



**NUI MAYNOOTH**  
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

**Workin' Class Records:**

**A Hip hop Subculture offering Hope and Resistance**

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I dedicate this thesis to my mother Irene who is always close to my thoughts.

## **Abstract**

While there is an abundance of international literature on the subject of Hip-hop, there is a clear deficit however when it comes to any substantive writing with regard to Hip-hop in Dublin. There has been an underground Hip hop scene in Dublin for over a decade now. This underground scene has witnessed the development of a vibrant and energetic youth subculture and it is the intention of this thesis to get a better understanding of what is driving those intimately involved with the scene. I have chosen to focus on one socially conscious label called Workin' Class Records based in Ballymun on the north side of Dublin. At the beginning of the thesis I will justify Hip hop as a legitimate source of academic study and continue to position myself within the research.

This thesis traces the movement of Hip hop from New York to Dublin and looks at what influenced those involved in the Dublin scene to begin rapping. I will make it clear that there are different forms of rap, and different elements within hip hop. Namely commercial or (gangsta rap) and socially conscious rap. These distinctions are vital to gaining an appreciation of the cultural value of the genre. The record label Workin' Class Records is aligned to the promotion of this conscientious output.

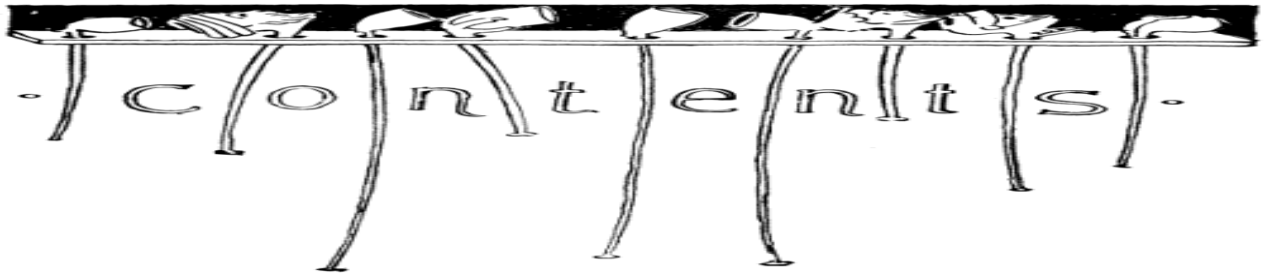
This qualitative research project primarily seeks to uncover what this genre means to the MC's involved through the use of in-depth interviews. I adopted an exploratory research method due to the lack of previous study on the subject. The themes which emerged from the interview process shaped the direction of the thesis. These themes included the background story of the label, subcultures, Hip hop as a reflection of the artists' experiential reality, working class authenticity within popular music and the educational merit of Hip hop in both informal and formal settings. It is my wish that the reader of this thesis will look anew at a much maligned genre and instead recognise the positive aspects of a true Freirean experience.

## Do the best I can

'Yeah this shit just started off as a hobby,  
Use to be in class writing raps in the back of me maths copy,  
On the regular getting stoned like a quarry,  
Listening to tunes in me room while all the smoke fumes had it foggy,  
Hip hop rocked me like a blast from a shotty,  
ill composed rhymes and flows just like gold for me mind soul and body,  
Stuck with me whenever the road got rocky,  
When she's by my side I'm feeling powerful like nothing can stop me,  
I love her truly just like me mommy,  
A beauty born in New York and flourishing through the project lobbies,  
Pricks be chatting shit acting all cocky,  
But when they get the chance to hit that lane,  
Dicks drop on a floppy,  
She's not impressed with the stocky dodgy bars from you knob jockeys,  
Juicing up on the sets to make yourself look stocky,  
The entertainment business gona be sorry,

*Symbols all throughout Dublin representing with the Workin Class Wolly'*

(Costello: Do the best I can; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBX5eqrnPsQ> )



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## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1: Introductory Prelude: Hip hop is CEESA



*(Picture: Hip-hop represents a culture that is manifested in a broad range of forms, including dance, graffiti art, DJing and MCing. Hip-hop's history has been one of sampling and remixing; playing with sound, text and context – experimental expressions that make for fascinating research: This thesis looks predominantly at MCing)*

*'Anyone that knows anything about Hip hop, knows that's it's a reflection of the street, a reflection of yourself'.*

*'Rap is something you do, Hip Hop is something you live'- KRS One*

Today in Ireland, as in most of the world, we are witnessing a growing disparity between the *have got's* and *have not's* for want of a better term. Increasingly at both national and global level, decisions which clearly impact on the many are being decided by the few. Activists who understand the current economic and social situation recognise that the power elite were motivated solely by the accumulation of profit as opposed to people's welfare and happiness. When their financial house of cards collapsed the mantra of 'Free Market' omnipotence was replaced by the critical need for 'Austerity'. By sleight of hand billions of currency units were vaporized. As a result, pay freezes were implemented, social programmes savagely cut back or halted entirely. The lowest paid further taxed and new home owners saddled with negative equity and all that this entails. The compliance of the population can only be understood in terms of Bordieu's '*Habitus*'. Our political masters, backed by the media outlined 'OUR' national crisis from which WE the good citizens were obliged to shoulder the burden in the national interest. Not all agreed.

The Spectacle of Defiance and Hope brought together community organisations to challenge the savage cutbacks to the community sector. They sought to offer a platform of protest to which people could bring along their 'books of Grievances and Hopes which would state clearly the kind of Ireland we all aspire to live in'. Occupy Dame Street which had ties to broader global movements sought to highlight the intrinsic link between private banking and government. Whilst it is extremely hard to quantify the success of a movement like The Spectacle or Occupy, I think it fair to say that the global Occupy movement certainly can take some credit for bringing about a shift in discourse, bringing into the public domain for the first time in many years the notion of the 'one percent' and opened a new dialogue on corporate irresponsibility and greed. What is important to acknowledge is that whilst most of the main issues which these movements were battling to alter did not change, many activists involved in Occupy in particular, saw this change in discourse as a form of success.



Occupytogether.org explains that ‘one of the important accomplishments may simply be changing the social and political discourse in America {and beyond} as the #occupy movement has called attention to important issues of unchecked corporate influence in politics and social and economic inequality. "We are the 99%" has become a rallying cry for the many’.

As someone who engaged with both movements to varying degrees, I identified with the feelings of anger that spurred those involved to get out and organise. The utter frustration at the fact that a small number of oligarch’s, bankers and corporate kingpins have brought about a situation whereby they can blatantly dictate government policy to further the augmentation and advantages of economic elites. The fall out of which can be seen nationally in the extraordinarily high numbers of people being unemployed and/or forced to emigrate. The result globally can be clearly seen with the great disparity of wealth and resource allocation around the world. The total disregard of our eco system is equally problematic and remains a cause of great concern for many activists. The inevitable result coming from such an approach to capital lead governance is widespread poverty and misery on the one hand and vulgarity and greed on the other. The gargantuan advantage or profit which is granted to the few from such a flawed and broken system must come at a disadvantage or deficit to the many, to take a Marxist approach to understanding exploitation.

So how does this tie into hip hop and why indeed would a student doing an M.A in Community, Equality, Education and Social Activism (CEESA), established to educate activists through praxis to alter this flawed system choose Hip hop as a worthy subject to discuss amidst such horror? And why did I decide to dedicate my thesis to understanding the artist’s motivations within a youth sub culture in the form of Irish Hip hop, at a time when activists both globally and locally struggle to fight back against the structures of power. The very structures which make such an unfair and cancerous system possible?

I chose this topic because I recognise that hip hop and rap are an alternative narrative to describe the social and cultural issues affecting an ever growing population of disaffected youth. At the outset however I must dispel the notion portrayed on mtv that rap can be reduced to bling and misogyny. I argue in this thesis that socially conscious Hip hop has a power not only to educate and influence minds but also can serve as a doctrine for change. It facilitates a space for the marginalised to articulate their perspective of reality. This thesis briefly traces the origin of this musical form, and looks at its journey to Ireland. I will engage with a socially conscious Hip hop label called Workin' Class Records. Through interviews and observation I hope to uncover what Hip hop means to them. I will also examine how they view their roles in this largely unknown Sub Culture. *'I don't speak for myself but a movement'*, explained MC Costello. He, along with other members are actively seeking to build Irish Hip hop from the ground up and identify themselves as activists, educators and spokespeople for working class residents in Dublin. They *'say what's supposed to be said'* (Costello).

The Workin Class Records artists, who are gaining an ever growing local following, are part of an underground hip hop movement which is rising in popularity within pockets of Dublin's North side. It is worth noting that while they receive practically no airtime on our national airwaves, they have managed to amass tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of YouTube views. Their stage shows attract a growing audience, at times numbering in their hundreds. Their output challenges dominant power structures and social sanctions by using a highly educational and anti establishment content. Unquestionably political and reminiscent of a lyrical oral tradition that spans our history. If one of the great successes recognised by Occupy is the change in discourse or the raising of consciousness then I believe that this is, in itself a sufficient reason to engage with Hip hop music. Whose 'global industry-orchestrated (but not industry-created) presence illustrates the power of the language of rap and the

salience of the stories of oppression and creative resistance it's music and lyrics tell' (Rose, 1994). There are other reasons to listen to these 'poets of the street'.

When I walk around Ballymun or Finglas with the lads involved or view the documentary *Broken Song* (which followed three of the artists I have worked with for over a year), it is amazing to witness the local popularity which the artists have developed. I was amazed at how frequently young people would not only recognise them, but rush to say hello and often seek advice on different rhymes that they themselves had written. I will elaborate on these relationships and analyse the role and impact that this one label is having on the community of Ballymun where it is based.

Whilst there is a highly commercialised element of Hip hop entitled *Gangsta Rap*, I will demonstrate the major differences between this highly publicised and marketed form and the socially conscious Hip hop as represented by the Workin' Class Records label. It is important also to note that this thesis has been written and re-written numerous times as I found myself falling into the trap of writing an all encompassing piece on Hip hop when in actuality the piece is intended to look at one label and their approach to the genre, how they interpret Hip hop and what they are producing to that effect. Through interviews, observation and an awful lot of painstaking hours transcribing lyrics from songs, I try to paint a picture from the perspective of those involved with the label (who have in some cases worked with W.C for over a decade). Nodlag Houlihan, a producer with Zuffa Films, explains how she '*had a revelation about half way through {filming Broken Song} while {she} was reflecting about their lyrics and stuff and taught my god these guys are just brilliant poets*' (Nodlag). I agree that Hip hop is as a legitimate form of poetry as any, and so throughout my work I will include transcribed materials. This will allow the reader to appreciate the works of the poets involved to allow their voice to be at the forefront of the research.

Dean Scurry who set up the Workin' Class label explained what he felt they have done over the past decade and what he believes others should take from their works. *'We have documented our perspective for over ten years now which hasn't been filtered through controlled media. We have been our own media. That's what I would like to encourage others to do , be your own media, your own community, people, story tellers and educators, and that is one of the main purpose's of hip hop.'* (Dean)

This notion of being your own media is very apt when one considers that today there is a multi billion euro industry in P.R and marketing. It tells us what to think, what to eat, who to vote for and indeed which rapper to listen to. Workin' Class Records with relatively little to no resources are striving to be their own media. They want to offer an alternative perspective to that of the mainstream, in order to empower working class residents. When one watches Adam Curtis insightful and brilliant documentary, 'The Century of the Self' we learn the history of modern day P.R. The documentary shows the tricks of manipulation and how relatively easy it is with the right amount of resources to appropriate and repackage popular symbols and icons. . Ernesto 'Che' Guevara is an obvious example (not in the documentary), of someone who rejected a potentially comfortable life in medicine to fight and inevitably die to defeat corporatism and capitalism, is today used to sell cars and pizzas for corporate entities, as his well known attractive face is strategically separated from the ideology which brought him to prominence in the first place.

*'Misinformation thrown at ya every time you change the station, television, newspapers and controlled publications, brainwashing generations and gulling the public with their fascinations, drinking from taps that contaminate us, if ya ask me the place is fucked, gardai stay corrupt, keep it shut for a snitch nowhere be safe enough, your issue isn't with the other fucker tyrna make a book, just take a look at the bottom of the barrel your scrapping from, a hungry man is dangerous, the corporation sit with the devils angels, they're overseeing and*

*dictating the faith of us, staring in the face us, the obvious truth their manipulating us, the youth a by product of what they flood us with, , and goodwill isnt gonna fill their stomachs up, two inches in your skull get the bullet stuck, the government are fucking us, divide and conquering look what they done to us, the mental slavery, like chains hung from us'*(4real; these streets)

4real who released *These Streets* in December of 2013 under Workin Class records speaks vividly of how he interprets this mental control or PR game and how it is played out and underpins this notion of symbols being misappropriated by corporate entities and the mainstream media to further their particular agenda. Hip hop at its humble beginnings was community based; it began as a voice for the voiceless, as a narrative or cultural expression for disenfranchised young blacks in the United States throughout the 1970's. '*Keepin it real*' meant highlighting injustices and frustrations at an unfair system and MC's (Masters of Ceremony) would promote consciousness and critical thinking within their rhymes. This would be done through colloquial expressions with an emphasis on rhythm and flow which meant that it was primarily focused on engaging with their peers, who were generally disenfranchised, angry youths. It is clear that Dean Scurry who has been a local Community activist for many years and also a massive fan of the earlier Hip hop has consciously set about reintroducing this community ethos and has instilled a sense of responsibility among those associated with his label on the importance of their words.

The history of Hip hop up to today is both sad and predictable on the one hand, yet inspiring and surprising on the other. The mainstream Hip hop played on MTV and the BBC, promotes content of hyper masculinity, and violence and could lead one into the understanding that this is a reflection of Hip hop. To be blunt however, if one only received their current affairs from RTE they may also believe that Enda Kenny and the TROIKA are doing the best job possible in bringing about an egalitarian Ireland for tomorrow with the weakest members of our

society at the forefront of any decisions they may make. My point is simple, MTV and BBC are not Hip hop, just as RTE or FOX news is not political gospel. There exists around the globe today in many different countries and in many different languages a Hip hop movement which is articulating an often sidelined voice of pain, anger, sexual desire, and pleasure. They represent the feelings of many disenfranchised people, offering them symbolic resistance against omnipresent oppressive forces. It is hard to put a number or quantify just how many people engage with socially conscious Hip hop. However the number of YouTube hits for the Iraqi/English rapper, Lowkey as an example has amassed an enormous YouTube following. Despite the fact that many of his tracks such as ‘*Obamanation*’ and ‘*Long Live Palestine*’ were banned from mainstream t.v. he got views on both numbering in the millions. If one wanted to look at Arabic Hip hop simply go to sites such as <http://revolutionaryarabrap.blogspot.ie/> to see its growing popularity, where you can hear Hip hop sometimes from people who have to hide their identity for fear of government reprisal. You could literally go around much of the globe and see the scope that Hip hop is having in marginalised communities, in John J. Crocitti’s book entitled ‘Brazil Today: An Encyclopaedia of Life in the Republic, Volume 1’, he argues that ‘Hip hop gained a foothold in Brazil when rap music and breakdancing became popular in the slums of Sao Paulo. Today, these styles of music not only encompass dances but also include an entire set of values, thereby representing a cultural movement{ ... } Hip hop lyrics more typically express political themes and address social problems while eschewing glorification of conspicuous luxury, misogyny and crime’. (Crocitti, 2012; 94)

The movements whether in the Arab world or Brazil seem to be returning to original community orientated *Fight the Power* type Hip hop which Public Enemy and Grandmaster Flash were promoting? This thesis works closely with Irish MC’s who have for over a decade been at the helm of this battle against greed through both their music and activism, who have

been members of the before mentioned movement in Occupy along with others. Their local popularity is unquestionable but they are also beginning to grow in popularity globally with Working Class Artists supporting world renowned acts such as Wu-Tang Clan, Nas, Melly Mel, Damien Dempsey, and Glen Hansard to name a few.

