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## Chapter 6

“Who’s afraid of the Dark?” – The Ironic Self-Stereotype of the Ethnic Other in Finnish Rap Music

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Drawing on recent sociolinguistic work on globalization and superdiversity, this chapter explores the multisemiotic and ironic construction of the self-stereotype of the ethnic Other in a Finnish rap music video. Because Finland and Finnish hip-hop are still ethnically relatively homogeneous, people of migrant background, such as rap artist Musta Barbaari (Black Barbarian), need to negotiate their belonging in various ways. In the video, he deliberately constructs himself as the ethnicized and sexualized Other to highlight prejudice, discrimination and racism. In doing this, he voices societal critique and dissatisfaction – and speaks for multiculturalism and tolerance in (super)diversifying and polarizing Finland.

**keywords:** ethnicity, Finland, hip hop culture, irony, music video, otherness, rap music, stereotype

### Introduction

Global hip hop culture, with its multicultural roots and ‘transcultural flows’ (Pennycook, 2007), has traditionally given marginalized and oppressed people a voice to discuss not only personal but also societal issues and challenges (e.g. Rose, 1994; Mitchell, 2001). Notwithstanding this global dimension, hip hop is always localized in various ways and draws on local cultural and linguistic elements in each context (see e.g. Westinen, 2014). In

stereotypically (ethnically) homogeneous Finland (e.g. Häkkinen & Tervonen, 2005) where rap artists with a migrant background have recently become increasingly popular and visible, emergent migrant rap expresses and highlights these ‘new’ voices and discourses. Indeed, hip-hop culture has become a channel for the discussion and debate of various aspects of multiculturalism, among other things, as evidenced, for example, by recent rap songs and rap artists’ social media communication (Westinen, 2016; 2017; Musta Barbaari & Takamaa, 2014).

At least up until recently, within the relatively homogenous and ‘monocultural’ Finnish society, Whiteness is still seen (by many) as the norm (Rastas, 2004), and non-Whiteness, hence also Blackness, as the Other. After many decades of emigration during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Finland has witnessed a more large-scale immigration phase only since the turn of the millennium, along with the enlargement of the European Union (Rapo, 2011). Increased (im)migration has resulted in public and political debates on issues such as multiculturalism, integration and racism – and in highly polarized and stereotypical discourses of the Other. As Finland diversifies, it will be significant to study how migrants themselves experience and communicate about these issues. Currently, there is little research about, for example, second-generation migrants (often young children and adolescents) in Finland (Lankinen, 2015; but see e.g. Lehtonen, 2015; Lankinen, 2010), while in other Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway and Denmark), typically characterized as more multicultural than Finland, they have been studied more extensively (e.g. Kotsinas, 2000, 2001; Svendsen & Røyneland, 2008; Quist, 2008, respectively).

At the time of the writing this chapter (summer 2016), the number of refugees, as part of the ongoing refugee movement across Europe, is changing the situation again, with 32,476 seeking asylum in Finland in 2015 (cf. 3,651 in 2014) (Ministry of the Interior, n.d.). As a result of the increased and complex migration and mobility flows, Finland has changed, and

is changing, towards a more multicultural society. Despite the value of immigration being recognized in the Finnish society in need of new labor, the changes have also triggered strong affective reactions and protests (Martikainen, Saukkonen, & Säävälä, 2013, pp. 37–38) – recently even intimidation, physical attacks and arson attempts towards asylum seekers.

This chapter explores the multisemiotic construction of self as the stereotypical Other in one music video, in the specific context of hip hop in Finland (see also Westinen 2016, 2017), – and how this Otherness enables, ‘necessitates’ and is intricately intertwined with the expression of dissatisfaction and dissent in and through the specific mode of hip hop. Theoretically and methodologically, I draw on insights from recent sociolinguistic work on globalization and superdiversity (e.g. Blommaert, 2010; Rampton, 2006; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011), the semiotic approach to the study of multimodality (Kress, 2010; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006 [1996]), and global hip-hop studies (e.g. Mitchell, 2001; Pennycook, 2007; Condry, 2006; Alim, Ibrahim & Pennycook, 2009; Terkourafi, 2010). Despite the abundance of studies on hip hop and its local contexts, research on Finnish hip-hop remains scarce, particularly in sociolinguistics (but see Kalliokoski, 2006; Leppänen & Pietikäinen, 2010; Westinen, 2014). Moreover, Finnish hip hop has not yet been extensively investigated in digital contexts (but see Leppänen et al., 2014; Tervo, 2014); also internationally, online research is just emerging (for China, see Wang, 2012; Varis & Wang, 2011; for Germany, see Androutsopoulos, 2009).

As data, I will use a rap music video and lyrics of a song titled “Kuka pelkää pimeet” (‘Who’s afraid of the dark’) by a Finnish rap artist and entertainer Musta Barbaari (Black Barbarian). Musta Barbaari was born in Turku, Finland, in 1990 and his family moved to Helsinki when he was 7 years old. He has a Finnish father but was raised by his Tanzanian mother alone; their home language was English and Swahili (Musta Barbaari & Takamaa, 2014; for more information on him, see section ‘Who’s afraid of Black Barbarian?’).

