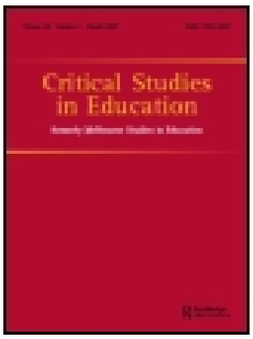

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Global flows as gendered cultural pedagogies: learning gangsta in the 'Durty South'

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This article theorizes empirical data from an ethnographic project conducted in and around the economically disadvantaged suburb of Noble Park in southeast suburban Melbourne (Victoria, Australia). Exploring the politics around gendered identities of young people involved in the research, particularly Australian-Sudanese men, the authors theorize global flows of 'gangsta culture' as gendered cultural pedagogies that are (re)produced by young men who live in the area. In highlighting the pedagogical role of gangsta culture, the authors read Appadurai's theories of globalization and the imagination in relation to theories of hegemonic masculinity, to argue global flows of gangsta culture are gendered and carry with them specific kinds of idealized masculinities in relation to which young people in the study produce themselves. The authors also argue that gangsta culture clearly is not an American phenomenon, despite commonly being associated as such. Rather, its reach is globalizing, appearing everywhere global media texts form part of local communities. Gangsta pedagogies are thus in motion and disjunctive, operating transnationally and having differentiated effects in the lives of young participants involved in the research. In line with this, gangsta masculinities are ubiquitous and constitute sites of constant contest and reconstruction, with the young men involved in this research constructing their masculinities dialogically, in relation to the perceptions of peers, family members, teachers, members of the community and in relation to the contours of local space. Whether young people choose to actively engage with gangsta culture, or are unwillingly engaged with it by virtue of the spaces they traverse, its pedagogical forces effect both problematic and productive performances of racialized, gendered and spatialized identities.

Keywords: Australian-Sudanese; cultural pedagogies; gangsta masculinities; gender; spatialization of disadvantage; territorialization

Introduction

In this article, we theorize empirical data from a one-year ethnographic project[1] conducted in and around the economically disadvantaged suburb of Noble Park in southeast suburban Melbourne (Victoria, Australia). In doing so, we explore and theorize global flows of 'gangsta culture'[2] as gendered cultural pedagogies that are (re)produced predominately by young men who live in the area. Our core argument is that gangsta culture operates transnationally and pedagogically in complex and disjunctive ways and has paradoxical and differentiated effects in the lives of our young research participants.[3] Specifically,

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gangsta culture appears to operate productively and normatively: offering powerful modes of resistance and identification while, at the same time, producing extreme forms of hegemonic masculinity, violence and territorialism.

In developing our argument, we draw on the work of Appadurai (1996, 2000) to suggest the kinds of gangsta culture that emerge within, and in relation to, mediascapes of gangsta rap music can be considered a pedagogy of masculinity that is racialized and localized in particular ways. In advancing this argument, we contend that gangsta culture, like many other forms of globally-spanning popular culture, is a form of pedagogical discourse marked by fluidity, unevenness and nuance. As such, the way it is received and produced by young people differs greatly, depending on their individual positioning within cultural contexts and fields of social power. Specifically, we suggest gangsta culture (and the kinds of masculinities it produces), might be considered a form of *cultural pedagogy*, as the types of learning, imagining and subjective performances that emerge among young people in relation to it are social practices that operate and travel through culture.

In highlighting the pedagogical role of gangsta culture, we read Appadurai (1996, 2000) in relation to theories of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2000; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), to argue global flows of gangsta culture are necessarily gendered and carry with them specific kinds of idealized masculinities, in relation to which the young people in this study produce themselves. It is our view that Appadurai's work requires a reading that draws attention to both the pedagogical and gendered realms of global cultural flows.

Global flows as disjunctive cultural pedagogies

Drawing upon Anderson's (1983) theory of 'imagined communities', Appadurai (1996) argues that in globalizing times, the imagination plays a new and critical role as a social practice:

> The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice. . . . The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order. (p. 31)

For Appadurai (1996), the imaginations of an increasing number of globally connected individuals and groups are constituted by a series of intersecting and disjunctive global flows, which he articulates in terms of five key scapes: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, ideoscapes, technoscapes and financescapes. These scapes are fluid, irregular, multiply constituted and perspectivally registered (Appadurai, 2000, p. 95). We suggest gangsta culture operates pedagogically through such scapes – particularly mediascapes and ideoscapes (e.g. mass media discourses, dominant cultural ideologies) – to orient the imaginations and subjectivities of young people in our research site. Groupings of young people that occur around shared imaginations of gangsta culture also appear to articulate 'communities of sentiment' (Appadurai, 1996, p. 8). That is, such groupings of young people offer examples of how, in globalizing times, media flows and forces mobilize groups of people 'to imagine and feel things together' (8). Following Richardson (2007, p. 212), it is our contention that communities of sentiment that emerge around gangsta culture are privileged by young male cultures in low socio-economic areas, where, despite the important forms of power and agency that gangsta

culture appears to provide, its privileging might also limit possibilities for how these young men imagine and produce themselves. We believe that imaginations of hegemonic gangsta masculinities can bear an intrinsic relation to young people's agentive possibilities.