While Hip hop has certainly been repackaged in the mainstream as something solely focused on misogyny, violence and wealth accumulation, in actuality it could not be further from its definition. Let us look at KRS-One's (a recognised godfather of the genre's) widely accepted definition of the term Hip hop and the origin of the term within the urban black dictionary;

"Hip means to know

It's a form of intelligence

To be hip is to be up-date and relevant

Hop is a form of movement

You can't just observe a hop

You got to hop up and do it

Hip and Hop is more than music

Hip is the knowledge

Hop is the movement

Hip and Hop is intelligent movement

Or relevant movement

We selling the music." KRS-One

This notion of intelligent movement must be at the forefront of any activism and as community educators it is imperative that we try to empower members of our community through pedagogical methods which participants can relate to. Although there is little to no scholarly research on Hip hop in an Irish context, this research reaffirms previous

international studies on the genre which see's Hip hop as a reflection of the social, economic, political, and cultural realities and conditions of many youths. While a lot of music which falls under the umbrella of Hip hop is listened to by many young people from many social classes around the world, (as can be seen by the hundreds of millions of albums sold annually around the globe; see The Nielsen Company & Billboard's 2012 Music Industry Report online) , it seems to be working class children who not only listen to the socially conscious stream of the genre but absorb it as it is often a rare acknowledgement of their day to day reality. It engages with them from an inside out approach in a language and manner they understand. Due to the longevity and the importance that Hip hop has had and is continuing to have within global and Irish youth culture, it cannot be dismissed as merely a passing fad or as a youth movement that will soon run its course. It is a musical form which is offering alternative accounts of the actuality of life at a time when reality for many is being shaped by people who have a disproportionate access to mediums of communication. Here is a verse from one of my interviewees MC Costello giving his slant on the state of affairs discussed in the opening of this thesis;

*'Wana know why there's so many people starving in poverty?, superpowers claimed the earth and carved it into colonies, plenty earth's resources to start their economies, but in the school books it aint regarded as robbery, why would our slave masters want ya to see it from that angle, cover your ears up if the truths something that you can't handle, child molestation political scandals, over a million accounts if I was to give an example, sitting with candles and hope to god that we end this corruption, I promise to never fold to the mental seduction, lust and greed are bad energies that men are indulging, open your eyes to perceive coz in the end what's resulting, and producing a population that shows no decency, keeps this planet vibrating at low frequency, till the revolution comes I flow frequently, knowing that when its time to die I'll go peacefully, get in touch with my soul as I blow greenery, a natural herb in*



*this age we can't grow legally, we've lost touch with the stars sun and the moon, have our brain warped with that box in the room, cause our minds our intercepting the signal from satellites, knowing are food is processed I'm losing me appetite, medias telling lies, to numb us with fear, pharmaceutical companies producing government gear, I'm happy with the work that we've done in a year, but me hearts broke seeing how people struggling here, if ya trace the problem right back to the source, evil cowards brought hell to earth with no remorse, I'm sick to me stomach we aint change it yet, I'll lay me life down before I feel the pain of death, soon enough I bet they'll try and make us pay for breath, we'll take the steps to justice to remain a threat, we're blind as we live our lives day to day, born into this world as naked slaves, what makes us so afraid to try and make a change, push the door to freedom gotta pave the way, working class, rest in peace lunatic'. (Costello; L.A.B sessions)*

## 1.2: My relationship with Hip hop: Knowledge is Power



(Picture: *Myself debating against a motion at USI congress to move away from 'free fees' stance*)

**‘History is written by the victor, and the songs by the losers’; Franke Harte**

“[T]he more one is conscious of one's political bias, the more chance one has of acting politically without sacrificing one's aesthetic and intellectual integrity.”(Orwell, 1946) I would have to agree wholly with Orwell in this view and shall briefly outline my position and relationship with Hip hop prior to the commencement of this work. I was brought up and still live in a working class area in west Dublin in a house where folk music and sessions were common occurrences throughout my childhood and immediately became intrigued by story tellers within music. Upon reflection it could be argued that these early ballad sessions instilled within me a great appreciation for descriptive narratives within music. This tradition of ballad sessions within many working class communities has often served as a means of communicating an aural history throughout different generations and my experience was no different. I am sure that the knowledge bestowed onto me in relation to both Irish and global

history from the various musicians and poets in these formidable years has unquestionably shaped my outlook on the planet immensely, such is the power of music.

The anti colonial sentiment and tales of old Dublin would have a great impact on how I formulated my identity and the politics to which I would align myself to in later life. From around the age of nine my taste in music began to shift from folk to the fast paced lyrically based genre of hip hop music which appealed to me as it fused storytelling with up tempo beats and had an alluring aesthetic which I found intriguing. The tales within the music resonated greatly with me even at this early age as the artists would often speak of contemporary issues which although in ghettos of the US had remarkable similarities with my own area and to which I could relate. Themes such as poverty, struggle, drug addiction, violence, and resentment to state institutions such as the police (or Gardai) were all familiar to me then and I clung to the music as a new found source of release. Whilst my fixation on Hip hop itself would be constant right up until the present, preferable styles and artists would be in a constant state of flux and in many ways can be directly linked and related to the different periods of my life.

Like many I began listening to the commercial rap artists at about the age of nine, who were *everywhere* throughout my childhood. This commercial or *gangsta* Hip hop had dedicated shows on MTV, occupied covers and entire sections of Music Magazines and had radio shows dedicated solely to the sub-genre. This gargantuan exposure has had the effect of Hip hop as a whole being branded *gangsta* (when in actuality it could not be further from the truth as it is merely one prong of Hip hop despite its heavy corporate financiers presenting it as such). Upon entry to my early teens my taste in rappers would change greatly and I became aligned to more socially conscious artists whose content I found to be far more insightful and rebellious. Whilst my preference would shift greatly throughout adolescence there remained a great fixation on every facet of Hip hop which was throughout my schooling undoubtedly the

most popular genre of music amongst my peers. One simply needed to attend any disco to see the impact this transatlantic genre was having on the dress sense, walk and even language or slang of the majority of young people in attendance who immolated their new found hero's. The impact of the genre on my generation and youth culture today remains immense and unavoidable and whilst evidently not cross generational to begin with, I believe it has retained many fans who began listening to it when the phenomenon hit initially and still listen to it to today, if nightclubs and college discos are anything to go by. My personal journey would see me move from US based artists such as 2pac and Nas, to English MC's like Lowkey and Akala and of course today to Irish MC's such as MC Costello and MC Lunitic and it is these Irish Artists and their influence on the younger generation which will be at the core of the analysis of this thesis.

Whilst I have always been a fan, I have also been a practitioner of Hip hop for some years now and today utilise the genre in motivational talks entitled *Knowledge is Power* which I have ran out in dozens of Secondary schools and Universities across Ireland throughout the past two years. It was these engagements and the positive feedback from them which brought about this thesis and a belief that more scholarly research into the influence of hip hop in Ireland is essential. Tricia Rose in 1994 spoke of the impact that Hip hop was having in communities in New York at the time, 'Rap music and hip hop culture are cultural, political, and commercial forms, and for many young people they are the primary cultural, sonic and linguistic windows on the world.' (Rose, 1994:8) It is the ethos and themes within this early/old school Hip hop which has inspired me and many of my interviewees to use the medium of Hip hop to convey messages of a cultural and political nature to the listener.

During my talks which are designed to promote education or knowledge as *sexy*, I utilise lyrics and artists within Hip hop to promote the idea that understanding the world is a prerequisite to a happy life. I speak of my own life experience and interactions with

institutions such as school to try and explain that formal education and the content within is merely one dimension of education and one should strive to be the smartest, most knowledgeable person that one can be. It is my opinion that working class children are more dangerous to any state apparatus or unequal system when intelligent and informed. They will not be hoodwinked by those in power. One of my recent talks took place in St Marks Community College, (a VEC school in Tallaght Dublin), After addressing roughly 700 school children, broken into two groups of 350. I delivered a speech entitled 'Get Educated', I spoke for about 20 minutes about the importance of knowledge of self with regard personal happiness. I was invited along with Irish athlete Brian Gregan and Dublin Football All-Star Michael Dara Mac Auley who were to talk about personal motivation in achieving ones goals. I spoke of education as a rebellious act as opposed to it being an act of conforming. It is rebellious in the sense that when one is informed then you are naturally empowered by way of choice, in the ability to choose to agree or disagree with anything that is taught or told to you within school or out of school.

My argument, to steal a Shakespearian observation is that life is but a game and every person is an actor with their part to play, and from this vantage point I laid out a question to the participants as to who shall determine *their* part or role in this game? The talks try to dismiss the notion that education or knowledge is a luxury afforded solely to the rich or nerdy, and that this widespread belief is simply an illusion created to limit the life prospects of many in our society. If one wants to 'peep the game of life', then it is imperative that you are able to critically engage with structures and ideologies which govern our day to day lives and this is only possible through knowledge. Not to dismiss the real structural constraints on many working class children in relation to access to certain educational institutions which see's an ever increasing gulf between third level fee's and the grants available for example, or the fact that wealthier children are granted a head start as they may afford private schooling and

grinds. Also the fact that there is are major class biases within much of the curriculum which many will find difficult to grasp or relate to, but this is one prong of understanding life and indeed one aspect of education as we must strive to have a knowledge of self, street smarts and a spiritual sense of being. These facts are real and cannot be ignored but these are the challenges we are faced with and must be overcome by any means necessary, and whilst we are overcoming them we will fight then to try and eradicate them. And they can be overcome, and through gaining insight to the world we gain confidence and the power to question and subsequently resist. Artists like Akala who often espouse these truths in his music also runs community based programmes throughout London with this ethos as their guiding principles; ‘The Shakespeare Hip hop Company’ which he established in 2009 has in its mission statement:

*Via our education programme we deliver workshops and residencies delivered by THSC’s Artist Associates (supported by THSC Peer Leaders) to educate and engage young people at schools, youth theatre’s and various youth organisations who may not ordinarily be interested in Shakespeare and his work by demonstrating how modern hip-hop shares many similarities with the themes, language and rhythm used by The Bard. Our workshops aim to encourage young people to develop new skills in performing arts by getting them excited about words and rhyming, and thus gain a positive experience of Shakespeare, music, literature and the arts.*

*We aim to help young people build their self-confidence and unlock their creative and artistic abilities by having them write and perform their own poetic lyrical reinterpretations based on Shakespeare’s works, providing a platform to showcase their own creative ideas with the support and guidance from leading music and theatre industry professionals.*

These workshops are similar to those that are run by Dean Scurry and the MC's at Workin Class who through Hip hop workshops throughout Ballymun attempt to increase the critical faculties and consciousness of the youngsters involved while improving their literacy and appreciation for writing and reading. Last year as President of the Students Union in Maynooth, I promoted the ideas of CEESA and extensively debated issues around the island predominantly geared around equity of access to third level, student fees and the pedagogical approach to education in Ireland again constantly falling back on my Hip hop education for guidance. In the spirit of Orwell I shall declare that my position was/is simple, education is a human right and should be promoted as such, in line with access to food and shelter and that currently in Ireland we have an approach to education which continues to fail many in our society as we adopt a corporate classroom organisational approach. Corporate classroom organization occurs when students and teachers are involved with subject matter and functioning that follows a factory or production mode of social interaction. The primary goal in corporate classes is to maintain order and to achieve specific results, such as scores on achievement tests. The antithesis such as Akala's THSC would see Communal classrooms involve students and teachers working with subject matter through interactions that focus on interpersonal relationships, community and the collective betterment of the group. This approach adopted by Akala's Hip hop Shakespeare Company is also being utilised in specific settings across the globe and in Dublin.

Dean Scurry who has been my gatekeeper upon this voyage into the Irish Hip hop scene is someone who adopts a very similar approach to THSC in the workshops that he runs in Ballymun. Dean has ran Hip hop workshops in the Axis centre and in other centres for many years now in which he and his MC's engage with groups of up to 15 young people promoting self expression through Hip hop, which '*raises consciousness and increases the critical faculties within the kids*' (Dean). The most recent programme which is being funded by the

Arts Council is a music mentorship workshop for budding Irish hip-hop performers. Mark O'Brien, the director of Axis, said: "Hip-hop has been a central part of [the] Axis music programme both from a concert and developmental point of view over the last number of years. Workin' Class Records recently had a residency here and Lethal Dialect is resident in our music studios at present completing his latest album. This new opportunity is the next phase of our continuing work in this area and we look forward to the outcomes." The initiative is an opportunity for hip-hop artists who are at the beginning of their careers to learn about their craft but also is an opportunity for many youngsters to learn the skills of writing and public speaking.

Through Dean I have been introduced to many Hip hop artists in the Irish scene including Jambo, 4real, Costello, Willa Lee, MissElayneous, Lethal Dialect, GI,DJ Moschops and Linko and wanted to discover what Hip hop meant to those who are dedicating their lives to this music. I not only conducted interviews but also was brought to recording and photo shots, hung out in different settings and witnessed firsthand the very real relationship between the artists and their fan base. My major interest was in the content that they covered in their music and their motivation for embarking in often lifelong journeys with this music. DJ Moschops in a verse he spat on the L.A.B sessions last year highlights the depth of issues which are covered within the tunes:

*'Fire blazing, star gazing, earths rotation, like a vinyl in the basement, deep and dusty like pyramid excavation, revealing truths to the nation, redemption, song of the long lost drum, and the boy who lost his mom, times are hard but people carry on, a beast aint afraid of dying, so why are we afraid of the government lying, tell me that ill raise a glass to it, half full the other half's in me stomach pit, before it turns to piss, and that's my physical, I'm representing on the spiritual, here and now is what we're living through, take the beautiful and horrible, balance, energy on canvas, stepping out of time, creating timeless, and that's*



*how high I get, but I know I see the lows again, just like the tides of the ocean friend, its hard for you to comprehend, the depths of your taught if that's sinking in, trapped in a skull, blinking and escaping your visions, but your part of a being that's not divided by blood and skin, see how a flock of birds switches in an instant, can it be explained or is part of natures rhythm, what, it was a given, we're pushed into the distance, locked into the mind like a criminal in prison, can we rise like the sun, over the tempered we've become, and build a better world for our daughters and our sons, you know in your heart what is wrong, the system is corrupt and thats why I wrote this song, and I'm a sing it till my tongue bleeds, and weeds grow in the streets of the drug fiends, and food blossoms on the trees of the hungry, real people break free changing the cycles of history, working class records doing it every day, we don't sleep'. (Moschops; L.A.B sessions)*

### 1.3: From Brooklyn to Ballymun



(Picture:4real, G.I and MC Costello of *Street Literature* in front of Ballymun Flats)

In 1994, Tricia Rose explained how rap's power was not limited to the US where it had since the 1980's the 'ability to draw the attention of the nation,{but it also had the ability} to attract crowds around the world in places where English is rarely spoken which is a fascinating element of rap's social power'. (Rose:1994: 8) Although Rose was very aware of the fact that some of this power is linked to US-based cultural imperialism which facilitates a disproportionate exposure of US artists around the world which is facilitated by the marketing muscle afforded to music industry she believes there is more to the appeal. Rose argues in her critically acclaimed book *Black Noise*, 'that the powerful conglomeration of voices from the margins of American society speaking about the terms of that position' equally draws in international spectators. And that 'rap music, like many powerful black cultural forms before it, resonates for people from vast and diverse backgrounds'. (Rose,

1994; 8) At its humble beginning this genre was used as a means to allow a disenfranchised and disillusioned Black youth population in the United States an opportunity to express their disgruntlement at an unfair power structure which saw an inherently racist and unequal system perpetuate inequality. Marable speaks of how hip hop forged its authentic progressive spirit in a ‘crucible of suffering’. Its ‘cultural forms’ were shaped amid the ‘economic and political turmoil’ of 1970s New York (Marable, 2003: 263)

Rose looking back almost two decades later would tragically concede that ‘Hip hop is not dead but it is gravely ill. The beauty and life force of hip hop have been squeezed out, wrung nearly dry by the compounding factors of commercialism, distorted racial and sexual fantasy, oppression and alienation. It has been a sad thing to witness. I am not prone to nostalgia but will admit, with self-conscious wistfulness, that I remember when Hip hop was a locally inspired explosion of exuberance and political energy tethered to the idea of rehabilitating community’ (Rose, 2011). This quote from Tricia Rose in her most recent book *‘The Hip hop Wars: what we talk about when we talk about Hip hop- and why it matters’*, is reflecting back on the period between her first book *Black Noise* back in 1994 and the aforementioned published in 2011, and the changes that she has witnessed in relation to Hip hop in the United States as she sees it throughout that period. However, this notion of Hip hop being a ‘locally inspired explosion of exuberance and political energy tethered to the idea of rehabilitating community’ (while tragically lacking in the US hip hop scene), is exactly how I would sum up the Workin Class movement in Dublin’s north side. Lethal Dialect explained how he believed we were *‘living in a golden age at the minute for Irish hip hop and a lot of people don’t even realise it. I think we will look back in a few years and say remember when he did that album and he that album. And they might be considered the classics because we never really had our 90’s era so I think that is now like. Sure when all the hip hop that was coming out of the country was intended almost to be mainstream or novelty, we all came out with the*

*intention to stay a million miles away from that and made stuff that was totally on the opposite side of the spectrum.... stuff that was underground, stuff that was serious and we were putting substance in it.'* (L.D)

According to Charlotte Pence in her thesis, 'The poetics of American Song Lyrics', she asserts that 'thanks to the engines of global commerce, rap is now the most widely disseminated poetry in the history of the world'. This is indeed a farfetched claim in so far as who defines poetry and how does one possibly measure the consumption of all written works across the globe. However, it is worth noting that Nielsen Company Billboard's 2012 Music Industry Report which can be found online lists Hip hop albums sales for the past two years at a staggering 208.6 million units which highlights just how commercially lucrative the genre has become. Penny also argues that 'of course, not all rap is great poetry, but collectively it has revolutionized the way our culture relates to the spoken word. Rappers at their best make the familiar unfamiliar through rhythm, rhyme, and wordplay. They refresh the language by fashioning patterned and heightened variations of everyday speech. They expand our understanding of human experience by telling stories we might not otherwise hear. We ignore them at our own expense' (Pence: 2012). I will not be stating the commercial success of certain Hip hop as a source of validity for Hip hop as a revolutionary force but simply highlighting that there is a huge market for this genre. In fact the lads that I have studied were all initially exposed to '*the usual stuff*' as Linco explained in our interview but soon '*realised there was alot more to it than just the gansta gangsta shit*'. (Costello) In fact there appears to be a great deal of animosity toward the music industry which is pumping out this one branch of Hip hop by the lads who have repeated '*fuck the industry, that shower would suck the life outta ya*'. (Costello)

Hip hop has been described as a 'complex, riveting mixture of sound, rhythm, dress, attitude and poetics has become a universal, underground culture for youth resistance around the

globe'.(Mc Broom, 2000) And this sentiment is still as true today in Dublin as it was fourteen years ago when Broom wrote it. The fact that the University of Arizona in the US introduced a minor Africana studies with concentration in hip-hop cultures in 2012, and last year ran a successful symposium to look into impact that hip-hop has had in shaping 'local, national, regional and global issues is a further testament to a recognition of the global reach of the music.'By looking at hip-hop in a global context', they argue that 'we can reframe our understanding of the history of hip-hop not only by examining its global, trans-Atlantic roots, but also by looking at its appeal for many cultures in which there is an ambivalence about assimilation and difference," said Melillo, one of the event organizers. The findings of such a study would make for excellent reading; alas it is much too far a stretch for the purposes of this work.

