



Resistance of Rap: An Ever Struggling battlefield in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The thesis explores the relationship of rap and resistance among youth in urban Bangladesh, situated in a transnational context. I first show how rap, a global phenomenon, becomes localized and gains its resistive nature in the particular context of Bangladesh. All over the world, rap has gained its massive popularity using the mechanisms of global market but at the same time managed to avoid the pitfalls of marketization. Through a close analysis of rap lyrics produced in two specific sites – by professional bands and those who frequent mazaars, and my own ethnographic study of these two groups, I have argued that both urban middle class and lower class youth of these two specific sites tend to take rap as a form of resistance as well as a lifestyle in Bangladeshi localized context. The resistance of rap in Bangladesh can overlook its market components not only because there is a lack of music market, rather the particular youths associated with rap representing resistance almost all of the time come from a struggling socio-economic background. The struggling nature and nurture of these young rappers in Bangladesh then contribute to the resistive element of their songs, giving them the ability to withstand market demand and acceptability.

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Introduction

Why this topic

Rap music has been a very popular art form globally for last few decades. As a form of music it is youth oriented and associated with generic youth characteristics of rebellion, anger, hotheadness and ethical dilemmas. According to Ralph H. Saunders, the origins of rap lie in Afro-American history and in the socio-political context of American ghettos (Saunders, 1993). With the expansion of globalized media and market, rap has been incorporated by almost all major marketing companies to reach the youth with their targeted products. Globalization allows rap forms to travel across borders. Through globalization, rap has become, at one level a market product which portrays a deluxe lifestyle. On another level, it carries the resistive sensibilities for youth associated with rap. The passionate youth of Bangladesh does not only follow the deluxe lifestyle that come with global rap and only consume it as a market commodity. Rather, in the middle class and lower class urban youth, for the majority, rap still means a way of life which has its resistive characteristics. To many of the urban youths, rap is the form where they can find their voice and express themselves and can resist all kinds of social, economical and political oppression that they face in their everyday life. Despite being a super successful commodity in the modern world rap still represents the youth who talk against what is wrong in a society and how they want to deal with it. The globalized market has helped rap to spread all over the world and at the same time it has given a tool to many youths around the world through which they can express themselves in a way that was not possible earlier.

It is very crucial to identify the difference between the global marketised rap and the rap that represents youth resistance and the ways in which they come to coexist, are deeply entangled.

The difficulty of co-existing as a form of resistance with a form of market product is very complex. Thus, this paper tries to look into the complex relations of “commodity rap” and “resistance” rap and the coexistence of both. This will unfold the different natures of rap and also help us to understand why many young people chose the path of resistance through rap rather than its marketing nature. Without looking into these complex and co-existing relations, we will not be able to deal with the question if rap still holds the possibility of being fierce, youthful and full of resistance in the new market capital in the global world.

For Bangladesh, it becomes very important to understand the resistance of rap as many young people now find rap as a medium to express themselves and criticize the social and political actions of the country. It also becomes important because of its symbiosis relationship of market and resistance of rap and how that function in the society. In order to understand how much rap can contribute politically in Bangladesh, we have to look into the grounds where rap takes place and establish the hidden and complex relationships it have with different factors of society.

In this paper, I have tried to identify resistance of rap as a representation of resistance in daily life with its totality. The urban middle class and lower class youth does not have many platforms where they can express themselves. Thus rap as a form of music becomes a resistance platform for them to express themselves. Often newer popular culture is considered a threat for the existing cultural platform and rap does the same for Bangladeshi society. Thus just being practicing and owning the lifestyle that comes with the rap is a form of resistance to the youth against the existing social norms. It is not only form that gives the young rappers a sense of resistance, but also they bend, own and innovate the form in many ways so that they can use it to

criticize the social and political notions from their experience of living in a particular society. Now, considering that rap's huge global reach and influence could have influenced these young urban middle and lower class youths to pursue the market formula rap consisting of high end party, drugs and sex. In reality, especially in Bangladesh, we see that majority of the rappers are interpreting, owning and recreating rap as a form of resistance. Thus this paper tries to look into the rap scenario in Bangladesh and try to understand how the rap is battling its way towards popularity among youth both being vigorously resistive and being a part of the global economy as it is. The factors which play into rap being a popular form of art and expression in Bangladesh being present in relation with political, social and economical preconditions thus needs to be located and examined in a way so that we can understand where does the rap in Bangladesh stands in relation with global rap scenario and if it has any resistive characteristics within it which appeals to the youths of Bangladesh.

Because of the easy availability of cable TV and popular pirated music CDs in Bangladesh, it was very natural for rap to gain a collective number of listeners and fans in the early 1990s. From there the journey of rap being Bangla rap has a significant relationship of the existing and changing conditions of Bangladesh and global nature. This paper, by examining this shift of taking a global art form and localizing it thus tries to understand the other necessary part of globalization that exists alongside with its market potential. Without this understanding, we will not be able to understand globalization of rap in contrast with the resistance of rap to its full potential. Everywhere rap has reached in the world has made a significant new characteristics that is different from the others still being identified within the periphery of rap as a category. Thus, the process of localizing the globalized needs to be understood in a way so that we can

identify the nature of globalized ideology, art, culture, economy, and products and decide if and how they can be of any good for the local people in a particular territory. This process is very important to understand the identity politics of the urban youth rappers and their relationship to rap in terms of ideological and practical position of resistance through the medium. We cannot avoid the impact of globalization or the spread of globalization itself in current world conditions. Thus, we have to communicate and exist within the globalized web of economy, culture and politics. How do we then assert our differences in such globalized world then? One of the ways of doing so is to identifying the globalized aspect and localizing it. Thus, this paper tries to understand this process through the transformation of globalized rap being transformed into Bangla rap as a localizing process and creating voice as well as identity in the globalized world.

Methodology and Ethnography

For an ethnographer, at first, it is very important to clarify ethnographer's own position. The different social, economic, cultural, racial and religious background of an ethnographer can bring different kinds of findings from an ethnography. Different socio-cultural background produce different ideologies for an ethnographer and even with long period of academic training it is not possible or necessary to eradicate someone's previous ideologies completely. Thus, it is very important to first located ethnographer's social position. The ethnographer's beliefs, social position and political consciousness mediates the relationship between the ethnographer and the interlocutors.

Moreover, it is the ethnographer's position itself which gives a comparative privileged position compared to the interlocutors. While I myself am a migrated urban middle class, the people who do Bangla rap are mostly from urban and non-urban middle class, lower middle class

and lower class. Beside their different economic and social position they relate themselves with rap in relatability. I have studied two groups of urban youth in Dhaka to establish a comparative analysis of rap among those who are professional and middle class and those who are enthusiasts and from lower class. Analyzing two different groups I intend to show how their approach of resistance through rap remains the same with different contexts of class and how they find a way to represent themselves with the form. The thesis will also present how despite being from different socio-economic classes, they come up with a form of criticism of their own towards social and political values through rap and identify that expression as resistance. The first group of rappers are urban middle class youths who in many cases have been dropped out of school and devote their entire time on making rap. Majority of these rappers have some kind of familial problems. Many of the rappers I interviewed either have lost one of their parents or have been disowned by their family. Economically most of them are not self-sufficient and thus in many cases rely on their kin. This economic dependency on others puts these rappers on chains in terms of doing what they want to do. Others who are self-sufficient are involved in little businesses and suffer from economic solvency. Most of the rappers live in very small houses where hardly enough room for everyone in the family and thus their activities around rap and hip-hop take place in public areas like roads and parks rather than being in close comfort in their own house. These urban youth middle class rappers usually have a group of crew with whom they practice, create and battle rap with rivalry groups. As these rappers are mostly from areas where social relationships are close more than that of newer Dhaka or residential areas, these rappers will also face social pressure for what they do and will be criticized in every way possible from their dress up to the way that they talk.

Another group that I studied are the people who are economically and socially are marginalized and most of the time orphans who live and earn their livelihood centering their lives on mazars. These young rappers are predominantly lower class and their production of rap music remains totally unnoticed in the mainstream music culture. The huge numbers of mazars of different saints produce different kinds of arts but they all carry a fundamental characteristic that is their art produces discomfort for the mainstream middle class art and literature producers because of its democratic language and its democratic essence that it carries. These rappers living in mazars starts earning at a very young age as most of them do not have any family. Those who do, still have to earn to contribute to the family as soon as they are six to seven years old. Many NGO's are active in the close areas of mazar with projects to literate these young people. However, these attempts fail in most of the time as the young people does not have any way of earning their food into the NGO programmes and choose work over education because of hunger. Most of the young people who do rap in mazars live with a group of same age people who most likely would work and stick together all of the time. Their earnings comes from a various of ways such as selling sacramental ornaments in front of mazars, helping people with heavy object lifting, working as helpers and mechanics of different human hullers. Their earnings will not always provide them enough for food and thus they prominently live on the premise of mazars most of the time. The rap music that they do is very basic in terms of technicality of the genre and simple in rhythm. However, the commonality for most of the rapper of urban middle class and these lower class is that they try to express their voice on different issues that they face in their everyday life. Rap thus becomes a medium for these two vastly different social and economic positional youths a medium through which they can channelize their suppressed voice in an artistic way. The social and economic position of these rappers thus

become very very important to understand the resistance of rap and also youths resistance in different context of society.

