Nordic Music Videos

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Chapter 5

Antiracist Strategies in Hkeem's "Ghettoparasitt"

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5 Antiracist Strategies in Hkeem's "Ghettoparasitt"

Kai Arne Hansen

Introduction

Norwegian rapper, singer, and songwriter Hkeem was awarded the 2018 Spellemann award, often referred to as the "Norwegian Grammy Award," for the music video "Ghettoparasitt" (2018). The then twenty-one-year-old artist explained that the title of the video, which translates as "ghetto parasite,"[1] refers to "someone with a minority background […] who is judged and not accepted because he or she speaks another language, has a different culture, or looks different."[2] Combining a range of bold lyrical, musical, and visual strategies, the video confronts the persistence of racist discourse and racial discrimination in twenty-first century Norway. It thereby brought attention to social issues that were seldom discussed in the Norwegian public sphere at the time, demonstrating the capacity of music video to serve as a space for cultural and political struggles to unfold.

In this chapter, I investigate "Ghettoparasitt" as a salient example of how hip-hop artists in Norway have used music video to address the lived experiences of ethnic and racial minority people and intervene in discourses on race, racism, and national belonging. Granted that racism and racial discrimination endure in present-day Europe,[3] Norway and the other Nordic countries face major challenges in combating inequality, reducing social conflict, and ensuring inclusive societies in a rapidly changing world. These challenges need to be understood in context of the increasing cultural diversity of the Nordic region,[4] as well as in light of the tendency that race and racism remain taboo concepts. In Norway, Frode Helland argues, debates about race and racism have been contentious to the point that the very existence of racism in the country has been questioned and researching the issue has been fraught with conflict.[5] Granted that discussions of racism have tended to be dismissed or downplayed in the Nordic countries, this can be partly explained by how persisting notions of "Nordic exceptionalism" obscure issues related to social conflict, power, and inequality.[6] As racial concerns have received renewed international attention in the late 2010s and early 2020s, the need for further studies into how the culturally and socially constructed notion of race is negotiated in both local and global contexts is becoming increasingly clear.

Nordic music scholarship has begun to tackle this issue in relation to our diverse engagements with music as artists, audiences, and scholars,[7] and the current chapter is intended to extend this body of work. Music provides a window into complex

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social issues, and hip hop's immense commercial appeal and long history as a political and politicized form of expression make it a particularly suitable point of entry for discussing how racialized identities are negotiated in contemporary, local popular music cultures. Since emerging in the urban US in the 1970s as an expression of African-American culture and experience, hip-hop music has been embraced by a global audience and adapted by performers around the world in response to local circumstances.[8] When the murder of George Floyd by a US police officer in late May 2020 spurred increased international support for the Black Lives Matter movement and pushed issues of racism and racial discrimination toward the top of the global agenda,[9] hip hop served as one prominent channel for fostering solidarity, articulating protest, and voicing support for marginalized groups. This was also the case in Norway. Indeed, the early 2020s have seen Norwegian rappers, including Hkeem, play key roles in (trans)national processes of solidarity formation and protest that contribute to reshaping the social fabric of the country.

Against this background, I aim to show how a single music video from a Norwegian artist can shed light on diverse aspects of contemporary hip hop music's antiracist potential. As is made clear by a spate of recent research,[10] music video is a medium that provides ample opportunity for considering the sociopolitical impact of broader cultural circumstances. This is not least because audiovisual media – characterized as they are by near endless possibilities for manipulating sonic and visual properties – tend to heighten the theatricality of how identity is acted out, thereby increasing the legibility of the aesthetic and discursive mechanisms that (re)produce certain ideas about people. My analysis of "Ghettoparasitt" calls particular attention to the video's depiction of inverted racial power dynamics, inquiring into the role of audiovisual aesthetics in Hkeem's critique of racial stereotyping. This provides a platform for considering how Hkeem came to assume a prominent role in public debates about racism in Norway in the early 2020s, as he spoke openly about his own experiences as a Black Norwegian man and employed "Ghettoparasitt" as a springboard for advancing the national conversation about racial issues through mainstream public channels (for example, on prime-time national TV). Ultimately, the chapter sheds further light on the potential of music videos to advance social criticism and shape public discourse.