In articulating his theory, Appadurai does not specifically engage with the concept of pedagogy, however, his theory lends itself to a consideration of pedagogy. The kinds of global flows (or scapes) Appadurai describes can be read forms of cultural pedagogy that are disjunctive and processual: that is, global flows of gangsta culture are composed of diverse and intersecting components, which have pedagogical forces. For example, gangsta culture operates through channels as different as corporately produced rap videos, histories of Black music performance, a young person's favourite cap, personal identifications with forms of speech and modes of 'gangsta comportment', television shows and movies that depict criminal activities or which fetishize gang involvement, everyday youthful forms of masculine legitimation, video games and so on. These individual elements, upon which cultural meaning is inscribed, might not be pedagogical in themselves, but when embedded in cultural narratives and processes of meaning making they become pedagogical. Moreover, these diverse components interact with each other across lives, countries and continents, teaching different things and meaning different things to different people. It is in these processes of making meaning (and the crucial roles played by materiality in these processes) in which our interest lies. Also, it is because of these intersections between public, private, people and things that we feel 'cultural globalizing pedagogy' offers an intimate and pervasive expression of the kind of informal, unbounded, culturally mediated and subjective learning to which we refer.

In advancing the notion of gangsta culture as a form of cultural pedagogy, our intent is to draw attention to the fluidities, inconsistencies and nuances in young men's engagements with transnational flows of gangsta. Aware that the notion of cultural pedagogy opens a range of analytical tributaries, we use it here to develop Appadurai's (1996) view that globalizing times are 'characterized by objects in motion', which include 'ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques', operating in ways 'not coeval, convergent, isomorphic, or spatially consistent', but rather in 'relations of disjuncture' (p. 5). As such:

> . . . the paths or vectors taken by these kinds of things have different speeds, axes, points of origin and termination, and varied relationships to institutional structures in different regions, nations, or societies. Further, these disjunctures themselves precipitate various kinds of problems and frictions in different local situations. (p. 5)

Global flows therefore make available what might be termed 'pedagogies of disjuncture'. Gangsta pedagogies are thus in motion, insofar as their discourses are forever moving through globalizing circuits of popular and corporate cultures, but are also disjunctive in that they are not uniformly disseminated or received. The ways young people learn and perform gangsta take place through a pastiche of cultural connections, consumptions and reproductions that traverse multiple spatial and structural contexts.

A key implication of viewing gangsta culture as a disjunctive cultural pedagogy is that its pedagogical potential needs to be considered both productive and normative. Gangsta culture, therefore, is not simply a form of corporate or cultural imperialism that wages wars of moral corruption on young people. We firmly disagree with such sentiments, which clearly rely upon positions of moral panic (Cohen, 1972) and often offer totalizing readings of popular culture as being responsible for the castration of young people's

potential for critical agency (Savage, 2010, p. 108).[4] For example, our analysis of young people's engagements with gangsta culture is concerned with a different set of questions from that which drives Giroux's analysis of the pedagogical role of corporate culture in texts such as *The mouse that roared* (2001a) or *Stealing innocence: Corporate culture's war on children* (2001b). While corporations, such as record labels, entertainment companies and branding think-tanks certainly contribute in powerful ways to global flows of gangsta culture, the imaginative life and cultural history (Richardson, 2007, pp. 197–227) through which gangsta is read, articulated in localized ways and folded into the subjectivities of young male subjects, is at least equally important as the corporately produced articulations of gangsta that appear in mainstream corporatized media. Also, while the large proportion of gangsta pedagogies that flow transnationally through popular-corporate media are produced in North America, we write from an Australian perspective and believe it is important to steer away from positions that might see Australian youth as Americanized or hijacked by gangsta flows. Rather than viewing young people's engagements with gangsta pedagogies as either resistive or regulatory, emancipatory or oppressive, our data suggests they are all of these things at once: dynamic, dialectical, political and bound up with social power in chaotic ways (see Savage, 2010, p. 113). Linked to this, we also reject the notion that gangsta culture might be considered a form of 'public pedagogy' (Giroux 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2004, 2005). This is because we do not believe a singular 'public' exists through which gangsta culture is distributed and received. In fact, such imaginations of public pedagogy run counter to our view that disjunctive cultural pedagogies operate transnationally (thus through multiple publics) and have differentiated effects in the lives of individuals depending on their positioning within specific cultural contexts and fields of social power.

Of course, the term cultural pedagogy is not beyond criticism and comes with its own history. We use it here with a slightly different meaning from those attributed to the term previously. Cultural pedagogy has been in use since the early 1990s and, at the date of publication, there are eleven refereed research publications that feature the specific term 'cultural pedagogy'.[5] However, the contexts in which the term is deployed and the meanings ascribed to the term are varied. The first and most often cited publication to work with the phrase is Trend's (1992) book *Cultural pedagogy: Art/education/politics*, which is a study of art education more than a project aimed at producing a theory of cultural pedagogy. In contrast to Trend's focus on the 'relationship between cultural work and critical pedagogy in the arts' (p. viii), we argue that culture (and cultural materialities such as TV, online media, music, schools, suburbs and spaces) is material pedagogy. Trend employs two particular methods of approach to avoid 'foreshortening the complexities and contradictions of particular circumstances' (pp. 2–3) and while our epistemological frame is very different from Trend's, we similarly embrace the notion of cultural pedagogy because of its potential complexity. Culture is un-'flattenable' and uncontainable and thinking about cultural pedagogy is a way of framing this messiness as an agent of subjectivation. More recently, 'cultural pedagogy' is used by Joe Kincheloe in his 2002 book, *The sign of the burger*. Chapter four of the book, 'McDonald's as cultural pedagogy' theorizes two forms of 'cultural pedagogy'. These are 'corporate cultural pedagogy' and a politically left wing cultural pedagogy 'operating on the terrain of everyday life' (p. 107). Our political conception of 'left' and 'right' is arguably less clear-cut than Kincheloe's and we are not concerned with what he calls 'corporate cultural pedagogy' (p. 111). However, his analysis of 'the cultural pedagogy of affect and emotion', which holds 'power to shape the world' (p. 108), articulates exactly the ways in

which we understand the workings of cultural pedagogy. It is clearly a process which 'takes place at all levels – the macro-ideological and the micro-disciplinary' (p. 115) and operates through 'affect and desire' (p. 214).