For this paper, I talked with two rap bands, *Jalali Set* a well –established group, and another group who live in and on the mazars. Jalali set is one of the most prominent rap groups in Bangladesh right now and has gained a very hardcore fan following for their unique lyrics and use of the form of language that most people use in their daily life in an urban setting. The other group of rappers from mazars are not rappers in traditional sense and do rap on their own environment especially in mazar areas among their own peer groups. This group does not have any opportunity to record and put their rap songs online in front of audience, rather they do it for their own pleasure. In doing so, they express their daily struggle and socio-economical oppression that they face through rap. I happen to be living very close to one of the mazars of Dhaka, Shah Ali's Mazar. Often times during my visit there, I would find these young people as very enthusiast towards rap music and listening and referring to the music all the time. Over a period of two years, I had the opportunity to observe the group and get to know them well and their journey of rap. At first they would be sharing rap songs from mobile to mobile and over social networks to suggest their favorite songs to their peer and friends. As none of them had any access to internet, they would often times go to cyber cafes to get to know what new rap music is available to the cyber cafes and they would transfer those to their mobile phone for a small amount of money. These young group of mostly homeless youths do rap not only because they want to establish themselves as successful rap artists but they do it as a play from which they get fun and find rap relatable to them as it becomes very easy for them to express themselves in the form. Keeping aside the musical appeal of rap, for these young people living in mazars, rap

appeals so much because as a form rap does not require any kind of formal training or instrument. One can rely on their own voice and can perform rap easily. Thus for these young people, rap becomes very attractive compared to other forms as they don't have to invest anything into the form other than their own voice and time.

Jalali Set is one of the pioneers and most popular rap group in Bangladesh right now. I first came in contact with Jalali Set while surfing through YouTube. The lyrical diversity and excellence along with their very good tune instantly struck me. This was during 2016, while I was randomly listening to many rap artists of Bangladesh. To my untrained ear, Jalali set was the one who struck me the most as brilliant. Out of all rap groups in Bangladesh, I wanted to interview Jalali set and Fakir laal because of their outstanding understanding of politics and social distresses. Their use of vernacular language was also a big reason why I wanted to interview them. Other than these two groups, there were only a few rap groups who were concerned about politics and society. However, their uses of formal language was a concern for me as I couldn't capture the resistance through the uses of formal language because of the history of Bangladeshi vernacular rap being denied as a potential language by the first generation of rappers based in New York. Also, the popularity of vernacular rap made me think twice about the relatability of rap made in formal Bangla language. As Fakir Laal does not live in Bangladesh, and I could not find any way of contact with him virtually, I had to consider the possibility of interviewing only Jalali Set. I first met Jalali Set at a concert arranged by my university during 2017. There I talked with one of the rappers from the group MC Mugz about the possibility of doing a series of interview about Bangla rap, its history, political potential and the group's own philosophy about Bangla rap and its future. Later on, when I decided to pursue this thesis, I contacted them again and asked if it

was possible for them to arrange one on one and a group interview for this thesis. As they agreed, I interviewed two group members personally and arranged one group meeting that took place in the studio of MC Mugz where he lived and worked. During the interview, I asked them about their individual journey and connection to rap, how they have observed the entry and evolution of rap music in Bangladesh, how do they see rap as a lifestyle, what are their philosophical take on rap and resistance, what is their motive of doing Bangla rap in vernacular language rather than following a well-accepted formal language and where do they see bangla rap in future.

MC Mugz lived in a studio apartment in puran (old) Dhaka, which, among other things is famous for its traditional Mughal foods. There are significant cultural difference between the old part of the Dhaka and the new part of the Dhaka. The old part still holds a very community based relationship where friends, family and relatives are given utmost important in social life, at least on the outside. Whereas, in the relatively new part of the Dhaka, social relationships tend to be more individualistic and self-centric. When I asked Mc Mugz during our interview “why do you live in puran Dhaka (old part of the Dhaka) while it is clear that you can live in a better condition in the new parts of Dhaka?” He replied to me that new part of the Dhaka is full of concrete building and apartments, and thus lacks the soul of friendship and family that he thinks are more important to him. The strong community felling in old Dhaka and living in such an environment has an effect of how Jalali set do their rap. The crew members have a very close friend like relationship and also try to maintain a close relationship with fans and other rappers in Bangladesh. Their interest in building a rapper community is expressed through their first album Level 13, where they gave chance to many other rap artists living in Bangladesh to take part in

different songs in the album. The general tendency is for any musician or music group is that they want to create their name and signature through their first album. Here, Jalali Set took an opposite turn and involved other rap artists who are promising and shared a platform with them through their first album, which is quite rare. The community based relationship in Pura Dhaka and living in such an environment from their childhood has shaped the way Jalali Set is today and how they function.

Another member whom I interviewed was Safayat, who was a University going rapper and probably have the best economic condition among the group members. To interview him, I relied on one of my friend who was in the same university and contacted Safayat at first with my offer of interviewing him for this thesis. Safayat agreed to the interview but could not give me a date for quite a few weeks as he was very busy with his exam and music recordings. He was quite popular outside of the group Jalali Set as he has been singing in other kind of popular music one of which had famous Bangladeshi singer Momtaz as a lead singer. Then on a busy weekday, Safayat agreed to give the interview in his university area. As my friend was from the same university and I have been to the campus before for a few times, the ground was known and comfortable for me. I asked Safayat how did he decided to do rap and how did he get involved with the rap group Jalali Set? He told me that, he was always listening to rap before deciding to do rap himself. During his university life, he decided to do rap as he saw many young people doing it on social media. He said, at first he was not so much interested in the history or the impact that rap can have on the young people and society. "It was Mugz Bhai (brother) who taught me everything" said Safayat. He said he didn't like the way many rappers were doing rap in formal Bangla language as it cannot express most of the youth's emotion fully. He said, "You

will not find a single person of our age who talks in formal language around us. Then why do rap in formal language. You can only express yourself fully with the language that you own yourself'. Our interview was a very brief one as he had a class within an hour, so we had to keep our informal interview short over cha on Safayat's university campus.

For the whole crew interview, Mugz told me that he can call the group for a practice session to his home and I am welcome there to interview them as a group. As I was already familiar with Mugz's house from our first interview, I was more comfortable around the crew. It was my first time I was meeting other two crew members on personal level. One of them was sadhu, a college going kid who looked nothing like he was going to college. Rather, he looked like a very intimidating young thug. Within an hour, I realized that sadhu was everything but intimidating. He was very curious about anthropology and my work and what sorts of things anthropology talks about. He told me he came to know rap music from his elder brother who was a DJ in the old Dhaka. When Sadhu's brother used to go to any programme to do his Djing, Sadhu would accompany his brother in most of the cases. Later on, he decided to do rap leaving Djing. During that period, he meet mugz on practice session in Suhrawardy Udyan and later decided to join Jalali set. Another member was Double S who never gave me his real name and hardly talked about anything about his personal life. As he was not very comfortable, I decided not to ask him any direct question and let him join any conversation that he wanted. He told me that he also lives in old Dhaka and has been doing rap from the very beginning period of rap music in Bangladesh. In my previous interview with Mugz, he told me that Double S has been active in

rapping from when there was rap lyric battle with New York based Bangladeshi rappers on web platforms and have been in the Deshi MCs group where Mugz was a crew member.

My intention was to take an hour or two hours long interview. When I finished my formal questionnaires, to my surprise the crew offered me to stay and talk with them more. Later on we ended up talking for more than five hours and talked about all sorts of possible things from their childhood history to their journey into rap. At last while I was leaving, I was invited again to visit and have a friendly chit chat with them. The class position of all the members of jalali set range from middle class to lower middle class. One of them even told me “It is struggle that brings the best in you and only then you will be able to make good rap music. No one has ever been able to make good rap music without their social and economic struggle”. Thus, there we can see a complex relationship of what we identify as good rap music and the history of struggling. The bitter socio-political condition of a person pushes them to go extra steps so that they can survive in a situation where they have no upper hands. This extra struggle helps a person to come up with the modes and modalities of survival which then is reflected in rap. Through rap, then we can understand what the problems are in the existing structure, as most of it remains unnoticed to our privileged eyes. Because of the struggle and its relationship with the creation of rap thus we see both resistance through rap and also where the social and cultural system is failing that is usually hangs outside of our known territories.

For my second group, young people from the mazars, I never arranged any kind of formal meeting or asked them any question ever in any interview like manner. My interaction with them

always has been like a visitor to the mazars who happens to be interested in rap and through that common connection can interact with them. Thus, there is not any record of any of their work but I could not get this factor to discontinue to mention them in this thesis as that would be denying an opportunity to share my observation of resistance from a group who cannot express their voice to the positions as possible for me as an urban middle class. My encounter with this specific group was during the time when I used to live in Mirpur near the mazar of Shah Ali. One of my friend who is also an anthropologist, took me to the mazar one day and introduced me to these young kids who were interested in doing rap and were trying to create music by their own. It would have been very difficult for me to connect to them on my own as the situation of these young people is such that anyone from middle class would never come to talk to them in a friendly manner. Thus believing someone like me into their inner circle was quite difficult for them if it was not for my friend who had already built rapport with them and introduced me. Because of their economic and social position, it was very difficult for them to arrange a studio and record their songs. These economic and social hurdles didn't stop them though, they recorded their songs in mobile phones. One of the benefits that rap gives to these marginal and economically underprivileged portion of society is that for doing rap one does not need and instrument like many other genres of music. For almost two years I visited the mazar on regular and irregular basis and observed the group trying their best to do rap. The whole informal interaction has taught me many things that is crucial in order to understand what rap is to people and how the resistance of rap remains alive among the desperate business properties of rap.