Hypervisibility, "Realness," and the Politics of Place

Abdulhakim Hassane, known professionally as Hkeem, was born in Oslo, Norway, in 1997. He is of Ghanaian and Nigerien descent and grew up in Stovner, a borough far north-east of the city of Oslo which is noted nationally for its ethnically diverse population.[11] Debuting as a rapper in 2016, Hkeem soon started addressing social issues through his lyrics, music videos, and public statements, often drawing on his personal experiences and describing local circumstances. "Ghettoparasitt" is a prominent example of this.[12] Hkeem has stated outright that "Ghettoparasitt" addresses racism in Norway,[13] noting that the video was partly inspired by his own experiences with feeling scrutinized or unwelcome in Norwegian public spaces.[14]

The song opens with a single, mellow synth sound that accompanies a series of sound bites of people promoting anti-immigration sentiments. Two of the three brief statements can be attributed to well-known conservative politicians Erik Gjems-Onstad and Sylvi Listhaug, both associated with the right-wing populist Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet) in Norway.[15] The visuals presented during the opening part of the video comprise a series of close-up shots of several young, Black men – the likely targets of the sampled politicians' scorn – staring directly into the camera. These images arguably counter the dehumanizing effects of racializing rhetoric by calling attention to the young men's unique features and individuality, thereby opposing the tendency of racial stereotyping to render individual difference invisible.[16] Notably, such a strategy of resistance has a distinct history in the visual materials of hip hop.

Considering Miles White's discussion of the politics of facial performance in rap music videos,[17] the direct stares of the young men in "Ghettoparasitt" can be understood as confronting the structures of power in Western culture that have made Black men hypervisible and subjects of constant scrutiny. Describing rappers' use of an intense gaze as "mean mugging," White argues that this representational strategy signals critique of racial stereotypes and their functions of control and censure: "it subverts the policing of black bodies and thus may be seen as transgressive."[18] Even if the men in "Ghettoparasitt" are not rappers, their direct stares – framed within the context of a hip hop video – produce a similar effect. What's more, the significance of "mean mugging" as a strategy of visual resistance is emphasized by its juxtaposition with the sound bites of anti-immigration statements by powerful politicians. Faced with marginalization and intense scrutiny, there is agency in claiming and exercising one's right to look back.[19]

During the transition to the first verse Hkeem's name appears in large, transparent letters (approx. 00:11), while the image of a Norwegian flag waving in the wind is shown inside the letters (see Figure 5.1). The flag further accentuates the theme of national belonging already implied by the video opening. Subdued percussion is introduced low in the mix and images from Stovner are interspersed with footage of Hkeem rapping. The lyrics describe an incident when he and his friends attracted unwarranted negative attention in public:

Figure 5.1 Screenshots from *Ghettoparasitt*. Dir. Thor Brenne. Left: Hkeem's name with a Norwegian flag effect. Right: Hkeem rapping.

En dame, hun får hjertesjokk.	*A woman, her heart skips a beat*
Vi kommer inn på bussen, hun skal av på neste stopp	*We enter the bus, she is getting off at the next stop*
Slapp av, vi ska'kke gjøre noen ting	*Relax, we won't do anything*
*É*Jeg og gutta mine skal bare ta en tur ned til byen	*Me and my boys are just headed downtown*

As the verse progresses, Hkeem contemplates feeling estranged in his own country and remarks, "Don't misunderstand, I love my country / But some people think I carry dynamite" (approx. 00:28). These statements allude to the stresses associated with reconciling one's desire to belong in one's country of birth, on the one hand, and feeling hypervisible – treated with suspicion – in that same country, on the other. In the video, Hkeem is dressed in a black outfit and performs in front of a dark, nondescript background (see Figure 5.1). The performance footage is thus characterized by a stark minimalism that contrasts Hkeem's feelings of hypervisibilty and underscores the severity of the lyrics. Additionally, the lack of interfering visual effects or props establishes a sense of realism that adds to the impression that Hkeem is recounting his own experiences as a racial minority man in Norway.