Because Finland and Finnish hip hop are still ethnically relatively homogeneous, this 'Black' artist needs to negotiate his role in society, and in the hip hop scene. In doing this, he brings up and comments upon discourses of discrimination but also of tolerance; his communication is multi-voiced and, at times, also ironic, often drawing on gendered and racialized stereotypes, i.e. representations of simplistic, unified and essentialized characteristics of individuals or groups (Hall, 1997). In general, 'the Blacks' have often been constructed as the object of history – rather than the subject (e.g. Barker, 2008, p. 264). This chapter will show how one 'Black' artist aims to gain power and subjectivity over representation of 'Blackness', and how, in the process, he expresses his (and others') dissatisfaction on the current societal, sociocultural and attitudinal climate in polarized Finnish society.

More specifically, I will examine how Musta Barbaari constructs himself as the stereotypical Other via language but also through other semiotic resources (see below). The specific linguistic resources (such as bits of the local slang, Finnishized English or specific 'loaded' words) can and do also act as cultural resources which may be characteristic of Finnish society and culture. By using particular resources, he is able to localize the rap format but also, significantly, to ironize and criticize the current sociocultural context and the current debates on the Other. This is also where thinking along the lines of *superdiversity*, i.e. the diversification of diversity across variables such as ethnicity, origins, class and language (Vertovec, 2007; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Arnaut et al., 2016), may prove useful: we cannot (or should not) assume people's complex and multifaceted (dis)identifications based on such variables or their intricate interconnectedness; rather, we need to explore them. In the current sociocultural context what is perhaps assumed by many Finns (such as those critical of immigration and multiculturalism) is that a 'Black'

man can neither be fully fluent and competent in the Finnish language nor ‘authentically’ Finnish, in general.

Finland as a macro context for this study is illustrative of countries where (large-scale) immigration has not been an integral part of the country’s recent history<sup>1</sup> and where negotiation of belonging is yet to take place: who belongs where, how, and on what grounds – and who gets to decide? One important venue for this negotiation of belonging is popular culture, as the analysis will show. Before that, however, we will look into stereotypes, otherness, diversifying Finnish hip hop culture, along with the methodological framework.

## **Background**

### ***Stereotypes and Otherness***

In this section, I will briefly outline the interrelated concepts of stereotype and otherness which are crucial for the analysis of the rap music video in question. The act of stereotyping “reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature” (Hall, 1997, p. 257; see Lippman, 1956 for the original definition of a stereotype), and further exaggerates and simplifies these characteristics (ibid., p. 258). Moreover, stereotyping is significantly related to power asymmetries: who has the power to represent whom? In what way? And who can classify whom into an insider (i.e. what is ‘normal’) or an outsider (i.e. what is ‘abnormal’)? (ibid.; see also Dyer, 1983). Minorities and marginalized communities, in general, are often controlled by stereotypes; in fact, stereotypes are used to construct “a discursive system through which the marginality of the culture [...] is sustained”.

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<sup>1</sup> Immigration in smaller numbers occurred during the periods of Swedish (until 1809) and Russian rule (from 1809 until 1917), when many Swedish, Russian, Jewish and Tatar officials, traders and soldiers moved to Finland, along with smaller numbers of English, French, German and Nordic people (e.g. Häkkinen & Tervonen, 2005).

(Ridanpää & Pasanen, 2009, p. 214). As such, stereotyping is also crucially related to Otherness and the practice of othering.

In addition to societal and political contexts, *ethnic* stereotyping is also a common practice in art, music and popular culture (cf. Ridanpää & Pasanen, 2009). Significantly, in addition to being a discriminatory and hegemonic practice of the majority, ethnic stereotyping is something which can be (and for long has been) made use of by the Other him/herself. As Sotiropoulos (2006) argues in her study on early 20<sup>th</sup> century Black US performers:

Black entertainers consciously used racist stereotypes in their performances in part to distance themselves from these images, since it was abundantly clear (at least to themselves and their black audiences) that they were performing these roles, not embracing them as representative behavior (p. 9).

Weaver (2010) has, in turn, examined how contemporary black comedians reproduce ethnic stereotypes in their performances to “produce resistance meaning” (p. 44), emphasizing, however, the multiple interpretations and possible meanings that this humor may have (a point I will come back to later). In the specific context of rap battles, Alim, Lee and Mason (2010) have explored how rap artists draw on, perform, parody and style racial and ethnic stereotypes, related to both themselves and, most significantly, to their rivalries, to “gain approval of the crowd and win the battle” (p. 119), noting at the same time how emcees have differing rights for such ‘disses’ (ibid., p. 128). Eminem, a US rap artist, in turn, often uses his Whiteness as a slur against the self in his lyrics – to deny his ‘opponents’ of it (e.g. Dawkins, 2010). In Northern Finland, an Inari Sámi rapper Amoc, however, aims to deconstruct the age-old stereotypes of the Sámi people (i.e. pagan, primitive people, living in

the cold, beyond civilization) by *avoiding* any such conventional Sámi topics (and also the traditional Sámi dress) in his music-making and performance and *escaping* stereotypes related to them and presenting himself instead as quite the opposite of a nature-loving, community-emphasizing Sámi person, thereby intentionally confronting them (Ridanpää & Pasanen, 2009). As we will see below, Musta Barbaari's tactic in handling the ethnic stereotypes is quite different from Amoc's, and bears some resemblance to that of Eminem's, albeit with regard to Blackness.

