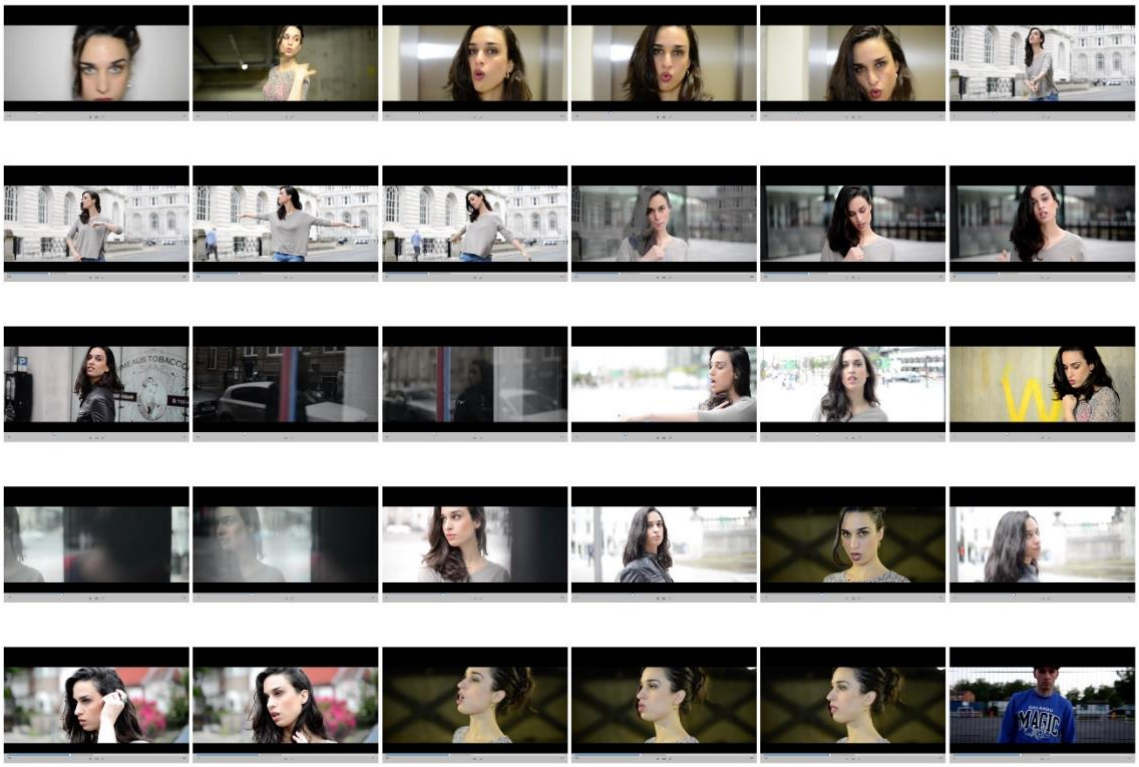


Figure 32:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' Number One (Extended version) 2
Digital Collage
Private Collection

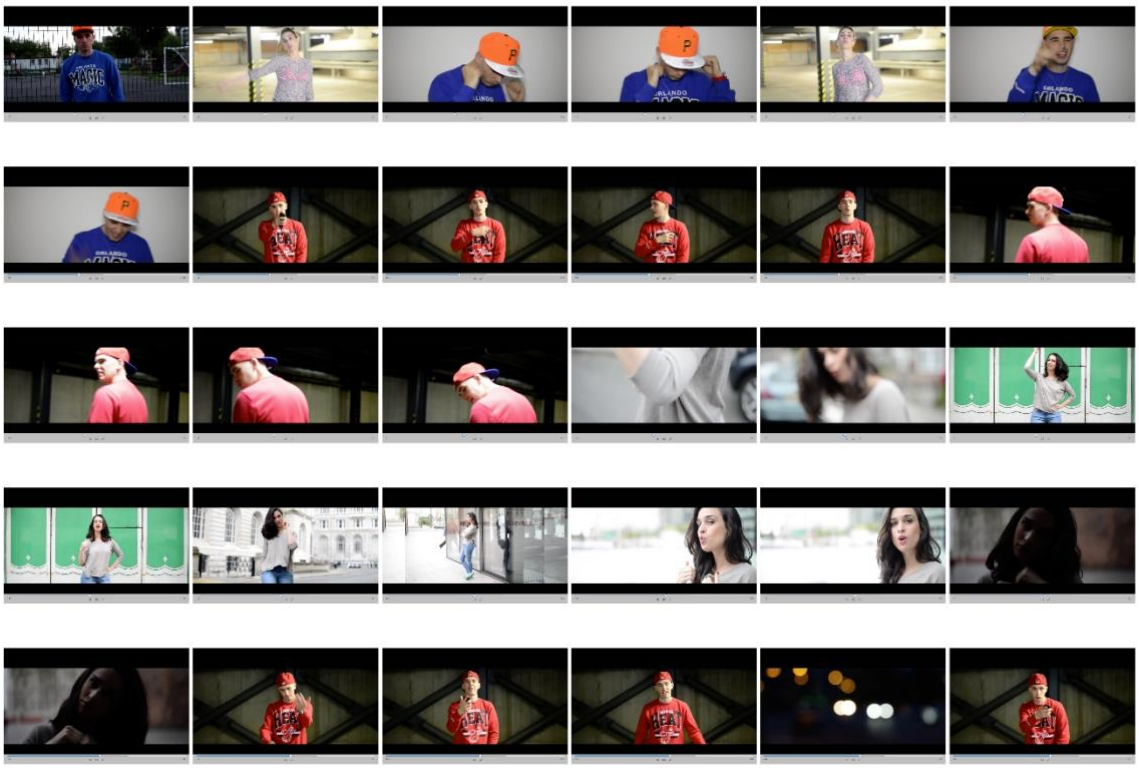


Figure 33:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' Number One (Extended version) 3
Digital Collage
Private Collection