Images from Stovner, the local environment where Hkeem grew up, reinforce the impression that the song addresses Hkeem's personal experiences and activate a politics of place that both resonates with hip-hop conventions of "keeping it real" and attaches to a range of ideas concerning cultural values, identity, and belonging. As Murray Forman points out, specificity (for example, clear references to rappers' own neighbourhoods and lived experiences) is integral to the "realness" ideal of authenticity that has long been dominant in hip hop music.[20] It almost goes without saying that the notion of realness is also central to hip hop's legitimacy as an expression of actual cultural experiences. The visual representation of Stovner is therefore significant for Hkeem's intervention in Norwegian racial discourse because it connects the lyrical themes of belonging, estrangement, and racial struggle to Norwegian people's daily realities.

Presumably on account of its diverse multi-ethnic population, the Stovner borough has been problematically labelled by some as a "ghetto"[21] – a derogatory term that is bound up with racial, ethnic, and classist connotations.[22] While the ghetto has traditionally been understood within a cultural deficit model as a racialized, "ethnic," and unfortunate blight on the urban environment, Forman argues, within hip hop's cultural forms of expression "the ghetto is elevated as the source of black authenticity, the stream in which both suffering and resilience flow in abundance."[23] The prevalence of ghetto-oriented discourse in much of hip hop's imagery, lyrics, and marketing strategies is integral to ideas about rap's particular capacity to represent the reality of ethnic and racial minority people's urban experiences,[24] which are meaningful also to audiences and performers far removed from the North-American geocultural context that Forman discusses. The ghetto thus

ambiguously symbolizes sociospatial marginalization and a site of community and authenticity, and popular culture represents one channel through which such ambiguity is negotiated in local and national contexts.

In "Ghettoparasitt," Hkeem both flaunts his association with Stovner and confronts the negative social effects imposed by prejudices about the place and its population. Notably, the video contributed to a broader trend in Norwegian popular culture in the late 2010s that saw the local setting of Stovner become a focal point for directing renewed attention toward ethnic minority experiences in Norway. In his widely acclaimed novel, *Tante Ulrikkes vei* (2017), Zeshan Shakar addresses interrelated issues concerning social class, ethnicity, and national belonging through a story that details the youth and young adulthood of two men from Stovner. Similar themes are explored in the popular TV series *17* (2018), which was produced by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation and promoted as the first Norwegian drama series focused on teenagers in the Stovner area. By centring the experiences of minority youth, such works – including "Ghettoparasitt" – arguably ushered in a shift in how the intricate connections between place, identity, and social power were represented and understood in the Norwegian public sphere. The politics of place associated with Stovner in the national context of Norway provided the most visible local frame for this cultural shift. This is exemplified well by "Ghettoparasitt," whose visual references to Stovner extend the hip hop tradition of rappers representing their 'hoods in ways that add "a localized nuance to the notion of space that conveys a certain proximity."[25] Such a proximity – a symbolic connection to an actual place – readily translates as increased legibility, in the sense that the social issues that Hkeem tackles appear more understandable, more urgent, and more "real" to viewers. In other words, Stovner provides a culturally significant local frame for Hkeem to reject the status of "ghetto parasite," challenge the prejudices that confer that status upon him, and confront persisting racial inequalities in Norway. This is achieved most forcefully through an audiovisual narrative that inverts racial power dynamics.

Inverting Racial Power Dynamics

As the first verse progresses, new sonic elements contribute to an increased sense of urgency that anticipates the chorus. Most notably, an arpeggiated synth sound appears at the same time as Hkeem transitions into a higher register (00:34). The video introduces a group of three middle-aged, seemingly middle-class, White men whose experiences comprise the primary visual narrative of the video. When we first see them, the three men are denied entry to a night club (00:30). Over the course of the video, they find themselves in several other uncomfortable situations (see Figure 5.2): a fast-food chef suspects the men of paying him with counterfeit money (00:55); they are approached and questioned by the police for no apparent reason (01:51); and one of the men is suspected of attempted assault and restrained by the police after trying to return a lost wallet to a young woman (02:41).