*Otherness* is linked to people's desire to differentiate and separate themselves from the Other, i.e. other people (or more abstract entities) who are dissimilar to them. Drawing on Riggins (1997), Jaworski and Coupland (2005, p. 672), characterize the Other as a "stereotyped, dehumanized, diminished, inferior, odd, irrational, exoticized, and evil other, an other which is also possibly desired, not least through eroticization". Othering, then, refers to the processes of stereotyping, objectification, naturalization and/or essentialization (ibid.). Blommaert and Verschueren (1998, p. 19) argue that we "reconstruct the other in terms of our own categories, expectations, habits and norms". Deviating from these, 'abnormality', is an 'essential property' of the other. For instance, when Africans are characterized as lazy, "the assumption [is] that we [whoever it may be in each case] normally embody diligence, tenacity and dynamism" (ibid.) Migrants, my case in point here, are often seen as strangers, as Other. But, as Ahmed (2000, p. 78) emphasizes, migrants should not be seen (purely) as strangers since this means denying their complex life histories and spatial, cultural and social belonging.

Whites have, for centuries, been in a position where they have more power (than others) to define not only themselves, but also, significantly, the others (Dyer, 1997, p. xiii). In examining questions of ('Black') representation, Hall (1997, p. 269) discusses *counter-strategies* with which to contest 'racialized regimes of representation'. One such strategy



deals with various forms of representation, and the ambiguities that lie within it. The strategy can be seen as “[entering] into a struggle over representation” (ibid.). By positively adopting the Black body as the main site of representational strategies, the strategy aims to dissolve the stereotypes. Moreover, the strategy makes “elaborate play with ‘looking’”, by focusing on the intersections of race, gender and sexuality by making them explicit, also through the use of humor (Hall, 1997, pp. 269–270). In this sense, what we will see in the analysis below can be understood as such a counter-strategy: a ‘Black’ Finn defining ‘Blackness’ in an ironic and confrontational way, using multiple semiotic resources (including his body) for specific purposes.

### ***Diversifying Finnish hip hop***

Hip hop culture and rap music, in particular, are currently extremely popular in Finland. The meaningfulness of rap as a music genre in Finland (Paleface, 2011; Westinen, 2014) is testified, for instance, by the visibility of rappers in the mainstream media, digital downloads, radio play and numbers of gigs in various live venues. Rap artists with a migrant background (born in Finland or not; with one or no ‘ethnic Finnish’ parent(s)) are a fairly recent addition to this genre (though not entirely without antecedents; see e.g. Mikkonen, 2004; Paleface, 2011). Roughly since 2010, such young people have become active in the Finnish hip hop scene. While at first most chose (African American) English as their rap language (e.g. Noah Kin and Gracias), more recently, artists such as Musta Barbaari and Prinssi Jusuf (Prince Jusuf), along with Kevin Tandu and Toinen Kadunpoika (‘Another/‘The Other Street Kid’) have ‘represented’ (mostly) Finnish-language rap. Finland is, in fact, lagging behind many European countries in terms of (im)migrant-background rap (Jansson, 2011, p. 26): in Finland, such rappers are still often seen as ‘exotic exceptions’, whereas elsewhere, most

notably in the multicultural societies of France (see e.g. Prévost, 2001) and Germany (e.g. Androutsopoulos, 2010), they have always been an integral part of the local scene(s). Furthermore, research on rap artists with a migrant background is still largely absent in Finland (but see Kärjä, 2011 for a historical overview of Finnish hip hop and its relation to Otherness through humor; Westinen, 2016, 2017).

In the context of global (and particularly ‘original’ American) hip hop culture, ‘Whiteness’, usually the unmarked, invisible category – i.e. the norm – against which other ethnic categorizations are measured (e.g. Lipsitz, 1995; Dyer, 1997), often becomes visible and marked (Cutler, 2003, p. 229), i.e. the Other. ‘Blackness’, in turn, stereotypically “emerges as normative and authentic” (ibid.). In Finland, until recently, ‘race’ or ‘ethnicity’ were not particularly prominent rap topics, perhaps because ‘Whiteness’ has been (stereo)typically unmarked in Finnish society (e.g. Rastas, 2005; Toivanen, 2014), although some discussion has taken place in, for example, rap lyrics, artist interviews and discussion forums about how White youth can ‘convincingly’ participate in the culture and make ‘credible’ rap music.

Recent research on Finnish youth with a migrant background shows that (American) hip hop culture, stereotypically emphasizing locality and Blackness, can offer these youth an ‘easy’ access and an empowering experience (Lankinen, 2015, p. 278), contrary perhaps to some other youth music cultures such as (heavy) metal (ibid., pp. 289–290). Moreover, the urban American street culture seems to provide these youth with a ‘positive’, ‘Black’ model in contrast with the stereotype of an immigrant (particularly of African origin) as uneducated, unemployed, and potentially crime-inclined (see e.g. Halonen, 2009) – an image which still often persists in Finnish media and public discussion (Lankinen 2015, p. 279; see Eronen, Härmälä, Jauhiainen, Karikallio, Karinen, Kosunen, Laamanen & Lahtinen 2014 on the unemployment rates of people of African origin in Finland).

Due to the relative ‘Whiteness’ of Finnish society, popular culture and hip hop, the new, up-and-coming ‘Black’ artists need to negotiate their role and status in the already established scene. While doing so, they also bring new voices into the picture and ‘talk back’ (hooks 1989)<sup>2</sup> from their often marginalized minority positions. In making use of his role as the Other, Musta Barbaari draws on and plays around with stereotypical ‘Blackness’ within the context of Finland and hip hop culture (see also Westinen, 2016; Nørreby & Møller, 2015), while engaging with and expressing dissatisfaction and dissent in societal discussions and debates.