In order to understand why rap is so popular among youths and how rap still beholds resistance within the global market phenomenon, I have relied heavily both on primary and secondary

sources. My primary sources were both formal and informal in nature. The young people in Shah Ali with whom I talked with have always been in an informal nature. With Jalali Set, I have talked in both formal and informal nature. My personal interest in rap and my interaction with these two groups have broadened my view on how rap becomes meaningful to people and in which conditions. The nature of ethnography for this paper thus is a form of my daily activities and interest that keeps me going. For secondary sources I have looked into many anthropological literature on rap and resistance and on writings of different people who are associated with rap music or holds a very keen interest for rap. As I have mentioned earlier that most of the people that I came in contact with are from struggling middle class or from lower economic class. However, when it comes to rap, I haven't seen or get to know any female rapper in Bangladesh. One of the members of Jalali Set told me that they have heard one or two female rappers existing in Bangladesh but their participation is so low that they have never met any female rapper in person. Thus, the gender spectrum of rap scene in Bangladesh is missing the representation of any female. Though there are very few female listeners of rap music in Bangladesh, Mc Mugz told me that "Women are becoming more and more interested in rap nowadays". He assured me with this information from his exposure to different rap battles and concerts and the increasing numbers of female presence to those areas. The sole purpose of ethnographer's information is to lead to findings, findings about what people do and why they do so, in that particular manner. Through ethnography cultural meaning can be located in practice, ritual, social influence, class dimension, language and social changes. In broader sense, ethnography is all about observing and finding cultural pattern or logic in the community that an ethnographer studies. Ethnography will accommodate social interaction, behavior, action and perception. It is possible for the perception of the interlocutor to match up with the ethnographer's. Thus, the duty of an

ethnographer is to collect and observe what he can and connect those information in a way so that it produces meaning in terms of social and cultural positioning of a group. Keeping these ideas in mind, this paper has tried to look into the existence of resistance through rap which both co-exist and compete at the same time with global market rap.

Every academic paper should contain literature review to show to what extent the researcher have looked into the existing works about the topic. Literature review also help a reader understand what the researcher have investigated and what has been left out of the research. The literature review also help a researcher to propose an alternative research path through the comparison of existing literature. It is also the preamp for what has been discussed in the thesis through theoretical framework. Despite all of these necessities of literature review, for this thesis, I have decided to not include literature review as a different part rather integrate it into my writings and findings. The reason behind this decision was that all the literature of different researcher that I have used in this paper are to indicate the history, evolution and resistance of rap in the global sphere. When it comes to my primary findings which talks about the evolution and resistance of rap in Bangladesh and two vastly different practitioners group of rap music in urban Dhaka, there was no literature whatsoever. Because of this reason, I decided that I will not indicate my literature review as a whole different segment as it does not help in my primary findings. Of course this makes the reading of this thesis a little bit difficult for the readers, but I believe that any interested reader will find the thesis itself more interesting rather than a missing literature review part.

In terms of guidance in the ethnographic arena, Scott Reeves, Ayelet Kuper, and Brian David Hodges talks about *Nine Observational Dimension* which might help in understanding this ethnography in a better way for the reader (Reeves, Kuper & Hodges, 2008). Reeves talks about space (physical layout of the place), actor (ranges of people involved), act (single actions people undertake), activity (a set of related activities that occur), object (the physical things that are present), event (activities that people carry out), time (the sequencing of event that occur), goal (things that people are trying to accomplish), and feeling (emotions felt and expressed). These observational dimensions are crucial for both ethnographer and reader to grasp and connect the information that is located within different layers of cultural and social context. Different modes of sense and sensibility helps an ethnographer to understand a community and their culture in more detail. As for this paper, as it deals with many layers of resistance, rap and global market economy, with all the points mentioned by Reeves language will be a significant part of analysis. Locating rap culture and resistance in a globalized world becomes very difficult for an ethnographer because of its relativity in different contexts in different part of the world and for the different meaning that rap produces and carries in different places. This paper thus tries to keep in mind about the flexibility of rap culture and how it can be in juxtaposition with the global market while denying the authority of the market itself.

Like any culture, rap culture is always fluid and so is the nature of marketization. Thus, this paper does not claim something that is absolute of truth. It is also not possible for someone to claim for the absolute truth. Thus like the fluidity of culture and market, this paper is also the fluid demand of the time in a particular space for a particular group of people. Thus, it is to be seen as a picture taken by the ethnographer in a certain moment in history, not as a claim of

ultimate truth in any particular way. It only tries to locate how rap carries its resistive nature living within the global market domain specifically in Bangladesh.

History and Category of Rap Music Around the World

Today rap is identified under the category hip-hop where four major forms exist with each other. The forms are, MCing, DJing, B-boying (breakdancing) and Graffiti (Chang, 2009). All these forms exist as a part of lifestyle to people who practice and perform it. These forms are also associated with resistance and youth. Through these forms, the youth who are usually minority and oppressed find their voice in a social structure where usually they don't have any voice or simply their voice is unheard of. The start of rap was in Bronx, New York. At that time the existing political and cultural position did not allow the Afro-American youth to have any voice. In the article, *It's a Hip-Hop World*, Jeff Chang points out the situation of Bronx during that time by saying,

“With its humble origins, no one could have foreseen the global phenomenon that hip-hop would become. Thirty years ago, New York City bore little resemblance to the glittering metropolis of today, particularly the embattled streets of the Bronx. Race riots, urban renewal, arson, and government neglect wiped out educational and social service programs, eviscerated housing stock, accelerated white flight and job loss, and created an international symbol of urban despair” (Chang, 2009).

This allowed the mainly African American youth of the Bronx to come up with a form of art that allowed them to pass their time in the politically abandoned area by rapping, mixed with Jamaican reggae with Bronx slang and spray painting their name on different abandoned

building walls until it finally got its artistic representation (Chang, 2009). It was rap which gave these youths a voice to talk about their daily struggle and resisting it by artistic expression. Their voice ranged from politics to police, from economy to racism, from struggle to everyday hurdle. At that time it also helped to solve gang rivalry by arranging rap battles and settling disputes over rap rather than bullets (Chang, 2009). From there the journey of rap is epic both in artistic nature and its ability to unify and attract youths all around the world.

Soon after rap reached outside of America, it took a very little time to become one of the most beloved art form of youth all around the world. The availability of cable network made it even more possible. Continents from Europe to Asia, one after another started to see the reach of rap into their territory. Multinational companies saw this as an amazing opportunity to reach a huge portion of customers through the influence of rap (Chang, 2009). This allowed a globalized market where either companies used influential rap figures in advertisement to sell their products or simply sell the products that can be associated with the rap lifestyle. Jeff Chang in his article talks about rap and its business side saying, “It sells an estimated \$10 billion worth of trend-setting luxury and consumer goods every year — not just in movies, shoes, and clothing but in everything from snack crackers and soda drinks to cars and computers” (Chang, 2009). Despite being global in nature and marketable, rap always had and still has another part where it is localized and addressing the existing problems in a certain place. Thus, being resistive is also present somewhere into the whole rap scenario. Jeff Chang talks about the annual Rap Battle which takes place in shanghai and where all kind of rappers from all around the globe gather and battle each other. He says,

“They look like typical hip-hop artists, dressed in baggy pants and baseball caps. But listen closely and you notice something unusual: They’re performing in Chinese. One rapper spits out words in a distinctive Beijing accent, scolding the other for not speaking proper Mandarin. His opponent from Hong Kong snaps back to the beat in a trilingual torrent of Cantonese, English, and Mandarin, dissing the Beijing rapper for not representing the people” (Chang, 2009).

Here we can see that rap though originated in USA, has gained a lot of different localized form which then again is represented in a global platform like rap battle. In these battles and competitions rappers through battle not only show their skill and talk about different socio political issues but also they establish and represent their different identity as well. The Shanghai annual rap battle is a perfect example of this as Chang mentions in his writing (2009). The process of localization of rap does not happen on the level of language only. It gains different characteristics like difference of topic, bar arrangement, and line throwing which is possible because of the existing conditions of a certain locality on many different levels which will be discussed later in the paper.

As rap attracts more youth and through rap youth can find a medium of expressing their thought and voice, it is rap where we find the characteristics of being a form of artistic resistance. The history of the birth of rap suggests that the youth came up with the form as they did not have anything to do in a racially segregated society in Bronx. The racial segregation mixed with economic and political deprivation created such a society for the Afro-American where they did not have any voice and had to go through some form of institutional torture in their everyday life. As their voice were denied and unheard of, the youth of the Afro-American community tried to

express themselves in a manner of rap, a lyrically rhythmic verse based art form. Through this, their aggression, complains, thoughts and suggestions came out as a form of resistance against the racially segregated community.