Gangsta culture as gendered cultural pedagogies

So far, we have argued that gangsta culture can be considered a form of cultural pedagogy that is disjunctive, in motion, productive and normative. Before we apply this interpretation to our empirical data, we deepen our theoretical frame by reading Appadurai (1996, 2000) in relation to theories of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2000; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005), to argue that cultural pedagogies of gangsta are necessarily gendered and carry with them specific kinds of idealized masculinities, in relation to which young people produce themselves.

In our view, Appadurai (1996, 2000) does not adequately attend to the gendered dimensions of global cultural flows. In other words, Appadurai's notion of the imagination as a social practice is linked intrinsically to individual and collective agency and is presented as somewhat 'gender-neutral'. This is clearly not the case. The imagination, as a social practice, needs to be understood as gendered and/or gendering. This is particularly the case when considering the extreme forms of masculinity around gangsta culture found in our research site.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain the ways in which gender exists as a regulating component of our social fabric, stating:

> Masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting. (p. 836)

The possibility for gender to be achieved through socialization attests to the regulatory aspects of the social imagination: that is, men must share an idea of what it is to be a 'man' in order to 'be men' together – their ideals lead to performances of gender. The social imagination is enfolded with located varieties of masculinity, many of which can be found in the materialities of media texts as well as in culturally specific histories and practices of gender. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) maintain that culturally specific histories and practices of gender carry with them idealized versions of masculinity. They offer the example of the Stakhanovite industrial worker in the Soviet regime – named after the idealized, hyper-productive coal miner Aleksandr Stakhanov – as a culturally specific example of idealized masculinity (p. 838). The important point, they argue, is that such idealized forms of masculinity do not necessarily 'correspond closely to the lives of any actual men' but, nevertheless, provide models that 'express widespread ideals, fantasies, and desires' (838). The imagination, therefore, operates powerfully to orient men in relation to ideal types. We believe that, much like the Stakhanovite worker in the time of the Soviet regime, the contemporary gangsta can also be read as a culturally specific example of idealized masculinity, with some young men in our research sites achieving a version of masculinity very close to the ideal and others producing themselves quite differently in relation to gangsta.

Global flows of gangsta culture take many forms and the word 'gangsta' is a nebulous term. For this reason, there are multiple forms of idealized gangsta masculinities. In this article, the gangsta to which we refer finds root specifically in the musical genre of gangsta rap. North American gangsta rap outfits and individuals of the past few decades have

included NWA (Niggas With Attitude), Wu-Tang Clan, Tupac, 50 Cent, Ice T, Ludacris, DMX and G-Unit. The music performed by these artists can be considered distinct from 'hip-hop', which artists such as De La Soul and Queen Latifah helped frame as a political musical form during the 1980s.[6] Grealy (2008) argues that gangsta rap can be seen as a mode of speaking against hip-hop and its more middle-class, democratic and political roots by attempting to focus on the daily battles faced in urban ghettos, thus invoking 'society's denigrated urban lower class' and glorifying 'the hardships endured by blacks' (p. 857).[7] While the gangsta rap artists introduced above are Black North Americans and the genre arguably took seed in predominately Black urban communities in the late-1980s and early-1990s, gangsta rap music is no longer a solely Black phenomenon.[8]

Our data suggests gangsta masculinities operate in the lives of young men from many different cultural backgrounds. In fact, a limitation of gangsta research to date has been its Afrocentrism: that is, a tendency to understand gangsta as a Black cultural formation and as 'just another ghetto pathology of the African-American underclass' (Hagedorn, 2008, as cited in Black, 2008, p. 44). Such analyses are both myopic and US-centric, in that they fail to recognize the global phenomenon that gangsta has become and omit discussion of the ways gangsta is appropriated into the lives of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds the world over (Hagedorn, 2008, Richardson, 2007, p. 227). Afrocentric accounts also fail to account for the increasing 'hybridity' of youth cultures and the distinct relations between the intersecting socio-cultural, economic and historical dimensions of specific spaces and the ways gangsta is taken up in them (see Butcher & Thomas, 2007; Nilan & Feixa, 2006). Gangsta culture is, therefore, 'bound up in complex histories of class, gender, and racial relations, and upon even a cursory glance it is by no means a homogenous, uncontested, black/male/working-class culture' (Grealy, 2008, p. 859).

Gangsta rap has developed into one of the more controversial music genres in recent history, widely attacked for its glorification and exaggeration of 'ghetto life' or 'thug life' and its glamorization and naturalization of violence, including hard-line sexual violence towards women.[9] Gangsta rap has been variously criticized, for example, for promoting racism, sexism, rape, murder, drug dealing and abuse, homophobia, police bashings, prostitution, suicide and other illegal or politically incorrect activities. Perhaps understandably, therefore, gangsta rap as been at the centre of enormous 'moral panic' (Cohen, 1972, Thornton, 1994) as it is regularly blamed by critics from the left, the right and the religious as the cause of all manner of social ills.[10] However, moral panics surrounding gangsta rap conceal the pedagogical role gangsta culture plays as a vehicle for imagining resistance and realizing forms of personal agency, particularly for young men who live in disadvantaged and often 'demonized' (McLeod & Dillabough, 2007; Warr, 2007) and 'abject' (Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2008) social spaces. For young people in such spaces, gangsta culture appears to provide an antidote to social exclusion and the 'demoralization' (Hagedorn, 2008, pp. 53–64) that can accompany the awareness that one has incredibly limited social and economic capital.