## **Approaches and concepts**

### ***Sociolinguistics of globalization and superdiversity***

Sociolinguistics examines language as a complex of resources in actual sociocultural and -historical contexts; it is interested in the values, distribution, rights of ownership, along with the meanings and functions of this language use (cf. Blommaert, 2010, p. 28). The sociolinguistics of globalization and superdiversity (e.g. Blommaert, 2010; Pennycook, 2007; Rampton, 2006; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011) explores the flows and mobility of people, language, discourse(s) and culture. According to Blommaert (2010, p. 42), in an age of globalization, sociolinguistic phenomena need to be understood within a given context, “where different orders of indexicality dominate, resulting in a polycentric ‘context’ where communicative behavior is simultaneously pushed and pulled in various directions”.

The concept of *resources* comprises not only linguistic (the ‘little bits’ of language people use in actual, sociocultural contexts, such as features associated with different

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Talking back’ refers to action and communication in which people positioned in the margins challenge the surrounding discourses and majority ways of categorizing and defining them. They turn from objects into subjects in their own right – and gain a ‘liberated voice’ (Hooks, 1989, p. 9; in Finland see e.g. Rastas & Päivärinta, 2010).

varieties, dialects or slang; Blommaert, 2010) and discursive (e.g. discourses, narratives, cultural references) resources but a whole repertoire of semiotic resources, such as embodied, visual and aural (i.e. body, gesture, clothing, still and moving images, audio and music). Blommaert and Rampton (2011, drawing on the work of Scollon & Scollon and Kress) have, in fact, suggested shifting away from “‘language’ in the strict sense towards semiosis as our focus of inquiry” and from “‘linguistics’ towards a new sociolinguistically informed semiotics as our disciplinary space”. In analyzing the languages of hip hop, Alim (2009, p. 16), in turn, has encouraged a move “beyond structure to a broader semiotic, multimodal system of representation”, which is where we turn next.

### ***Examining multimodal music videos***

By drawing on insights from the social semiotic approach to the study of multimodality (Kress, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006 [1996]; Burn & Parker, 2003), I will explore how Musta Barbaari communicates and constructs *meanings* (e.g. stereotypical Otherness) in one music video of his by utilizing various modes and their combinations. This approach suggests that people always have an interest, a motivation or a need to communicate, whether it is to represent something in the ‘real’ world or to connect with other people; this communication is dependent on both the available semiotic resources and the given socio-cultural context (Burn & Parker, 2003, p. 5). A *mode* can be defined as “a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning (Kress 2010, p. 79), such as (moving) images, writing, speech, layout, music, gesture and soundtrack. This approach enables the exploration of interest and agency, (resources in) meaning(-making) and the meaning potentials of different cultural/semiotic forms (Kress, 2010, p. 59).

Selecting a particular mode for constructing meanings comes with its affordances and limitations (Burn & Parker, 2003, p. 7). In the case of making a music video, producers, directors and artists can take into account the semiotic potential of each mode (and their coexistence), their specific sociocultural context and the affordances offered by the format of a (YouTube) music video for the construction of their message (Kress, 2010, p. 137; see also Peuronen, 2014), which, apart from gaining publicity for the artists and their music, may also be of use to their specific cause (here most notably: tolerance and/or anti-racism). Alongside signification, i.e. how texts create meanings and how these meanings are created by various resources, such as language, image, sound and gesture, Burn and Parker (2003, p. 3) further emphasize the importance of integrating the analysis of texts with the larger political, economic and social contexts of their production, an issue which is also taken into consideration here.

For the (multimodal) examination of music videos, Shuker (1994), drawing on film studies, offers ‘classic’, yet currently relevant categories (see also e.g. Vernallis, 2004; Kärjä, 2007). As different music styles and genres make use of different video conventions, the rap music video in focus in this chapter will be investigated for its: 1) *mood*: how music, lyrics and visual elements contribute to a certain mood or feeling; 2) *narrative structure*: a clearly defined story vs non-linear sequences; 3) *setting/environment*: realist vs fantasy-like; 4) *themes*: e.g. love, political and social consciousness; 5) *importance of performance*: the ‘matching’ of the format and the music genre; 6) *modes of sexuality*: representation of women/men/androgynous characters, homo/hetero eroticism, mixing gender roles etc.; 7) *star texts*: comparison of the performer’s role in the video with their star persona, in general; and 8) *music*: the comparison and juxtaposition of what the audience hears and sees, i.e. how does the aural relate to the visual? All these aspects contribute to understanding the particular

nature of the multisemiotic and stereotypical Otherness in the music video under investigation, in the context of (stereo)typically ethnically homogeneous Finland.