Just like everywhere in the world, Bangladesh also got familiarized with rap by globalization. When internet was not easily available in Bangladesh during the 1990s, rap spread through the hearts of youth by cable TV and pirated music CDs. It was a diasporic import. The first attempt to do rap was taken by some Bangladeshi second generation New Yorkers who wanted to establish their identity as Bangladeshi in the global arena through rap. The first generation of New York based rappers were not as much politically conscious as the recent generation. They usually rapped about the fun and party life that they dream about, mainly coping the ideas from mainstream American rap music. The first successful New York based popular rap group was Stoic Bliss, who became famous for their song “Abar Jigay”. In this particular song which was composed in New York, the rap group talk about the life of urban higher class youth living in particular areas and the group’s journey to the Bangladeshi rap music scene. Besides, Stoic Bliss Fokir Lal was one of the main pioneers of Bangla rap who paved the way coming from the new York based struggling upbringing and releasing songs on different issues in Bangladesh. Fakir Laal was politically conscious from the beginning of his rap journey. He talked about the political situations in Bangladesh. He talked about the political parties and their power driven politics, the sheer amount of corruption, the use of 1971 war ideology as political weapon and the uncounted number of extra judiciary killing in Bangladesh. Even before the appearance of these New York based rappers, there was a significant amount of admirers of rap in Bangladesh

who listened to the well-known artists in the western rap music industry, which paved the way for these young rappers.

The arrival of someone brought up in New York, the birthplace of rap itself, these pioneer rappers like Stoic Bliss and Fokir Lal were already accustomed to the multicultural and hip New York where rap and rappers were present in their everyday life. The familiarity with rap from a major global city center helped these people to come up with the idea that they can bring the art form of resistance into Bangladesh doing Bangla rap. Needless to say that along with their familiarity with rap, their passion for rap also pushed them to take the steps that made Bangla rap as it is today. After a few years of the arrival of the New York Based rappers came Deshi MC which popularized Bangla rap and reached a broader audience compared to the previous niche audience that Bangla rap had at first. During the period of Stoic Bliss and Fokir Lal, the audience of rap were limited to urban middle class youth who were already interested in western rap. Deshi MCs changed the audience and popularized Bangla rap to a various social and economic class of youths all around the country. Even, during the period of Deshi MCs, Bangla rap was not fully Bangla, rather Bangla was used in only the description parts of the rap and rhythms were in English. There was still debate going on among rappers from both Bangladesh and New York about whether rap can be done fully in Bangla. At this point in time, many artist had arrived in the Bangla Rap scene and some of them made name for themselves by their unique vocabulary, vernacular dialect, topic such as violence among gangs and relations of youths with weed and weed's historical relevance with pagol/fokir (Madman/saints). Among them Black Zang and Taurra Safa from Uptown Lokolz became popular for their distinctive style

of local vernacular dialects and their choice of vocabulary and topic. Especially Taura Safa became very popular for his open advocacy for weed and its relationship with mazars and fokirs.

At this point, Bangla rap was mostly using mix language of both Bangla and English into Rap as it was thought by many rappers in Bangladesh that without using English words a proper rhythm cannot be created. As a result most of the rap songs produced were more in the line of name dropping one another and claiming on doing and having this and that. One example of such is Black Zang's famous song "Ai Mama Ai" where the lyric goes on as

"Ami tor moto na, Tui amar moto na,
Ami tor moto fapor maira kapor chiri na,
Er laiga tui achosh tui, ar ami tui na,
Ei gaan ta 10 bar hunis, ekbar tui amar lyric bujhbi na" (Uptown Lokolz, 2012).

Which translates to,

"I am not like you and you are not like me
My cloths don't get ripped like you when bluffing,
Because of this you are what you are and I am not like you,
Even if you listen to my lyric 10 times, you will not understand nothing".

Another part of the same song says referring to the graffiti culture,

"Dhaka sohorer prottek deyale ora hudai spray maare,
Eisob deyaler saamne giya ami muti kharaye kharaye" (Uptown Lokolz, 2012).

Which translates to,

"They spray on every wall of Dhaka city for nothing,
And I pee on those sprayed wall while standing".

Thus, the general trend of rap became more market oriented in this period if not by market itself but by global consumer based rap notions where the trend is to show a lifestyle of overachieved gangsta, party, drugs, sex and money.

Fokir Lal was an exception to this from the beginning as he talked about more political issues in his rap from the independence of Bangladesh to the corrupt nature of the politicians, from the death of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the political unrest and suffering of the people in Bangladesh in his own Sylheti dialect that is different from the standard form of Bangla. The reason behind his choice of particular choice of vernacular Bangla language comes from his history of being from a migrant Sylheti family. Though by birth he is an American, his first language was the vernacular Sylheti language (which now has been acknowledged as a full different language) that he learned from his family. When it comes to representing himself, Fakir Laal decided to go with his first language rather than following the standard Bangla language. In terms of resistance of language, this was the first step towards resisting the dominance of the standard Bangla in majority of the art and cultural scenario through rap music.

Rap outside of its commercial association most of the time is associated with youth and resistance. As I noted earlier, today's youth, globally are seen are socially indifferent and extremely self-centered. Generally, the youths are the most vocal ones about any injustice taking place in a society. The form of the rap is something that allows young people to express themselves easily compared to other music forms. In most of the music forms other than rap requires some sort of practice or instrument to perform. Rap on the contrary, provide the freedom to participate in for any kind of social and economic class as it does not require any money or instrument. This is one of the main reasons why rap has gained so much popularity among young

people, especially socially marginalized young people like African-American youth. Because of the free form of rap and no boundaries in terms of musical sense and beats, beat-boxing has evolved as a new form of hip-hop genre originated from rap itself. This flexibility of rap attracts young people, especially who does not have enough economic means all around the world. The young people also realize their dissatisfaction for different social hierarchy and status quo through rap's form as they can identify the musical form which is practiced by the middle class and lower class whereas other musical form such as rock music not only requires pricy equipment, but also most of the time is practiced by young people from more solvent families. This is why the urban middle class and lower class can hardly associate themselves with other music forms such as rock or modern Bangla songs. Another reason of this association is the flexibility of using vernacular language forms in rap music which is missing in most of the other musical forms present in urban scenario. Because of the vernacular form, a young person from a remote corner of the country can easily relate to the song which hardly happens with other musical forms.

Mubashar Hasan in his article "Bangladeshi rappers wield rhymes as a weapon, with Tupac as their guide" talks about the uses of rap as a form of resistance by Bangladeshi youths. He points out that it is the well-known names of rap like Tupac Shakur, Eminem, NWA and Public Enemy has encouraged Bangladeshi youths by their use of rap to speak against social oppression (Hasan, 2018). Hasan says in his article,

"The old school hip-hop icon Tupac Shakur – who was murdered in Las Vegas in 1996 – holds particular significance for Bangladeshi MCs. Like Shakur, who spoke of police

brutality and racism in the U.S., Bangladesh's young rappers want to use their music to criticize their country's political dysfunction, democratic erosion and gaping inequality" (Hasan, 2018)

However, this is not the only side of rap, being used as a form of resistance. Critics identify rap as "materialistic, misogynistic, homophobic, racist, vulgar, and violent" (Chang, 2009). While some of the claims here are true, it is also true that whenever rap becomes a market commodity, the market will produce and serve commodity if there is demand in the market. As our society is still violent, materialistic, misogynistic, homophobic, racist, and vulgar, some parts of rap as a huge market oriented product will also contain such characteristics and there is no alternative to it. This is true for every art form, no matter how and where they originated. The market value of rap is immense and thus simply cannot be avoided. According to Amy X. Wang in her article published in Rolling Stone magazine indicates about the significant business contribution of rap music in the music industry saying, "Hip-hop and R&B – a rapid-rising genre that, with 31 percent of the market, is definitively the most popular music in the country these days. (Rock & roll, which led for decades, ceded the throne in 2017 and is now at 23 percent.) It's not surprising, then, that acts like Post Malone and Cardi B are dominant in the mid-year tally – or that Drake's "God's Plan" has been the most-streamed song of the year so far, nabbing 1.1 billion streams across audio and video" (Wang, 2018) . Now, the question then come forward is that if there is any resistive nature left to rap as an art form after its marketization?

Rap originated in USA as a form of resistance but it got its global reach through marketization and globalization. Without its market potentials, it was quite difficult for rap to reach such a

massive audience that it has right now. Now whenever rap reaches a new continent or geography, the youth that particular area takes rap as a form of lifestyle and a form where they can communicate with a particular community who has the same passion and similar tendency to express themselves through the art form. The youth gets a sense of belonging through rap, as they can find out that in a society they are not the only one who are suffering but there are many other like them who suffer the same way they do. Also, it is not only the territorial community that gives rap its unique feature. The worldwide fan, followers and practitioners of rap despite having the marketized part of it fell like that the form actually represents people's voice who are oppressed in a society. This feeling creates the harmony of a global community of rap. As Chang points out that though the trend of rap is being accelerated through the MTV base in Africa, when it reaches to the youth, they are using the form as a form of resistance. He says,

“Young Kenyan rappers’ lyrics — in *sheng*, a creolized language that includes English, Swahili, and Kikuyu words — tackle the themes of joblessness, poverty, and the older generation’s failures. Indeed, young artists are building communities that actively support the development of cultural politics unique to the continent” (Chang, 2009).

This goes on to show that though rap has a huge economic side which mostly assert very imaginary lucrative life of young rappers and lifestyle, when it reaches to the ground, a major proportion of the youth take the form and use it to resist the social injustice though they were introduced to rap through the global music and entertainment market.