What I can highlight however in relation to the global strength of the genre is that we have 'MCs in Brazil rapping in Portuguese over the berimbau, multilingual MCs in Copenhagen expressing themselves in English, Danish and Arabic, Iranian MCs like Hickas speaking in Farsi, telling tales of the everyday struggle in Tehran and French-Congolese rappers like Bajoli addressing one of the largest conflicts of the 20th century in his home nation, a conflict all but ignored by the world's "traditional" media. As far afield as Vietnam and Mongolia you can find paintings of the bat-like "W" symbol of, perhaps, hip-hop's most poetic collective, the Wu-Tang Clan'.(Akala, 2011) Akala further explains how each 'branch of this worldwide family brings its own specific stories and cultural reference points to the movement and it has happened because of the inherent democratic values of the genre and how adaptable and open-minded it is as a cultural world view'.(Akala, 2011). This is no different in Ireland, and this thesis researches how some of Irelands most recognisable Hip hop artists came to get involved with this youth culture. Through interviews and observation, I explore what Hip hop means to those involved in this relatively underground scene and what they want to achieve

with regard Hip hop. Workin Class Records based but not exclusive to Ballymun is at the centre of the research. Irish Hip hop is starting to receive more kudos abroad now and as Linco stated in our interview *'there's all these heads that are starting to notice it, people across the sea, look at the exchange of Europe hip hop sure and Irish hip hop is one of the strongest at the moment, and that's what a lot of heads have said that aren't from here, sure just check out the comments on the videos that are like 'I'm from Minnesota and this shits way better than what's coming out in America today'(Linco)*

Gimme A Reason

(Lunitic)

Gimme A Reason why the world is filled with sadness and sorrow,  
I can only imagine known that your child might be dead tomorrow,  
From lack of food or diseases like aids,  
Very little is done and so little are saved,  
If every government pulled together to help in every way,  
There'd be less people dying in Africa every single day,  
But the greedy get richer, don't look at the big picture,  
Sit in a warm office and upgrade their bank figures,  
On home soil, while kids are walking the streets, far from discreet,  
never knowin where their gonna sleep, or when they might eat,  
and what's fucked up is,  
all of this is completely normal to all of these kids,  
a fella aged 12 killed himself tonight,  
cuz he uncle liked to touch him and say it was alright,  
Gimme a reason cuz me heads about to crack,  
I talk to danny every day but now he doesn't talk back

(Costello)

Looking over this worlds history, harsh stories of injustice,  
Mans will corrupted makes it hard for our own god to even trust us,  
Genocides with innocent people being butchered,  
This world is a place where billions of souls have experienced life and suffered,  
Realising how our society was structured,  
Europeans took over the whole world and lay waste to some beautiful cultures,  
Dwelling on it all tryna understand the basics,  
Why theres so much racists spreading hatred, rapists stripping women naked,  
The righteous people being shackled with metal bracelets,  
Life the most beautiful thing in existence is idly being wasted,  
Gets too much some times for me mind to take it,  
Return to me higher form so i can see it on a universal basis,  
Ya think we do this music to be famous,  
Our main objective is to be effective and try to bring about some changes,  
With all the shit that going on no wonder people atheist,  
But that's what gives me a reason to try and replace the faith in yiz

(G.I.)

Gimme a reason why these people are screaming,  
In agony cuz their bleeding just because what they believe in,

Whether its allah or jesus, while diseases increasing,  
Over the needles their fiending people need pieces to sleep with,  
So much misery creeping, they say imprisonment weakens,  
The broken syllables deepen, for the kids that need treatment,  
Cuz their sick a been beating, nightmares overpower their dreaming,  
Some grab a rope for their last hour of breathing,  
I blame the ones who are leading for leaving our own on the streets,  
Hungry and freezing, now the currencies needed,  
Recession plummeting people,  
Were the lower class they don't give a fuck how were feeling,  
drugs have to come from somewhere for the smugglers to deal it,  
Newspapers publishing tragedies, more or less punishing families,  
Just to supplement casualties, just the worlds fucked up mentality,  
Having me stuck in a fucking fantasy

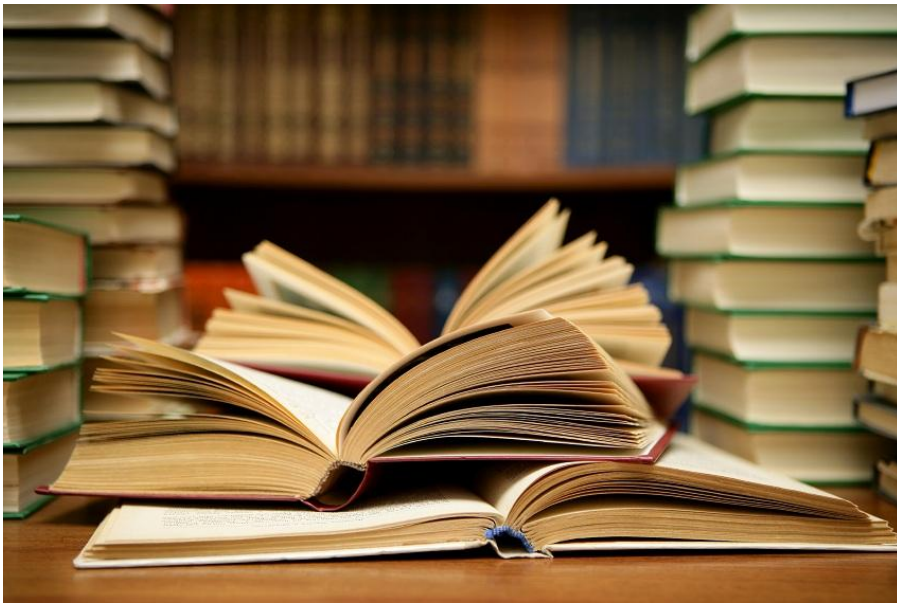
(4Real)

I try and come to some sort of realisation,  
Truth is devastating its hard to find something to keep your faith in,  
Some people think they own the streets, others have their own beliefs,  
Do I have to blow myself to pieces for you to notice me,  
So much evil in the world i wonder where the fucks the good,  
Then again I couldn't care less wonder if I even should,  
They say to keep me faith in god would ya stop,  
I lost that when they start putting perverts in the confession box,  
I see some of the boys I used to be getting fed with,  
Smoking spliffs at the back of the sheds and breaking heads with,  
And they don't even recognise me now I'm like a stranger,  
Still debating on whether to give em that score till later,  
Its helping em to his grave sure,  
The boys had 2 choices smoke the dirty shit or sell it end up doing it major,  
Reality at times would make you sick to your stomach,  
humanity be wiped out with just the push of a button,  
Gimme A Reason

(Street Literature: Gimme a Reason; [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFa\\_y5Cegpk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFa_y5Cegpk) )



## Chapter Two: Literature review



In this chapter I will look to situate my research within some of the existing literature in a bid to provide context. As the research is a pioneer in relation to Irish Hip hop, it seeks to justify the study as a legitimate source of academic study also.

## 2.1: The story of a Community



(Picture: *Ballymun Flats with Maser's art work on the side to mark the knocking of the towers*)

Margaret Ledwith's *A Critical Approach to Community Development* is intended for practitioners within the field of community work. Community development according to Ledwith must be grounded in people's everyday lives. Ledwith adopts a Freirean pedagogical approach to understanding community profiling and explains how 'a critical approach to community work calls for insight into the power structures that influence that reality, and one way of beginning that process is the community profile'. In Freirean pedagogy, 'this begins in the narratives of the people and is set within an analysis of poverty as a structural discrimination'. (Ledwith: 2005: 31) Workin' Class Records which was began back in 2003 has since the outset set about facilitating a space where its artists can speak of issues impacting on their lived experiences and within their songs often detail aspects of the community they live in. Dean Scurry who established the label was working with gangs as a Youth and Community worker at the time (and still does today), and explained that he saw

*'One of the pinnacles of youth work is that you would help and support young people to become self aware and critical analysers of society and their role in civic society and I think that this is what this hip hop is doing.'* (Dean)

Ledwith asserts that at the very outset, the process of community development 'lies in listening, valuing and understanding people's particular experience' (Ledwith: 2005). One of the first groups under the label were Urban Intelligence who began channelling their lived experiences with a grimy underground sound which conveyed starkly the reality facing themselves and many youths within their area of Ballymun. They convey both a sense of frustration and anger at the fact that they see future prospects for many to be greatly limited, *'we live in dark times, crippled with poverty, people held back by their own criminology, another robbery, on the local shops, robbed cars ripping around people killed on the blocks, Ballymun's a pressure pot, just waiting to let off steam, youngfella's dying before they get to their teens, or they make it but don't get to see nineteen, it seems mean, but this society is twisted'* (Urban Intelligence: Underworld) There are many other tracks which negotiate the options which confront these young MC's in their day to day life upon entering their adolescent with regard the constant temptation to enter into a negative lifestyle which *'is just outside your front door'* (Costello) as a means to alleviate poverty.

If one watched *The Wire*, you see how David Simon highlights the attraction with regard entering criminality or drug dealing if there appears to be little to no alternatives by way of opportunities in relation to getting money. Simon explained in a commentary track that *'institutions have an effect on individuals. Whether one is a cop, a longshoreman, a drug dealer, a politician, a judge or a lawyer, all are ultimately compromised and must contend with whatever institution to which they are committed'* (Simon: 2005) This notion of being compromised translates as much in Dublin as Baltimore and is something which runs throughout many tracks by our MC's who often lay out scenarios which they have witnessed

or been part of and the different outcomes when one does enter this world or breaks bad. In 4reals solo track entitled 'The Drop', he deals with the notion of fast money through moving large quantities of drugs, *'As I assumed it was routine, get a few keys drop it off, get me money that will do me'*, however the track goes on to describe a situation where our protagonist is set up and concludes with, *'it's easy money till your set up'*, as you will undoubtedly serve time behind bars. Lethal Dialect explained in our interview that rappers take different personas in their songs, and while *'they are usually the ones that are doing the action, sometimes the honest ones might be on the other side of the robbery or that'*(L.D). He put in plain words how *'Listening to the stories in Hip hop educates you, even if you don't live around that sort of stuff, it will educate you on what really goes on, telling ya the story of how they{the MC or character within the song} reacted to different scenarios* (L.D)

In relation to the prison population in Dublin, John Lonergan who was the governor in Mountjoy Prison for over two decades ,explained in a speech in 2010 how a 1996 report into the prison demographic highlighted that *'six little pockets in Dublin supply 75% of all Dublin born prisoners{...}, tiny little areas within six separate postal districts... so we could identify very clearly where these black spots are'* with Ballymun being one of them.(<http://www.dublincitypubliclibraries.com/john-lonergan-transcript>) His efforts to further the research in 2006 met with a refusal for funding by the minister of justice. It is no surprise that this high level of incarceration is coupled with worrying statistics in relation to both educational attainment and also drug addiction.

A Ballymun Community Case study carried out in 2006, highlighted more harrowing statistics which confronted many children growing up in the area, that between 1998-2001, that *'Ballymun, along with the Ballyfermot and Canal Communities Task Force Areas, had the highest rates of opiate-related deaths for the reporting period, approximately 16 times the rate experienced in areas of Dublin not designated as task force areas* (Long et al 2005:43)

This makes it almost impossible for youngsters growing up not to know someone who has over-dosed or someone addicted to drugs and so the stories within the music can often be very personal. MC Lunitic's track Stacy's Story in his album 'Based on a True Story', tells the distressing story of *Stacy* who after suffering extreme abuse runs away from home, a home where *'she suffered in silence, she'd rather escape to the streets than suffer all the violence'*. It details her experiences on the street and her mental decline from an initial sense of freedom or escape to alienation, poverty and desperation. *'The rain pours as she sits with her cup, she's had enough, but the hunger won't let her give up, the weather gets too much, so she goes to a bus shelter, and cries out loud wishing somebody would come and help her, she's at the end of her wits nothing can bring hope, two months on the streets and she finally broke, Stacey wanted to escape she couldn't live on with this fear, with the money she gathered she bought gear'*(Lunitic: Stacy's Story). The track goes on to show her sharp fall into addiction and writing from the perception of Stacy, it's hard not to have a great sympathy for the young protagonist within the rhyme whose life story is one of pain and abuse. It portrays the human element which must be always taken into account when we look at the issue of drug abuse. It also highlights how one can fall susceptible to such a hazardous drug as heroin, and in many ways acts as a counter argument to the hackneyed trite around personal responsibility for drug use as a life choice.

Whilst people die due to drug overdoses, there is also the element of crime which comes along with it. This element is also tackled on the tracks by the Artists at Workin' Class. If one looks at the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime report, 2000 to 2010, which is easily accessible online we see stark results for Dublin which showed 27 recognised homicides in the city in 2003 when the label began. These numbers increase to over 30 for many of the years after, which consistently rank Dublin at wrong end of the European table of City Homicide per 100,000. To give some contrast in the years 2005 and 2006, the figures equate

to 2.8 and 2.7 per 100,000 which is a higher rate to London whose numbers in the same years were 2.4 and 2.2 respectively. Street literature who are another group under Workin' Class in their track, Deep End, explain the attitude of those involved within the game. *'Pushers pullin products, pickin up different profits, Picking on others pockets, pick up a gun and cock it, if someone trys to stop it, they just lock it and pop it, Get the cream by any means keep the streets hopping'*(Street Literature: Deep End). So with all this negativity which surrounds the youth in the area and which they speak of within their tracks, Hip hop is serving as an avenue to channel creatively some of the real dangerous issues which confront them. Dean explained, that Hip hop is definitely having a positive influence in steering people away from crime as it is *'building confidence, openness through an acceptance of unpolished creativity; and it is starting to create a strong sense of community for some people in the area that I live in'* (Dean)

Nodlag Houlighan Spoke about a young 14 year old lad named Nathan who appears at the beginning of her documentary Broken Song, she explained that his *'older brother was shot in some drug related issue'* but how he often of his own accord seeks advice from GI(Workin Class MC) quite regularly to talk about issues that face him. In the Documentary we see him discussing Finglas to GI and Costello and then spitting a rhyme *'all those guys they do whatever they want and they sell drugs or whatever they want. They live by one rule they don't know it but I do, it's that if you can't find something to live for you best find something to die for'*. Nodlag would say that *'it might sound a bit simplistic except he has really lived this and here he is actively going out and asking the lads, 'will you talk to me about this?, will you talk to me about writing?'*, and then he expresses something in his writing which *actually happened to him in his real life{in relation to} that kind of really negative stuff. He is saying to the lads I don't want to be like this I want to be like this and verbalising it through his music almost exactly like that'*(Nodlag)

## **Music and Crime: Street Literature**

*Its like me life split into 2 sections,  
Instead of making drug investments, I took music as a preference,  
Took the right turn the right direction,  
Fuck chopping white stuff I think I'll just write stuff,  
Play the cards with a nice bluff, seen some nice muff in New York,  
Shit you should see how long the flight took,  
I let the mic bust, till the mic rust,  
If I hada taken that left me life's fucked,  
Probably would a been in tight cuffs taken couple right hooks,  
Off a tight slut not polite but... fuck it,  
I got the opportunity to dodge selling sniff so I took it,  
This music I love it, teaching the ways of street literature to all the crooked,  
Put it however way ya wanna put it, this is the way we gonna run it,  
Educating up and comings on the route they should be running,  
Make your choice its crime to the left music to the right*

## 2.2: The Sense of Belonging



*(Picture: On the left side; MC Lunitic. On the right side; a gathering of Workin Class Friends to celebrate his life)*

It would be this notion of getting perspective from those on the ground which motivated me to take on the interview led qualitative research as I saw a great value in understanding the Hip hop artist's subjective realities. I wanted to conduct my research *with* these people as opposed to *on* them. The importance of inclusion or involvement of people within the research is therefore of major importance throughout the research. A prime example of this is that if one chooses to simply look at reports such as those touched upon in the last section, it would paint just one side of a story, one of pain and anger. Whilst we have touched on some of the more negative issues in relation to drugs and criminology in the previous sub section I think that it is important to highlight the fact that there remains a lot of pride in the area amongst residents. And whilst there is a lot of angry sentiment and frustration expressed within the music and interviews towards the many issues facing residents, there is also a lot



of pride which can be easily overlooked. In a study on children and inner city council estates Raey and Lucey (2000) found that people can have conflicting feelings of belonging and abhorrence for the place in which they live. This is reflected in the title of their piece in which they use a child's quote to sum up their research, "I don't really like it here but I don't want to be anywhere else" (Raey and Lucey, 2000). This reveals the extent to which the connection between place and identity can be problematic for some communities. This is extremely relevant as our MC's often '*rep for Blanch, Finglas and Ballymun*' (Costello: Representatives) within their tracks and take great pride in their the area from which they hail from.

Equally it should be noted that while there is a definite consistency throughout my research in relation to the many issues which need addressing in Ballymun, this is generally followed with a sense of place amongst the lads whom I researched. The anger coming out in the lyrics and interviews is primarily directed at government and decision makers who are deemed to have neglected tackling the many concerns raised in the tunes as opposed to full out attacks on the community itself or the people within it. '*There are guys in government doing jobs that they are not connected with at all only to collect a paycheck at the end of the week*' (Dean). Dean who has worked for many years in the community explains that regeneration or the gentrification which has been going on in the area over the past decade or so, has predominantly seemed to serve interests outside of the community and has seemed to wreak chaos for the people within the community. This can be seen in the building site like environment which has ensued since its beginning. The sense of nihilism which can be expressed within the music is real and exists yet contradictorily or in opposition to this the sense of pride or closeness' to the community remains evidently strong when one visits the area or speaks with any of the MC's.