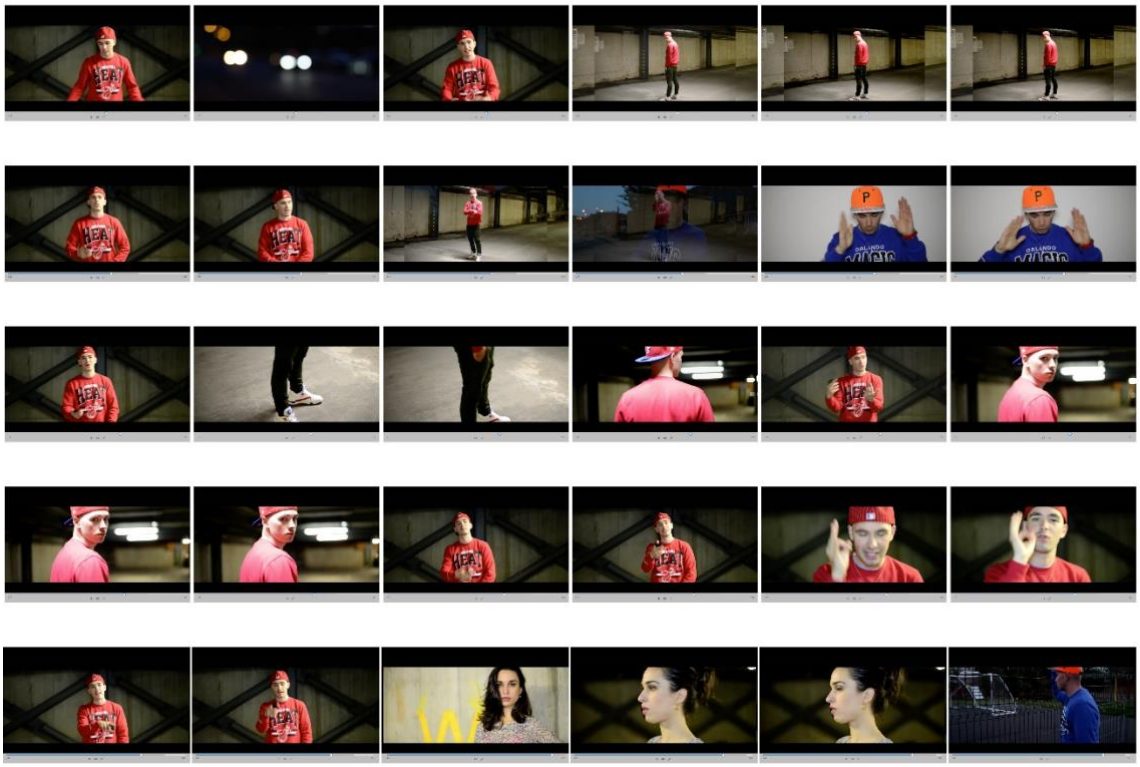


Figure 34:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' Number One (Extended version) 4
Digital Collage
Private Collection

Figure 35:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' *Rollin (Extended version) 1*
Digital Collage
Private Collection

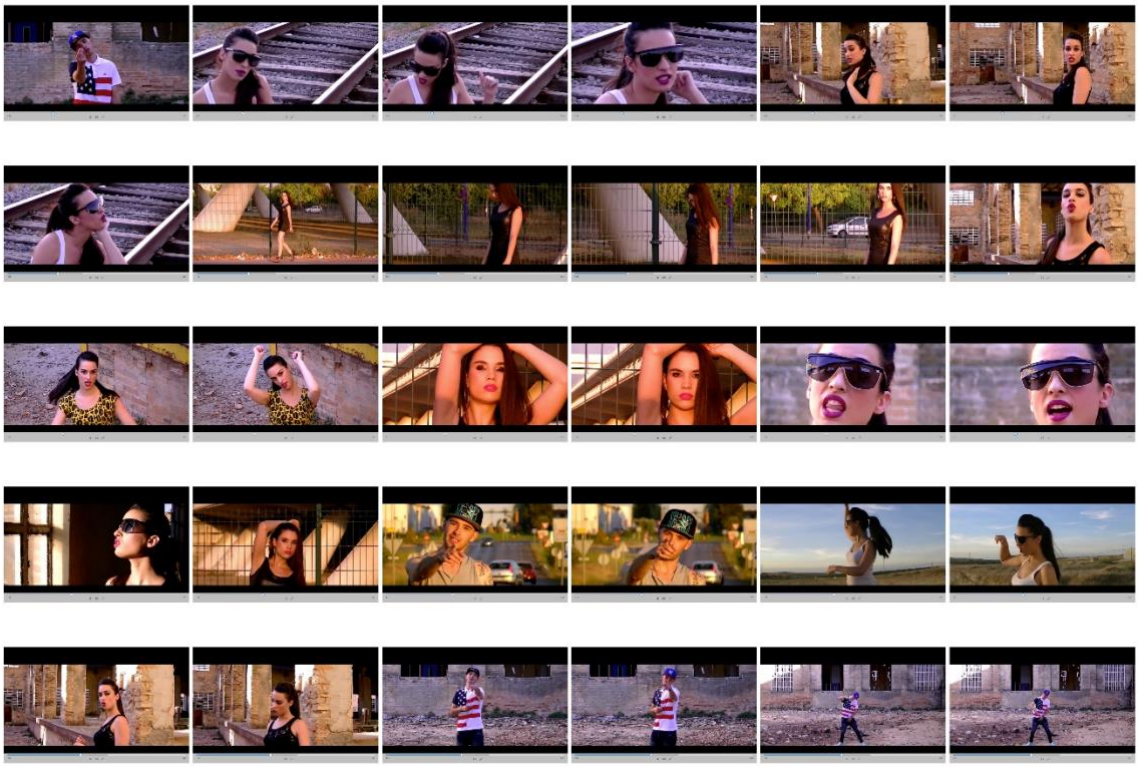


Figure 36:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' *Rollin (Extended version) 2*
Digital Collage
Private Collection