Hagedorn (2008) argues, for example, that research into gangsta culture has failed to adequately account for the influence of rap music, which, on the one hand, provides individuals with a 'culture of rebellion' (p. 85) and resistance against mainstream cultural values and, on the other, reinforces gendered and racial stereotypes and serves as a conduit through which young people are exploited by corporate multinational music companies (pp. 93, 100). We are particularly interested in exploring this 'split character' of gangsta's pedagogical role and argue that it can be seen operating in the lives our research participants as Janus-faced: offering identities marked by social visibility, power and control, yet also as a social category that marks young bodies as socially and economically impoverished. Far

from being a monocultural, top-down influence upon young people, gangsta emerges as both a 'space of protest' (Grealy, 2008, p. 852) and as a punitive, normative force, embodying the productive and the normative aspects of the social imagination.

Following Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), we believe the normative aspects of gangsta masculinities can be understood as unique forms of extreme hegemonic masculinity, generating narratives of urban hyper-violence and territorialism, thug/outlaw culture, the misogynistic exploitation of women, macho sexual stylization and the fetishization of the male body. According to Connell (2000), hegemonic masculinity is constructed through the understanding that men should dominate women (p. 77), however, Connell and, later, Demetriou (2001) elaborate this concept by proposing hegemonic structure within masculinity, via which certain groups of men dominate other groups of men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 835; Demetriou, 2001, p. 337). Gangsta men may offer an idealized kind of masculinity that attempts to dominate other forms of masculinity and that might eclipse the social visibility of alternative masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity typically contains no evidence of femininity. It identifies a vision of a 'pure' masculinity, a fantasy founded on qualities such as force and competence, strength and skill. The man who embodies hegemonic masculinity is physically strong and emotionally stoic (Connell, 2000, p. 5). Producing a particular kind of male body is therefore central to attaining hegemonic masculinity. In our research, the kinds of gangsta masculinities performed by young men support Crawford (2008) and Welsing (1991), who suggest hegemonic masculinities appear to offer a hyper-masculinized disavowal of the feminine.

While operating normatively, hegemonic masculinity is not static. Connell (2000) argues that social, historical and material aspects of subject formation each play a role in crafting the hegemonic male body. Connell further elaborates, stating: 'Masculinities are created in specific historical circumstances and, as those circumstances change . . . gender practices can be contested and reconstructed' (pp. 13–14). Gangsta masculinities are thus ubiquitous and constitute sites of constant contest and reconstruction. Young people consume and produce gangsta in wild and different ways, which seem to be largely mediated by the specific local spaces in which they are immersed. The young men involved in our research constructed their masculinities dialogically, in relation to the perceptions of peers, family members, teachers, members of the community and in relation to the contours of local space.

Learning gangsta in the 'Durty South'

After a few weeks with young people in Melbourne's southeast, particular phrases become difficult to avoid: the Dandy Boys, the Noble Boys, the Springy Boys and, perhaps most centrally, the Durty South. For newcomers, it takes a while to carve out a sense of 'who's who and what's what', but eventually, nuances become clear, allegiances and territories can be imaginatively mapped out and the fear and violence associated with these gangs becomes a palpable reality. As one young woman from Noble Park explains:

> Mila: Noble, they're Sudanese, Springy, they're Asian, Dandy, they're Afghans, Wogs, Lebanese. They're all dangerous. They think they own the South! You don't want go near any of them.

Historically, the 'Durty South'[11] has roots in American gangsta rap culture, coined by rappers from southern cities such as Dallas, Miami and Nashville. In America, the Durty South, as a southern colloquialism, is part of a history of racism, slavery and prejudice in the former Confederate States of America, yet through transnational scapes of gangsta culture,

the Durty South now operates globally, through the social networking pages and subcultural discourses of young people in countries as diverse as Sweden, Israel, Ireland and Malaysia. In each case, the Durty South is taken up as a spatial signifier and as a place-based imagination that revolves around glorified myths of social dislocation and demonization, as well as narratives of gang and outlaw culture. The Durty South, therefore, is in motion, shifting through globalizing mediascapes and ideoscapes and engaging young people with particular kinds of 'imagined worlds' that appear to generate distinctly local meanings, while at the same time feeding back into globalizing flows of gangsta culture.

For the young people in our research, the Durty South operates as a powerful signifier among those who identify with gangsta cultures in Melbourne's southeast. The kinds of 'ghetto' and 'hood' narratives generated around the term in gangsta rap appear to speak powerfully to the realities of growing up around Noble Park – a suburb subject to regular demonization through sensationalist media accounts that regularly target young people from the area's significant Sudanese refugee population as purveyors of gang warfare.[12] For the young people we interviewed, the Durty South meant different things, depending on where individuals positioned themselves in relation to gang culture. For the minority who identified themselves as involved in local gangs, the Durty South appeared to signify pride, neighbourhood and gang allegiance and served as a way of imaginatively positioning themselves within a fiercely territorialized network of shopping malls, train stations, parks and streets. In most cases, associating with the Durty South was accompanied by collective alliances with the stylistic norms of gangsta culture. These alliances bear the hallmarks of what Hebdige (1994) calls 'communities of affect' and Bennett (1999), drawing upon Maffesoli (1996), terms 'neo-tribes' or 'lifestyles': that is, social groupings built around affective and symbolic engagements with popular and consumer cultures. To illustrate this, let us draw briefly on the online social networking profiles of several young men who identify as members of the Noble Boys – a group of almost exclusively Australian-Sudanese young men who live in and around the Noble Park area.[13] We discuss these profiles because they reflect the ways young people 'imagine and feel things together' (Appadurai, 1996) in relation to global mediascapes. Moreover, we think these profiles illustrate young people's collective imaginations more than our interview data, because engaging young people involved in such gangs in sustained dialogue proved particularly difficult.[14]