## **Analysis**

### ***Who's afraid of Black Barbarian?***

Like many other Finnish rap artists, Musta Barbaari (hereafter MB) has an active presence online (see also Westinen, 2016, 2017) – it is, therefore, justified to explore his actions and communication also in digital settings. His self-chosen, highly ironic artist name indexes his race, ‘primitivity’ and ‘wildness’ when compared to and from the viewpoint of Westerners (see also Bradley, 1996, p. 116; Hall, 1995). His debut single and music video was “Salil eka, salil vika” (‘First at the gym, last at the gym’; see Westinen, 2017) which has thus far attracted 5.01 million views on YouTube (June 29, 2016). The ‘hype’ around this rap act has been considerable, both on- and offline. MB has also become famous for his fitness enthusiasm and he also competes in that sport and gives out training advice to others (as exemplified by his autobiography/training book “Salil eka, salil vika”; Musta Barbaari & Takamaa, 2014). Initially, MB, along with his rap colleague and friend Prinssi Jusuf (of Ethiopian origin; has lived in Finland since he was 2 years old) became known for an online series entitled “Taru Painojen Herrasta” (‘The Lord of the Weights’) (2013–) the title of which makes use of and modifies the Finnish name for the book and film trilogy *Lord of the Rings*, focusing (unsurprisingly) on bodybuilding but also, significantly, on raising awareness on racism. They have also sought to combat racism and speak for tolerance by, for example, visiting schools and appearing at various events.

The music video “Kuka pelkää pimeet” (‘Who’s afraid of the dark’) is a prime example of how current Finnish rap music discusses multiculturalism, integration and

tolerance from the perspective of the (assumed) Other. The social media website YouTube, where also this video has been published, has recently evolved into a participatory cultural site (cf. Burgess & Green, 2009), a digital, multimodal environment where artists can construct their ‘image’ and ‘identity’ and reach a (potentially) large audience, who can also participate by e.g. watching videos and commenting on them, but also by creating and uploading their own new versions of the ‘original’ ones. Currently, physical and digital communication and resources are significantly intertwined with one another; social media should thus not be seen as separate and separable from ‘real’ life (see e.g. Stæhr, 2014), as can also be seen in MB’s case.

### *The multisemiotic construction of the stereotypical Other*

The music video “Kuka pelkää pimeet” (directed and produced by Taito Kawata<sup>3</sup> and Rudy ‘Ruudolf’ Kulmala) was published on MB’s channel on YouTube April 15, 2015 and has thus far attracted c. 860 000 views (June 29, 2016). The lyrics<sup>4</sup> describe the life MB is (supposedly) leading as a Black man in Finland and the stereotypes and prejudice that he faces. The title draws on a children’s running game (a type of catch) called, in Finnish, “Kuka pelkää mustaa miestä?” (‘Who’s afraid of the black man?’). In general, children’s games and stories can contribute to one’s thinking later on in life and may create specific representations of certain groups, such as Africans (Löytty, 1997, p. 14). Although it remains ambiguous to what / whom the ‘black man’ refers (whether an actual Black man, a man in a dark outfit or a boogeyman), the game may be seen as racist by some people. In fact, in Switzerland, parents (of African American origin) are suing their child’s school over the dispute concerning the game (<http://www.thelocal.ch/20111017/1496>). In Finland, perhaps due to the controversy of

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<sup>3</sup> Born in Finland, has a Japanese father and a Finnish mother.

<sup>4</sup> Permission from the artist has been obtained for both the video and lyrics material.

its name, the game is nowadays also called, for example, “Kuka pelkää mustekalaa?” (‘Who’s afraid of an octopus?’).

The aim of the analysis is to identify different kinds of stereotypes of ‘Blacks’ (or Black men, in particular) that are represented and reproduced in the video and, more specifically, to examine how they are constructed through different multisemiotic resources. Moreover, the aim is to explore how such stereotypes contribute to the construction of (self and) the Other and how this position of Otherness is intricately intertwined with the expression of dissatisfaction and dissent in contemporary Finland.

In terms of the video’s *visual* resources, at the beginning (up until 0:17), immediately when the music starts with the first stanza, we only see a black background. After this, a ‘Black’ character, MB, appears on the screen and he starts rapping the lyrics (mostly facing the camera) while moving to the rhythm of the song and making various gestures (more below). What immediately draws our attention is the oiled Black male body. The oiling enables the audience to see the highly toned muscles in a clearer way, while also being a practice of fitness competitors before they enter the stage in front of the judges and audience. Throughout the video, what we also see linked to the fitness world are the different poses that MB makes. We also witness several close-ups of MB’s upper body (mostly his chest area and his six pack) and his face. The facial expressions are mostly serious, sometimes even angry and ‘threatening’, as he seems to shout at the camera (see Figure 6.1), which can also be considered an expression of frustration and dissatisfaction of something.

**<FIGURE 6.1 ABOUT HERE>**



By the second stanza (1:16), also a few other Black men appear on the video (see Figure 6.2). They, too, appear serious while staring at the camera and have fit, muscular upper bodies which we can clearly see since they only wear jeans. These men do not engage in rapping. In a sense, they are there only to be looked at. Up till now, the background has been completely black, with the light focusing on the men only. Gradually, we also see something of the surroundings: grey walls around the men in (what appears to be) quite a small space.

**<FIGURE 6.2 ABOUT HERE>**

During the second stanza, we see more Black men (about 10, one of them the previously mentioned Prinssi Jusuf) on the video, most of them half-clad. They stare at the camera wide-eyed and serious but they also move and dance to the rhythm of the song (see Figure 6.3). At the end of the stanza, we see the men in a more lit way. One of them wears a hoodie and is briefly zoomed in on once the chorus (particularly the phrase “Kuka pelkää pimeet”) is repeated but his face is not shown completely, only the serious looking mouth. What this representation thus perhaps suggests is Otherness and even an unknown threat.