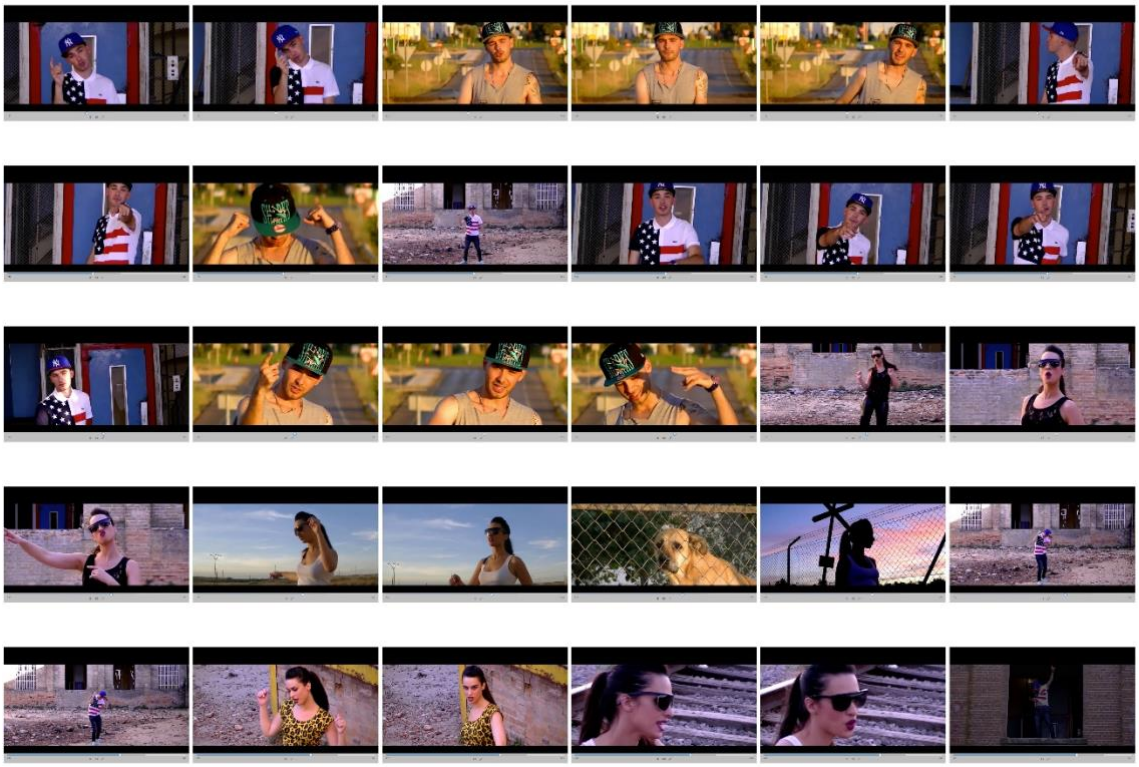


Figure 37:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' *Rollin (Extended version) 3*
Digital Collage
Private Collection

Figure 38:

Carlos Santos
Frames from Beautiful Brokers' *Rollin (Extended version) 4*
Digital Collage
Private Collection

Appendix 3. Artworks

Figure 11:

Carlos Santos
Preliminary Sketches for Hoodzilla (2018)
Illustration. Blue ink on white paper
Private Collection

Figure 12:

Carlos Santos
Hoodzilla as part of A Liverpool Bestiary
Digital Illustration
500x Gallery, Texas, Dallas. USA, March 2019
Photo Courtesy of Hannah Fray

Figure 13:

Carlos Santos
Hoodzilla (2018)
Digital Print 58 x 41 cm
Group Exhibition. A Liverpool Bestiary 2019

Figure 14:

Carlos Santos
Untitled (2019)
Digital Illustration 58 x 41 cm
Group Exhibition. SUES at Liverpool John Moores University

Figure 15:

Carlos Santos
Potential Portrait in process for Untitled (2019)
Digital Illustration
Private Collection

Figure 16:

Carlos Santos
Colour Tests for Untitled (2019)
Digital Illustration
Private Collection

Figure 17:

Carlos Santos
Rap Portrait Database (2017)
Digital Collage
Private Collection

Figure 20:

Master P
Frame from Master P's music video *Is there a Heaven 4 a Gangsta?* (1996)
Music Video
No Limit Records

Figure 21:

Carlos Santos
Is there a Heaven 4 a Gangsta? (2019)
Digital Illustration
Private Collection

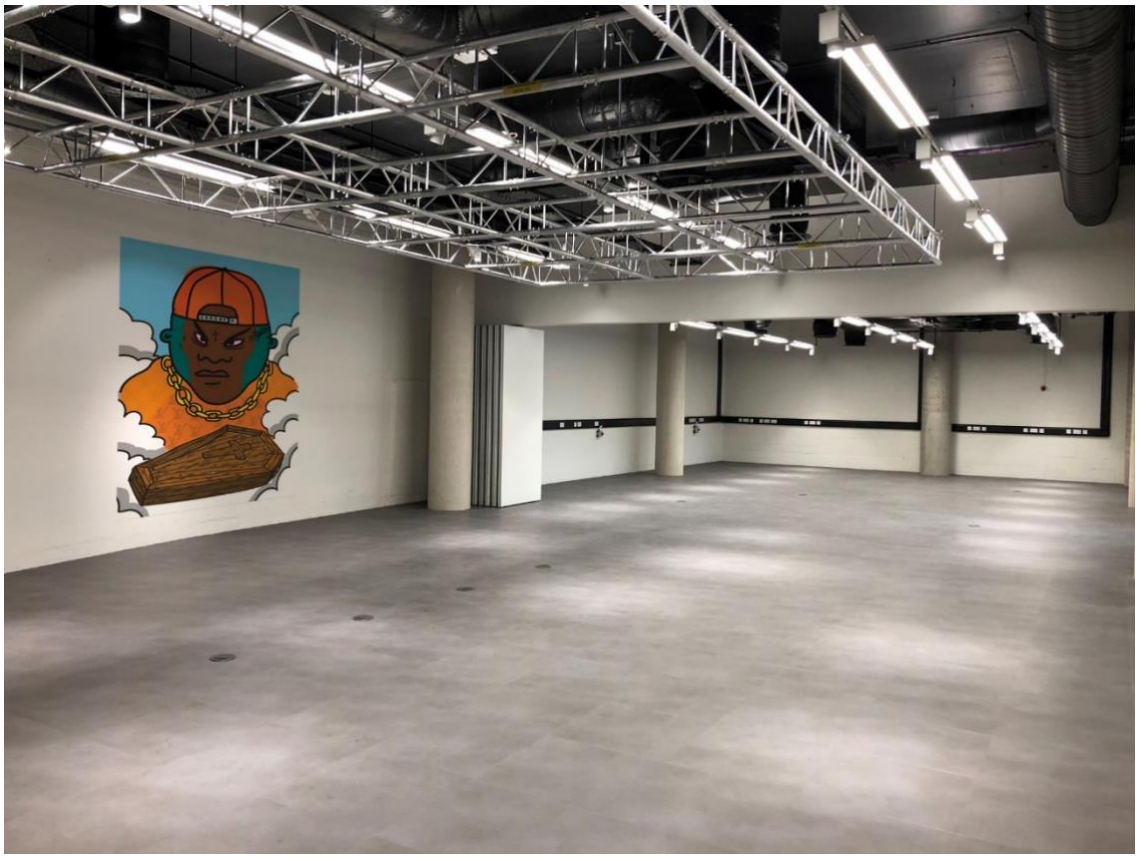


Figure 22:

Carlos Santos
Virtual test for *Is there a Heaven 4 a Gangsta?* (2019)
Digital Illustration
Private Collection

Figure 23:

Carlos Santos
Preliminary Sketches with Other Lyrics for the Exhibition (2019)
Digital Illustrations
Private Collection

Figure 39:

Carlos Santos
Preliminary Sketches for Hoodzilla (2018) (Extended) 1
Illustration. Blue ink on white paper
Private Collection

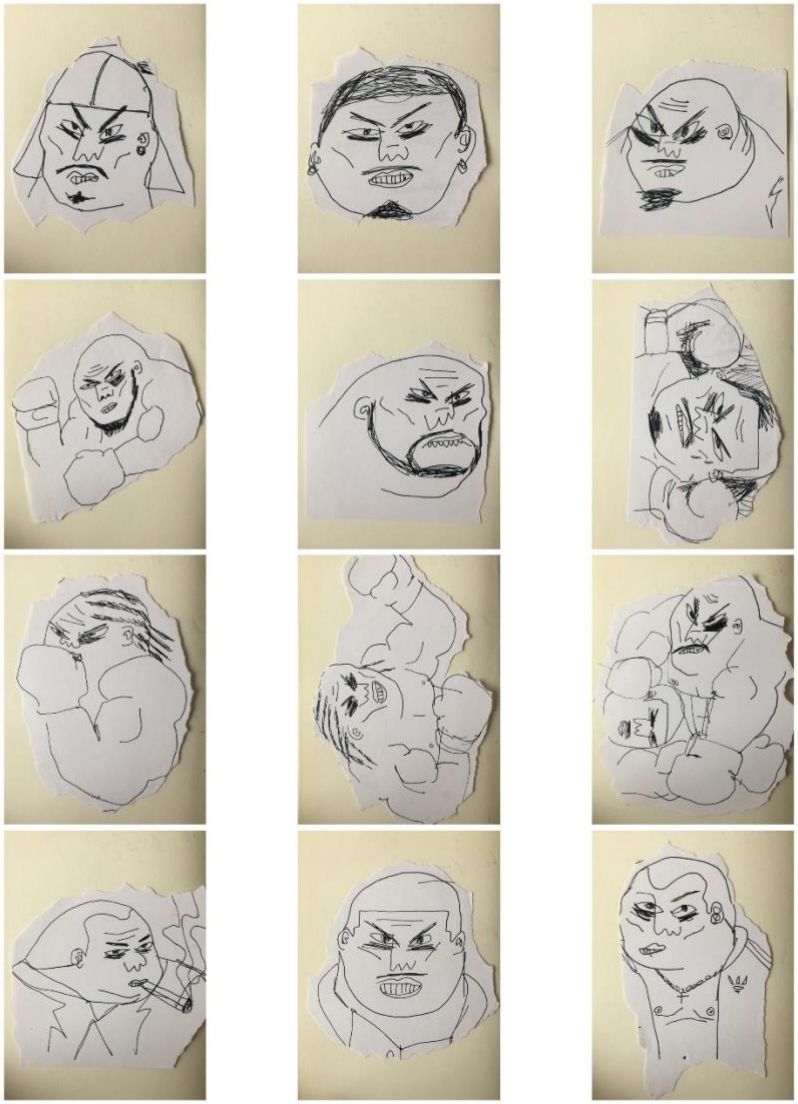


Figure 40:

Carlos Santos
Preliminary Sketches for Hoodzilla (2018) (Extended) 2
Illustration. Blue ink on white paper
Private Collection

Figure 41:

Carlos Santos
Preliminary Sketches for Hoodzilla (2018) (Extended) 3
Illustration. Blue ink on white paper
Private Collection

Appendix 4. Illustrations

Figure 1:

Carlos Santos
In the Catholic School at the Age of 9 Giving a Military Salute During a Religious Celebration (1994)
Photograph 10.6 x 15.24cm
Private Collection

Figure 2:

Carlos Santos
At the Age of 13 Painting Graffiti Close to my Neighbourhood (1998)
Photograph 10.6 x 15.24cm
Private Collection

Figure 3:

Carlos Santos
In the Middle of the School Picture 'showing off' in Front of my Peers (2000)
Photograph 10.6 x 15.24cm
Private Collection

Figure 4:

Carlos Santos
My Friend Jesus and Me (on the right) Posing Next to our Graffiti in 1998-1999 at the Age of 13-14 (1998-1999)
Photograph 8 x 15.24cm
Private Collection