The Durty South is predominately used on social-networking profiles as a spatial signifier and an imagined space through which forms of violent territoriality and masculinity can be exercised. This is well illustrated in the self-penned rap lyrics of a young Australian-Sudanese man from Noble Park, which he posted on the social-networking site *Bebo*:

> It about gettin Durty went u in tha south
> M.B.P they are tha nigga u ever hurr about
> if u try 2 diss respect us u better shut ya mouth
> we got nigga evur wurr u get knock tha fuck out
> it M 2 tha L representing Durty South[15]

In these lyrics, the imagined violence and domination associated with the Durty South is quite clear. Outsiders are warned to be on guard in the Durty South and physical violence is threatened as a response to those who 'disrespect'. The fact that such imaginations are expressed through lyrics is significant, demonstrating the ways gangsta rap pedagogies are taken up in order to learn and map out a sense of self and place. Compare this young man's spatial identification with the Durty South to NWA's identification with Compton, Los Angeles:

> Straight outta Compton, crazy motherfucker named Ice Cube
> From the gang called Niggaz With Attitude
> When I'm called off, I got a sawed off
> Squeeze the trigger, and bodies are hauled off
> You too, boy, if ya fuck with me
> The police are gonna hafta come and get me
> (*NWA, Straight Outta Compton*)

Young men who identified with the Noble Boys often naturalized and glorified such violent territorialization on their *Bebo* and *MySpace* profiles. In imagining and constructing their online selves, these young men drew closely upon gangsta rap pedagogies. They posted iconography and imagery, musical references, videos and links and created photographs in which they performed heavily stylized and masculine performances of gangsta. On such profiles, young men fetishized violent gangsta narratives, referring to themselves as 'durty niggas', 'dangrus muther fuckn biatches' and 'kingz of da Durty South'. A particularly stark example was the online profile of a young Australian-Sudanese man from Noble Park, who created a series of images in which he superimposed his own image onto backgrounds filled with fast cars, piles of cash, semi-automatic weapons and semi-naked women. In the images, the young man emulates a typical thug pose, staring menacingly into the lens from under a low-set bandana and stiff-brimmed sports cap. The careful juxtaposition in these images creates a persona devoid of the everyday vulnerabilities, disadvantage, systemic racism and social disconnection often faced by young Australian-Sudanese people in the Noble Park area.[16] This carefully crafted set of images harnesses the mythologized discourses of gangsta rap culture to imbue the young man and his community of friends with seemingly formidable power.

The graphic nature of such imagery calls to mind Appadurai's (1996) argument that mediascapes serve to blur and complicate lines between realistic and fictional landscapes and can 'construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic' (p. 35). This said, while profiles of this nature may err toward the chimerical, the imagined communities they create are not pure fantasy. Rather, as Boyd (2008) argues, while young people might use social networking profiles 'to depict an idealized self or present a facet of their identity that they do not normally show in public spaces' (p. 128), 'few generate self-representations that are completely disconnected from their everyday lived experiences' (p. 128). Thus, it should be recognized that gangsta culture operates for these young men as a resource for generating feelings of ownership and belonging. As members of newly arrived refugee communities who, according to the Victorian government's *Rights of passage* report (Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission, 2008), view 'public' spaces as zones to be feared,[17] these young men appear to have re-imagined and thus re-configured the streets as spaces in which 'they' should be feared. The Noble Park train station, for example, emerged as a particularly powerful site of ownership for the Noble Boys and was a central part of the Durty South narrative. Online commentary around the station ranged from stories of simply hanging out, to vivid descriptions of acts of violence that took place there (such as fights that had occurred, incidences of robbing people on the trains) and fantastical narratives about what might happen if other gangs were to threaten the territory. Beyond such bravado, spatial identifications with the Noble Park area also included innocuous and positive references to local schools, shopping centres and parks in and around the Noble Park area, which reflected a clear sense of neighbourhood pride. As one 17-year-old wrote on his Bebo profile: 'Frm da Durty South, Noble Boyz, b luvin' it . . . Frm da durty south alwyz!'

A strong theme to emerge from our online research was the extent to which gangsta pedagogies were called upon as a means for mapping and policing hyper-masculine and violent gender performances. This took place through a variety of means, particularly through the style and choice of photos young people would post on their profiles and through messages and comments shared between members. The *MySpace* page of a 16-year-old Australian-Sudanese boy, for example, featured a series of images taken in a suburban back yard, which show the boy and his friends posing for the camera. In the images, one young man holds a baseball bat in a variety of menacing poses, while the rest stand with either crossed arms or holding up long-neck beer bottles for the camera. In another photo, one boy lies on the ground while the others pretend to kick and beat him with the baseball bat. On one level, these images emulate the typically violent imagery found on gangsta rap albums covers and in magazines such as *Murder Dog*, in which rappers are drenched in imagery of alcohol and weaponry. On another level, such violent narratives among young Australian-Sudanese men may also have roots in complex personal histories of violence in Sudan, with incidences of torture trauma high among the newly arrived (see Khawaja et al., 2008) and may serve as important resources for coping and understanding. Either way, the pedagogies of gangsta rap appear to blur with the specificities of life experience in the creation of such imagery. The performance of such hyper-masculine gangsta roles may be difficult to understand outside the memories and histories of these young men and the lineages of social disadvantage along which they have traveled. Complex personal, familial, racial and social histories and memories are brought to young people's engagements with gangsta culture.