**<FIGURE 6.3 ABOUT HERE>**

Towards the end of the video, in the C part (2:29–), the men are seen in more light and more details can also be detected about the surroundings (Figure 3). While continuing to dance and make advances towards the camera, the men also appear to be losing balance and move from side to side; the camera shooting also starts to ‘shake’. After this (3:29–), we see, for the first

time, outside this specific space and catch sight of a shipping container which is being lowered down to the ground, next to other similar-looking containers (Figure 6.4), thereby suggesting that all this time the men have in fact been located inside a container.

**<FIGURE 6.4 ABOUT HERE>**

Quickly after this image, the doors of the container open and the men start shouting and running away from the container while looking around to see if anybody is behind them (see Figure 6.5). At the very end of the video, a ‘new’ man, someone we have not yet met, appears from the container. He looks quite different from the other men: his outer appearance is stereotypically Asian (possibly the director of the video, making a cameo appearance), he wears a ‘Hawaiian’ style shirt, shorts and a summer hat. He, too, looks puzzled and starts running towards the same direction as the others. His particular role in the story, however, remains unclear. After this, the camera zooms out of the men running and we catch a higher-up, long distance view of the area, most likely a port, which is filled with such containers. The truck goes on handling the containers. What these images with the container and port seem to suggest to the viewers is that the ‘Black’ men have been transported from some place to another, presumably from a third world country to the first world, as is typical of globalization processes and transfer of people and (/as) goods. Their running and suspicious looks also contribute to the representation of these men as illegal immigrants (and cheap work force) entering a country, perhaps Finland in this case.

**<FIGURE 6.5 ABOUT HERE>**

The *aural* resources of the music video consist of the musical elements, MB's punchline-style rapping and hype man's vocal doubling, particularly in the chorus. The music (produced by Pianomies, 'Piano man') can be described as a kind of ('West Coast influenced') groovy gangsta funk (g-funk), characterized by heavy and catchy low base and whiny synthesizer sounds (somewhat similarly to MB's first single "Salil eka, salil vika"). MB wrote the lyrics together with Ruudolf, a well-known Finnish rapper. The first stanza and the chorus of the song are shown in Table 6.1 (see Appendix for the complete lyrics), the original ones in Finnish on the left and my translations into English on the right.

**<TABLE 6.1 ABOUT HERE>**

The *linguistic* resources MB employs in the song, in general, draw on features from spoken vernacular Finnish, local Helsinki slang (e.g. 'duunii' ('work'), 'kytille' ('to cops')) (although many slang items, such as these, have also spread outside the Helsinki metropolitan area) and Finnishized English (e.g. 'bulkkaa' ('to bulk', i.e. to purposefully add weight by eating more), modified according to Finnish morphology, orthography and phonology. These resources localize MB as a young Finn, living his life in Helsinki (see e.g. Lankinen, 2015, p. 290 on young people's use of slang in anchoring themselves to Helsinki area). This mixing of different linguistic resources and extensive use of the vernacular is typical of Finnish rap music (see e.g. Westinen, 2014), as elsewhere in different local hip hop scenes (see e.g. Pennycook, 2007; Alim et al., 2009), and indexes, first, the absence of clear boundaries between 'local' and 'global' languages or resources, as many of these are used for local purposes and for constructing local identifications (cf. Leppänen, Nikula & Kääntä, 2008),

and, second, rap's orientation towards and affiliation with 'non-standard' language use (e.g. Androutsopoulos & Scholz, 2002).

The Finnish language he makes use of is 'actual' spoken vernacular Finnish, not that of (stylized) 'immigrant' Finnish or 'huono suomi', 'bad Finnish (i.e. not 'proper' Finnish) (see e.g. Lehtonen, 2015), which, for example Prinssi Jusuf often makes use of in his social media performances, despite his highly fluent and 'native-like' Finnish. The current stereotype of many immigrants speaking 'bad Finnish' is fairly widespread, for example in everyday discussions, the media and popular culture but also, significantly, made use of by the immigrants themselves for various (playful) (dis)identification purposes (e.g. Lehtonen, 2015). Linguistically, MB can by no means be categorized as 'mamu' (short for maahanmuuttaja, 'immigrant'), at least due to his use of Finnish, which seems to indicate 'sameness' rather than (ethnic) Otherness.

The *discursive resources* constructed in the lyrics are various. The discourse of *Blackness* (vs *Whiteness*) becomes evident already in the name of the song ('Who's afraid of the dark'): 'dark' is associated with 'black', something unfamiliar and scary, as suggested by the question format: 'who's afraid?' In the second stanza, the connection between the Black man and the previously mentioned children's game is made explicit: 'who's afraid of the Black man?' Blackness is further emphasized as something permanent one cannot get rid of: 'no matter how much I wash myself, I don't get washed out'. This also significantly links the song to old Finnish ABC books (e.g. Kultainen aapinen, 1956) which exemplified the letter N with a sentence: "A nigger washes his face but is not getting any whiter". By no means coincidentally, then, is washing evoked in the song; as Hall (1997, p. 241) argues, in the colonial world, soap "apparently had the power to wash black skin white [...] while at the same time keeping the imperial body clean and pure in the racially polluted contact zones".