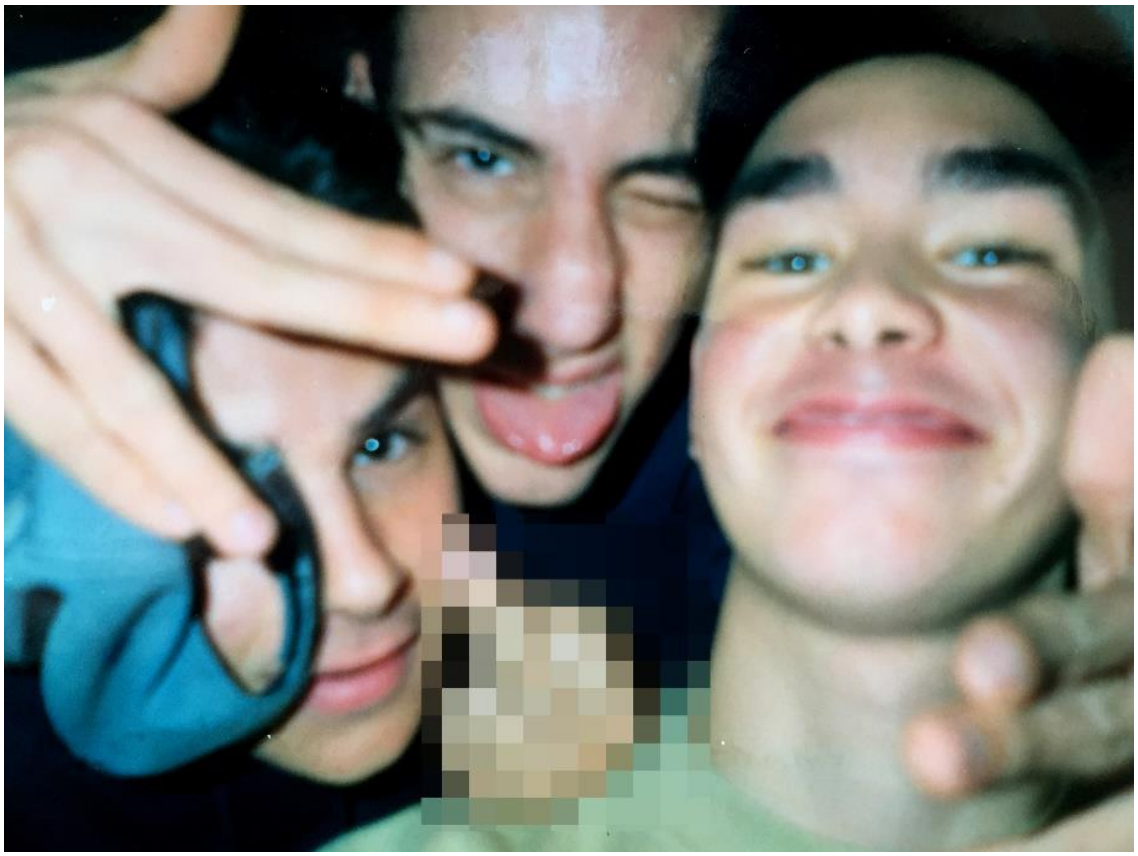


Figure 5:

Carlos Santos
My friends and I (1999-2000)
Photograph 10.6 x 15.24cm
Private Collection

Figure 6:

Carlos Santos
At the Age of 15 Dressed up for a Home Party (2000)
Photograph 10.6 x 15.24cm
Private Collection

Figure 7:

Carlos Santos
Waiting to Rap Live in Front of an Audience for the First Time (2000)
Photograph 15.24 x 10.06 cm
Private Collection

Figure 8:

Carlos Santos
Photoshoot and recording of Huyendo de los Dramas (2008)
Digital Photograph
Private Collection

Figure 9:

Carlos Santos
My First Rap Metal Group, Old Track (2001)
Photograph 10.6 x 15.24cm
Private Collection

Figure 10:

Carlos Santos
With Inda, During a Promotional Photo Session (2009)
Digital Photograph
Private Collection

Figure 25:

Carlos Santos
E 106th St & 3rd Ave on a Week Day
Digital Photograph
Private Collection

Figure 26:

Carlos Santos
Hall of Fame in Harlem
Digital Photograph
Private Collection

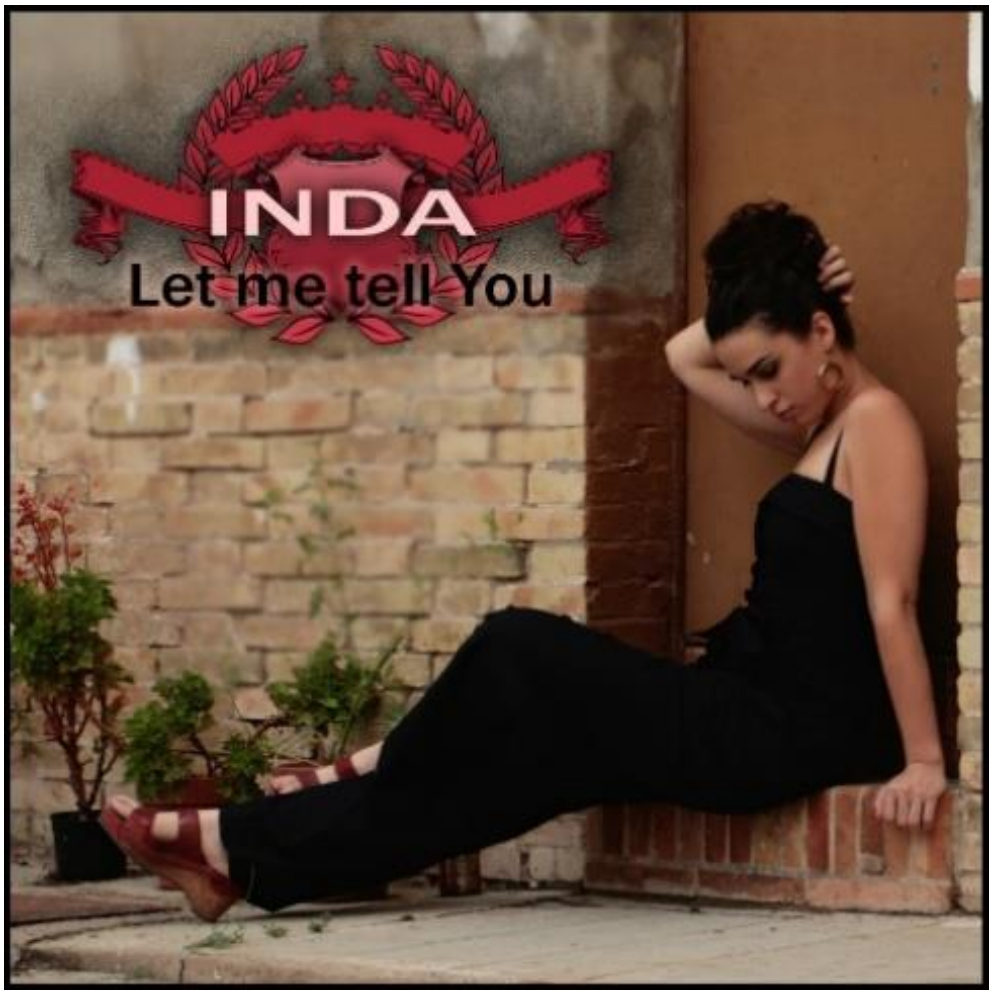
Appendix 5. Music Publications

The following section contains a Catalogue Raisonné of recorded works made between 2004-2016.