Performances of hyper-masculine symbolic violence and domination can also be seen operating through online commentary. For example, one comment by a 15-year-old member of the Noble Boys on the profile page of a 12-year-old boy suggested that if he wanted to be a 'real nigga' he needed to stop looking like his mum had dressed him. Another comment made by a 16-year-old member of the Noble Boys on the page of a 14-year-old Australian-Sudanese girl suggested she was 'the right kind of biatch' for him. Such articulations of masculinity demonstrate the ways gangsta pedagogies are drawn upon by young people in the mapping out and coming of age of gendered selves. Such data also supports core aspects of Carrigan, Connell and Lee's (1985) understanding of hegemonic masculinity as 'a particular variety of masculinity to which others . . . are subordinated' (p. 86) in the competition for women, privilege and power.

The social-networking profiles we have canvassed so far serve to demonstrate some ways the cultural pedagogies of gangsta and associated imaginations of the Durty South are appropriated and learned by a specific group of young men to narrate self and to define their particular community of sentiment. Gangsta offers these young men a 'social face' and generates powerful, albeit problematic, spaces of normativity and resistance. It is important to make clear, however, that for the majority of our interview subjects, who do not identify with gangsta culture, the Durty South represents something far more terrifying. For these young people, gang culture operates powerfully in their imaginations and plays a key role in defining their understandings of local space and community. Gangsta is learned in different ways, seeping into young people's lives through the fabric of their local experiences, not necessarily through the direct consumption of gangsta rap discourses. As such, despite associating gang culture with negative impacts on their lives, these young people have extensive knowledge of gangsta fashion and music trends and can speak in detail about the activities and territories of gangs in the local area.

The most powerful way gangsta culture is understood by 'non-gangsta' young people is in terms of experiences and imaginations linked to the unsafe nature of the local area,

which they associated directly with gang territoriality. For example, when asked whether they consider their neighbourhood to be 'a good community', a resounding 'no' often sounded:

> Nimali: No, you see fights and gangs
> Rosanne: There's gangs around this area, it's an area of gangs.
> Sakari: This is a bad area. Gangs, racism.
> David: I wouldn't say it's a good area. There's too much violence, gangs.

Specific areas around Noble Park, such as the train station, emerged as sources of particular fear, seen by many as 'Sudanese areas'. Thus, while the young Australian-Sudanese men who associated with the Noble Boys expressed positive feelings of belonging over areas in Noble Park, the very opposite was true for other young residents. A strong theme which came through from young people from a variety of cultural backgrounds was that if you were not Sudanese, or weren't friends with the Sudanese, it would be best to avoid such spaces:

> Sakari: Noble Park's like, I don't mean to be racist or anything, but that's where all the Black people, the Sudanese live.
> Melek: It's the Sudanese. You've gotta watch out for the Sudanese.
> Michelle: My friend had a party the other night in Noble Park, but my mum wouldn't let me go. She's like, 'No way, all the Zulus are there!'

Here, racialized understandings of gangsta culture provide a powerful optic through which young people's imaginations of local space emerge. Such comments also reflect some of the ways existing gang culture, among a minority of young Australian-Sudanese people, can lead to the reification of racist stereotyping around an entire community. A bind is produced in which attempts to carve out a sense of belonging and power by a small group of young Australian-Sudanese men leads to the further demonization of the vast majority of young Australian-Sudanese people who do not associate with gangs. This demonization fuels an already biased media environment.[18] Moreover, as Darya, a young girl from an African background said, the stereotyping of Australian-Sudanese boys often meant they had little choice but to 'play the role' of gangsta:

> Darya: I think people generalize Sudanese boys way too much. People are like 'Sudanese this, Sudanese that' and so eventually they play the role. So they end up being these massive catastrophes, where gangs and things go on in Noble Park because of that sort of stuff. Not all of them are bad. People just judge them like that.

Racial stereotyping around gang involvement was not, however, reserved for Australian-Sudanese, but was also directed by young people from a range of cultural backgrounds at members of the Dandy Boys (who were generally described as 'Wogs') and the Springy Boys (an exclusively 'Asian' gang). Both gangs were considered to be, as one young person put it, 'seriously racist' towards those who represented an 'Other'.