When I was attending a viewing of Broken Song for example within the axis centre in Ballymun, it was really quite uplifting. The auditorium was full to capacity, almost exclusively with local people, family and friends of the artists involved and I was immediately struck at the warmth within the room. The documentary which won multiple awards at the Jameson Film festival and ran for close to two weeks in IFI was purposely screened in the Axis centre to ‘bring it back to the community’ (Nodlag). After the screening there was a prolonged standing ovation which was followed by a live performance and a Q and A session which showed to anyone in attendance what such an event meant to everyone in attendance. Questions ran for over an hour and a half and you genuinely got the feeling that it could have went on all night, if the buildings staff didn’t need to go home! When we exited the building we remained outside for over an hour as a rhyming session kicked off, with younger kids literally queuing up to show their new lyrics to the MC’s who were in the show. It was truly one of those uplifting things to be a part of. This spontaneous rhyme session which seemed extremely random was in fact quite a common occurrence, and Nodlag explained to me how throughout recording that these types of sessions would often take place with whoever was around. This is reflected in the documentary as on numerous occasions we see people approaching the artists involved to ask them to give a listen to their rhymes.

The connection between place and identity is also known as ‘place attachment’. This refers to “the emotional bonds an individual feels to an area or place” (Livingston et al, 2008: 2). In their study of place attachment in deprived areas Livingston et al suggest that it plays two important roles:

1. Encourages individuals to remain longer in an area, helping to stabilise the neighbourhood and promote the development of social networks.
2. Encourages people to engage positively in the area in informal and formal ways.

(Livingston et al, 2008: 2).

I believe that while this could be contested in certain situations, particularly in Dublin where different government schemes such as rent to buy resulted in the loss of strong community members who moved to more affluent areas of the city. But when one looks at the valiant efforts made by the likes of Dean who runs both comedy and hip hop workshops, produces Dole TV and many other local initiatives and the dedication shown by members of the label to give their time to listen and help the younger lads, you begin to recognise some of what Livingston is stating as truth. In this track 'Dublin is the place', we see this notion just discussed of frustration at the conditions being forced on the community yet a definite sense of place attachment with anger being levelled at those who come from the outside to the area. There definitely exists a situation where the working-class participants certainly *do* care what other people think about them, however this seems to stem from an inability to access their own intellectual / educational institutions - which are both features of class power and what the Working Class lads are struggling to overcome.

*'Dublin is the place where my deals go down, so I've got to give it up for my home town, come around to the city everybody wants to be from, where's that place?, Dublin!, take a look around this place that use to be fun, I never taught I'd have to say goodbye to Ballymun, Flats are coming down, houses are being changed, their even thinking of giving Ballymun a different name, while this is going on we're growing up on a building site, have they any idea of what it's really like, I think not, they just turn up in their flash cars, and make decisions about this place of ours, and they head home to their lovely house in foxrock, while we've to live in this shite everyday, nonstop, we're blocked in by hoardings like animals, do they want us killed for example look at balcurras field , whats it gonna take before something is done, its the hardest thing I've ever done, to say goodbye to Ballymun'* (Urban Intelligence: Dublin is the place)

### 2.3: Understanding Experience



(Picture: *Street Literature*, with Costello, G.I and 4real in Ballymun 'post regeneration')

The Educational philosopher John Dewey wrote extensively on the concept of experiential learning. His work is helpful in developing a deeper theoretical understanding of what is meant by the term. Dewey posits two essential criteria of experience: continuity and interaction. The 'criteria of continuity' is, "the notion that experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:2). No experience occurs in isolation but rather is impacted by previous experience and affects future experience. Dewey's second criteria, 'the criteria of interaction' builds on the individual experience of the first and claims that experience is at once both personal and social. People exist in relation to others and therefore their experience is never entirely individual, "any normal experience is an interplay between the internal and the external forces" (Dewey, 1998: 42). Dewey's two criteria of experience are not distinct features but

rather they “intercept and unite” to create the whole experience (1998: 42).

*‘People judge these places and all they find, is high drug use, burnt cars and crime, bad state of mind, maybe your minds a state, selling drugs isn’t a choice but a chance to make, some money, no job the school couldn’t accept, a troubled teenager that faced neglect, of course he lacked respect, for these so called teachers, they said he’d never be shit, so he grew weaker, his hate increased and piece by piece became a beast, he lost his mind and felt deceased , I was lucky at least , I was given a chance, the choice I made helped me advance, and helped me glance past all the negativity and leave a life of crime for an urban symphony , next time before you judge consider the reality of what makes today’s youth have this mentality’:* MC

Lunitic

MC Lunitic in this track is conveying a very similar argument to Dewey ‘no experience occurs in isolation but rather is impacted by previous experience and affects future experience’. The criteria of continuity which Dewey speaks of can be seen in the *troubled teenager* who after being both neglected and made to feel as though he was worthless began to gradually become angrier at the world, and *piece by piece became a beast*. This point highlights the fact that our experiences shape our being and if negativity and criticism is all one knows then they will soon *feel deceased*, or dead inside. The point that Lunitic makes at the beginning of the verse suggests that the decision to sell drugs *isn’t a choice but a chance to make, some money*, which highlights the ‘interplay between the internal and the external forces’ at play which have limited the prospects of finding money through other means. Lunitic at the end of the verse explains how he *was given a chance*, or an opportunity to move beyond this situation through his exposure to music but doesn’t put it exclusively down to him being any better or worse than our drug dealer or mentally deranged characters within the verse but rather this interplay between the interior, in his personal choice in choosing music combined with the exterior which saw this option afforded to him.

## 2.4: The legitimacy of Hip Hop in scholarly research



(Picture: MC Costello, G.I and Willa Lee in Ballymun)

It could be argued that popular music can act as a veracious commentary on a society and its culture. It is also true that sometimes popular music is a mendacious commentary on both of these. I would argue though that whether it is fact or fiction that is being propagated through the medium of popular music, it must be critiqued and examined as any other popular form of communication would be. The messages which are coming out of this medium of communication should be scrutinised just as one would a news article or report as the information contained within tracks have an impact whether right or wrong in shaping hearts and minds. We must look at the power relationship contained within the music by looking at who musicians are targeting with their songs, what issues they are dealing with and most importantly who or what profits from particular musicians adopting a particular persona or approach to the music. Rose in 2011 argues that ‘Hip hop is in a terrible crisis. Although its

overall fortunes have risen sharply, the most commercially promoted and financially successful hip hop- that has dominated mass media outlets such as television, film, radio, and recording industries for a dozen years or so- has increasingly become a playground for caricatures of black gangsta, pimps and hoes' (Rose, 2011; 1) This recognition of Hip hop being in a 'crisis' is in and of itself an extremely political statement as it suggests that there has been a radical shift in the direction and impact of the music. We must then look to question the factors which have been at the forefront of such a shift and the implications of such a move.

The introduction of Tony Bennett's *Rock and popular music: politics, policies, institutions* explains how many in academia today have come to 'the realization that music is not something 'done unto', but a series of actions integrally conditioned by as well as conditioning the circumstances of their articulation, which makes the continued critique of established discourses even more important' (Bennett 1993:4). This notion of conditioning the circumstances of their articulation is important with regard this thesis as we continuously hear of the concerted efforts being made by the Workin Class Records label in trying to 'create a space for People to do their own thing and go away and become their own independent seller of this positivity'. (Dean) MC Costello explained that while 'The music industry is gone right up shits creek without a paddle', its hard without the big finance the big labels provide to get the exposure to make a big splash on the international scene outside diehard Hip hop fans, and one would be lead to believe that this is the case with alot of socially conscious artists. 'To make the music just isnt enough coz we are very limited to get it out ya know what I mean. To have big publicity runs or PR runs ya have to throw up the few quid to pay someone to do it for ya and we don't have that money because we're not known that well. It's still very underground but there's that many young fella's getting into

*now that phhhhh, I could see it in the next few years blowing up because there's strength in numbers'* (Costello)

Derrick P. Alridge and James B. Stewart, writing for the Journal of African American History breaks down the significance of Hip hop as a cultural and artistic phenomenon affecting youth culture around the world over the past four decades. Their thesis *Introduction: Hip Hop in History: Past, Present, and Future*, found that 'for many youth, Hip Hop reflects the social, economic, political, and cultural realities and conditions of their lives, speaking to them in a language and manner they understand'. Due to this longevity and the importance of Hip hop in today's youth culture they argue that 'Hip hop cannot be dismissed as merely a passing fad or as a youth movement that will soon run its course. Instead, Hip hop must be taken seriously as a cultural, political, economic, and intellectual phenomenon deserving of scholarly study, similar to previous African American artistic and cultural movements such as the Blues, Jazz, the New Negro Renaissance, and the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Arts Movements.' (Alridge and Stewart: 2005: 190)

It is true that these different movements which took place in different periods and different geographical settings often represented different levels or numbers of African Americans with regard participation. For example the CRM being a mass movement which was based in the South while the Harlem Renaissance was mostly urban and arguably much more restricted in participation. Equally it is difficult to put an exact number on the amount of people to which Hip hop has influenced but if we are to look at a group like Public Enemy and their third album, *Fear of a Black Planet*, 'which was released in April 1990. The album peaked at number 10 on the *Billboard* 200, with first-week sales of one million copies.' (Jones, 1990) To move one million units of a politically charged pro black, anti establishment piece of art is something which cannot be ignored, with issues being broached that simply would never be talked about in the mainstream media, (in fact P.E were inflicted



with many radio bans and blocked from many T.V shows). An example here of one of the verses in a title track 'Fight the Power' is an example of the very political nature of the band, a band who have been cited as influences by a lot of the MC's I have worked with and observed throughout my research. And whilst our MC's in Ireland of the socially conscious, political nature are not selling anywhere near these numbers of albums they are still getting close to 100,000 views on many of their YouTube videos with material which has a similar bite to that of the much celebrated P.E.

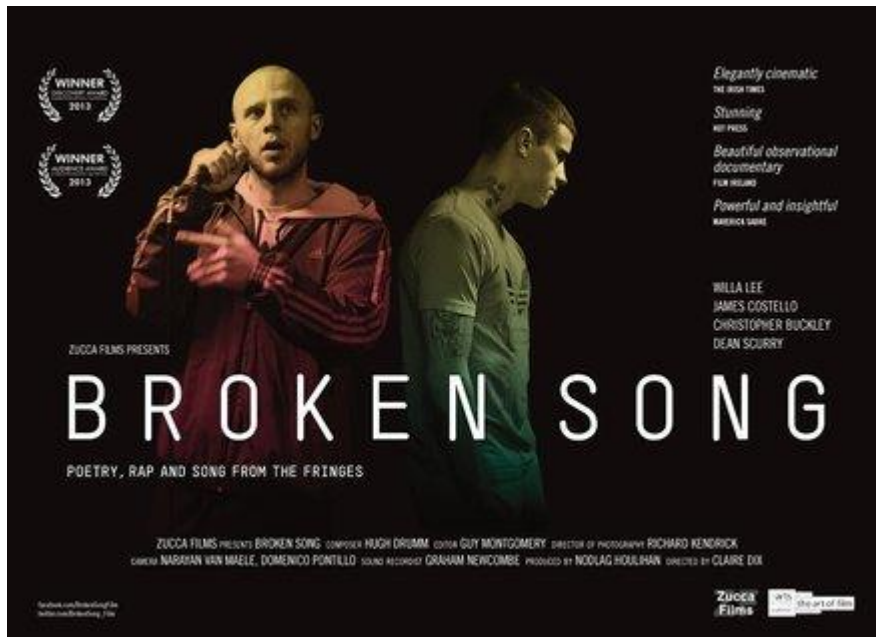
As the rhythm designed to bounce  
What counts is that the rhymes  
Designed to fill your mind  
Now that you've realized the prides arrived  
We got to pump the stuff to make us tough  
from the heart  
It's a start, a work of art  
To revolutionize make a change nothin's strange  
People, people we are the same  
No we're not the same  
Cause we don't know the game  
What we need is awareness, we can't get careless  
You say what is this?  
My beloved lets get down to business  
Mental self defensive fitness  
(Yo) bum rush the show  
You gotta go for what you know  
Make everybody see, in order to fight the powers that be

Lemme hear you say...

Fight the Power (Public Enemy: Fight the power)

As I have pointed out on numerous occasions the work of American intellectual Professor Tricia Rose, *Black Noise* almost overnight legitimised Hip hop with regard scholarly research. I believe that the Workin Class Records ethos and approach to music has set out to achieve the values to which Rose in her earlier work attributed to Hip hop and is equally confronted with many of the same challenges. The book which won the Before Columbus Foundations, American Book of the year in 1995 is recognised as a masterpiece by many Hip hop educators and activists. This extensive study offers a compelling analysis of the history and development of Hip-hop as both musical and artistic expression whilst dealing with the politics of culture which shaped its reception and interpretation. It is in the opening pages that Rose explains how ‘Rap music brings together a tangle of some of the most complex social, cultural, and political issues in contemporary American society’. Raps contradictory articulations she argues are not signs of ‘absent intellectual clarity but are rather a common feature of community and popular cultural dialogues which inevitably always offer more than one cultural, social, or political viewpoint. These unusually abundant polyvocal conversations seem irrational when they are severed from social contexts where everyday struggles over resources, pleasure, and meanings take place’. (Rose, 1994:2) It is this notion which guided my research in the sense that the issues which our rappers allude to throughout their material simply cannot be taken or severed from the vantage point to which they rhyme.

## 2.5: Working Class Authenticity within Popular Music



(Picture: Advertisement for *Broken Song* with MC Costello and Willa Lee)

Irish folk and Sean Nós legend Frank Harte famously stated that ‘history is written by the victor, and the songs by the losers’. As sociologists we try to understand the link between our environment and the impact that this environment has on our attitudes, behaviour and life chances. Colin Coulter in his ‘A double bed and a stalwart lover for sure’, expresses how the lack of artists dealing with the topic of social class in contemporary society goes hand in hand with the lack of sociologists dealing with the topic of social class (2010: 173). Whilst I would agree with Coulter’s view, Workin Class Records and its artists clearly take great pride in their social class as the label’s name clearly highlights. *‘I’m marching forward through the orchard tryna restore order, feeling mad awkward knowing how the poor get poorer, when your rich capitalise from capitalism... trapped in a system when we gonna come free, the moment that we start seeing life for what it could be’* (Costello)

In Michael Pierson’s, ‘Writing Ireland’s Working Class: Dublin after O’Casey’, he begins by asserting that ‘Class exists objectively as ‘an empirical category, and its enduring subjective

existence as lived experience'. Relative deprivation 'not only affects[s] life chances (quantifiably), but also lifestyles, in the way that we measure and differentiate our social status (quantifiably). The gradations of such social status inform and prescribe our mobility through social space; they affect our bodily practices, circumscribe our ideational reality, our sense of self'. He furthers this assertion by questioning as to 'Why has class become the elephant in the drawing room of so many disciplines, not least Irish Studies? Why, if class is inextricable from "aesthetic" matters, from our "way of life, appearance or language", has it become the unfashionable shibboleth of a hidden Ireland?' (Pierse, 2011)

Dean would explain that simply put, *'The purpose of Hip Hop is to create an empowering aural history. We have documented an aural history of our perspective of the Celtic Tiger Boom in this country which was one of the most interesting but devastating moments in our history where greed was the emotion of the day'*(Dean). In this spirit of documenting a period of Irish history from *our* perspective Dean is referring to working class values and alludes to the fact that documentation of the lived experience of the period is often ignored favouring instead to outline the macro economics of the Celtic Tiger. The power that this music can have in strengthening peoples resolve is something which working class music has been doing throughout history. It is why folk music and Hip hop which integrates working class realities within the songs and narrations have such a power over its audience. As Clarke et al. suggests, 'music in people's lives is undoubtedly significant in strengthening their well being and sense of self. The incorporation of music into their lives also has the ability to manipulate the moods of those listening to it, as recent research suggests' (2010:166). This ability to alter moods and to recognise aspects of working class life so often oppressed by those in charge of the corporate music industry are in many ways being challenged by outfits like Workin Class Records.

*'We keep it real what else would you expect, people in our circle fucking right we're gonna protect, snapped outta that American accent quick, hear linco spitting flames and GI telling me to keep it lit, we don't need to be commercial we just keep it relevant, coz we're better than these other rappers who are shit, like fucking excrement, this lyrical content, is our way to vent, we stubborn in our ways like our head was fucking cement, we're not looking for any ones approval, just looking for ways to decipher lyrics to move you, coz the stories I told they could be so influential, and their out in the open no more confidential, never be a victim of censorship we speak the facts, even when they don't want us to mention that (Linco and Ger: State of Mind; <http://gerkellett.bandcamp.com/album/state-of-mind-lp>)* This notion of keeping the content real and not submitting to corporate influences is another massive part of keeping true to working class values as linco again highlights in this track state of mind.

Workin' Class Records last year along with Zucca film productions released the award winning documentary Broken Song which tried to give an inside out view of Workin' Class as opposed to 'the usual RTE perspective' which Dean criticised during our interview. A prime example of the RTE take being that of fair city, one the broadcaster's flagship series, which gives a very suspect interpretation/representation of working class life in Dublin.