KB
Click Click (2005)
Compact Disc
Beautiful Brokers Records

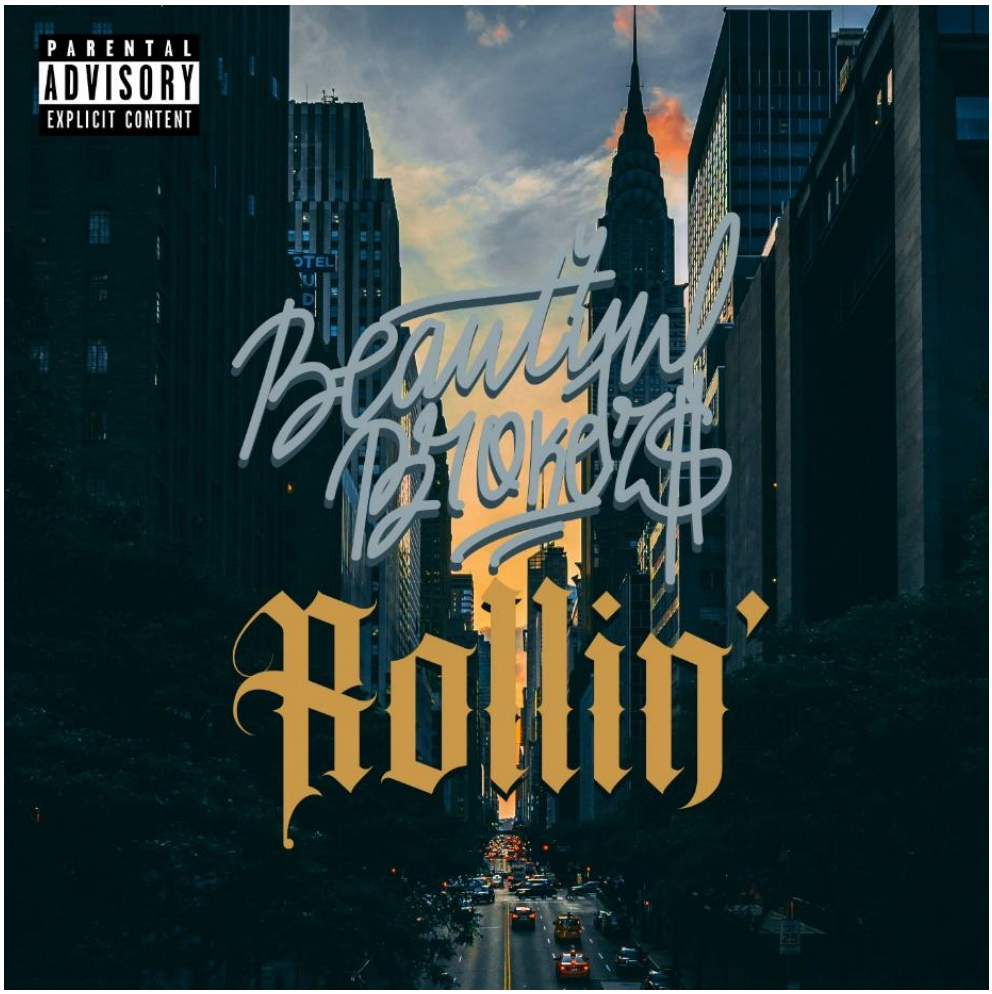
Inda
All I Need (2006)
Compact Disc
Beautiful Brokers Records