In Bangladesh as well, the rap reached in to the youth through different mediums of global market and on the surface level like cable TV and pirated CDs as mentioned earlier. In many cases it represented the lucrative promises and lifestyle that the market production of rap portrays through different music videos and merchandise in the global market. It is also true that

many young people wanted to practice rap to appear cool among their peers. However, when it comes to resisting different socio economic oppression, the rappers in Bangladesh also have the tendency to protest and raise their voice through the art form. Mubashar Hasan talks about this coexistence of market potential rap and the rap as a medium of protest in his article said,

“Though many Bangladeshi rappers rhyme about love, money and romance, there are several recurring political themes. One is the culture of silence around inequality. “Everyone is silent ... nobody is talking,” observes rapper Skib Khan in “Shob Chup.” The elite need inequality, he says, because “otherwise how will the rich get servants to serve their families?” (Hasan, 2018).

If we look at the popularity of the two different sections of rap, we will see that youth in general like the rap form that is more politically charged such as rappers like Fokir Laal and Jalali Set and talks about different social problems. The Bangladeshi urban young rappers have attracted a huge crowd of young people from all classes and have spread their reach in suburbs and villages as well. However, the majority audience of these rap music are young male with a very few numbers of female listeners. Though there are some female listeners, there are no female rappers that have come to my attention during the writing period of this thesis. The small presence of female listeners of rap music and no female rappers indicate how rap is still being associated as a musical form exclusively for men, especially in Bangladesh. The social ideology of what women should do and don't, what they should listen to and how they perform also contribute to the fact that women are less interested in rap music. The ideology is so strong that, even though the many women has taken many jobs and activities as their profession as a process of women empowerment in Bangladesh, no one has still come out to become a female rapper. This shows amount of social stigma that is associated with rap music, especially for women. Another reason

for rap being so stigmatized in the country is because it has not been able to establish itself as a strong, economically viable option in the music market. Even most of the rappers in Bangladesh are still in the same economic position from where they originally started. During my interview with MC Mugz, he offered me a lot of chocolate, when I asked if he had bought these chocolates by himself, he said that they were given as a present from a competition where he was a judge of rap and the organizers didn't pay any money rather they handed him a box of chocolate.

History of Bangla Rap: The Beginning of Localizing the Global

During the 1990s, Bangladesh also entered the global market like any other countries in the world. As a result of globalization, along with many other things, Rap music found a place among the hearts of Bangladeshi young people. With the availability of cable tv channel and very flexible copyright law, Bangladesh saw a huge increase of pirated CD and DVDs during the 90s. The first wave of orientation of rap came through different CD/DVD rental shops. Young people would go to these shops and buy or rent an album for a couple of days. During my interview, Safayat told me that, it was the rental shops from where they would rent the famous american artists like Linkin Park, Eminem and Limp Bizkit. At this time, internet was not very accessible, and youths would go to different cyber cafes to browse through internet and orient themselves with different artists and bands. Mc Mugz told me that even at this this, they were not

ever thinking about taking hip-hop as a lifestyle or never thought about doing rap. They were living an average young life like any Bangladeshi young person.

The second wave of familiarization and orientation came into two parts. In one part a few young people from New York whose parents have migrated from Bangladesh decided to do Bangla rap and to reach the Bangladeshi audience with their creation. The demography of these young people were struggling middle class whose parents were doing blue collar jobs in New York. At this time, two were most prominent. One of them was Fokir Laal, who started rapping about different socio political issues ranging from the role of the politicians in the country to the authority of power holders who were against the freedom fight during 1971. Because of Laal's Sylheti Bangla dialect and political vision, he gained a very strong base of followers very quickly. Especially owing to the fact that he presented linguistic attraction and relatability to his listeners, which ranged from 'native' speakers of the dialect and non-native, simultaneously. Another prominent New York based rap group was Stoic Bliss. Stoic Bliss emerged with their first album *Light Years Ahead* and it was an instant hit. Young people liked it very much because of its catchy lyric and tune. Compared to Fokir Laal, Stoic Bliss was much more advanced and sound in terms of technicality. They were more easy and smooth to the ears. However, the battle of what is good rap and finding and locating identity through rap and making it a lifestyle was still to emerge as it does in every country after rap has reached any new territory. The primary intention of these New York based artists were to create and express their identity as Bangladeshi in abroad through rapping. They wanted to contribute something as Bangladeshi to the world and mark their existence and identity through rap in global arena. However, their rap though sound in technicality and catchy in tune, could not please the heart of the listeners in

Bangladesh for very long. This is where another part of familiarization comes in play the availability of personal computer and broadband internet. With the availability of broadband internet, young people started to listen to various rap artist from every corner of the world. The advance of information at their fingertip through internet gave them adequate knowledge to choose what they want from rap and how they want to do it. This also gave them the option to free roam and connect with various artists around the world and learn from them which later gave them the ability to work in a collaborative way.

Mc Mugz is one of the oldest rappers in Bangla rap industry who has seen the beginning of Bangla rap and is a part of that journey. When I was talking with him about his childhood and involvement in rap, he told me that his life was very ordinary. He used to play cricket all day and listen to various artists that he can find on different pirated CD/DVD shops. His interest into rap grew stronger and serious with time as the internet became more available and a way of communication was built up. When Stoic Bliss released their first album, they also created an online forum where rap enthusiasts of Bangladesh can discuss and learn from each other. As Mugz told me, it was this platform from where he got to know many things about rap and people who are interested in rap. Regular rap battles were hold on that forum and the new emerging rappers in Bangladesh would show their skill there. Eventually, the forum got dissolved because of internal dispute. The dispute started as a result of showing who can do better rap on the platform. As rappers became divided on two different blocs, there was hardly any rapping contest left in the forum and eventually got dissolved.

The dispute originated from the idea of identity and representation through rap between those who were functioning from New York and those who were trying to do rap from Bangladesh. As Mugz told me, the people who were doing rap from New York were technically sound because of their orientation with rap from an early age but their content was not representing what is going on in the fields of Bangladesh. Rapper group like Stoic Bliss though was talking about particular areas of Dhaka, but their idea about those areas and lifestyle of the youth was very superficial. How the New York based Bangladeshi rappers represented the urban youth life did not resonated with the urban youth life in Dhaka. Thus the MCs and rappers in Dhaka choose their own path of creating their own identity and representation while maintaining the global connection. In order to identify the difference, we will look into one of Jalali Set's songs where they talk about the special, social and political notion of capital city Dhaka. In the song "Dhaka city", they say

“Dhaka City, Jaygay Jaygay Laage Poysapatti,
Bomabaaji, Chandabaaji
Bus er kalo dhoya, Rajniti” (Set, 2015).

Which translates to,

“It is Dhaka city, where you will need money everywhere,
Then there is bombing and extortion,
The city is full of smog and politics”.

This goes on to show the difference between first generation New-York based rappers and their idea of a superficial Dhaka consisting of areas where only upper class lived and the later generation who rap about the spatial, social and political condition of the city.

After the dispute among New York based rappers and rappers in Bangladesh, the young rappers of Bangladesh started practicing different path of rapping. Some took the more market oriented philosophy and talked about what kind of material possessions they have and how much power they have on the street mimicking the gangster rap of New York. This approach however did not gain much popularity because of the representation of a life with which neither the rappers nor the listeners could connect to. Others tried to talk about different social issues and their struggle as youth coming from struggling backgrounds and living in the city.

Among the newer approach, at the beginning level, the rappers were using both Bangla and English language to write lyric and express themselves. With more time, the rappers eventually understood that rapping in English does not represent their way of life at all as they don't use English in their day to day life. MC Mugz was the first person to take initiative to create a full Bangla rap album and it was a massive hit instantly.

The use of different local dialects, political concern, social problems and youth representation in the album got the crew Jalali set a massive fan base in Bangladesh. It is after their album, that most of the rappers both in the city center and outside tried to do rap in their local dialect and brought more diversity and connection to the Bangla rap scenario.

In my interview with Jalali set, Double S told me that they realized over time that rap cannot be done here in English, though the general primary ideology was that rap cannot be done in Bangla as the language does not give proper rhythm to the tune, though technically there is no issue here. To overcome the situation, the crew took almost five years of time to do research on the essence of Bangladeshi culture and language, in order to identify how rap could be reproduced in Bangla keeping true to the beats, rhythm and music that are associated with the genre. They

travelled to many places, exploring a number of districts in Bangladesh and learned different local dialects- particularly those of Mymensingh, Barisal, Noakhali, Rangpur etc, though they adopted an urban mixture that occurs from the migration of people towards Dhaka. Mugz even learned a variation of what can be identified as a pidgin that is used among the professional butchers in Bangladesh to communicate amongst themselves, though this is used only in the course of their business, and they switch to other forms (locally and widely used Dhaka-I or formal Bangla) to communicate in other sections of their daily life.

By doing so, they incorporated different local ideologies and sensibilities into their songs as the variation of different dialect carry different meanings and sensibility which is mostly absent in the mainstream Bangla language. This also helped them to create a path for future generation Bangladeshi rappers to represent their way of life through rap which was thought to be impossible in the earlier days, a comparison of which has been demonstrated above.

Jalali Set has set the benchmark high for other rappers in Bangladesh right now. Most have been unable to display more diversity or originality in comparison to the amount found in the works of Jalali Set. But it also sets the ground for rappers to come out with more sense and sensibilities in their music which represents their life in much more detail. For an example of this representation, I asked Mugz why he had never come out with any songs that deals with the family disputes that happen regularly in many families. He told me that currently they are focusing on things that most of the people can relate to, consequently leaving out the topics that connect to a very few. In this stage of rap in Bangladesh, the ground is still being prepared and future generation will probably make it more fertile in terms of resistance, identity and representation.