Negative stereotyping associated with gangsta culture can, however, generate positive imaginative responses, such as the formation of Australian-Sudanese hip-hop acts like AMC (African Mic Controllers) from Melbourne's southeast. African Mic Controllers's songs like *Understand* and *Sudanese Hip-Hop* promote positive political messages of community harmony. They articulate the need for Australians to look beyond the actions of a minority of Australian-Sudanese people who are involved with

gangs. By promoting themselves as Aussie hip-hop artists, AMC effectively work with and against the negative aspects of discourses of gangsta rap, taking their understandings of gang culture among young people in the Durty South and re-working them into political statements:

> You keep hating, analysing me, judging, one side of history, I'm not really who you think I am, so I spin this rhyme to make you understand . . . what you really know about a young kid from Sudan? . . . TV and Newspaper spin a lot of damn lies . . . came [to this country] for a peaceful time, but get blamed for all the crime . . . this shit is aching my mind, man why we getting judged by the way we dress, or the way we look? . . . There's brothers starting trouble, but we need to work as a group . . . at the end of the day we're all human, we should be giving and receiving. (Understand, AMC)

These lyrics, and the various comments above, suggest that for better or worse, gangsta culture is omnipresent in Melbourne's southeast. Gangsta culture positions young people in different ways, depending on a range of social factors. Whether young people choose to actively engage with gangsta culture or unwillingly engage with it by virtue of the spaces they traverse, its pedagogical forces effect both highly problematic and, in some cases, productive change.

Conclusion

Gangsta isn't an American phenomenon (Richardson, 2007). Its reach is globalizing, appearing everywhere that global media texts form part of local communities. We have drawn upon empirical data from research with young people in Melbourne's southeast to explore and theorize global flows of 'gangsta culture' as gendered cultural pedagogies. These pedagogies are in motion and disjunctive, they operate transitionally and have differentiated effects in the lives of our young research participants.

By theorizing processes of performing gangsta in relation to scapes of motion and disjuncture, we have argued that gangsta culture operates productively and normatively: offering powerful modes of resistance and identification, while at the same time producing extreme forms of hegemonic masculinity, violence and territorialism. This reading disrupts totalizing conceptions of popular culture that might see gangsta culture as responsible for the castration of young men's potential for critical agency. After all, as Lukose (2008) argues, youth research often paints young people as either 'vanguards of a new, global dispensation or victims of a global consumer culture' (p. 137), but it is within 'the polarities of this discourse' that light can be shed on youth agency and the 'everyday lived realities' (p. 137) of globalization. This position has synergy with what Kraidy (2005) terms 'critical transculturalism' (p. 148): an analytical position that takes 'a synthetic view of culture' in order to move 'beyond commonplace models of domination and resistance' (p. 149). As Kraidy explains, such a view does not limit analyses of global cultural flows to the meanings which cultural discourses transmit (e.g. cultural imperialist analyses whereby global culture is seen to dominate and threaten agency), nor does it focus solely on the processes of resistance in the reception and consumption of culture by individuals in local spaces (e.g. cultural pluralist analysis, that foreground the ability of individuals to counteract dominant global flows of ideas). Instead, it 'takes a more integrative approach that considers the active links between production, text, and reception in the moment of cultural reproduction' (pp. 149–150).

With this in mind, however, it is crucial not to imply any sort of evenness between these productive and normative realms. For example, while our data suggests gangsta culture

does offer spaces rich in meaning and power for select young people, for the vast majority of socially disadvantaged youth involved in our research, the territorialization of space seemed to produce anxiety and suffering. As such, for young men involved in gangs like the Noble Boys, the forms of social visibility and agency produced might be outweighed by the influences such engagements have on reifying forms of racial oppression and demonization. In these cases, the windows of opportunity that gangsta culture provides for imagining beyond the realities of disadvantaged suburbia appear minor when compared to the punitive effects gangsta has on the everyday lives of the young men in the Noble Boys.

Finally, while we have applied our theorization of youth cultures to a specific local frame, we believe the conceptual framework of global flows as gendered cultural pedagogies can be further developed and taken up as a lens through which other arenas of social life can be explored. What would it mean, for example, to apply this conceptual frame to the masculinities of Wall Street bankers? Or to men's fashion? Or to other youth-oriented subcultural movements? We invite readers to further consider what it means to assert that culture can be pedagogical *and* gendered. What are the limits of this position? What are the dangers? Does such an approach help us to further our understandings of how gender is imagined, learnt and performed in global times? To read media and interact with others who live in global flows of media culture is to necessarily learn one's gender in relation to the gendered imaginings of global media and ethnoscapes. Tell us about it.

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Notes

1. The argument developed in this paper emerged from conversations about the importance of gangsta masculinities for young Black men across a number of our research sites. The final version of the paper includes quotes taken from interviews conducted by Glenn and because of this he is listed as the first author of the paper. However, the authorial voice in the paper articulates similarities in fieldwork experiences across multiple research sites in Melbourne.
2. We define 'gangsta' in detail later in this article. We follow Richardson's (2007) preference for the spelling of the word gangsta.
3. The project involved semi-structured interviews with, and observations of, approximately 20 young people from a school located in a suburb adjacent to Noble Park. Young people were observed in class and interviewed twice during the 2009 school year. The project was not specifically designed to explore young people's involvements with gangsta culture, but this topic emerged powerfully during interviews when young people were asked to reflect on their local community. The online data we feature in the 'data analysis' section of this paper was sourced by the authors of this paper as a response to such commentary among young people (see note 10, below).
4. These analyses arguably mirror classic neo-Marxist critiques of mass media socialization as articulated by key Frankfurt school thinkers (see Adorno, 2001, Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, Marcuse, 2006). These classic accounts posit media technologies as predominately agencies of repressive socialization, which placate individuals through containing and castrating their potential for critical thinking. As Kellner (2002) argues, Frankfurt school texts regarded the culture industries and mass culture as 'modes of social control' and 'powerful forms of ideology and domination' (p. 290).
5. These references canvas the work of scholars working at the intersection of Cultural Studies and Education, such as Duncan Andrade (see Andrade & Morrell, 2005), John Ernest (1992), Ofra Korat (2001), Alison Jones (2001) and Inna Semetsky (2007).