There are also shades to being Black since MB describes himself as ‘blacker than the shadow in Congo’s<sup>5</sup> night’ and as ‘pitch black licorice from exterior to core’. Such characterizations construct MB as the ‘blackest black’ – although in reality he is the son of a ‘Black’ Tanzanian woman and a ‘White’ Finnish man. Nevertheless, what some of the lyrics seem to emphasize is a representation of MB as a very Black man, perhaps hinting that the skin color is the (only) thing seen by fellow (but White) Finnish people. Blackness is also contrasted with Whiteness as MB calls out for ‘milkfaces’ (i.e. White Finns) who have been ‘scared of the dark’, thereby suggesting particular roles for these two people, and by naming Aryans, the ‘ultimate’ Whites. The discourse is also very much constructed visually, through the emphasis of a dark space and several Black male bodies – hence perhaps also making the Finnish audience aware of how White the society has been, up till now, and how the situation is now changing. The stereotype made use of here, both discursively and visually, is that of a threatening and scary savage of whom ‘White’ people are afraid (cf. Kaartinen, 2004, p. 58). As argued by Barker (2008, p. 272), for some ‘Black’ men “the adoption of a hard and excessive form of masculinity has been a response to white power”. This may also be the kind of representation and critical (societal) discussion MB is here aiming at.

Second, a *societal discourse of immigrants as the Other* includes seeing them, stereotypically, as (lazy) workforce and as (potential) delinquents. The ambivalence of the work theme can be seen, for instance when MB (ironically) claims he does not ‘need a (proper day) job’ but how he nevertheless aims to be ‘the employee of the year’ by working out hard at the gym. Mentioning the social services and collecting the social welfare further imply that the likes of MB do not have (or want) a (real) job but rather enjoy the benefits of a welfare state. Moreover, it is hinted that MB should not have even been allowed to enter the

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<sup>5</sup> Exactly why Congo is mentioned here, as a *place reference*, remains vague. It may have to do with it being the neighboring country of Tanzania, to its location in the sub-Saharan area, which is stereotypically populated by very dark inhabitants, to its general ‘recognizability’ as an African country or to the rhyming.

country ('some border official will get fired') and that he has had run-ins with the police since they have his photo. MB also seems to 'echo' the voice (and dissatisfaction) of the immigration critics as he himself argues 'this country doesn't need one weak licorice'. In her research on old Finnish travel books (focusing on West Africa, in particular), Kaartinen (2004) examines concepts within the Western discussion on Otherness, one of them being the lazy servant which is clearly evoked here in an ironic fashion. This also bears resemblance to Hall's (1995, p. 21) discussion on the 'slave type' (see also Barker, 2008, p. 265). Through such a characterization, MB can be seen to voice dissatisfaction towards wide-spread categorizations of Black men (or immigrants, in general) as lazy and useless in the context of contemporary Finland.

Third, the discourse of *the sexually desirable Other* is emphasized by the lines at the end of the chorus: 'two things you can't get rid of me/ is women and the tan'. This links with and makes visible the age-old discourse and stereotype of (particularly Black) foreign men appealing to the taste of Finnish (or any local) women and the local men being concerned about (and feeling threatened by) this phenomenon. Moreover, it relates, with particular reference to Africa, to the (still persisting) discourse during colonial times of Africans as highly sexual(ized) (Kaartinen, 2004, p. 106; Miles, 1994, p. 47). Another way of eroticizing the Other is the process of vegetalization (cf. Shohat & Stam, 1994; Rossi, 2003, p. 188): this can be seen in how MB compares himself to things such as chocolate and licorice. In fact, when MB raps about 'suklaakastike' ('chocolate sauce'), the camera zooms in on his oiled six-pack, therefore emphasizing the combination of the modes. Concepts such as chocolate or licorice can, of course, also significantly relate to the societal discourse of immigrants as the Other since describing someone as 'laku' is highly othering and insulting. The sexuality is, lyrics-wise, suggested to be hetero-oriented. However, fitting several half-clad and oiled male bodies into a small space (and no scantily clad females, typical of rap videos) may also be

seen as ambiguous and whether we can also see homoeroticism in the video, in addition to heteroeroticism, remains vague, and dependent on the viewer (see also Shuker, 1994). In its (visual and discursive) emphasis on the Black man as desirable, the video may ‘mock’ and criticize the absurdity of yet another recurring stereotype related to the likes of MB.

Finally, a *fitness discourse* is constructed mainly by the numerous mentions and references to MB’s active training life at the gym: how he ‘builds his meat wall every day’ and ‘puts working out before all else’. Emphasizing that he is ‘the most ripped’ licorice of Stadi (i.e. the slang name for Helsinki, hence also a specific *place reference*) further builds an image of him as highly muscular, in addition to being a line, a catchphrase, already used in his debut single which also discussed the fitness theme. In a *cultural reference* to Jari ‘Bull’ Mentula, a well-known professional bodybuilder, a national ‘bench mark’ for being fit, MB can even be seen as boasting about his own superiority over him: their training session was *so hard* that Mentula ‘still hasn’t recovered’. As in the previous discourse, this one is also highly emphasized by the visual aspects of the video: MB’s frequent fitness posing and display of his highly muscular (upper) body, alongside the other muscular bodies.