Conor McCabe writing for the Dublin Opinion Blog explains that whilst 'Fair City is set in a predominantly working-class area of Dublin, there are an extraordinary number of characters owning their own businesses. Although most characters were supposed to be of working class origins hardly any of them have been wage labourers. Those that have been, have worked in the local businesses. In fact, there is very little evidence of this community being connected with any of the popular institutions of modern Ireland. It led the Scottish academic, Hugh O'Donnell, to comment that 'in Fair City working class experience is replaced by petit bourgeois aspirations.' (Mc Cabe, 2011)

At the beginning of 2012, RTE produced a documentary from their perspective on the Irish Hip hop scene called 'Irelands Rappers'. This moronic manipulative take on the Hip hop scene which claimed to encompass wholly Irish Hip hop has undeniably inflicted a great deal of harm to the perception of what is occurring in the Hip hop scene today. As Costello described it, *'fools made it a mockumentary'*. (Costello) On RTE's website they advertised the show by stating 'there has in fact been a long running feud between the Class A'z and the Working Class Army not unlike the feuds which have broken out amongst American rap stars such as Jay-Z and 50 Cent'. (<http://www.rte.ie/tv/realitybites/irelandsrappers.html>) So right from the outset the angle was to present the show from a particular angle. The Workin Class records lads spoke very bitterly at how they were presented in the 'mockumentary' which seemed to edit the footage in such a way as to present 'lame, talentless weirdo's who should just get a life'. They point out the barrage of negative comments which were directed at those involved. In relation to the 'feud' which they present in their review, Linco simply laughed and said, *'there's no feud, let them do their thing and we'll do ours. It's simple we just choose not to work with certain people who have a different understanding of hip hop to us, we just wana do our own thing'* (Linco)

Broken song which was released in the IFI last year shows a different side of the same coin. It is a testament to how things can be presented when viewed without prejudice. Dean explained the difference as quite obvious, *'Broken Song was real as fuck. Its like putting a camera on the shoulders of these lads, as opposed to the RTE's perspective of what working class life is! It is our interpretation'* (Dean) According to an Irish times report, Broken Song is a 'highly original, deeply humane documentary – we're calling it Dublin's first hip-hop street opera. It proved its mettle with both punters and critics when it took home the Michael Dwyer Discovery Award and was named as the audience's favourite title at this year's Jameson Dublin International Film Festival. *Broken Song* deserves its accolades. It tells an

important story in a poetic style without either patronising or glamorising its subjects. Even those with no interest in rap should find themselves alive to its hustle and flow'. (Brady, 2013; <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/broken-song-1.1594818>) Nodlag explains that her grant allowed her a lot of '*creative freedom*' and chose not to comment on the RTE effort but simply said, '*yeah I don't think that's how it was intended!*'(Nodlag)

Pierse would also argue that, "The 'working classes' have been the source of much disappointment and disgust for the middle- class observers who have studied them, and, in large part, this is marked out through the lack of legitimacy granted to working- class cultural capital,". In orthodox academic and cultural terms, "they do not know the right things, they do not value the right things, and they do not want the right things". 'How, then, could the working classes read, let alone write, the right things? Since the development and codification of middle- class concepts of art and culture in Western Europe from the early eighteenth century, "taste" has been closely aligned with the attitudes and affectations of the middle and upper classes.' This is something which seems to transpire in the differences between 'Broken Song' and 'Irish rappers' and how one chooses to look at a similar phenomenon and what is emphasised. It has been very relevant within my research as over and over again producers and MC's point out that they are the working class and their lived experiences are too often sidelined.

Tricia Rose in *Black Noise* argues that, 'poor people learn from experience when and how explicitly they can express their discontent. Under social conditions in which sustained frontal attacks on powerful groups are strategically unwise or successfully contained, oppressed people use language, dance, and music to mock those in power, express rage, and produce fantasies of subversion'. (Rose, 1994:100) She continues by stating that cultural forms are especially rich and pleasurable places where oppositional transcripts, or the

‘unofficial truths; are developed, refined and rehearsed. ‘These cultural responses to oppression are not safety valves that protect and sustain the machines of oppression. Quite to the contrary, these dances, languages, and music produce a communal bases of knowledge about social conditions, communal interpretations of them and quite often serve as the cultural glue that fosters communal resistance’. (Rose, 1994:100) One obvious example of this is the reoccurring ‘fuck the gardai’ theme, which runs through many of the tracks. This ability to express their discontent at the institution of ‘an Gardai’ would not be wise in public and would probably lead to the same interaction as is often spoken about in the music.

Irish Hip hop MC’s and the use of the Dublin accent is another aspect of class representation which I feel is worth mentioning. I would argue that there are very few heavy Dublin accents present in influential positions of power or in the media and in many ways when the Dublin accent is heard it is often mimicked or derided. The fact that highly intelligent wordsmiths in our MC’s do not shy away from their accents is, it could be argued, an empowering thing for younger fans. They need not be embarrassed of their accent. In ‘Spectacular Vernaculars’, Russell A.Potter applies Deleuze and Guattari’s comparison of Kafka’s use of Prague German as a ‘minor language’, with the use of English by African-Americans to what he regards as the heteroglossaic, marginal vernacular forms of African-American rap, which he sees as a de-territorialisation of ‘standard’ forms of English. Potter sees African-American rap as a form of ‘resistance vernacular’ which takes the minor languages variation and re-definition of the major language a step further and ‘deforms and repositions the rules of ‘intelligibility’, set up by the dominant language’. He concludes that African-American rappers ‘have looked more towards the language and consciousness of the ghetto in search of a more authentically black identity’. (Potter:2004; 69)

Through listening to and observing Workin Class Records and their artists we can see that their topics are predominantly geared towards addressing issues confronting their



communities and delivered with Dublin accents and slang throughout. Costello would explain how in *Workin Class* 'there's a philosophy there about what all this hip hop thing is about'. He explained how MC Lunitic together with Dean who began the label, 'developed a brand that really represents what hip hop is, what it should be'.(Costello) The fact that the lads are 'on that conscious level' is down to this understanding of what Hip hop should be about and who it should represent. In this next stanza G.I asks the listener 'if you speaking our language, you peeping the stanza's', in other words if one understands the colloquial expressions within his tracks then you can find the meaning of the words within.

*'Im looking to Dan, I look to the fam for guidance, the violence, got me walking round with a fuckin minus, sign this, scratch no deals we avoid them, sometimes I do be thinking iv either no luck or Iv bad luck, got me in the bad books, with a fat pump sticking up your ladbrokes, visualising always end up in some handcuffs, Fuk it anyway, I brushed it off like it was dandruff, scheming up our next ambush, seen where it lands us, if you speaking our language, you peepin the stanzas, deep beneath in its canvas, beats from the streets where they brand us bandits(GI: Smack Haze)*

## 2.6: Sub cultures



(Picture: *MC 4real dropping a track*)

The style of sub-cultures goes ‘against nature’, interrupting the process of ‘normalization’ (Hebdige 2012:18). Hebdige would distinguish a sub-culture from its parent culture by stating that sub-cultures ‘are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the silent majority, which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus’ (2012:18). The existence of sub-cultures continually opens up those surfaces to other potential readings. John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts’ studies entitled *Subcultures, Cultures and Class* discuss the inability for individuals to participate in normative dominant society due to membership to a certain class structure.

Individuals who become fans of certain hip hop artists and crews would naturally begin to discover the artists interpretation of the history and tradition of their genre and assimilate themselves to them, which allows the fan to ‘knowledgeably discuss the different artists, records, styles, trends recording companies, literature etc.’ (Shuker, 1998:64). This then

distances the individual from other musical styles, forming an identity of the listener which almost labels the individual as a whole.

Hip hop artist and social educator Akala in an article for the Huffington post explains that ‘Hip-Hop culture has always and will always be about a dialogue of self-determination and affirmation’ (Akala, 2011) He explains that the five elements of Hip-Hop, as codified by its founding fathers are: DJing, MCing (Rapping), Breakdancing, Graffiti, and the vital fifth element which is Knowledge. There appears to be a massive misconception surrounding this genre and throughout my own interviews they would all be addressed. ‘Guns, materialism, disrespecting women and or any of the other stereotypes that some have come to view as the primary imagery of the genre may be a part of reality in 'the hood' (and indeed the wider world culture) to some degree but are not part of the five elements and their preponderance in Rap videos is much more a reflection of corporate hegemony over, and fetishisation of Rap than of the reality of how the Hip-Hop community and culture defines itself’.(Akala, 2011) This difference as Akala rightly points out is one of the fundamental differences between the corporate hip hop culture and the socially conscious sub culture which is seen by artists such as our Workin’ Class MC’s. Lethal Dialect explained however that he is struggling to find a medium between being true to hip hop in the sense discussed here by Akala and also just engaging with his passion for the serene joy of making the music.

*You can tell a man by the group he is among,*

*So I'd keep it tight nit and avoid those loose with the tongue,*

*I'm a man of a few words because the truth is unsung,*

*So when you see me then it would just be a salute and a thumb,*

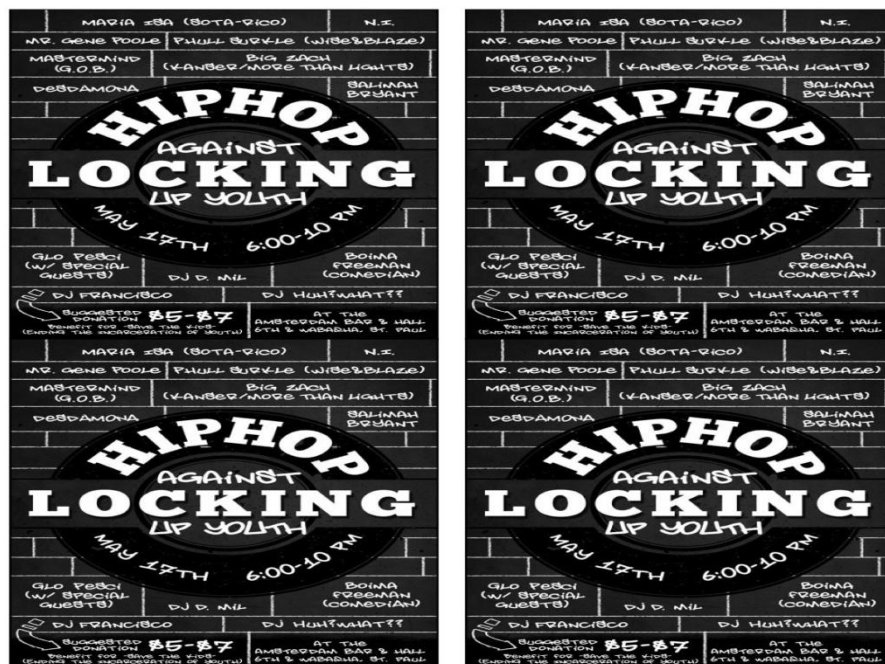
*I was sitting on the roof in the sun pouring juice into rum,*

*Viewing the view taking a zout to the lung,*

*I have a couple of options I need to juice into one,  
Should I be doing this for fun or I should I do it for funds,  
See if I was keeping it too real I'd be refuted as scum,  
And that's a fanbase reducing to none,  
But if I was keeping too sweet could me music be shunned,  
Now Fuck excusing a pun but picture me invest blood sweat and years in this music I've  
done,  
for me to not to be recouping a crumb,  
I wrote a formula confusing to some, like computing a sum,  
It has to be GI or Jacknife on the loop or the drums,  
While my phonetics like milking the sun (L.D)*

This rhyme which he spat during our interview is in response to a question about the role of the MC in the community. Whilst he reaffirms that he categorically is not someone who subscribes to the commercial stuff, he worries that if you try and maintain a singular 'gem dropping' approach then it is inevitable that you are going to greatly reduce your fan base. He conveys a sense of frustration in that one may feel obliged at times to constantly maintain highly conscious raising material which limits artistic expression. He talks about his want for variation, 'I wanna see mc's doing different things. When ya you look at the classics ya have Guru who drops life lessons, Naz who tells stories, ya have Kulzy rap who's on that street shit ya know what I mean. It's a miss match instead the one thing because I think maybe a lot of the MCs coming up are trying to be conscious. I don't want to preachy but everybody is being the mentor, if that makes sense, but everyone in life isn't a mentor, do the thing what you want to do'.(L.D) While this seems to stand in contrast with a lot of this work I think it is an honest reflection and must be included.

## 2.7: Food for thought



Hip hop which began in the North East of the US at first seemed to represent the anger and fears of urban black youths, from the poorer suburbs of New York. It acted as a medium for disenfranchised young black people to voice their anger in relation to a power structure which was limiting their life prospects. Grandmaster Flash in his song ‘The message’, articulated the difficulty in remaining positive in the harsh environment of the ghetto which many blacks grew up in at the time, ‘It’s like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder how I keep from going under’. (Grandmaster Flash: The Message) The music often used ghetto slang and was intended primarily for the members of the black community, and whilst consumers would greatly shift throughout the nineties, the music was originally locally based and community orientated to begin with. Rose describes the corporate Hip hop scene as one solely fixated on the ‘gangsta, pimp and hoe trinity’ as she calls it which has led to critics on ‘one side blaming it for all societal ills and on the other defenders touting the ties to black youths and the notion of pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. The hyperbolic and polarized public narrative about hip hop that has emerged over the past decade discourages progressive and

nuanced consumption, participation, and critique, thereby contributing to the very crisis that is facing hip hop' (Rose, 2011).

Hip hop music and its history is a fascinating subject. It clearly involves so much more than music. There is an undercurrent of insidious manipulation of the medium. This manifests at a per functionary level on the airwaves. The corporate run stations (i.e. all of the major stations) choose to broadcast what Rose calls the Gansta, Pimp and Hoe trinity of nihilism. At surface level this reinforces racial stereotypes and increases inter racial tension. It also serves to silence legitimate hip hop and its message of critical thought. Below the surface lies darker motives. I have recently gleaned some insights which I will include in this thesis. There are incontrovertible statistics to show that U.S prisons are disproportionately filled with young black and Hispanic males. They are incarcerated in the main for drug related crimes. Coincidentally the Hip hop artists dominating our airwaves are the ones that talk exclusively about selling drugs and glorifying violence.

### **The Impetus behind the Prison Industrial Complex**

Dave Hodges writing for the online blog 'The Common sense show' would explain some worrying details in relation to the relationship between private prisons and the media.

'According to public analysis from the Security and Exchange Commission (SEC), the largest holder in Corrections Corporation of America is Vanguard Group Incorporated.

Vanguard is a major player in controlling several media giants. Vanguard is the third largest holder in Viacom and AOL Time Warner. Vanguard is also the third largest holder in the GEO Group. The GEO group, second only in size to the CCA with regard to privatized prisons as it controls over 100 correctional facilities in the US, UK, Australia and South Africa. In addition to CCA's unwarranted control over the media, the number-one holder of both Viacom and Time Warner stocks is a company called Blackrock. Blackrock is the

second largest holder in CCA, and the sixth largest holder in the GEO Group in this never-ending incestuous relationship. The conclusion is inescapable. The people who control privatized prisons in the United States are also heavily invested in the media. This is why you don't hear about the Prison Industrial Complex in the media and the installation of institutionalized slavery in their privatized prisons'.( Hodges, 2013; <http://thecommonsenseshow.com/2013/06/09/the-prison-industrial-complex/>) After all they are protecting the good citizen from that domestic terrorist 'THE BLACK GANGSTA'. This food for thought has been included not only as a potential factor in the major shift in content on our airwaves but also to raise awareness to the fact that the Private Prison industry is creeping into the UK already. Given our government's willingness to sell pretty much anything they can to private investment, we should watch carefully that our prisons don't follow suit.

## The Human Condition

They say the youth will only listen to us  
Cos we are the youth that just grew the fuck up  
They got the schools attacking them  
They're telling them to go a certain way with their life  
Be academically right  
As if we're meant to lose sight  
Or follow the syllabus  
Or end up somewhere in between fighting for our principles  
There's no community cos we don't do nothing communally  
All we do is talk this slang fluently  
That's the only thing do together we don't do brutally  
Question every face I see that's new to me  
I was raised in a place where people act inhumanly  
See a 12 year old saying nothings new to me  
A fuckin grown man mentally before he hit puberty  
That's the youth now or what they seem to be  
I see the truth now instead of what I used to see  
We're living in a place that promotes hate exclusively  
Wrestling with our immunity

[Hook]

If there's a problem with the youth these days is they don't listen  
I'd say that's just the human condition  
Cos you won't right your own wrongs until it's too late  
Cos you've given up on life because you've no faith  
.. from estates trying to juggle these fakes and mates  
But your bang on time in the wrong place what a fuckin waste  
If there's a problem with the youth these days is they don't listen  
That's the human condition

From a different perspective  
These lads aren't killers they're just nippers that grew up neglected  
Raised in estates disconnected  
Smart minds never intercepted and left rejected  
Educated from a different perspective I'm directed  
Bitten by the fast life livin infected  
On the streets where your mindstate stays separate  
Where you commit sin or even kill to be accepted  
Nowadays if there's profit then of course there's incentive  
The boys are waging all out war because remorse is subjective



They grew up too quick and never get their life back from where they left it  
They went from jockeying the horse to hockeys the Lexus  
A force undirected at the time it doesn't seem senseless  
Till they've seen the sentence  
And watch your potential as it dispenses  
The human condition

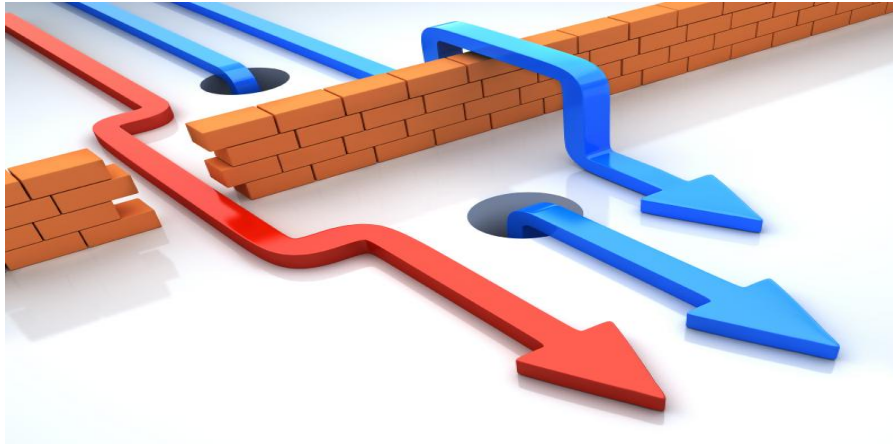
[Hook]

The way we live is unnecessary  
Built our whole life up on lies and swore we'd never confess to any  
In this world honesty is secondary  
Analyse prides emissary seen it bring an end to many  
Too preoccupied with the pennies and whats on telly  
Made their mind petty never sussed that life is momentary  
Its the human condition isn't everybody different?  
Can't accept that life is blessed, it isn't  
Takes people being buried for us to suss  
We didn't give a fuck about them till they were missin  
Situation just wouldn't let us give it  
Be careful where you hate because your mistakes  
Will be waiting in the past when you relive it  
And the past is a place you won't escape once you're in it  
That's the human condition  
Stuck sitting thinking bout your giving  
Like there isn't no chance to double back to re-begin it  
This is your life so live it or diminish long before you reach the limits

(**Jambo: The Human Condition**; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjM42U-zaR0>)

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methods and Methodology**



#### **3.1 Introduction**

*'Methodology is a body of knowledge that describes and analyses methods, indicating their limitations and resources, clarifying their presuppositions and consequences, and relating their potentialities to research advances'* (Miller, 1973; 65)

This section of the thesis will explain the approach or methodological design which the research took. It will highlight how the research was planned and why a qualitative approach was taken throughout the study. As with all research there are ethical considerations which must be taken into account and they will be developed in this chapter also. The issue of credibility will also be covered and a justification for the approach taken will be explained.