The matter that the three men are being discriminated against first becomes fully evident during the first chorus (00:45–01:07). The revelation is accentuated

Figure 5.2 Screenshots from *Ghettoparasitt*. Dir. Thor Brenne.

by a heightened musical intensity, introduced by a busy drumbeat, additional synth sounds, and wailing pads. A rumbling sub-bass establishes a powerful presence in the low register, further emphasizing the building tension in the visual narrative. Adding to the dense sonic texture of the chorus, Hkeem's vocals are divided between two separate vocal tracks as he now sings more melodically in his middle register:

Vi kan leve vårt liv (kriminelt)	*We can live our lives (criminally)*
Som en ghettoparasitt (i ditt hjem)	*Like a ghetto parasite (in your home)*
Vi kan gjøre som vi vil (ikke tenk)	*We can do what we want (don't think)*
Som en ghettoparasitt (som en ghettoparasitt)	*Like a ghetto parasite (like a ghetto parasite)*

The lyrics address how people of ethnic and racial minorities are Othered by social scrutiny and suspicion, accepted only as "ghetto parasites," a status that severely limits their opportunities to participate and feel included in society. The demeaning effects of such a limited form of cultural acceptance are further illustrated by the visual narrative. As the only White people in the video, the three men appear subordinated in a social order that privileges a Black majority. Hkeem has explained that "we switched roles between White people and Black people, so that you […] can contemplate what's really going on [in Norwegian society]."[26] The inverted racial

power dynamics of "Ghettoparasitt" do indeed shine a stark light on processes of racialization and the unequal power relations they (re)produce, and the "shock effect" of the role reversal lies in forcing audiences to reconsider their ideas about minority and majority experiences.

In a Norwegian context, the minority/majority divide is regulated at least partly through the prevalent use of the increasingly controversial term *etnisk norsk* (ethnic Norwegian) – used to describe someone whose ancestry is assumed to be solely Norwegian – which excludes people with an immigrant background from full national belonging. As Helland has shown,[27] the term informs public and political rhetoric that divides the country's population into groups of "us" and "them" – "real Norwegians" and "Others" – based on skin colour, religion, or other physical or social traits. Stan Hawkins has suggested similarly that the term *etnisk norsk* connects the legitimacy of Norwegian citizenship to Whiteness and therefore distributes symbolic cultural privilege unequally based on notions of race and ethnicity.[28] It is such an unequal distribution of cultural privilege that is unveiled by the inverted racial power dynamics of "Ghettoparasitt." The conspicuous absence of the White men's privilege serves as a scathing indictment of the extent to which the prevailing social structures of Norway have tended to favour those who pass as *etnisk norsk*.

The visual narrative's disempowerment of White men complements the strategy of mean mugging introduced at the start of the video. As a critique of the racialized power relations that make young Black men hypervisible and subjected to constant scrutiny by institutions of state power and media, the video affirms Miles White's argument that the politics of looking form an effective discursive basis for resisting the control and censure that impinge on many Black men's lives. The video's inverted racial power dynamics ensure that "the Panopticon gaze is turned back on itself by those it has sought to confine."[29] While White is first and foremost concerned with the techniques of facial performance employed by rappers, I would suggest that the politics of inversion that are placed on display in "Ghettoparasitt" represent a similar form of "looking back." The video creates a discursive space that, like those spaces of agency identified by bell hooks,[30] facilitates both the interrogation of suspicious gazes and the exploration of oppositional ways of looking.

By confronting and rejecting the sociocultural power dynamics that disadvantage ethnic and racial minority people, the video promotes an antiracist agenda. It does so, at least in part, by inviting viewers who have not themselves experienced racism or racial discrimination to imagine a pain that is unfamiliar to them. In the case of "Ghettoparasitt" the musical sounds and visual aesthetics of hip hop, imbued as they are with echoes of the genre's significance as an avenue of cultural resistance, are integral to how this invitation gains its affective potential. As such, the video exemplifies J. Griffith Rollefson's point that hip hop provides European artists and audiences with the aesthetic means to negotiate globally significant social issues in their own local and national contexts:

> European hip hop gives voice to the ideal of equality through anti-assimilationist expressions of minority difference, a set of essentializing and

> paradox-laden creative strategies that expose the national conflations of race and citizenship in European national imaginaries. By using racialized discourses, hip hop youth are challenging the conventional distinctions between sameness and difference as a way of bringing into form the antinomies of inclusion and exclusion that structure conventional national identities and their preoccupations with immigration, purity, and tradition.[31]

If hip hop offers, as Rollefson suggests, a framework for "harnessing, flipping, and releasing the unlimited potential energy of hypocrisy in our purportedly universalist Western society that is anything but,"[32] "Ghettoparasitt" illustrates the unique forcefulness that the medium of music video offers for such an endeavour. The interplay between narrative, visual style, and musical sound generates a rich audiovisual text whose multiple layers of sociocultural significance both reflect the complexities of contemporary social struggles and intervene in these struggles' ongoing development. An important point in this regard is the matter that music videos are not self-contained but rather circulate widely across different media and cultural spheres. Therefore, music videos sometimes serve as the basis for new musical performances or collaborations, or for other forms of public engagement and debate.