Seeking Community and Togetherness

After Jalali set many rappers are currently doing rap and trying to create their own identity through various forms and topics. Though the form and style varies, one thing has been very stagnant from the earlier days of Bangla rap is the feeling of community. From the first internet forum to the present community based actions have given Bangla rap its unique feature. The community feeling does not come only from the community sense that rap usually carries. It has its own ground in Bangladeshi relationship and social encountering manners. As Mugz said about his living choice in old Dhaka is that the community relationship among people is much more active in old Dhaka compared to newer parts of Dhaka.

One of the reasons behind this is that the newer Dhaka primarily consists of migrants from different parts of the country, thus there is no previous social relationship of any kind. New relationship building culture is also absent. On the other hand, in old Dhaka, there has been a significant number of families living there for generations. Thus from shopkeepers to barbers everyone tends to know each other. Even if someone new moves in, they try to socialize them into the existing social network. This social relationship plays a significant role on rap as well. While identifying value in life, the old Dhaka residents identify, relationship, family and friendship, the rappers in Bangladesh also identify the soul of rap by community. Without the sense of community they would not be able to feel the connection to the whole society and rather feel outcast in the society. It is the community feeling among the rappers that help them realize that whatever they are feeling and facing in their everyday life, there are others as well who feel the same way. This connection of sameness/togetherness in a society helps them to believe in their cause that they are not wrong in what they are doing. As many would connect over the

same issues, they can still draw power for their everyday battle in society whether or not the society frowns upon them.

As community holds a special place in rap culture in urban Bangladesh, the collaborative work has been another aspect of that community feeling in the Bangla rap scenario. The trend of collaborative work started with Jalali Set. When they were about to release their first album, they wanted to incorporate other artists who are not known to market but poses talent and possibility. This was a risk in terms of market strategy as these new artists who are not popular and bringing them on the first album could have been a disaster. But the Jalali set crew took their leap of faith and decided to release their first album collaboratively.

Mugz told me during our interview that, he wants to create a studio which will give the opportunity to talented artists so that they can practice, record and release their work for free from the record level. This shows how much rappers in Bangladesh think about their community and want to do things to help out the community. There are many artists right now who are also trying to work in a collaborative way. Taura Safa, Black Zang, Skib Khan has shown efforts to work collaboratively in previous times. After the popularization of the social media in recent times, the collaborative work has reached new heights. Now, rappers are collaborating not only within the country but also with Bangladeshi people living abroad. Rapsta Record is one of the most popular one in YouTube showing different collaborative works. They have worked with different local artists as well as Bangladeshi people living in France and UAE. Collaboration work does not stop at producing and creating music videos and records only.

There are thousands of local gigs every month around different places in Bangladesh where rappers from different corners of the country will show up and represent their locality and

try to prove their skill through rap battle. Not only unknown artists, many known and popular artists also join these rap battles. Normally, the primary arrangement will be done on social media and date and venue will be fixed. The content of these rap battles goes on to show that the rap scenario of Bangladesh has taken a huge turn from blindly following the English rap trend which was the norm in earlier days and now producing rap in different local dialects on different social, political, cultural, economic and youth lifestyle in different areas of Bangladesh. This is the globalization of rap in Bangladesh being localized among the globalized.

The reach of Bangla rap in global periphery is also getting its hold day by day. In one of my attempt to contact a slum rap group in India named Swadeshi, one of their members told me that they have heard of Jalali set from Bangladesh and they think that the group is very prominent in south Asia. During my interview as well, Mugz told me on reaching global audience that even Nepali and Pakistani rap groups and listeners have contacted Mugz and told him that they and their audience like Jalali Set. This is a step toward claiming the space in global world through localized ideology, style, culture, and senses which will in future mark and represent the essence of Bangla rap in a globalized world.

Global Resistance of Rap: Resistance as a Nature of Rap in a Globalized World

The origin of rap has been associated with resistance because of its association with African American youths representing themselves through rap and claiming their rights in the society that they have been denied and speaking against the injustice that has been implemented on them systematically. When the first Universal Zulu nation was formed, it focused on community and resistance rather than dispute among the rappers based on areas (Lamotte, 2014). This is the essence of rap that it carries with it and people would identity this essence of community and

resistance as the true essence of rap though the market component of rap is a million dollar business. With the spread of globalization, rap also spread around the world. The first spread was through cable TV, especially through MTV. MTV's programme *Yo! MTV raps* has given a huge boost to American rap to the global audience (Miszczynski, 2013). Later on, the internet has taken the communication and information to a very high level. With the availability of internet, entertainment and information was easy and far reaching. Thus, with internet, rap also reached every corner of the world possible. There is no doubt that rap travelled around the world because of its market properties, but wherever it reached, it has always created a practice of resistance and community alongside its market related activities. The resistive essence of hip-hop does not deny the marketization of rap rather it denies the essence of the market which is profit centric. In this paper, we looked into localization of rap in different countries and their relationship in contrast with global market.

As Chang in his article "It's a Hip-Hop World" talks about the million dollar industry that rap music has around the world through music and merchandise, the rap music also has a resistance side to it (Chang, 2009). The hip-hop music reached Africa through the cable TV like anywhere else in the world. Upon its arrival, an interesting thing happened in Nairobi, Kenya. The underground and popular rap artists there formed a Hip Hop parliament just like the previous Universal Zulu nation in America (Marsh and Petty, 2011). The goal of this Hip-Hop parliament is to create a collective conscious movement where the boundaries are open for everyone around the world. This parliament also provides the youth of Kenya a place from where they can raise their voice and participate in social, cultural, political process in Kenya (Marsh and Petty, 2011). Through this parliament, the rappers in Kenya is trying to decolonize the image and ideology that

has been created by the west. Chinua Achebe in his book *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* said,

“Art must interpret all human experience, for anything against which the door is barred can cause trouble. Even if harmony is not achievable in the heterogeneity of human experience, the dangers of an open rupture are greatly lessened by giving to everyone his due in the same forum of social and cultural surveillance” (Achebe, 1990).

It thus becomes very important represent the African youth’s experience to be present in the global stream of representation to decolonize their present and the parliament is focused to do so. Like this Kenyan hip hop parliament, all around the world, youth has raised their voice through hip hop as a form of resistance. Marsh and Petty in their article *Globalization, identity, and Youth Resistance: Kenya’s Hip Hop parliament* talks about different resistance that took place in different countries in Africa and middle east which goes to show that no matter how much market components are present in hip-hop, there are always youths around the world who use rap as a form of resistance. Robin wright in his book *Rock the Casbah: Rage and Rebellion Across the Islamic World* talks about the resistance of youth through rap in the context of Senegal and Tunisia. He says,

“Young hip hop artists throughout Africa and the Middle East have created sites of resistance and new forms of political activism. In Senegal, young rappers were condemning the oppressive and extravagant regime of former president Abdoulaye Wade until he was finally replaced in the 2012 elections by Macky Sall. One of the most noteworthy examples of hip hop as a site of political pressure occurred in Tunisia when Hamada Ben Amor who raps under the name “El General,” posted a four minute video

criticizing the regime of then President Zine al Abidine Ben Ali. The video went viral and was aired on news channels such as Al Jazeera (Wright, 2011). Weeks afterward, the tragic and now infamous self-immolation of street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi provoked an incredible wave of protest and resistance throughout Tunisia. El General released another song called “Tunisia Our Country” and was arrested for alleged treason but released after three days when the government thought his release would appease demonstrators. Only two weeks later, the government fell and the president fled the country” (Wright, 2011)

This goes on to show that rappers around the world despite of being associated with the market rap, in a way always finds the essence of rap by making it into a ground of resistance. The people who are focused with the generalized market rap representing some mythical rich, powerful and sexual life usually don't seem to identify themselves with the resistance of rap. They are rather performer in a show business. On the other hand, people who take rap as a way of life and find rap a place where they can be themselves and express themselves in an artistic way tend to use rap as a form of resistance. The part of being the hip-hop community is like being the part of a global nation where everyone is allowed with their differences to represent what they are and what they have through rap. Morgan and Bennett in their article *Hip-Hop & the Global Imprint of a Black Cultural Form* talks about this sense of citizenship in hip-hop which allows them to resist against different oppression and dominance. They said,

“To speak of the hip hop nation, is to acknowledge the “citizens of the global hip-hop cultural community,” and this citizenship “is defined not by conventional national or

racial boundaries, but by a commitment to hip-hop's multimedia arts culture, a culture that represents the social and political lives of its members" (Morgan and Bennett, 2011).

This commitment towards the community is what is usually missing in the ideology of the people related to hip-hop who are in general market oriented. In the market oriented hip-hop the rap that is produced is usually a utopia which talks about things that other rappers and listeners who take rap as a way of life cannot relate to. Thus, the raps that are hyper sexualized and utopian usually don't stick in people's memory and people always remember those who gave a cause to the rap and their way of living. Marsh and Petty in their article said "Adaptations of hip hop culture by young people to include local cultural practices, sounds, vernacular, landscape, and politics demonstrate an interconnectivity between local and global discourses" (Marsh and Petty, 2011). This interconnectivity is what most of the rappers and hip-hop enthusiasts identify as the core essence of rap all around the world.

