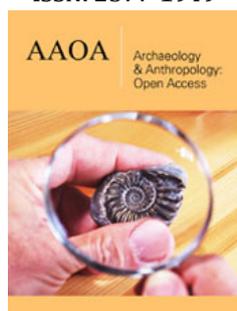


Urban Femininities in Greek Hip Hop and Street Dancescapes

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Case Report

In spite of female participation, hip hop to a great extent is often regarded as a genre in which women are degraded and spoken of in violent and sexually objectifying ways [1]. At first glance, hip hop culture through the discourses of its most official elements that is rap (MCing), DJing, graffiti and breakdance (breaking or b-boying), can be considered a widely patriarchic and puritan culture. As far as dance is concerned many hip hop scholars and feminists have stressed [2-4] that breakdance is recognized primarily as a masculine dance, while anatomical and moral claims are used against women who are breaking. Undoubtedly, gender structures and practices of each local culture influence any particular hip hop and street scene and their inside gender norms and discourses. Although at certain times it seems that contemporary Greek culture has moved beyond traditional gendered distinctions and paradigms of the past, celebratory practices and tactics [5-8] are fields where we can observe the blatant or tacit development and reproduction of structural sexism and gendered bipolarities. Hip hop is one of those fields. As in many places around the world, street and hip hop dance culture in Greece is mainly appropriated by working-class, lower middle-class and migrant males and, therefore it can be considered as a male-identified and dominated culture [9,5]. Especially this applies to breakdance. For a long period of time breaking was the most popular hip hop dance in Greece and was appropriated mainly by boys (b-boys). Today this gendered specificity hasn't changed much. Popping is a funk style recognized as original hip hop dance which was born in California and is also male dominated in Greece and worldwide. Young women in Greece who practice breakdance and popping are few while the majority of female hip hop and street dancers—coming from working class, lower middle class and middle class backgrounds – usually experiment with other street and hip hop styles such as new style hip hop, hip hop party dance as well as funk, disco, house and club dance styles such as waacking, voguing, dancehall, house dance etc., all of which may fall simultaneously under the category of “street”, “club” and “urban”. Girls combine these styles in all-style hip hop competitions or in separate competitions for each style. In most cases, male breakers (b-boys) are those who hold the reins of power and recognition and can be judgmental over the authenticity of dancers, dance styles and street competence.

However, in these all-style competitions of the Greek hip hop and street dance arena, crews are more gender mixed. Women and gender queer people have the opportunity to participate more actively in comparison to uncompounded breakdance or popping events where women (let alone queer of gender people), at least in Greece are scarce or unable to remain for a long period of time in crews either because of strategic sexism or androcentricity. As my extensive audiovisual fieldwork in Athens and Thessaloniki has designated Koutsougera 2011 [10,5-7] in the growing hip hop/street dance arena there are influential cisgender female hip hop/street dancers and female break dancers (b-girls) who become more and more willing to experiment with genderly hybrid dance embodiments and alternative dance formats,

badass [4], wild or dangerous femininities [5-9] and they energize feminist masculinities [11] or female masculinities [12]. They even rhetorically resist the “naming” of their gender identities, gendered self-identifications, or even any “in betweenness” betwixt the feminine and the masculine.

They experiment from an early age with different hip hop, street and urban dance styles. Some of them mix styles, while others follow one particular style. They participate in their own style’s competitions (breaking/popping/waacking/voguing) as well as all-styles hip hop competitions and in hybrid choreographies for shows and hip hop theater. They perform fluid and combative femininities, raising anti-sexist voices in male-dominated hip hop spaces. These female figures form empowering sisterhoods inside hip hop through female affectivity and battle spirit and at times they try to empower female dancers with conventional femininities. They face many attacks from male dancers and struggle to build a reputation as women who support female power in Greek hip hop contexts. Their unities as manifestations of trans individuality [10], multiplicity and “agonistic intercorporeality” [13] reflect on their movements’ exchange, sharing and embodiment. As it seems, most male hip hop dancers feel very uncomfortable, even threatened with an androgynous performance combining simultaneously both feminine and masculine figurations, instead of something they recognize and are used to: a distinctive masculine (tomboy) or effeminate performance (girly) from a b-girl or hip-hop dancer. They don’t like women fusing and confusing stereotypical gender traits, conventional and normative gender patterns. As many competent girls claim, despite declared equality and conditional recognition, some boys don’t hesitate to exclude them from significant battles and hegemonic positions (e.g., judging roles) or become offensive with them in battling events because of jealousy. B-boys call those unconventional girls “freaks”, “crazies” or “boyish” in their inability to accept them. The facts that some of these girls self-identify as hip-hop dancers-which symbolically privileges masculinity in Greece-and synchronically may practice another non-hip-hop dance style-which again symbolically is closer to the effeminate-and they may battle the boys with a raging hyper femininity, betrays to their eyes the heteropatriarchal axioms of hip hop. Through contested freestyle performances and choreographies which fuse original hip hop and other urban dance styles these relatively marginalized populations queer the dominant norms of the male-dominated hip hop and breakdance scene, introducing new authenticities,

embodiments, imaginaries and subjectivations which disperse beyond the hip hop field and destabilize ordinary mediations of the category of the “female” in wider Greek culture.

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