Broader Perspectives: Expanding Public and Political Discourse

"Ghettoparasitt" became a springboard for Hkeem to engage in antiracist practices in more diverse ways and in disparate spheres of Norwegian public culture. Notably, this occurred during a cultural moment characterized by significant social upheaval following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. The incident precipitated worldwide protests and reignited both global and local debates about racial injustice. In Norway, protests were held in several major cities including Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, Kristiansand, and Tromsø. On June 7, 2020, Amnesty International Norway organized a live-streamed concert in support of justice for Floyd. Hkeem was one of the artists who performed at the show. As the Norwegian press showed renewed interest in racial issues during this period, he spoke openly about his own experiences with racism.[33] He also discussed his participation in the Oslo protests. Hkeem described protesting as important to him, something that he connected to a sense of obligation: "I don't want to have to tell my children that I didn't turn up to show my support."[34]

Over the following few years, racism and racial issues continued to form central themes in Hkeem's creative output and public appearances in various ways. He participated in season 11 of the popular Norwegian reality TV show *Hver gang vi møtes*,[35] in which a selection of well-known Norwegian artists live together for a week, discuss their careers and personal lives, and perform cover versions of each other's songs. In the episode devoted to Hkeem's life and music, which aired January 30, 2021, a conversation about "Ghettoparasitt" led him to once again reflect on feeling obligated to use his public platform to raise awareness about racism in Norway: "As a Black man in Norway, I kind of feel that I can't stay silent.

Especially when it comes to racism, because I myself have experienced racism here in Norway."[36] By highlighting a sense of obligation as part of the motivation behind "Ghettoparasitt" Hkeem directs attention to what Helland has described as one especially problematic consequence of how racial prejudices and stereotypes structure social relations: those who are dehumanized by racist rhetoric are usually burdened with the task of humanizing themselves.[37] Through his participation on *Hver gang vi møtes*, Hkeem was able, at least to some extent, to confront this issue and distribute some of the responsibility for combating racism both to his fellow artists and to viewers at home. As he himself has noted,[38] the TV show also served as a platform for him to reach a broader, mainstream audience.

In *Hver gang vi møtes*, Hkeem's "Ghettoparasitt" provided a point of entry for a group of prominent Norwegian artists to discuss the persistence of racism in Norway, the strain of confronting it, and how musicians can contribute to instigating social change. The song was performed by Maria Mena, who had herself publicly discussed experiencing racism.[39] Mena performed alongside backup singer Sisi and her father Charles Mena, a Nicaragua-born drummer who grew up in New York, and a brief account of how her father has had to endure racist remarks after moving to Norway provided part of the context for her choice to perform this particular song. Hkeem, Mena, and Sisi later recorded a new version of "Ghettoparasitt" and performed the song on the televised Norwegian award show *Gullfisken* in February 2021, thereby bringing further attention to the issue of racism in mainstream cultural channels. In November 2021, a new music video featuring Mena and Sisi was recorded for the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation's anti-racism initiative *Hev Stemmen* [Raise Your Voice]. As part of the programme, Hkeem once again spoke about his personal experiences with racism – this time alongside other musicians, political activists, and government politicians.

In late March 2023, Hkeem premiered his stage show *Abdul ≈ Hkeem* at Det norske teatret [The Norwegian Theatre], located in the Stovner area of Oslo. Equal parts one-man show, stage play, and live performance, this theatrical production saw Hkeem reflect on topics that included his upbringing, family, friends, career, and social issues – including racism. The dramatic high point of the show comes in a scene where a cacophony of sampled voices bombards Hkeem with personal questions about his responsibilities – as an artist in the public eye – to address his own experiences with racism and fight back against racist discourse through his creative work and in public settings. Two stage actors shine flashlights directly in Hkeem's face, as if to illustrate the intense scrutiny he has felt subjected to and the pressures that are placed on ethnic and racial minorities to bear the main responsibility of counteracting the dehumanizing effects of racism.[40] The tension is resolved when Hkeem breaks into an energetic performance of "Ghettoparasitt." The contrast in mood between the previous scene and the performance of the song arguably reinforces the lyrics' critique of racial stereotypes, at the same time as new light is shed on how Hkeem's choice to explicitly address racism in some of his work – especially the "Ghettoparasitt" music video – has shaped audience expectations of him both as a musician and as a public person.