KB
Huyendo de los Dramas (2007)
Compact Disc
Beautiful Brokers Records



Inda
Let Me Tell You (2008)
Compact Disc
Beautiful Brokers Records

Beautiful Brokers
World Money (2011)
Compact Disc
Beautiful Brokers Records

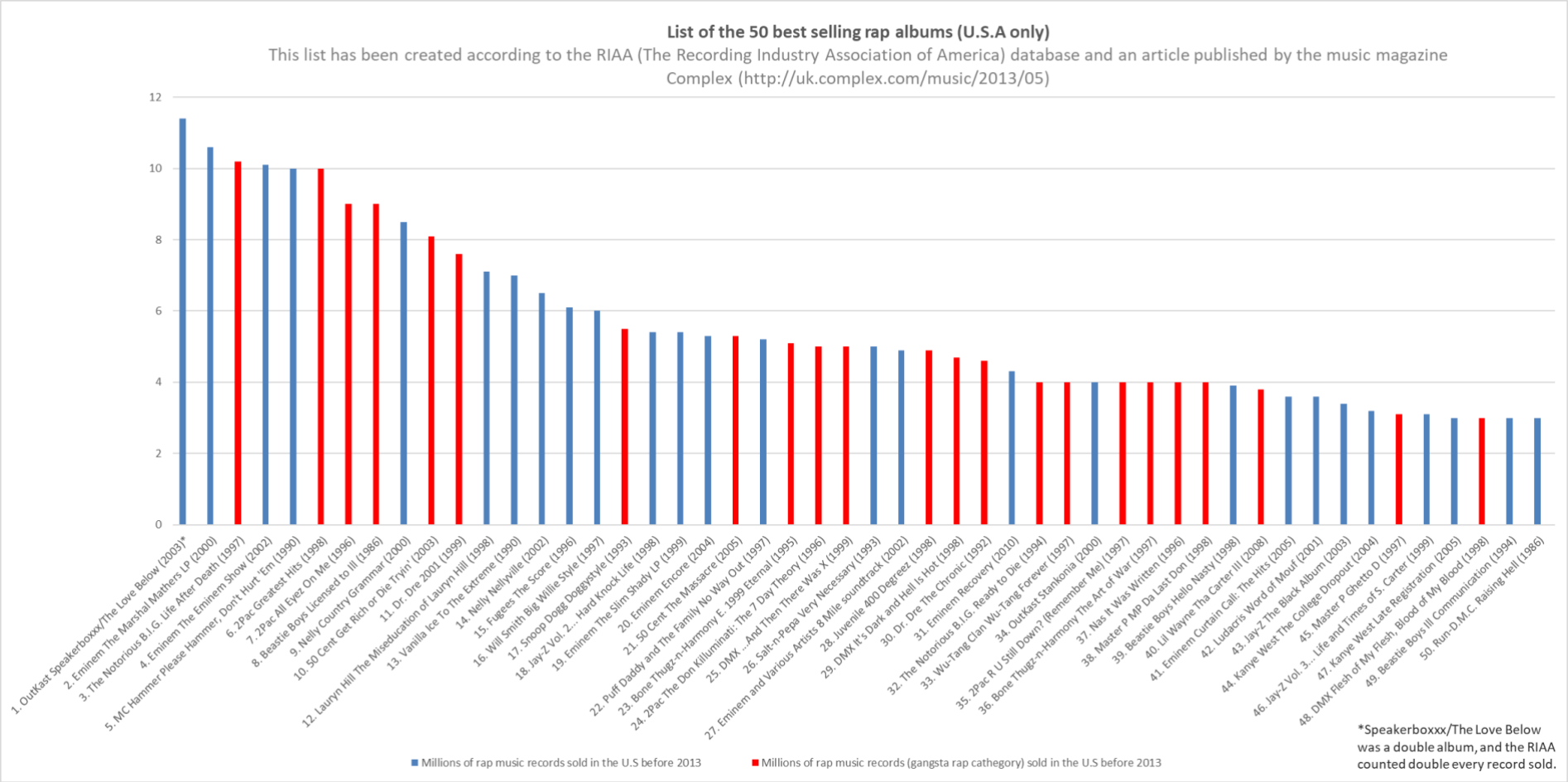


Beautiful Brokers
Rollin' (2012)
Compact Disc
Beautiful Brokers Records

Beautiful Brokers
L.O.V.E. (2016)
Compact Disc
Beautiful Brokers Records

Beautiful Brokers
Number 1 (2016)
Compact Disc
Beautiful Brokers Records

Appendix 6. Gangsta Rap Best Selling Records



Appendix 7. Gangsta Rap Social Political Context Timeline

This timeline reflects the most influential events in gangsta rap history. This historical mapping will be framed from 1984, close to the origin of the subgenre, until 2003, just after the release of the first iPod, the born of iTunes and before online video and music sharing platforms where consumers behaviour and record sales are measured in different ways, as views, clicks, interaction, etc.

Year	Most Important Events Gangsta Rap	Artist	Location	Social and Other Relevant Events.
1984	Although they were one of the most influential rap groups of all time and their sound was genuinely aggressive, they were not considered a gangsta rap music group. However, they had a great impact on gangsta rap's fashion as they adopted and introduced the aesthetic of gang members to rap music.	Run–D.M.C.	Queens, New York.	On October 30, 2002 Jam Master Jay was killed in his recording studio in Jamaica, Queens. The tragedy was considered linked to the music business.
1984	For the first time rap music brings the attention of ethnographers and scholars, and David Toop publishes *Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip Hop* becoming the pioneering book on hip-hop.	David Toop	U.S.A/U.K.	

1985	The song *P.S.K. What Does It Mean?* is considered to be the first gangsta rap song.	Schoolly D	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.	
1986	The song *6 in the Mornin'* is one of the most defining gangsta rap songs for its lyrics, contents and its delivery. It changed the way other artists understood the subgenre.	Ice T	Los Angeles, California.	Ice T was inspired by Schoolly D to create *6 in the Mornin*, and this song inspired many artists to follow the same artistic path.
1986	*License to Ill* was the Beastie Boys' debut album. They were the first (successful) group composed by white members to produce gangsta rap lyrics.	Beastie Boys	Brooklyn, New York.	Some songs were criticised for the misogynistic lyrics (e.g. *Brass Monkey*) however, the album was never censored, and the group was allowed to play their songs live.
1987	*Criminal Minded* was one of the first albums to include graphic violence and personal stories about the life in inner cities.	Boogie Down Productions	South Bronx, New York.	DJ Scott La Rock was shot dead a few months after releasing the album. After this tragic event, KRS One changed his position about rap music and initiated the 'Stop the Violence Movement' trying to stop violence in music and more importantly, within the black community. The movement was also criticised by some gangsta rappers as they thought they were giving visibility to their community issues through their music.

1987	Eric B. & Rakim created a combination of music, fashion and performance that gangsta rap artists still follow nowadays. Sports clothing, excessive use of jewellery and lyrics about money and street respect will be a 'must' for most artists of the subgenre after their debut album.	Eric B. & Rakim.	New York.	
1988	N.W.A's *Straight Outta Compton* is one of the most influential albums in rap history.	N.W.A	Compton, LA. California.	The F.B.I asked N.W.A to not play the song *Fuck the Police* live. As the group disobeyed the police instructions, during a concert in Detroit in 1989, the group were detained, and the concert was cancelled.
1988	*Life Is...Too Short* was the best-selling album of Too Short's career. It is considered one of the pioneers gangsta rappers and one of the first artists to write controversial lyrics about prostitution and drug use.	Too Short	Oakland, California.	
1988	*It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* was Public Enemy's second album and is considered key for the evolution of gangsta rap. The political lyrics of Public Enemy inspired many artists in the industry, including Ice Cube and the Beastie Boys to revendicate and fight	Public Enemy	Long Island, New York.	Public Enemy were constantly criticised by the media for their attacks over white artists, politicians, etc. As an example, in the song *Fight the Power* the band attacks Elvis Presley and John Wayne for representing what they considered a reflection of a white racist America. Furthermore, Professor Griff made some anti-Semitic remarks on

	against the oppression using their lyrics. Also, their lyrics inspired black cinema Directors such as Spike Lee and the creation of the cinema genre Hood Films.			stage about Judaism and the Palestinian conflict which did not help to improve public perception or opinion.
1988	*Making Trouble,* their first studio album, was full of violence (also known by horrorcore), some fictional and some biographical. Research suggests that the lack of commercial success of this album was due to the location of the artists as California and New York kept most of the media attention.	Geto Boys	Houston, Texas.	If rap music was polarised between New York (East Coast) and California (West Coast) Geto Boys would create a new subgenre called Dirty South or Southern Rap that would provide with a platform to southern rap artists.
1991	*Death Certificate* was banned in some states of the United States, and songs were removed before selling the album in the United Kingdom (*Black Korea* and *No Vaseline* were withdrawn).	Ice Cube	Los Angeles, California.	Mark Marot, the UK record executive who signed the deal with Priority Records to distribute Ice Cube's music in the U.K decided to exclude the two songs, even before any other legal body, to prevent a potential ban.
1991	*2Pacalypse Now* was 2Pac's first studio album. His lyrics, about police brutality, racial profiling, and crimes between the black communities, combined with his personality and performance, made Tupac a mass idol (as well as a villain) in America. Without knowing it, Tupac, Snoop Doggy Dogg and later Notorious Big (amongst	2Pac	Los Angeles, California.	The former U.S. Vice President Dan Quayle made some public comments about 2Pac lyrics and his views about police brutality and racial profiling. In 1992, in an interview that can be found in Los Angeles Times Dan Quayle commented *"Today I am suggesting that the Time Warner subsidiary Interscope Records withdraw this record. It has no place in our society."*