When it comes to the essence of rap, it is true that most of the rappers and hip-hop community choose resistance and community over the market components. This however, does not imply that rappers are anti-market. On one hand rappers like their accessories. The clothes, shoes, caps and accessories that they use most of the time is a part of multimillion dollar business. Chang in his article discuss about the massive business around hip-hop (Chang, 2009). He indicates that every major business company is using hip-hop to sell their products and to reach new customers. He talks about a successful rap coordinator and artist in Shanghai named Dana Burton who has big links with major corporations and help them to do business while managing and maintaining Shanghai's rap scene. Chang says,

“Burton soon began to promote tours for famous hip-hop artists visiting from the United States. Today, multinational corporations including Intel, Coca-Cola, and Adidas turn to him when they want help in marketing their consumer goods to China’s booming youth market. Burton then taps into his pool of more than 300 Chinese rappers, DJs, dancers, and graffiti artists” (Chang, 2009).

While this is true that some rap artists try to sell multinational company products through their music and performance. There are many others who deny the multinational and starts small business by themselves to supply the local rappers with local products and accessories which are considered a part of the lifestyle. Milosz Mischzynski in his article *“Rapped Resistance and Capitalism”*: *Contexts, Identities, and Distribution of DIY Rap in Poland* talks about the market invasion in post-communist Poland and rap gaining a significant amount of popularity there where after a certain period of time the rappers in poland not only took their attention towards the resistive nature of rap, but also they denied the global market products and started to produce local products associated with hip-hop (Mischzynski, 2013). In the article Mischzynski shows the relationship of rap and globalization through one of polish rappers voice. The polish rapper Daniel said “Polish hip-hop's development is parallel to the birth of the market-economy and democracy, and just like transition, is a part of his life (Mischzynski, 2013). Like many other country, in Poland as well rap entered through cable network. At first the channels aired American artists and later on started to air and host local rap artists. This gave the popularity of rap in Poland a big boost. However, following this, quite quickly, the government made a new law where cursing, swearing and showing violent content in television was banned (Mischzynski, 2013). As a result the local artists shifted their focus from big media houses and started to produce and sell their own songs by themselves. As Mischzynski informs us in his article saying,

“At this stage, many artists decided to either give up or take a track of continuous, stable development. In effect, some of the top-notch rappers established self-managed micro-companies specializing in various disciplines: music labels aimed at promoting independent music; companies offering services necessary for music production such as recording music videos and renting equipment; or they started their own clothing brands” (Miszczynski, 2013).

It might seem that it was new law that made the local artist shift their focus on self-producing and marketing. This is not entirely true, as Miszczynski tells us that at this point rappers who were more Americanized started becoming less popular. As Miszczynski mentions in his article “I wrongly assumed that popular trends from the outside are imitated locally. During my research, my interviewees claimed that the current state of art of American hip-hop does not suit their tastes and they prefer the older songs, “the old school” (Miszczynski, 2013). This shows that though the rappers in Poland started being interested in rap by global media but with time they have preferred what made more sense to them, the community based old time rap which has resistance in its core.

This localization did not stopped only in making and selling rappers songs by the rappers. Some of them started local businesses to supply locally made pants to shoes which is something that the polish rappers take pride in. The rappers in Poland have denied the cover commercialized rap essence because of its deviation from the core essence of rap, community, freedom and resistance. One of the polish rappers told Miszczynski in the interview that “American hip-hop went a long way towards commercialization: the artists got richer and wealthier and became part of mainstream pop music, which is less attractive than the Brooklyn recordings of the early 1990s” (Miszczynski, 2013). This process is termed as cultural hybridization and interference by

Arjun Appadurai in his book *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization* (Appadurai, 1996). In recent times, there has been another ideological group of rappers who does not care if their music is downloaded for free and they do not make money from their music. Miszczyński introduced one rapper named Małpa saying “they do not care about the downloading of bootlegs, as they do it too, and post their products on the internet” (Miszczyński, 2013). Though most of the country in the world got introduced to hip-hop because of its market components but the world of global hip-hop thus does not stand only on market components. Taking from the global and altering it so that the rap represents the life and existence of the local is what gives the rap its unique feature. Doing so sometime it takes help from the global market, sometimes it tries to create its own sustainable local market. But in every way rap music holds, values and nurture its resistive nature within in it different socio-cultural grounds.

Rapping Resistance of Middle and Lower Class Youth in Dhaka and Its Relation to Market

Like any other globally connected country, in Bangladesh as well rap reached through the channels of global market economy. As a result of being part of the global market, here in Bangladesh as well many rappers follow the global trend of rap market and want to create rap in that manner which supposedly going to sell on the market. As the music market in Bangladesh is hugely affected by piracy, the general trend of producing album and selling it on market doesn't

work very well. Thus the rappers need to take other steps to make a living out of rap. Social media has boosted the popularity of rap music in Bangladesh. As a result, rappers who have well connection have emerged as different radio hosts and sometimes judges on different rap competitions. They even try to sell their name or brand logoed t-shirts and hoodies in the market to a=make money. This process hardly gives any rapper the possible option to earn to support themselves fully. Thus rappers do all sorts of regular jobs and chores to support themselves. The record levels are also not very professional and oppress rappers in many way. During my interview, Mugz told me that for their first album and video shoot, they were supposed to get a certain amount of money but they ended up getting only half of it and the record level QinetiC Music denied to give them the rest of the money making different excuses. Rappers also earn a very small amount of money from their YouTube video views. The earning however is too small to consider as any kind of sustainable earning. Many rappers are still students by their profession and depend on their parents for their daily expenses. So, there is an overall lacking in terms of organized music market in Bangladesh which can give the option to the rappers to make money from their work for living.

This economic hindrance does not stop rappers in Bangladesh from taking rap as a form of resistance.

Resistance had many forms and faces in the history. Even today, resistance take place in the smallest of ways not only as a form of conflict and confrontation. In our common knowledge, we identify resistance as people organizing themselves and challenging the inequal and unjust system. Though, anthropology as a discipline, recognizes these broad social and economic

challenges and protests organized by group of people in the society, it also recognizes everyday small notions of actions that resembles resistance. In the article “Resistance” published in “The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology”, Fiona Wright talks about the paradigm shift of theoretical change of notion of what resistance actually is within the discourse of Anthropology. On the change of ideology about resistance and how it has been studied and identified in the anthropological discipline, Wrights says “The discipline has also, however, been interested in understanding the broader everyday contexts that make these spectacular events and moments possible. Seeing resistance as one element in a complex system of power relations, anthropologists have sought to describe and explain acts of resistance within the rich social, cultural, and economic fabrics in which they take place” (Wright, 2016).

In this paper, I have identified resistance of rap not only as an act against the social and political system but also as a whole and everyday mundane acts of resistance which takes place in different social, cultural and economic fabrics of a society. The urban middle class rappers of Dhaka city are rapping about the corrupt political system and unjust in the society. This is a form of resistance that can be identified easily in the speech and vocabulary. However, these rappers also carry a certain type of fashion and body language that is frowned upon in the society. Thus the embodiment of a certain clothes and lifestyle becomes resistance for these young middle class rappers a form of resistance. Again, the lower class rappers from the mazars show different form of resistance through their rap and daily activities. In one of the rap music that I can still remember from those rappers of the mazars says,

“Ek Tala Pach Tala Samne Ache

Mohammadpur, Gym a Giya Dumble Maira Khoma Banaicho ki Sundor”.

Which translates to,

“There are multi storied buildings in Mohammadpur,

And you are making attractive body going to the gym and living in those buildings”.

This shows that the resistance does not reside only in the form of organized protest but also in the words of the young people who identify their position and others who live in a privileged position and most of the better contributions that they have comes from their better position. This indication of class based contrast is a form of resistance from these young lower class mazar living rappers.

On the contrary, rap here is considered as a form of resistance by most of the rappers. Despite of their struggling economic conditions, rappers are devoting their time for rap and hip-hop community in Bangladesh. They take this struggling situation as an inspiration and make it a tool to create better rap. Sadhu of Jalali Set told me that, “You will never see any good rappers coming from privileged position. The struggle of your daily life will make you see things clearer which is essential for good rap”. The poverty thus becomes an element for the rappers in Bangladesh to tell the stories of oppression and institutional violence in Bangladesh which are mostly unseen, inexperienced and unknown to most of the educated middle and upper class citizens.

The resistance of the rappers in Bangladesh can come in many forms. It can be of political, social, ideological, cultural, identity and space. Fokir Laal is one of the first generation rappers who have talked about political unrest and the struggle of immigrants in USA. One of Fokir’s very famous song is *Bichar Chai* (We want justice). In this song Fokir talks about the lacking of

democracy in Bangladesh and how the corrupted ones have captured the political power of the country and how he want to bring justice to all of this. Fakir says,

“একাত্তরের দালালরা ঝুঁশিয়ার সাবধান

অস্ত্র থাকে কাপুরুষের, লাল বাহিনির র্‌যাপ গান

ধর্মের নামে ধান্দাবাজি এই শালারা বেঈমান

মূর্খ মানব মন্ত্রী হইছে, লাঞ্ছি মাইরা চেয়ার ভাঙু” (Laal, 2016)

Which roughly translates to,

“Be aware o enemy of the 71

The cowards carry the gun, where the gang of laal has their rap

Those dishonest are the one who play with the religion

The stupid has become the minister and we need to get him out of his power”.