Hkeem's commitment to addressing racial issues across a range of media channels and public contexts shows how Norwegian hip hop artists have contributed to bringing renewed attention to the experiences of ethnic and racial minorities in Norway. As media scholar Torgeir Uberg Nærland has demonstrated, focusing specifically on the rap duo Karpe Diem[41] and their positioning in Norwegian public debate following the terrorist attacks in Oslo and at Utøya in July 2011, hip hop artists have at certain points held central roles in the public negotiation of democratic discourse in twenty-first century Norway.[42] Nærland shows that, in the early 2010s, Karpe Diem's music and performances served as focal points for the expansion of long-standing ideological and political debates, for bringing new actors and perspectives into public discourse, and for stimulating constructive dialogue between citizens and political decision makers.[43] This recent history arguably provided a precedent for Hkeem to deploy his song lyrics, music videos, and live performances as legitimate political interventions in the highly profiled (trans) national debates concerning racism that occurred in Norway (and elsewhere) in the early 2020s. The continued influence of hip hop artists in national debate and social justice developments affirms the tendency, identified by Nærland,[44] that musicians and audiences have, over the first few decades of the twenty-first century, contributed to a democratically desirable expansion of Norwegian public and political discourse.

Concluding Thoughts

Music videos can both mirror and shape the multifaceted cultural realities of the countries and regions in which they are produced and consumed. In this chapter, I have aimed to shed some light on how these processes unfolded in the case of Hkeem's "Ghettoparasitt" and the context of Norway in the late 2010s and early 2020s. Against the background of a significant increase in the country's cultural diversity over the first two decades of the new millennium, the video confronted the dehumanizing effects of anti-immigration rhetoric and racial stereotypes and queried the boundaries of inclusion within a society that is commonly viewed as among the world's most successful and stable democracies.[45] This demonstrates the potential of music videos to both document and negotiate the impact of global social challenges on cultural circumstances and everyday life on a local level.

The most striking element of "Ghettoparasitt" is arguably its audiovisual inversion of prevailing racial power dynamics. I want to emphasize the point that the visual narrative, which severs the common association between cultural privilege and Whiteness, gains its potential as social critique partly through working in tandem with samples of anti-immigration statements by conservative Norwegian politicians, Hkeem's lyrics, and musical idioms that are firmly grounded in hip hop tradition. While any form or genre of music can serve as the framework for political commentary, hip hop's history and global reputation as closely associated with social solidarity and political resistance increases the legibility of its audiovisual protest strategies. As Rollefson has suggested, this has allowed ethnic and racial minority people in Europe to employ hip hop as a particularly effective means

"both to differentiate themselves from *and* to relate themselves to their respective majority societies."[46] This is what Hkeem achieved in "Ghettoparasitt": by celebrating minority difference at the same time as he rejected the limitations placed on minority people's participation in society by racial prejudices and discrimination, he paved new paths for negotiating national belonging in contemporary multicultural Norway. As such, the video also provided a platform for Hkeem to engage with and work through issues related to racism and racial discrimination across a variety of creative and public contexts.