	others) would take gangsta rap music to the mainstream audience.			As an example of the political climate in some big American cities, on 3rd March 1991 Rodney King, an Afro-American male, was brutally beaten by Los Angeles Police Officers after a dangerous car chase. This event triggered different riots across the country and fuelled the social discourse in gangsta rap rhymes.
1992	*Cop Killer*, a song of their joint debut album was highly criticised specially by white reviewers, politicians and some sectors of the media as they considered that the lyrics were offensive and unfair for police officers.	Body Count	Los Angeles, California.	In some states of the U.S., Police Officers called for a boycott of Warner Artists. On the other side, intellectuals and the National Black Police Association defended their right of freedom of speech. Ice T, compared the lyrics in *Cop Killer* to other white artists (e.g. Eric Clapton's *I Shot the Sheriff*) who made songs or films about a similar subject without carrying any consequences.
1992	According to the Recording Association of America, *The Chronic*, after one year of its release, was awarded triple platinum. After this album, gangsta rap was not an underground subgenre anymore and became a big player in the music industry.	Dr. Dre	Los Angeles, California.	As Dr. Dre did from this album, many rap artists and producers decided to start their own record labels to enjoy the creative freedom of being independent and be able to lead their own professional career.
1992	*Too Hard to Swallow* is the first album of Bun B and Pimp C as UGK. If Too Short introduced lyrics about sex, drugs and prostitution from the pimp's point of	UGK	Port Arthur, Texas.	Pimp C dies on December 4, 2007 due to a cocaine overdose.

	view, UGK would continue his legacy creating controversy.			
1993	Doggystyle was the debut album of one of the bestselling artists in hip hop history. The songs, featuring lyrics about drug use, gang affiliation and sex were labelled by rap artists and music critics as a West Coast rap classic.	Snoop Doggy Dogg	Los Angeles, California.	
1993	*Represent* was the debut album of Fat Joe. Terror Squad would contribute to the commercialization of gangsta rap and to build an identity for East Coast gangsta rappers.	Fat Joe	Bronx, New York.	
1993	*Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)* became extremely popular as it reached all types of audiences. Furthermore, it influenced 90s music, music videos and fashion.	Wu-Tang Clan.	Staten Island, New York.	
1994	*Ready to Die*, was his first debut album and one of the most iconic records in hip hop history. Although the legacy of The Notorious B.I.G had a great impact in the music business, his professional career	The Notorious B.I.G.	Brooklyn, New York.	2Pac and Biggie were the “famous” faces of the war between the west coast and the east coast gangs. Tupac died a year before (1996) and police investigations suggested that the feud between the two musicians triggered both deaths.

	would last only 3 years as he was killed in 1997.			
1994	*Illmatic* contributed to the creation of New York's sound identity. Nas' lyrics reflected the lifestyle of young black people in the American projects. This album was inspired by his personal experiences as a teenager living surrounded by drugs and violence.	Nas	Queens, New York.	
1995	*True* is an iconic gangsta rap album from the south of the U.S. Many of the songs are based on true stories and following its commercial success, Master P became a role model for many young rappers from smaller American cities.	TRU	New Orleans.	Master P, the leader of the group, was born in one of the most depraved areas of the U.S, the Calliope Projects, New Orleans. Master P became a role model for the community when, after completing a college degree, created one of the most profitable music labels in rap history, No Limit Records.
1995	They were the first group, alongside with Nate Dogg, to introduce melodies to gangsta rap. They had a variety of musical influence, from gospel to doo-wop, combined with violent lyrics and fast rhyme delivery.	Bone Thugs -n- Harmony.	Cleveland, Ohio.	Bone Thugs-n-Harmony were the only group able to collaborate with Tupac, Notorious B.I.G and Eazy E. The origin of the group helped to promote the collaboration with other gangsta rap artists regardless of their location.

1997	The Hot Boy$ as well as Big Tymers were the two main groups of Cash Money Records. Following to the success of No Limit Records, they used the same aesthetic and sound for their own music.	Cash Money Records.	New Orleans.	From early 2000s onwards, they became the main international record label for rap and r&b artists.
1998	*Confessions of Fire* opened the mainstream doors for other artists from the collective Dipset.	Cam'Ron	Harlem, New York.	Cam' Ron was publicly blamed for promoting negative values to young people. In a TV program with Bill O'Reilly, Cam'Ron commented how he felt about these accusations and said that his music was made for an adult audience and that parents should be responsible for the education of their children.
1999	*Murda Muzik*, Mobb Deep's debut album, went platinum over the first year of its release. This album was a clear reflection of how American consumers were buying gangsta rap music regardless of their origin and social/economic status.	Mobb Deep	Queens, New York.	Mobb Deep were benefited by the gang rivalry between west coast and east coast rappers as 2Pac and other Californian artists disrespected them on their lyrics, which generated free publicity and controversy for Mobb Deep.
2000	Inspired by Master P and his record label No Limit Records, Birdman and Mannie Fresh released *I Got That Work*. The album, plenty of lyrics about drug dealing and gang activity, anticipated Cash Money records' growth over the following years.	Big Tymers	New Orleans, Louisiana.	

2001	*Thugs Are Us* was full of controversy. As an example, in *I'm a Thug,* Trick Daddy stands against the police and law enforcement. What made Trick Daddy a more relevant artist compared to others from the same subgenre was his origin (Miami) and his connections with the poor communities.	Trick Daddy	Miami, Florida.	
2002	*500 Degreez*, including the single *Gangstas and Pimps* contains controversial lyrics about prostitution, use of firearms and drug trafficking.	Lil Wayne		Despite of his lyrics, Lil Wayne was one of the most successful artists of the last decade. He is the clear reflection of gangsta rap music reaching a much wider audience.
2003	According to the RIAA*, Get Rich or Die Tryin'* became six times platinum as it sold more than 8.4 million copies in the U.S. From this point gangsta rap will not be an 'underground' subgenre anymore as people from different social status, radio stations and film industry would consume or play this music on a daily basis.	50 Cent		