### 3.2 Qualitative Research Approach

*Qualitative research is a type of research process that is widely used to give people a voice while researching a particular subject matter. (Bufkin,2006:3)*

This research takes a qualitative methodological approach which will allow for holistic insight into the MC's personal experience's (Silvermann, 2005). Creswell states that qualitative research "uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic [...] which is emergent rather than tightly prefigured". (2003:181) A qualitative research approach allows the researcher to gain a closer insight into peoples, behaviours, attitudes, concerns and value systems. Qualitative methods "are designed to capture social life as participant's experience." (Schutz, 2004:15) It is the intention of this research to seek insight into the lives of MC's involved in the Workin Class records label. I felt that I must take this qualitative approach so as to get a deep understanding of the life and whole person of the participants involved. Observation included simply hanging out, attending gigs, rehearsals and photo shots from which I was privileged to get an inside perspective into the day to day lives of the participants which allowed for a better ability to contextualise many of the issues which are raised in the music.

In 'Social Research methods- Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches', Neuman deals extensively with qualitative interviewing. Qualitative research differs from the quantitative approach in that it captures and discovers meaning and is desirable with regard my thesis as opposed to quantitative analysis seeks to gather knowledge or an understanding of a subject in quantifiable units. 'The qualitative researcher may use a case study approach(1997:331), by gathering a large amount of information on one or a few cases, going into greater depth and getting more details on cases being examined. If one wanted to simply look at the sales or views of the music being produced it could allow for a good quantitative piece of research in

relation to the commercial appeal of Irish Hip hop. *'If I got into this for the money I'd have quit a long time ago'* (Costello). MC Costello explained that following the lead of MC Lunitic before him, their attitude is to simply get the music to as many people as possible even if that means *'giving it away for nothing'*. Any profit that may be made from selling the CD's, is used to try and springboard the next E.P or album.

According to Quinn Patton, 'the essence of qualitative inquiry is paying attention, being open to what the world has to show us, and thinking about what it means' (Patton, 1990; 13)

According to Marshall and Rossman, 'qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data'(Marshall and Rossman, 1995; 111).

As Quinn Patten states, 'the advantages of qualitative portrayals of holistic settings is that greater attention can be given to nuance, setting, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies and context'(Quinn Patton, 1990; 51). The research carried out in this thesis required an open and flexible approach to permit exploration into the phenomenon being researched. The qualitative paradigm is an interpretive paradigm of research. Quinn Patton states that interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, building linkages, attaching meanings, imposing order and dealing with rival explanations, disconfirming cases and data irregularities as part of testing the viability of an interpretation'(Quinn Patton, 1990; 423) I have included experiences that I encountered whilst observing and interviewing my participants. I have also taken great time to transcribe the lyrics of the songs to fairly represent them. This effort is in keeping with my respect for their individual penmanship, and the integrity of their message.

### **3.3 Exploratory**

*Exploration, with its open character and emphasis on flexibility, pragmatism, and the particular, biographically specific interests of an investigator, is arguably a more inviting and indeed accurate way of representing social research (Stebbins, 2001: V)*

*Social science exploration is a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximise the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life. Such exploration is, depending on the standpoint taken, a distinctive way of conducting science- a scientific process- a special methodological approach (as contrasted with confirmation), and a pervasive personal orientation of the explore. (Stebbins, 2001:3)*

The research will follow an exploratory approach in order to gain a deeper understanding of how Hip hop has affected the participants within the study. This approach is flexible which makes it particularly suitable to my research topic as it is on an area of study to which there has been very little investigation. This method of research is conducted when a problem has not yet been clearly defined or when data is difficult to collect. As Irish Hip hop has never been researched before I was entering into an unknown terrain. This exploratory approach helped greatly in determining the most appropriate research design, data method and subject selection as I engaged with the topics which came up throughout observation and the interviews. Exploratory research can allow for significant insight into different topics by asking the what, why and how questions throughout and allowing the participants to shape the direction of the research to a large degree and the creation of a formal hypothesis. However it is important to note that this form of methodology is not typically generalisable to the population at large. As I choose a specific sub culture in socially conscious Irish hip hop this was not an issue. Social exploratory research "seeks to find out how people get along in

the setting under question, what meanings they give to their actions, and what issues concern them. The goal is to learn 'what is going on here?' and to investigate social phenomena without explicit expectations." (Russell K. Schutt, "Investigating the Social World," 5th ed.). This methodology is also at times referred to as a grounded theory approach to qualitative research or interpretive research, and is an attempt to unearth a theory from the data itself rather than from a predisposed hypothesis. I hope that from adopting this methodological approach that I can unearth some insight into a group in Irish society which has received very little research and aside from the documentary Broken Song seems to be portrayed in a gimmicky light with little attempt to explore either the penmanship or motivations of those involved in the subculture.

### **3.4 Semi Structured Interviews**

In semi structured or intensive interviews the interview guide is a list of topics to be covered rather than a strict script or tightly structured set of questions to be asked in precisely the same order (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; 8-12). In this type of interviewing, both the interviewer and respondent are free to veer from the order of questions on the interview guide and respondents are encouraged to speak freely in their own terms about the topics of interest in the interview guide. This method was chosen for its flexibility, potential to collect in-depth information and ability to seek clarification about the topic.

Semi structured interviews are used in flexible qualitative designs as although it has predetermined questions, "the order can be modified based upon the interviewer's perception of what seems most appropriate". (Robson, 2002: 270) When I was entering into the interviews with my participants I wanted to search out specific areas of interest but also wanted to allow the participant a freedom to discuss any topic they felt was of interest. As

semi structured interviews are most appropriate when “individual perceptions of processes within a social unit – such as a work group, department or whole organisation – are to be studied prospectively, using a series of interviews.” (Robson, 2002: 271), they were adapted in the research design. The advantages of these interviews are their flexibility and adaptability to make the participants as comfortable as possible. I had a rough list of questions which I showed the participant prior to beginning and also ensured that they were comfortable with the Dictaphone being on. As all have had experience within the entertainment business, the process of doing a recorded interview was not new to any of my participants. As all the interviews were face to face, I found that certain non-verbal cues helped in both understanding the verbal response and also a good indicator as to when it was time to move forward.

All of the questions used were open ended so “they could be fully expanded at the discretion of the interviewer and interviewee, and can be enhanced by probes. (Schensul et al, 1999: 149) I modelled my questions on Agee who concluded that good qualitative questions can be “significant tools that shape a study design and analysis. Observing that the goal is to refine and possibly expand the inquiry through reflexive, iterative, and dialogic processes.” (Agee, 2009:446)

I centred my questions on four key areas of investigation.

- What Hip hop meant to the participant and how/when they got involved with the genre
- What they believed the role of the MC to be in relation to the community
- What they felt the impact of Hip hop had been on the Community
- Was there educational merit in the discipline

Each interviewee received a consent form and interview guide in advance of the interview. Permission was sought to use a Dictaphone. All the interviewees were asked the same core questions which were recorded and transcribed. As all involved with the research are public figures they had no problem with their names and comments being printed and put into the public domain. There was also an option at the end for the participants to give any input they felt necessary. An informal evaluation was also included afterwards to make sure the participants were comfortable with the process and questions asked. I met the participants at a time and location of their choosing. I did not impose any time restrictions as a result the times taken varied from thirty minutes to forty five minutes. This reflects my effort to maintain the conversational flow. However as a result the effort and time involved in transcription was indeed an onerous task particularly as MC's have a tendency to speak extremely fast!

### **3.5 Purposeful Sampling and My Participants**

The method of sampling in this thesis will be that of a purposeful sample. A number of individuals involved within the Hip hop scene in Ireland were asked to take part in a one to one in-depth interview in order to generate the data required.

The participants in the study included my gatekeeper, namely Dean Scurry. Dean is a prominent community activist in the Ballymun area and also the person who began the working class label back in 2003. I interviewed Dean along with three of the well established Hip hop artists from the label, Costello (James Costello), and Linko (Ryan Lincoln) who were very forthcoming with their stories and time. Lethal Dialect (Paulie Allwright) was also interviewed and although not directly under Workin Class, he has collaborated with the label and artists and is currently pursuing a solo project under the guidance of Dean. Along with the afore mentioned I also interviewed (less formally) many other artists, including 4real (Andy



Farrell) , Moschops(Harry Webley)Temper-Mental Miss Elayenous(Elayne Harrington) and Willa Lee. It was particularly useful to interview the producer of the award winning documentary Broken song Nodlag Houlihan who charted the lives of the artists involved in the label over the period of a year. This was an excellent interview which allowed me a great opportunity to enquire how someone who had previously no experience with the genre viewed both the genre and its artists throughout the process and how over the course of the year her impressions altered.

Although Hip hop is still a relatively new genre of music to take grip in Ireland, it is worthy to note that the participants in this research are not only known on a local level. Lunitic, who began Workin class records back in 2003 with Dean Scurry had supported major international acts such as Melly Mel and Snoop Dogg. Costello whom I interviewed has done support twice for Wu Tang Clan who are recognised as not only as pioneers in this genre but also as one of the best Hip hop outfits in the world. L.D is currently embarking on a nation wide tour with Damo Dempsey and has also had major support slots. On an international level and amongst Hip hop circles online there is a growing appreciation for the artists and the work they produce. This is a testimony in itself and adds validity to their understanding of this craft.

I also attended various concerts and was privileged enough to attend photo shots, I gained great insight into what goes into the production of the songs and of the writing process. The ten year anniversary of Workin Class was celebrated with a Gig in the twisted pepper. (Dublin club). On the night up to a dozen artists graced the stage, many of whom were very willing to chat informally afterwards about their experience with hip hop and where they saw the genre moving in Ireland in the future. The screening of the Broken Song Documentary in the Axis Centre in Ballymun was followed by a live show and a questions and answers forum. This provided me with a unique opportunity to evaluate the real impact the music had

on many of the members of the Ballymun community. Outside the theatre I engaged with some very humorous young people (7-15 yrs) about the documentary. They left me in little doubt that hip hop is a growing phenomenon.

### **3.6 Informed Consent**

Each participant was given an information sheet about the research prior to consenting to take part. Participants were given the opportunity to raise any further concerns with myself or my supervisor, which none of them did. Prior to each interview I explained what was involved and the participant signed a consent form. I asked participants prior to the day of the interview and again before the interview if they were comfortable being recorded. I reassured the participants that the interview recordings would be transcribed and then destroyed within a year of the recording. Participants were also informed that they could stop participating at any point, to ensure that participation was voluntary, in order to support the principle of autonomy (Ali and Kelly, 2005).

### **3.7 Reading the Transcripts**

The first step in analyzing the interview data was to read and re-read the transcripts. The Voice Centred Relational Method (VCR) of data analysis was adopted for this process. This method of narrative analysis focuses on the voices of the narrator (Byrne et al, 2009: 68). VCR method demands researcher reflexivity and focuses attention on the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Byrne et al, 2009: 68). This method of reading the transcripts was used as it focuses on the voice of the narrator, “if we do not take the time and trouble to listen to our respondents, data analysis risks simply confirming what we already know” (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998: 134).

VCR analysis takes place over two stages. The first stage involves four readings of the

interview transcripts, each examining a different aspect of the narratives told. These included reading for: the overall plot of the story; the role of the researcher; the narrators perceptions of self; interpersonal relationships; and finally placing people within cultural contexts and social structures (Byrne et al, 2009:69). This method of reading transcripts allows the researcher, “to offer a number of slants on the same narrative material”, moving from the intimate to socio-political realms (Byrne et al, 2009: 69). The second stage involves arranging the data thematically. After the readings of the transcripts each transcript is broken into themes and sub-themes. The themes from the different transcripts were grouped together and a number of significant and repeating themes were noted. These themes make up by my findings and the angle to which I took in the literature review.

### **3.8 Methodological limitations and weaknesses**

Due to time restrictions this research was bound to a certain sample size. Also, there is a gender imbalance in the study. Whilst I met with and spoke to female artists I did not conduct an in-dept interview with any prominent female artists. Whilst this imbalance is probably a fair reflection of the hip hop scene in Ireland, it reflects the fact that currently more men than women engage in the genre. Further research would definitely need to include more female MC’s and their relationship with the movement. Workin Class records for example does not have any prominent female MC’s on the label, yet it does projects with female artists and has young girls engage with their workshops. The sample reflected one aspect of Hip hop (within an urban economically disadvantaged area) which is a class and socially conscious label, and chooses not to engage with the more commercial elements within the genre which are also in play around the country. If the research were to be repeated with more time I would include a larger sample size and different aspects of the hip hop scene nationally (rural based, etc.)

Also Hip hop as a movement also includes many other elements other than the MC(knowledgeable socially conscious rapper), and further enquiry would delve a lot deeper into the other elements such as the graffiti artist, break-dancer, beat boxers and Disc Jockeys who complete the movement.

## Ghostwriting

'Keep it real because this music here is guidance to us,  
Lightening conducts whenever we're applying our touch,  
The islands finest like some silent monks writing the book,  
Feeling sorrow when the violence erupts,  
Analysing your environments a requirement for the wise to adjust,  
Consciousness is what we righteously push,  
Life has its ups and downs but in spite of the luck,  
At the end of the night the most high is who I rightfully trust,  
Knowledge is power but we see how minds will corrupt,  
Truth staring us in the face where are eyes still shut,

When we gonna wake up?

In a silent zone as I plot me destiny,  
Striving for longevity I close me eyes to find what's ahead of me,  
Trust me yo the rhyme treasury is stocked plentifully,  
A tendency to smoke excessively while rocking melodies,  
Resurrecting the art that was dropped in the 70's,  
By the neighbourhood legends and the local celebrities,  
Old school lessons I can quote academically,  
Words of wisdom that forever locked in me memory,  
Studied hard with this music and I've grown with it pleasantly,  
It can free your mind when you adopt to its therapy,

Connected with a few who got the chemistry,  
Collectively capture our culture here in the hip hops legacy,  
Made and lost some good friends on this road to prosperity,  
Daniel McDonnell was like a prophet God sent me,  
Speak me mind till I suffer from a loss of energy,  
Are lives came to be conceived thru mother earths pregnancy,

Every dream lived is part of Gods documentary,  
Knowledge reigns supreme so I write with top supremacy,  
This world is pure sick so what's the remedy,  
Tell me how your gonna please your soul by acquiring lots of equity?  
Try and understand stop condemning me,  
Yo I probably stand beyond me grave when people flock to cherish me,  
Reason I ignore what most be telling me,  
Cause your seeing life for what it is,  
I'm seeing life for what its meant to be,  
I'm the ghost writer for James everytime he smokes we both swop identities,  
Serenity from a heavenly entity,  
The mission to ensure that this music knocks for a century,  
Passion inside burns with hot intensity,  
Got the spirit of the city in me like the blocks in O'Devany,  
Beats and rhymes are our choice of weaponry,  
Notice how the son of god died to teach us bout the cost of jealousy,

(Costello: Ghostwriting; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipYS6jKnaCQ> )

## Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

### 4.1 Workin Class Records: The background story



*(Picture: Dean Scurry showing off a painting he did as part of a Youth Arts Project in Ballymun)*

*'Working Class is building confidence, the openness and acceptance of unpolished creativity and it is starting to create a strong sense of community for some people in the area that I live in. We do sometimes have, a crab in the bucket mentality and I'm not ignoring it, I'm just moving on through it. I'm part of a movement that is pushing forward and aspiring to go beyond this negativity. To be honest it's just about brotherhood and connecting with one another'. - (Dean)*

Dean Scurry, who began Workin Class Records back in 2003, reflected throughout our interview upon his early years and gave the background story to the label. He explained that as someone who grew up in Ballymun in the 1980's, he had lived through a very bleak period in the area which saw little to no opportunities for many. *'It was like the Wild West...there*

*wasn't much access to Jobs... as a young person at the time life was about surviving' (Dean).*

He explained that with this lack of opportunity came inevitable social problems which crippled the area including the disastrous heroin epidemic; the scars of which are still healing. Dean talked briefly of this period of his life before his engagement with youth and community work and was open about the fact that he himself was *'caught up in a lot of the negative stuff which the area was infamous for'*. It was during this *'chaotic period'* of his life that he got *'mad into'* Hip hop music, music he felt had major resonance with many aspects of his life. The bootleg tapes purchased in *'town'* would allow him to transcend or *'escape reality'*, and often seemed to give a *'broader context or understanding to the issues he was facing'* at this period of his life. He explained that it was often the messages within the music which he really clung onto and as they were delivered over *'banging beat's'* he developed a strong connection to this musical form or artistic expression. The artists producing this hip hop *'were young disenfranchised struggling men who were producing banging tunes that {he} could relate to {himself}'* and as such his *'Hip hop journey'* began.