Nordic societies continue to evolve rapidly amidst technological advances and changing media trends, complex transnational social developments, and the emergence of new regional and global challenges. Music provides artists and audiences with a means through which to deal with and adapt to these processes. New combinations of musical sound, visual style, and lyrical expression both index changing realities and shape them, and it is important for music scholars to keep up with these developments as they unfold. It is my hope that this chapter makes a contribution to increasing our understanding of music's multiple impacts on the circumstances of social life in the Nordic region and that it prompts readers to further contemplate how music videos especially can invite us to think anew about minority experiences, racial dynamics, and cultural change.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1 All translations from Norwegian are by the author.
2 Nicolay Woldsdal, "Føler han blir sett på som en bakterie," *NRK P3*, January 27, 2018, https://p3.no/musikk/foler-han-blir-sett-pa-som-en-bakterie/ (accessed June 27, 2022).
3 "A Union of Equality: EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020–2025," *European Commission*, accessed September 15, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/a_union_of_equality_eu_action_plan_against_racism_2020 _-2025_en.pdf
4 Norway underwent notable changes in its demography over the first two decades of the new millennium, during which the percentage of the Norwegian population who are immigrants or Norwegian-born to immigrant parents rose from 6.3 to 18.5. See: "Immigrants and Norwegian-born to Immigrant Parents," *Statistics Norway*, accessed February 22, 2022. https://bydelsfakta.oslo.kommune.no/bydel/stovner/innvandrerbefolkningen/
5 Frode Helland, *Rasismens retorikk: studier i norsk offentlighet* (Oslo: Pax forlag, 2019), 11ff. For the purposes of this article, I adopt Helland's definition of racism as those actions, attitudes, and practices that reduce groups of people to certain essential cultural or biological traits, thereby explicitly or implicitly rendering these people "inferior, dangerous, and/or 'problematic'" (*Rasismens retorikk*, 12). The definition is intended to encompass the subtle ways in which racism manifests itself in everyday life, and it allows for addressing the racializing discourses that frame cultural production and consumption (see David Hesmondhalgh and Anamik Saha, "Race, Ethnicity,

and Cultural Production," *Popular Communication* 11, no. 3, 2013). Note that racism and racial discrimination in Norway has received increased scholarly attention in recent years; see Cora Alexa Døving, ed. *Rasisme: Fenomenet, forskningen, erfaringene* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2022).

6 Kristín Loftsdóttir and Lars Jensen, "Nordic Exceptionalism and the Nordic 'Others'," in *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region: Exceptionalism, Migrant Others and National Identities*, eds. Kristín Loftsdóttir and Lars Jensen (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

7 See, for example, Stan Hawkins, "Masculinity, Race, and Transculturalism in a Norwegian Context," in *The Oxford Handbook of Popular Music in the Nordic Countries*, eds. Fabian Holt and Antti-Ville Kärjä (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Thomas Husted Kirkegaard and Mikkel Vad, eds., "Special Issue 2022 – European Music Analysis and the Politics of Identity," *Danish Musicology Online* (2022); Birgitte Sandve, "Unwrapping 'Norwegianness': Politics of Difference in Karpe Diem," *Popular Music* 34, no. 1 (2015).

8 Tony Mitchell, ed. *Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop Outside the USA* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001); J. Griffith Rollefson, *Flip the Script: European Hip Hop and the Politics of Postcoloniality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Justin A. Williams, *Brithop: The Politics of UK Rap in the New Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

9 Jamilah Bowman Williams, Naomi Mezey, and Lisa O. Singh, "#BlackLivesMatter—Getting from Contemporary Social Movements to Structural Change," *California Law Review Online* 12 (2021).

10 Gina Arnold, Daniel Cookney, Kirsty Fairclough, and Michael Goddard, eds., *Music/Video: Histories, Aesthetics, Media* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017); Lori Burns and Stan Hawkins, eds., *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Popular Music Video Analysis* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019); Mathias Bonde Korsgaard, *Music Video After MTV: Audiovisual Studies, New Media, and Popular Music* (London: Routledge, 2017).

11 As of 2022, the percentage of the population in the Stovner borough with an immigrant background is estimated to be around 61%. Statistics available here: https://bydelsfakta.oslo.kommune.no/bydel/stovner/innvandrerbefolkningen/ (accessed June 28, 2022).

12 "Ghettoparasitt" was written by Hkeem in collaboration with a team of composers, lyricists, and producers: Kjetil Belvin, Lasse Digre, Håkon Ingvaldsen, Adil Svendsen Laatyaoui, Omar Mohammed, and Eirik Tillerli. The music video was directed by Thor Brenne.

13 He discussed this topic on the *TV 2* show *Hver gang vi møtes*, season 11, episode 5. First aired January 30, 2021.

14 Woldsdal, "Føler han blir sett på som en bakterie."

15 Erik Gjems-Onstad (1922–2011) was a member of the Norwegian Parliament from 1973 to 1976, representing Anders Lange's Party before being voted out in 1976 and finishing his term in parliament as an independent. Anders Lange's Party changed its name to the Progress Party in January 1977. Sylvi Listhaug has been the leader of the Progress Party since 2021, having previously held numerous cabinet positions in the period between 2013 and 2020 and served as a member of the Norwegian Parliament since 2017.