This goes to show that rap and rappers from the very beginning in Bangladesh is concerned about its socio political situation. The resistance that Fokir is asserting here is that though many have died during the war giving their life for a better country, the country right now is full of corruption and the most corrupted ones are in the power. Poor people cannot afford food regularly, law enforcement does not catch the convicted, and everyone is just watching and not doing anything. Thus Fokir is calling back to the lovers of the country to rise again and stand against these injustice that has spreaded in every sector of the country. Fokir also puts a huge importance on democracy in a country. In his song, he says “ইচ্ছা মত দেশ চালাইলে গনতন্ত্রের দরকার কি” which translates to, “If the country is operated on rulers wish, then what is the need of democracy here” (Laal, 2016).

In another song Fokir Laal talks about the value of Bangla rap that has never been given to it. In the song “Bangla Rap Er Daam” (Value of Bangla Rap), Fokir talks about the devaluation of rap in Bangladeshi music industry. He arranges the song as if he is replying many peoples question and answering them. In the song in response to one question why he does not sing like the other popular artists in Bangladesh and laal responses saying “Naam Fataibar Laiga Laale Gaan Konodin Lekhe na” which translate to “Laal does not write song to make a name”. This is a resistance itself against the dominance of the music industry in Bangladesh and how that industry discriminates against music and create an oppression. When band music first emerged in Bangladesh during the late 70s, the already established classical form of songs identified band music as disturbed music, invasion of the western culture and the music of the not so good youths. With years of struggle, the band music has reached a huge audience in Bangladesh and now is an established music form which dominates the market in many ways. Now, when rap is emerging, the band music is doing the same thing that was done to them by the previous classical music. They are identifying rap as not music at all. Fokir Laal is challenging that identification and calling to everyone to give the proper value to rap so that rap does not suffer in the industry. In my interview, Mugz also told me that the band musicians and the followers sometimes create a hierarchical sense to the public by saying that rap music is not music at all. The rappers of Bangladesh is trying to change that perception and challenge it through their rap songs and everyday living.

When I asked Sadhu of Jalali set why the rappers in Bangladesh do were baggy pants, sneakers and other rap related accessories? Is there any significance to them? He told me that these accessories attract attention very easily and by that they both disturb and attract the public. They

disturb the public so that the society is in constant shock that there are differences and variation in the society that they need to be aware of accepting of. On the other hand they attract the youth by these accessories in a way that youths want something new and fun in their life. Resistance is something that can be very easily activated among youth. In order to attract the youth to a new resilient life, the rappers wear the accessories that they do in Bangladesh. Now this explanation cannot be generalized as this was the philosophy of one of the members of Jalali Set. Though the explanation can be of good sociological tool to understand the youth life and living in Bangladesh.

As most of the rappers come from struggling background in Bangladesh, they have a very controlled space in the cityscape that is open to them. Though there is no official rule that pours cannot go to the rich neighborhood but when they actually do, they are harassed in many ways, by police, by guards, by the looks and comments of the residents. Rappers also protest about this lack of availability of the space in Dhaka. In one of Jalali set's song *Dhaka City*, they talk about the Dhaka experience that is never represented in any mainstream songs or culture. They represent the pickpocket, the garbage collector, the fraud, the bus helper and many other characters who jalali set claims is the core of the characteristic of the Dhaka city and others just deny their existing experience on different ideological ground. The group of rappers in Shah Ali's Shrine also tried to represent their experiential existence that is avoided and denied to be recognized by addressing the privileges that the upper and middle class has without which their experience would be just as meaningless as the poor shrine living people's experience are today. The rappers thus want to challenge it and demand that their experience and struggle need to be

addressed and recognized with as important as the privileged ones. This is their resistance through rap.

In another song done by the young rappers from the mazars talk about their struggle of survival and how young people of their age can never even imagine about what they have to go through.

In the song, they says,

“Baper Takay khoma Banao, Banaiya Hunda Chalao,
Nije Taka Kamaite Gele Pant Voira Muita Dao”.

Which translates to,

“It is your father’s money which has given you the shiny face and with that money you show off on your bike,

If you ever had to earn your own money, you would have pissed yourself”.

These young rappers does not organize themselves to protest against the class inequality, rather describing their opinion and struggle in life through their rap among themselves. This needs to be identified as a form of resistance despite of it not being present in any social media or street. Resistance lies in every actions like this.

Martin Lamotte in his article *Rebels Without a Pause: Hip-hop and Resistance in the City* talks about the theoretical prospects of why rap should be considered and analyzed as a political and social movement. Bringing American rap history, he says,

“I argue that hip-hop engages with and potentially challenges American democracy by creating an autonomous space in which to practice citizenship. I seek to underline the importance of studying hip-hop in order to better understand social relations and ways of appropriating space in the city” (Lamotte, 2014).

Lamotte sees the importance of rap in terms of democracy, autonomy and citizenship which also applies to the understanding of Bangladeshi Rap. He shows that during the emergence of rap in America, the rappers actually criticized the mass media and the unconcerned white citizens who denied to recognize the systematic violence in the country. Bangladeshi rappers, known-unknown are doing the same kind of criticism. They are demanding their right as a citizen in the country which are denied for them. The battle over public place and street is another aspect that Tricia Rose deals with in her book *Black Noise* by saying “The hip-hop movement is rooted in a struggle for public space and a claim for street presence” (Rose, 1994). The resistance over street and public space is also true for the Bangladeshi rappers. The control of the public space is defined by political and economic power in Bangladesh, not by public consensus. Thus these young rappers are claiming their rights over those spaces and the authority of decision to be given back to the public consensus. Through this resistance they also try to deny the occupation of elite residential areas which ultimately denies many public rights like using parks and roads and demanding the justice to be implemented. Asef Bayat in his book *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* talks about the occupation of public space by public and the politics of daily life. He says,

“Indeed, conflict is generated when citizens actively take over the streets when only passive use of them is allowed. Therefore, according to Bayat, street vendors whose activities unintentionally extend onto the sidewalk, park squatters, youths lingering at corners and women selling homemade food on the streets all question the state and its prerogatives by actively appropriating the public space in their daily activities. On the other hand, the struggle for the control of public spaces makes way for the development of collective identities and solidarities” (Bayat, 2010).

Thus the resistance of the rappers in Bangladesh does not remain only a form of resistance which is associated with the art form. Eventually it represents the politics of space, citizenship, democracy, language, market, and power. Though it still remains true that rap has a massive market, it is also true that the resistance of rap remains no matter where it reaches and how a certain area localizes the global rap. Resistance thus becomes the core essence of rap by the living the lifestyle of the rappers.

Most of the rappers in Bangladesh, no matter from which class they are from, they have their resistive nature in a way or other in their daily life. Even though the rappers who rap about general market oriented party songs, that person even carries the resistance with them through the embodiment of rap as a culture. It is true that most of the rappers cannot make enough money from the Bangladeshi music market to support themselves. Some of them does not even have the access to the market, but we also have to recognize the relationship of market with the resistance part of rap. It is the market properties of rap music that gives it a global form and that global form keeps alive the localized forms of resistance within it, sometimes even contrasting with it. At the end, the market and resistance of rap stay together in a symbiosis like manner even if practitioners want it or not.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to look into the relationship and mechanisms of rap, resistance and the global market. Doing so, the paper has looked into the localization process of a well-established globalized phenomenon of rap. This process opens to us many new doors to look at rap in a specific cultural and geographical context. How one area's rap becomes different from the others is something that needs multidisciplinary attention to understand fully. Culture is a very fluid and so are the elements of culture. Where it was impossible to think about doing rap in Bangladesh 30 years ago, today the youths are representing their ideology, sensibility and daily struggle through the rap form, music and language, adapted to the Bangladeshi reality. Their resistance, feeling and community connectivity/connectedness gives hopes to many youth to do something better for the society. Thus, to understand the socio-political possibility of the future in Bangladesh, we cannot ignore the importance and role that rap has to play in the Bangladeshi society.

Rap as a medium gives the youth the opportunity to represent themselves and their way of life in a creative form through which they represent their voice in the society. The denial towards many social bindings and oppression comes back as a form of resistance through rap for these youth. Political unrest, economic hardships and inequality also become the prime source for the rappers to resist through their art. Resistance of daily life through embodiment of rap and protesting against social injustice and inequality becomes a common factor for rappers of both middle class and lower class. In this way, having differences of class, these rappers from embodies rap and resistance in a complex way, where not only they challenge the system through their everyday activates but also critique interclass positions as well. This thus becomes not only

a medium of critiquing the social and political space but also to criticize the actions of the rappers from different classes.

It is their social and economic position that makes their artistic cultural production a threat to the urban middle class who dominate the recognized art-culture production, and the production methods. Any established art form that is predominantly elite in nature, feels threatened by the newer form of art, here Bangladeshi adaptations and variations of the rap genre. Nowadays, in Bangladesh, rock music is accepted in the mainstream music industry and is recognized as a powerful form of music. However, in the past, the previous prestigious music forms such as Robindra Shangeet or Adhunik Gaan used to mark rock music as a threat towards the culture of Bangladesh. Now, rock music has taken the same place as those previous forms of music, and identifying rap music as non-musical and a threat to our culture- as a lesser genre. Thus, the art produced by these rappers seem obscene to the majority of the middle class population, who dictate the standard of the artistic discourse. This analysis will also help us understand the future course of resistance and its relationship to youth though understanding the inequity of arts and its relation to market and local people.

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