6. Without wanting to be unrealistically proscriptive, or to speak outside our areas of expertise, we mean to gesture towards the work of artists who perform the line of connection that hip-hop holds with fairly middle-class, left-wing political agendas but who do so without relying in a foundational way upon enduringly misogynist and immobile performances of masculinity. We don't necessarily mean to refer to the East Coast/West Coast/Midwest divides, even though here we cite East Coast artists in a 'positive light'. We write as listeners, rather than as music scholars. We cite these artists partly because we are fans of the ways in which they do gender. Artists from the South that might be considered in the vein to which we refer include Arrested Development and Missy Elliott.
7. This distinction between hip-hop and gangsta rap is one that rappers make themselves and, wanting to cite the modes of identity construction undertaken by gangsta rappers, we re-make the distinction here. While we re-make this distinction through our reading of Grealy's work it is not a distinction he makes, or with which he necessarily agrees.
8. For example, Eminem, a White rapper who makes violent political statements against White middle-class and mainstream America, can be considered part of the gangsta genre.
9. For example, Eminem's song ''97 Bonnie and Clyde' features a fantasy in which the singer murders his wife in front of their young child: 'Da-da made a nice bed for Mommy at the bottom of the lake / Here, you wanna help da-da tie a rope around this rock? (yeah!) / We'll tie it to her footsie then we'll roll her off the dock' (Eminem, 1999).
10. In a recent petition submitted to the Canadian Parliament, gangsta rap is described as: '. . . the worst and most satanic form of music in the world. It promotes hatred and violence of the worst sort, a kind of evil that kids are being exposed to at an increasingly younger age' (online, URL: http://bit.ly/9RNPt1 access date 15/02/2010). Such responses are perhaps unsurprising when artists like (hed) P.E, a heavy metal and gangsta rap fusion artist, pen lyrics like those in his song 'Represent'. In the song, the rapper sings about how he will 'titty fuck', 'wreck' and 'beef inject' 'hoes' and threatens those 'faggots' who say his lyrics should be more respectable by suggesting they 'gargle' on his testicles.
11. This is a variation of the 'Deep South'.
12. Our comments here about gang and racial violence in the Noble Park area are based on extensive media coverage such issues and the area has received in Melbourne media. Issues of gangs, violence and young people's safety in the area are also discussed in the *Rights of passage* report, published by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC, 2008). This report specifically examines the experiences of young Australian-African people in the City of Greater Dandenong, in which Noble Park is located, and draws attention to the 'systemic issues impacting this group' and related 'difficult issues' experienced by the local community (VEOHRC, 2008, p. 5).
13. It is important to note that while we choose to use the term 'Noble Boys', there is some blurring between several groups in the area. For example, young people who associate with the Noble Boys also appear to associate with 'The Bloods' (who take their name from the famous Los Angeles gang) and some with 'The South-East Boys'. The presence of The Bloods in the Noble Park area was given some media attention around the time of Liep Gony's death, when police reported to media that Liep was a 'known gang member' and part of the Bloods (See, for example, 'Noble Park in Lockdown', *Herald Sun* Newspaper: http://tinyurl.com/yby3usm). We prefer to use Noble Boys as it is the name most frequently employed on the social-networking sites of young people in the Noble Park area and also was a name cited by several young people we interviewed.
14. In the cases when young people did suggest involvement with gangs, their commentary was vague and they were incredibly reluctant to speak about it, likely fearing the consequences of having such information recorded. Compared to the social networking profiles we detail in this article, our research interviews felt like an extremely artificial and ineffective form of data collection.
15. While these lyrics and other comments we feature exist on currently active *Bebo* and *MySpace* pages, we believe it is ethically inappropriate to provide direct links to these pages in order reference them. Doing so would expose detailed information about the lives of the young people to which we refer as, in many cases, these young people do not have their profiles set to 'private', which means personal contact information, photos and so on, are essentially 'public access'. We believe this poses an ethical issue and feel such personal information should not be used without the formal consent of young people who created them. As such, throughout this section we have tried our best to not provide any links or identifications to specific young people.

16. Again, see VEOHRC (2008).
17. In the *Rights of passage* report (VEOHRC, 2008), it states: 'It is not just fear of verbal and/or physical attack that affected these young people. Our researchers found that some young people doubted their right to be in public spaces by virtue of who they were' (p. 6).
18. In late 2009, the Australia Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) found that ATV Melbourne, GTV Melbourne and HSV Melbourne all breached the *Commercial Television Code of Practice 2004* requirement that factual material must be presented accurately in news programming. According to ACMA: 'The breaches occurred in segments of *Ten News at Five*, *National Nine News* and *Channel Seven News* broadcast throughout Victoria on 3 October 2007, about incidents concerning Sudanese refugees in Melbourne's south-east. The segments included closed-circuit television footage of a person being arrested who was not Sudanese. In each case, the ACMA found that the licensee's verbal commentary, the footage broadcast and the omission of clarifying information on such an important element of the news story meant that the CCTV footage of violence attributed to Sudanese gangs was not presented accurately as viewers would have inferred they were being shown visual evidence of Sudanese gang activity'. (ACMA Media Release, 30 November 2009). With regards to Channels 10 and 9: 'Ten and Nine were also found to have breached the requirement for news to be presented fairly and impartially. The ACMA considered that both of their segments contained an unfair selection of material, was unfairly juxtaposed and created an unfair presentation, overall, of Sudanese people as being particularly prone to commit violence and crime' (ACMA Media Release, 30 November 2009). See the ACMA media release at: http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_311966.

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