16 See Helland, *Rasismens retorikk*, 13, 189.

17 Miles White, *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z: Race, Rap, and the Performance of Masculinity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 43.

18 White, *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z*, 43.

19 Something similar is argued by bell hooks, in her discussion of "the oppositional gaze": "The 'gaze' has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally. Subordinates in relations of power learn experientially that there is a critical gaze, one that 'looks' to document, one that is oppositional. In resistance struggle, the power of the dominated to assert agency by claiming and cultivating 'awareness' politicizes 'looking'

relations—one learns to look a certain 'way' in order to resist." bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 116.

20 Murray Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 189ff, 236.

21 See Nazish Kahn, "Jeg er luta lei alle fordommene som rettes mot hjemmet mitt, skriver Nazish Kahn," *Morgenbladet*, June 7, 2018, https://www.morgenbladet.no/aktuelt/kommentar/2018/06/07/jeg-er-luta-lei-alle-fordommene-som-rettes-mot-hjemmet-mitt-skriver-nazish-khan/ (accessed June 29, 2022).

22 For an in-depth study of the ghetto concept and its association with ethnic segregation and territorial stigmatization, see Tom Slater and Ntsiki Anderson, "The Reputational Ghetto: Territorial Stigmatization in St Paul's, Bristol," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37, no. 4 (2012).

23 Forman, *The 'Hood Comes* First, 94.

24 Forman, *The 'Hood Comes* First, 94.

25 Forman, *The 'Hood Comes* First, 191.

26 Hkeem on *Hver gang vi møtes*, season 11, episode 5.

27 Helland, *Rasismens retorikk*, 99–100.

28 Hawkins, "Masculinity, Race, and Transculturalism in a Norwegian Context," 296.

29 White, *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z*, 43.

30 See hooks, *Black Looks*, 116.

31 Rollefson, *Flip the Script*, 2.

32 Rollefson, *Flip the Script*, 5.

33 Ingvild Fjelltveit and Karen Setten, "Hkeem (22): – Jeg opplever mye hverdagsrasisme," *TV 2*, June 4, 2020.

34 Øystein David Johansen and Stein Østbø, "Hkeem om demonstrasjonen: – Historisk," *VG*, June 5, 2020, https://www.vg.no/rampelys/musikk/i/rAwv7K/hkeem-om-demonstrasjonen-historisk (accessed June 29, 2022).

35 *Hver gang vi møtes* is based on the format premiered by the Dutch show *De beste zangers van Nederland*, which has been adapted in numerous countries.

36 *Hver gang vi møtes*, season 11, episode 5.

37 Helland, *Rasismens retorikk*, 189.

38 Kjartan Brügger Bjånesøy, "Hkeem: – Folk behandler meg annerledes nå," *Aftenposten*, March 23, 2023.

39 Ruben Pedersen, "Maria Mena: Anmelder rasismen," *Dagbladet*, July 3, 2020, https://www.dagbladet.no/kjendis/anmelder-rasismen/72632398 (accessed June 29, 2022).

40 Helland, *Rasismens retorikk*, 189.

41 Now known simply as Karpe.

42 Torgeir Uberg Nærland, "From Musical Expressivity to Public Political Discourse Proper: The Case of Karpe Diem in the Aftermath of the Utøya Massacre," *Popular Communication* 13, no. 3 (2015). See also Sandve, "Unwrapping 'Norwegianness'," 61–63.

43 Nærland, "From Musical Expressivity to Public Political Discourse Proper," 228.

44 Nærland, "From Musical Expressivity to Public Political Discourse Proper," 228.

45 See, for example, "A New Low for Global Democracy," *The Economist*, accessed October 14, 2022. https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2022/02/09/a-new-low-for-global-democracy

46 Rollefson, *Flip the Script*, 2, original emphasis. Note that Rollefson critiques the common tendency to distinguish clearly between hip hop's commercial and political forms; *Flip the Script*, 7. Extending Rollefson's argument, I would suggest that part of the political potential of hip hop music can lie exactly in its mainstream appeal, as is demonstrated by how *Ghettoparasitt* provided a platform for Hkeem to address the delicate issue of racism in mainstream cultural channels, such as on prime-time TV.

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