Dean explained *'that {his} Ma instilled in {him} a strong sense of community from very early on'*, and spoke of how he initially got involved with Community activism. One of his first campaigns he remembered was the fight to get street signs put up around Ballymun. *'There weren't even street signs up around the area'*, which meant that ambulances would often *'struggle to find'* their destination which could mean *'life or death'* for the person in need of help. He explained how he would be subsequently *'introduced to Youth Work by Ray 'Sparky' Corcoran'*, and began working with many local youths and gangs in the area. It was at this point of his life, and with the recognition that *'many of the challenges which had confronted {him} in his earlier days remained'*, that he began to consider the potential that Hip hop may have in offering the young people he was working with an opportunity to *'voice the issues'* both personal and structural confronting them in their daily lives. This ability to



*'offer a voice to the voiceless' and the 'disenfranchised' would be in and of itself an 'empowering' move he explained. 'One of the pinnacles of youth work is that you would help and support young people to become self aware and critical analysers of society and their role within civic society and I think that this is what this hip hop does'.*

Hip hop was by the turn of the millennia was having major global commercial success, not just in Ireland but around the globe, which would naturally begin to see many young budding artists the world afar beginning to immolate their new found hero's. Dean explained how he had heard of one such *'young man named Daniel McDonnell, AKA MC Lunitic, {who} had a reputation around the Ballymun area as a talented rapper'* and so he decided to *'knock around to him to listen to him spit'*. What impacted on Dean was the way in which Dan delivered his material which whilst having *'impressive flow and rhythm'* was *'like something you'd hear in L.A'*. Dean questioned Dan as *'to why a kid from Ballymun in Dublin had an American accent'* and seemed to be dealing with *'American issues'* in his rhymes? Dean left at this point but returned the next day to Dan's house and gave him a Damien Dempsey C.D, *'asked him to listen to it and come back to him afterwards with his thoughts on it'*.

Damien who is a singer songwriter from Donaghmede on the north side of Dublin, has gained great notoriety for his authentic style and delivery which see's him sing of local issues through a powerful Dublin accent(something which many artists were shying away from), and although he was still relatively unknown at this time he has gained a large international fan base since with many notable celebrity fans coming out in support of him including Christy Moore, Morrissey, Sinéad O'Conner and Bob Dylan to name but a few . The album entitled *'They don't teach this shit in school'*, was Damo's first studio album and was released in 2000. It impressed Dean greatly for it was *'real'* and *'authentic'* and would be utilised by Dean not only on this first meeting with Dan but as a reference point with other rappers who *'fell into the same trap of going all American'* with regard their accent.

For Dean *'authenticity'* within music was vital particularly within Hip hop which at its best is *'reflection of yourself'* and pressed that right from the outset *'this hip hop journey for me is simple, its saying and articulating what we want and what we see, and putting it onto some kind of public record to share it with more people. This can empower more people as we live in a system where a few dictate the lives of the many'*. This sentiment obviously wasn't lost on Dan who returned to Dean *'less than a month later with an entire album written'*. This was to be the beginning of Workin Class Records which Dean and Dan subsequently set up during 2003, a label which has organically grown since and has today on its roster some of the most recognisable names in the Irish Hip hop scene including 4real, Costello, G.I, Linko and DJ Moschops, to name but a few. MC Lunitic's first national release would be a track alongside Damo entitled Patience which dealt with the state of the music scene in Ireland at the time, testament to the impact Dean would have in guiding a young man who is widely recognised as the original godfather of Irish Hip hop. MC Lunitic began to rap and flow exclusively with his Dublin accent and like Damo Dempsey before him took to articulating issues which confronted himself and his community, and is accredited with *'changing the game'*, when he did so.

## 4.2: The Workin Class Wolly



(Picture: The Workin' Class Wolly)

*'Its like a family that we made up ourselves'*: MC Lunitic

We can see above the Workin Class Records symbol, named as The Workin Class Wolly. The symbol *is* a true reflection of the ethos of the label and represents a great deal to those associated directly and indirectly with the label. Dean explained how one of the main goals of Workin' Class was to offer *'our perspective of what working class life is, not that of RTE! It is our interpretation of reality, like in Broken Song which is real, it is us and our lives as we see it'*. The importance of ownership here is a reoccurring theme throughout alot of the interviews and music and cannot be overlooked. With Workin' Class records even with the

name there is an attempt to take ownership of working class representations. The content and ethos of the label sets about building strong community relationships and does not shy away from confrontation with certain hazardous institutions.

The Workin' Class symbol or Wolly which is attached to all the merchandise produced under the label from CD's to T-Shirts is a source of great pride for those involved in and around the label. The image see's our struggling little figure leaning forward under great strain due to the immense weight of the load he is transporting. One quickly notices that the object is a giant microphone which is obviously intensely heavy as our figure grips tightly with both hands in his attempt to move forward. Costello in our interview would explain how he felt it was '*a true logo for the working class brand, a true logo for what hip hop should represent, that your words carry alot of weight so carry the weight of your words and always recognise their power*' [...], he furthers on that the symbol also represents responsibility and that anyone associated with the label must ensure that they are '*saying stuff thats real because if ya give the wrong idea to kids, then they can fall straight into the BullShit, coz its right there for them, right outside their front door*'.(Costello) The image and its connotations are not taken lightly by the members of the crew who not only apply it to all their records but many of them have tattooed the image to their body which act as a permanent reminder of their bond to the label.

Within Hip hop there is a definite pride associated with regard your 'crew' and this sense of belonging is made abundantly clear when one looks at Workin Class Records. Nodlag Houlihan who produced Broken Song which would see her regularly meeting with members of the label over a period of a year would describe how she looked upon the relationships of those involved with label as almost a family structure. '*In a way we looked at the lads in Workin class as a little family of men. It is an eye opener into male relationships as they seem*

*to have forged brotherly relationships with one another*'.(Nodlag) Tricia Rose would highlight how 'Many Hip hop fans, artists, musicians, and dancers continue to belong an elaborate system of crews or poses'. The crew, a local source of identity, group affiliation, and support system appears repeatedly in Rose interviews and also in 'virtually all rap lyrics and cassette dedications, music video performances, and media interviews with artists. Identity in hip hop is deeply rooted in the specific, the local experience, and one's attachment to and status in a local group or alternative family'. (Rose, 1994) Workin class records and all those involved express this sentiment of family repeatedly throughout concerts and indeed during my interviews.

MC Lunitic would state something similar in an interview when he stated, *'its like we're a big family, only not like your family at home that you have no choice over, this is a family we made up for ourselves'*. (Lunitic) Lethal Dialect would explain how it would be Lunitic and his group *'urban intelligence who really started off that kinda street aware, street educated and also conscious raising tip in Dublin. Urban intelligence started that for me without a doubt'*.(Lethal Dialect) The tragic loss of Lunitic in 2009 seems to have brought into this family a spiritual element as the recognisable put your 'L' up which is a hand signal in which your thumb and index are shaped in an L formation is never far away. There has been two songs dedicated solely to his memory, in 'Working Class Warrior' and 'Put your L's up', while there are references throughout many others. *'Ya represented like an urban prophet, being quite honest; your existence in this life was nothing short of iconic'... "Learned a lesson from your death and that's to strive harder, bible of street literature and you're a divine martyr"*(GI and Costello: Put your L's Up)

Dean Scurry influence over the direction of the label should not be overlooked although he constantly underplays it. He elaborated on his earlier motivation in relation to setting up the

label. He explained that it was to fill a vacuum through the utilisation of hip hop to create an empowering aural history. This to be repeated is from a working class perspective to allow the younger people in his area an opportunity to listen to positive role models who they can then relate to.

### 4.3: A Day in the Life of Workin Class



*(PICTURE: Workin' Class merchandise)*

*'This is what I've learned we're the voices for the silent,*

*Gardai getting pay off's that will last them till retirement,*

*Read between the lines this is more than fucking Rhyming,*

*I'm tired of being seen as council housed and violent'. (4Real: Flawless)*

Nodlag Houlihan explained in our interview how *'Teenage boys from these areas(working*

*class estates) are a real focus of fear and anxiety within society and people really worry*

*about what they're doing or thinking or why they're hanging around and while there has*

*been many projects whose purpose was to talk to them and understand them, they come from*

*the outside and look in yet with the lads they are talking at the same level or from inside out.*

*They might be completely different to the way you'd expect. They can be pleasant and soulful*

*when your preconceived notions may have led you to negatively approach them'.(Nodlag)*

This negative approach, as Nodlag has pointed out is down to ingrained prejudices or an us and them mentality, which she concludes is due to a lack of communication or engagement with working class youths. What is interesting is that there is an acknowledgement that whilst there have been projects designed to engage with *troubled* kids, these attempts are usually coming from outside the community. Throughout her experience she would openly admit how she herself would be '*amazed at the levels of intelligence that you just wouldn't expect*' coming from these young men. I think this is an extremely apt sentiment as it uncovers what one *expects*, or that a certain level of expectation of working class youths still exists today. Nodlag who I can affirm is extremely open minded and a very pleasant person was just being open about a fact that is often neglected. The fact that due to many cultural factors expectations throughout our society as a whole are that people who have a particular accent or dress sense are more than likely going to be of a certain character.

This notion of how one is perceived is not fiction but factual. When I had arranged to interview MC Costello, we decided to meet in the city centre in Dublin on a Wednesday afternoon. Our first location was in a cafe on the quays but due to the noise, I felt that it would be better to use a quieter space as transcribing the interview would have been extremely difficult. I had remembered The Teachers Club on Parnell square due to the fact that we had throughout the course of my MA used this space on numerous occasions to run workshops and talks. The talks were ironically on working class life in Dublin and abroad. I felt this would offer an excellent space to which we could conduct our interview. What happened next was something which will stay with me for the rest of my life and in essence confirms much of what is already known in relation to attitudes towards members of working class Dublin. Upon entry, myself and Costello proceeded to go up the stairs when we were stopped by two men on their way down.



I want to make it clear that neither were official doorman, with the quieter being a member of staff and the more obnoxious a well known member. ‘*Where are ya’s off to lads?*’, in an affirmative tone was levelled at both of us. Before I even had a chance to respond, one of the men (dressed in a sharp suit and with the look of a true aristocrat) pointed at Costello, and stated ‘what are you up to huh?, look at the state of him, he looks dodgy!’. I was at first taken aback and almost speechless by the comment, my Dictaphone and student card which were in my hand at this stage were snatched off me by the other *gentleman*, who similarly asked, ‘well what are yi’s up to?’, as he looked at my card. I stated that I was hoping to conduct an interview with an Irish Hip hop star and wanted to utilise a quiet space upstairs which I had been in numerous times before. He continued with a furrowed brow to look at my card as if he were border control looking at a fraudulent passport, while the other commentator proceeded to level some more *opinions* at Costello, this time stating that I ‘looked alright’ apparently, ‘but the state of your man, he looks dodgy that fella!’.

Whilst everything was happening so fast, I turned my attention to this man and with a stern tone asked him if he would like me to ‘comment on how I felt he appeared to me’, followed by a question on his manners and ‘if he thought it acceptable and not rude to pass remarks on someone due to their appearance?’. My instincts however were to punch him square in his rat like evil looking face if I were to be honest. His absolute superiority complex even at being called out for his rudeness was unwavering however and seemed to represent for me at least the face of political Ireland. ‘I then asked what the purpose of this building was?’ and at this stage our passport inspector realising that the mood was quickly changing and perhaps realising how extraordinarily rude his partner was behaving immediately handed me back the card and told us to come with him. By this stage I was personally both embarrassed and angry but we proceeded to follow him. If I were not there with my University Card or entry to the

middle class club, and just someone doing a local media project I wonder what the response of these educators would have been.

Myself and Costello followed the quieter of the two up the stairs and at this stage I was both extraordinarily embarrassed and confused and questioning whether we should just have left. MC Costello however simply smiled as he passed by our suited up loud mouthed friend and under a barrage of more comments simply said, 'A wolf in sheep's clothing eh bud?' We were given a room and when we sat down I apologised profusely for recommending the building but with a chuckle Costello stated, '*Chill shay, this is nothing new bro[...] Sure look it if it's not posh fucks like that fella its the pigs, stopping ya and searching ya, constant harassment for nothing, for wearing a tracksuit... ya get use to it*'. (Costello) This is something which is so vital in understanding the importance of Workin Class records and the absolute necessity for MC's like Costello who articulate feelings and situations that many will never acknowledge let alone experience. Here was an establishment run by *middle* and *upper* class individuals to stare into and pass judgement on a section of society to which they feel superior. Class warfare it would appear in this instance doesn't exist only if you are part of the lucky elite but for those who feel the brunt of this discrimination based on clothing or accents it very much exists every day. To just clarify I am not suggesting that all people from different classes hold such values but the point of including this story was that far from it being isolated, Costello would explain that this is an everyday occurrence and something which is not new to himself or '*any the lads, ya get use to it, sick of it but use to it*'. (Costello) Equally as he was not armed with handcuffs and a baton his pettiness was mild.

The Workin Class MC's instead of writing to alter attitudes within the oppressive class are primarily '*writing for the kid in the dark corner smoking a spliff and not giving a rats about anything*'(4real). That is not to say they are not targeting some material at the oppressive classes but choose to predominantly acknowledge that discrimination exists and to '*offer*

*hope that its possible to overcome' (4real). I asked all the MC's throughout the interviews if they had any rhymes they wanted to spit and Costello laughed and dedicated this one to our adversary on the stairs.*

*'we document the high lights of real life,  
grow up where fella's conceal knives, steal bikes, and deal white,  
estates full of emphy gafs the council boards up,  
no regeneration schemes government makes more cuts,  
soon as your accent's heard all of the doors shut,  
same around Dublin from millbrock to corduff,  
Can't make an excuse when we're coming up short but,  
Working class residents are use to the poor look,  
  
Remember all the fields with the burnt out cars,  
Boys were earning money as they served out bars,  
A life of poverty is gonna turn out hard,  
Writing songs about hip hop is how we learned bout ours,  
At the weekends kids hit the offy to rob dutch,  
The estate can get you killed, strung out or locked up,  
So many souls fell into a hole and got stuck,*

*Thats why we get enraged when we get judged by posh fucks,*

*I'm struggling through life wondering what trials next,*

*Habitat is dirty enough to be causing your child stress,*

*Government is like a vile pest,*

*tricked into borrowing money so the IMF can pile debt,*

*Be alert theres a reptile treat,*

*Im surprised boys aren't throwing the projectiles yet,*

*From Blanch to Finglas walk a 5mile stretch,*

*home of shotguns and horses Dublin is the wild wild west.'(Costello)*

#### 4.4: More to Hip hop than the Gangsta Gangsta



(Picture: Lethal Dialect)

Back at the beginning of the end in relation to Hip hop moving towards Gangsta Bell Hooks produced a great article in which she contextualised Gangsta rap. Hooks argued that, ‘gangsta rap does not appear in a cultural vacuum, but, rather, is expressive of the cultural crossing, mixings, and engagement of black youth culture with the values, attitudes, and concerns of the white majority[...]and that the sexist, misogynist, patriarchal ways of thinking and behaving that are glorified in gangsta rap are a reflection of the prevailing values in our society, values created and sustained by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy’. (Hooks, 1994) And while Hooks explains that *Gangsta rap* is part an anti-feminist backlash and should be challenged as such, that it should not be used as a scapegoat for a much larger endemic issue within a patriarchal capitalist society. ‘When young black males labor in the plantations of misogyny and sexism to produce gangsta rap, their right to speak this violence and be materially rewarded is extended to them by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

Far from being an expression of their "manhood," it is an expression of their own subjugation and humiliation by more powerful, less visible forces of patriarchal Gangsterism' (Hooks, 1994)

The MC's involved in this research seemed to follow a similar to each other in their journey with regard Hip hop from their earlier exposure to the genre up until this point. They were all exposed initially to '*the usual stuff*' (Linko), at a '*very young age*' (L.D) and while it may '*sound a bit cliché to say it, but when the likes of 2pac and that started coming out it was how a lot of us got into it.*' (L.D) Costello who was 10 when he first '*heard 2pac*' and explained how the '*stuff that he was talking about like teenage pregnancy, drug addiction, violence and police brutality*' had impacted on him straight away as he could immediately '*relate to it[...] because growing up in weirview there woulda been alot of negativity, alota anti social stuff ya know*'. (Costello) When Linko says the *usual stuff*, he is referring to the commercially successful element within Hip hop, commonly referred to as *Gangsta Rap* which throughout the mid to late 90's and into the naughties surpassed other elements within Hip hop in relation to both global sales and exposure. Gangsta rap is a subgenre of hip hop which purports to reflect urban crime and the violent lifestyles of inner-city youths became the most commercially lucrative subgenre within hip hop right up to today. This element of Hip hop which initially got all three of the participants engaged with the genre has received unprecedented levels of criticism from many media outlets and from as high quarters as 'Bill Clinton, George Bush and David Cameron' (Neath, 2006) and has unfortunately done a massive disservice to '*The Message*' which Hip hop originally fought to promote (Grandmaster Flash, 1982).

Whilst this subgenre is still falsely propagated as the sole face of Hip hop from powerful quarters and whilst opportunistic politicians and right wing media outlets who like to put blame on it for all of societal ills, I think it is important to understand the power dynamic at

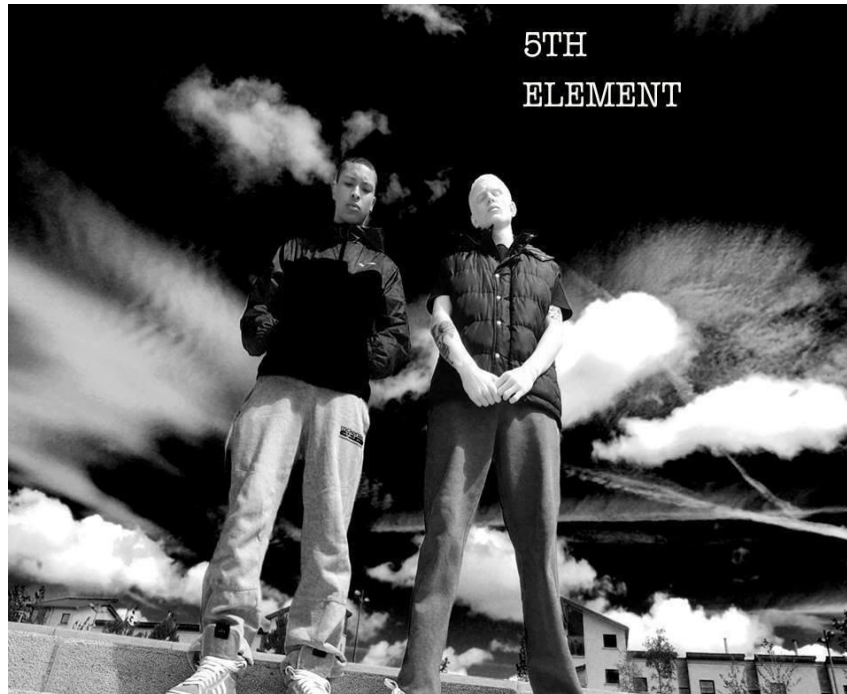
play here which MC Costello explained throughout our interview. Just as Tricia Rose detailed in *Black Noise* in relation to the big 6 corporate labels in ‘CBS, Polygram, Warner, BMG, Capitol-EMI, and MCA purchasing the independent labels, with the hope of reaping the benefits derived from the toil of these smaller labels that originally brought hip-hop to prominence’. (Rose,1997), Costello directed me ‘*to look at Byron Hurts documentary Beyond Beats and Rhyme*’ to get an insight into the ‘*power play*’ which saw the unprecedented rise of the sub genre.(Costello) After the major labels bought out the smaller independent companies, there was a noticeable shift in the lyrical content of hip-hop. (Hurt, 2006) Whereas, previously the lyrics focused on social, political, and cultural issues, the lyrics now were becoming more hyper-violent and hyper-masculine, eventually coming together as a new genre known as “Gangsta Rap” which rose in popularity and sales while being heavily promoted by the major labels. (Hurt, 2006)

Our MC’s would all articulate that the initial attraction with this subgenre would eventually transcend into a greater appreciation or deeper understanding of Hip hop. Costello explained that when he ‘*started listening to it more and more and got a few years older, {he} sussed it out to what it was really about, more so than the gangsta gangsta image and this and that. I saw it was much deeper and took it from there.*’(Costello) Linco explained that as he ‘*learnt what the vocabulary actually meant instead of just rapping along with it {that} it opened up his eyes to how deep hip hop does get, and I loved it, just always immersed in it then. Literally addicted.*’(Linco) All three MC’s would explain that they would go from one MC to another, from different styles and periods, and ‘*the deeper you {got} into it, and go through the levels that you then start to listen to the underground and stuff. Then you start listening, not just to the underground but the independent stuff. Stuff that was rare basically, seriously rare collection of hip hop, stuff that never really got out*’ (L.D). In academia there is a clear understanding that if one claims to be an expert of a particular subject that you must be up to

date with existing literature and competent enough to engage with current idea's before such recognition is granted. There appears to be a similar process (albeit informal) within practitioners of Hip hop. This understanding or knowledge which precedes recognition is apparent within Hip hop circles, as there are clear distinctions between 'young apprentices' or students, and MC's or Masters of Ceremony. What one must take from this then is the clear distinction between the commercialised elements and the differentiation to the true Hip hop which exudes a high level of consciousness and is highly educational. These MC's act in almost a mentor fashion to the younger members of the crew or listeners and promote the 5<sup>th</sup> element of knowledge within their music.



#### 4.5: Hip Hop Education. The school with no walls



(Picture: MC Linco and Ger Kellet)

*'These lads that I work with through Hip hop are privileged to have different levels of education; they've spiritual education, a hip hop education, community education, academic education, peer education and an understanding of where they fit into the world and this is a real privilege'.(Dean) .*

*'Although we cannot expect the education system to solve the problems of dysfunctional families or the inequalities within society, we should expect it not to reinforce those inequalities. This is what I would seek to change in education. Although we are led to believe that the education system can provide a path to equal opportunity, in reality it is a major force in preserving the existing social stratification of society'. (Mc Verry, 2013)*

A throw away comment by a young man at a Workin Class gig, (when I was asking him about Hip hop and knowledge), has really stuck with me. He said, *'this is our school, hip hop is like a school without walls and we're all top of the class'*. Peter McVerry of the The McVerry Trust Foundation for the homeless wrote an article in The Irish Times in October of last year in which he questioned the role the formal education system in Ireland was playing with regard inequality in our society. Dean pointed me in the direction of this article during our interview and mentioned that he *'agreed with Mc Verry in this article in that it's (the education system) just not a system centred around the person'*. (Dean) Mc Verry stated that through his many interviews with young people who have been failed by our formal education systems that he found that it was school itself that *'made them feel worse about themselves'*. The total emphasis on academia of an often *abstract* nature alienates many of the young people from a system which in practice is supposed to bring about more rounded individuals who are then able to move out into society with knowledge of self and the world to which they will inhabit. Or least this is what much eloquent rhetoric would lead you to believe.

As articulated by Freire, the raising of critical consciousness in people who have been oppressed is a first step in helping them to obtain critical literacy and, ultimately, liberation from oppressive ideologies. Dean Scurry who is also a youth worker explained that *'one of the pinnacles of youth work is that you would help and support young people to become self aware and critical analysers of society and their role in civic society and I think that this is what this hip hop is doing'*. (Dean) MC Costello who is a massive advocate of self learning, wrote a song entitled Young Apprentices in which he calls out the *'nippers'* to become more aware of *'whose fucking them'*. He explains how he believed that Hip hop is often mistaken in that often *'people forget the 5<sup>th</sup> element of Hip hop and thats knowledge itself, now that means that if you live in this world and base your ideas only on other peoples idea's, those*

*already structured, then ya could be easily led or tricked into thinking this or that. Sometimes ya have to have knowledge of yourself to question things*'. (Costello) It is the belief of the participants that this is what Hip hop does; it is almost a school of sorts in that one learns from artists about issues which impact on their everyday lives and from such a knowledge exchange become more well rounded and educated.

*'Keeping some secrets, deep with the knowledge that stick to us like adhesive, you can never know too much pal, that's what I'm at peace with, piecing the puzzle without sneaking and cheating, peep the uniqueness seeping through the brain like its telekinesis, tryna better our thesis, preaching from reading and teaching to the ears of the youths that we're reaching, we execute when we're speaking, been outstraight to the point not for the light hearted or people who do be feeling their feelings, don't be feeding them demons, seeing is believing but not when your dreaming 24/7 in what we call reality fein in for a bucket: (GI Don )* GI in the verse above is speaking about this notion of education and piecing together his life thesis. This notion of self directed learning is a major part in fulfilling the 5<sup>th</sup> element in Hip hop which is knowledge. An element which cannot be circumvented if MC status is to be attained. 'Self directed learning is a form of study in which learners have the primary responsibility for planning, carrying out and evaluating their own learning experiences' (Merriam and Caffarella 1991: 41). More recently writers such as Charles Hayes have returned to self teaching and sought to champion the idea that people should take control of their own learning and adopt self-directed inquiry as a lifelong priority. 'When we fail to take control of our education, we fail to take control of our lives. Self-directed inquiry, the process of taking control of your own education... is the lifeblood of democracy' (Hayes, 1998:xiv) I believe that this championing of self directed inquiry is part of the underpinning philosophy of the Workin Class label and movement.

Linco who is the youngest of the MC's interviewed is currently enrolled in Ballyfermot College of Further Education where he is studying digital media studies. He equally spoke of the benefit of Hip hop as an educational tool but also commented on the fact that it was more representative of working class people than formal schooling. To him it shattered the myth that working class people, who may not have attained high levels of formal education were automatically less intelligent as a result. He elaborated that *'hip hop was always like that, yano fucking originators all them boys coming from the grimest of spots and just being fucking geniuses at what they do. The like's of Akala- talking about Shakespeare and showing that the whole thing then goes even deeper than you can imagine. And then like that Shakespeare himself was a working class head so even with him, greatest writer of all time, was fucking poor basically. I just think intelligence isn't something that's taught all the time yano that way. Just do it- there's no other way, just do it! Cos I have that mind over matter'* (Linko) This confidence and sense of empowerment he believes is a direct result of his exposure to hip hop. Separately whilst talking to Nodlag she spoke about one of the scenes in Broken song, which *'opened her eyes to the power of rap on the young people. Nathan does a rap at the beginning of the film and afterwards he states that he was up all night with his sister doing his rhyme and they looked up all the big words in the dictionary and it is this very thing. We see and know many who have been by passed or slipped through the education experience, to have them pouring over the dictionary is an amazing thing to encourage in someone'*. (Nodlag) Whilst this thesis is not about the utility of Hip hop within the pre-existing formal school system, I believe that if done correctly, that Hip hop would benefit formal educators and students alike.

Morrell and Duncan in their wonderful investigation entitled 'Promoting Academic Literacy with Urban Youth through Engaging Hip-hop Culture' argued that Hip-hop texts are 'literary texts and could be used to scaffold literary terms and concepts and ultimately foster literary

interpretations. Hip-hop texts are rich in imagery and metaphor and can be used to teach irony, tone, diction, and point of view. Also, Hip-hop texts can be analyzed for theme, motif, plot, and character development' (Morrell and Duncan: 2002, 89) When asked about the potential merit in formal education with regard Hip hop, Dean stated: *'Well it all depends on who's scoring the score sheet. As far as we're concerned this is on par with learning sociology or advanced mathematics, if you can connect to this in half the way that we connect to other theories or other business practices or so own then of course there's merit. Not saying we have to swipe those things to the side but what I am saying is that Hip hop can live in the same field as that and there could even be a space in the formal education for this. This would mean a complete reworking of the education system back to looking at students actual people as opposed to numbers who need to be processed. In the door and out the door and once a certain percentage get certain grades bob's your uncle'* (Dean)

Nodlag also commented on the levels of enthusiasm which she witnessed when filming some of the Hip hop workshops. These workshops which were run by Workin Class were to her an example of how to engage kids and could be used in a mainstream setting. *'From a teaching point of view the fact that these kids have such enthusiasm for writing and for writing poetry and are happy to stand around on a street corner talking about rhyming schemes or whatever. I mean to be able to harness that level of enthusiasm and perhaps bring it into teaching in school or somewhere or just learning English would be brilliant, It would be an amazing thing I think even to encourage creativity'*. (Nodlag) .Morrell endorses this view in his study, concluding that, 'If one goal of critical educators is to empower urban students to analyze complex literary texts, Hip-hop can be used as a bridge linking the seemingly vast span between the streets and the world of academics. Hip-hop texts, given their thematic nature, can be equally valuable as springboards for critical discussions about contemporary issues facing urban youth'- (Morrell and Duncan; 2002; 88)

Another form of education which can't be taught in school is known as street smarts. Hip hop it is argued can fill that void because much of its content concerns itself with the everyday life of the street. Lethal Dialect in our interview mentions this notion of *street smarts*. Street smarts are something which are not taught in school but often learnt as one grows up. This is a running theme throughout all of my interviews and observations. There is also a deep seated anger directed at the formal education system, which often ignores the challenges facing young people. Young people who may face grave challenges not on the syllabus, which those teaching them might not *'understand or be able to handle themselves'* (L.D) Lethal explains that he *'know{s} certain people and they are not street smart, in fact they are just flat out naive, they are just lacking a part of an education. A lot of my street smarts came from not just growing up in Cabra but listening to hip hop. Listening to the stories in the tunes and learning bout the things going on in the real world. Hip hop educates you, gives ya an insight and a different perspective on things, even if you don't live around that sort of stuff, it will educate you on what really goes on. It gives you an awareness of your environment. You're not naive then, you learn how to deal with things, for me street smarts means when you're in a sticky situation your almost expecting anything at anytime but it's not effecting you. You're not sitting around paranoid, your still doing your thing but you always have that constant awareness. It builds your guard more so than anything'* (Lethal Dialect)

Linco also mentioned the notion of street smarts and his track street intelligence speaks of this topic which L.D has just discussed. *'staying grounded with our street intelligence, in the jungle hunting with all these beasts and predators, stalking our prey so we can attack and reap the benefits, there's no time for self defence when you meet these elements, the shootings kidnappings stabbings that happen is damaging, ravishing savaging anything in the sanctuary, sanity vanishing, brain capacity is average no your minds a fucking power house now use it to your advantage, your brains more powerful than any optic or physical, some*

*find it difficult to exploit it in ways but people pay attention and listen, I'll make sure that its getting through,{...}, Ill transform like the altered beast, better places I'm embracing watch me bound across constant constellations, countless seismic waves of a conscious elevation, next stage is the destination, higher plains waiting, we'll always step pace and check mating in this chess game of patience. (Linco and Ger: Street Intelligence)*

This notion of self directed learning and street smarts as well the benefit towards formal education is not simply obtained by listening to Hip hop but comes through study and a dedication to the art form. Costello explained how he moved on as a 'student' of Hip hop from his initial limited exposure, to obsessively 'studying' different artists as he *'kept on progressing with it and buying albums every week, and remember{s} working part time jobs just so as to buy as many albums as I could out of HMV, I'd probably have 400 plus collection in me gaf, all hip hop CD's, so I'd be well educated on it, soaking it all up.'* (Costello) There is an informal relationship between the artists who are established MC's and those younger students who are called the 'apprentices'. The process of being elevated is often unspoken but understood. It is determined by the depth of your written work (penmanship) and also your understanding of other tracks and the logic behind them. This again reflects that earlier notion of a school without walls. Becoming more real (aware) except without formal exams, and is totally based on peer reviews. The potency of this socially orientated style of Hip hop can undoubtedly have sociological and educational benefit to its listeners. They understand at first hand the lyrical content and how it applies to their lives. I will end with a rhyme dropped by our youngest MC who whilst still in his teenage years highlights the breadth of knowledge which can be conveyed in a single verse:

*'Sphere vision, 360 precision, tyrna a list a giving's, that keep me driven, things like religion, But never rely solely on the sound of silence to listen, even when the dark clouds drift, and*

*keep with the spirit ya can hear it, now the limit is limitless, manifesting images once  
electrical signals, no longer metaphysical, just ripples in existence, mind over matter, I'll be  
achieving the stature, hold the earth until the globe fucking shatters, ill lower colon fractions  
probing for answers, orbit like the matter in an atom, spinning balance sipping from life's  
chalice, arrhythmic and chantress synchronise with the tribal jumps, shine like a viva's son  
rhyme with the enlightened ones, heightened senses in the writing call us the Irish monks ,  
ironic I know but it's the only land that I know, that I call home, in the zone yo I work for the  
throne, we go on, live long be no pawn shifting pieces with songs I drift along to the beat of  
the storm, calm in the eye I flow and rip like a tide leaving mics torn, forever thankful for  
being born, end to it intentions of making it, never be the spectator be the best player, respect  
the maker ,whose inventions are sacred, yeah I'm talking bout nature, so I'm aiming for  
acres for me children to play in, for me children to play in'. (Linco)*



## **Chapter Five: Summation**

### **5.1: Conclusion**

Whilst writing this thesis

I have learned firsthand and trust that I have demonstrated the cultural value of hip hop .I observed how it affects by instruction, the marginalised and disillusioned young people who come in contact with it. I was struck by the sense of integrity and of community that is so intrinsic to the penmanship of the artists. The articulation of the social ills that blight their lives and the justified anger expressed in their lyrics.

Of equal importance is the palpable sense of empowerment so valued by all progressive educators and social theorists alike. Workin class records indeed represents a model worthy of emulation not only because it functions as a ‘school without walls’ but it is also a touchstone for many who would blame themselves for their powerlessness. Drug addiction and suicide are real issues in need of real dialogue. Dictates from above or shambolic law enforcement has done nothing to remedy these or indeed any of the problems besetting this community. Another common thread I encountered was the abandonment of formal schooling at very young ages. It was therefore heart warming to learn of a young person scanning a dictionary late into the night. Proof if proof is needed that engagement in the subject is a pre requisite to learning. Hip hop is at the centre of this myriad of experiences. It has had a positive effect both for individuals and as a result, for the community at large.

Ballymun is not in any way unique. Every council estate in Dublin shares the same social problems. Current austerity measures are pushing the weakest into impossible situations. The greater the disempowerment, the greater the isolation. Young people deserve to understand why they are without fair paying jobs, and that what opportunities that do exist are beyond

their attainment. I would never be naive enough to offer hip hop as a panacea to all injustice however it can reassure the vulnerable. Like all victims of abuse the first stage of recovery involves not blaming oneself. The second most striking positive is the level of political nous transmitted by the poets. I cannot fully conclude without once again thanking Dean and all the lads and girls for their warmth and acceptance of a nosey bugger. Keep it Lit.

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