The general *mood* of the video (cf. Shuker, 1994) is intense, dark and aggressive, as emphasized by the colors, gestures and expressions. There is a kind of a *storyline* in that the men are depicted as travelling from one place to another, and the video is a snapshot of that, presumably long, (im)migration story. The *setting*, the container and the port (?) area are realistic, although the audience only realizes that the small space is a container towards the end of the video. The format of this particular video relates to rap genre conventions in that it includes and emphasizes half-clad, muscular ‘Black’ male bodies. However, generally rap videos are set in the street, symbolizing rap’s origins in block parties (Vernallis, 2004, p. 77; in luxury mansions or in artificial and abstract settings (see also Tervo, 2012, 2014). The video contents relate significantly to MB’s *star persona* (Shuker, 1994) as he is known to

compete in fitness and continuously shows his body and reports on his training in his social media updates. The aggressiveness, however, is not typical to his (social) media communication and he has become known as an easy-going, likeable and positive person. This may then suggest the seriousness of his message (although in a somewhat ironic form) and how concerned he is over the state of Finnish society nowadays.

In general, then, the stereotypes being drawn on, played with and also exaggerated in this music video are: the Black man as a (delinquent) threat (to Finnish society) and as lazy workforce, constructed via references to officials and negligence of work; the Black man as savage, as suggested by the facial expressions, the bulging eyes and (visual) comparison to commodities which can be transported to new places. Moreover, the stereotype of a Black man as strong and muscular is emphasized both in the lyrics with fitness references and by close ups of MB's and the other's bodies; linked to this, the Black man is also stereotypically represented, both discursively and linguistically, as heterosexually desirable and desired (exoticized and even fetishized). When combining the stereotypes of a strong, muscular and angry savage with that of the overtly sexual Black man, we get what Bogle (1973) has termed the stereotype of 'Bucks' in American films. Another ethnic stereotype that applies to MB, in general, not particularly this music video, is that of a Black man as the entertainer (Karttinen, 2004, p. 93; Hall, 1995, p. 22), something which, by now, already has a long history, also in Finland (Karttinen, 2004, p. 93). Hence, something previously 'appalling' came to be seen as an exotic wild, particularly with reference to music and dance, the 'appropriate' roles for them.

What seems significant in this music video (and also in MB's other performances) is that in 2015, at the time of the publication, these kinds of issues and debates can actually be brought forward and questioned by a 'Black' man himself, as compared to the earlier times (in Finland) when it was the majority, the Whites, who sang, talked and wrote about the



Other (see Westinen & Lehtonen, forthcoming). Now, it is MB who gets to bring forward and play with the ethnic stereotypes, thereby questioning and criticizing their role and function in today's society. Although partly masked under humor, MB's discussion of difficult topics such as prejudice and discrimination is an important addition to ongoing societal discussions and debates on multiculturalism and racism and an expression of dissatisfaction and dissent by the Other against the state of contemporary Finnish society.

### **Concluding discussion**

Drawing on insights from the sociolinguistics of globalization, along with the semiotic approach to the study of multimodality and global hip-hop studies, this chapter explored the multisemiotic construction of self as the Other in a music video by a Finnish rap artist of migrant background. Moreover, it was examined how, by making use of various ethnic stereotypes (that of the 'Black' man) and semiotic resources, MB could express dissatisfaction and dissent with the current societal and even political climate in Finland, in and through the mode of hip hop.

### ***Self-stereotypes***

While for some Finnish youth with a migrant background, (American) hip hop culture offers 'ready-made' stereotypes to adopt and identify with and, in the process, to bypass questions of specific ethnic background (Lankinen, 2015, p. 290), MB by contrast makes use of both hip-hop cultural stereotypes and, significantly, stereotypes concerning Africa and Black, African men, in particular. By selecting, performing and exaggerating these stereotypes, the supposed and assumed Other aims to gain control over them and thereby also empowerment (cf. Kärjä, 2007). Therefore, songs and videos such as this can be seen as a public and widely

circulated expression of dissatisfaction and dissent, and hence as *social and political action*, outside traditional political establishments: who has the power to represent who, through what kinds of stereotypes and with what kinds of consequences (cf. Ridanpää & Pasanen, 2009, p. 227). As I have suggested elsewhere (Westinen, 2017), instead of the ‘secure(d) and safe Otherness’ suggested by Kärjä (2007) in his earlier work on Finnish music videos, MB’s performances engage us with an ‘*in your face*’ type of *Otherness*, which both makes use of the safe and secure Otherness and its stereotypes but also, significantly, ironizes them in a very straightforward and provocative way. Here, Otherness is brought center stage by the Other. And with the vast popularity of a phenomenon like MB, this message is likely to get across to a large audience of (young) Finns.

### ***Ambivalence of representation and stereotypes***

Although I have here emphasized the empowering and anti-racist aim and potential effect of MB’s songs and his overall performance, they can, nevertheless, also be seen from different viewpoints and as complex and ambivalent. As Hall (1997, p. 270) reminds us, “meaning can never be finally fixed”. This offers us affordances to try our best to resist and subvert racist, othering practices but also limitations and uncertainties as to what can actually be done and achieved. It remains “an extremely difficult exercise, about which there can be no absolute guarantees” (ibid., p. 276; see also Weaver, 2010; Barker, 2008, pp. 264–279).

MB’s performances also draw on humor. They make use of and play around with ethnic stereotypes in an ironic and confrontational way, while aiming for criticism against racism and for dissatisfaction and dissent against contemporary social conditions and attitudes in Finland. MB may, in fact, invite us to become aware of such stereotypes in our thinking and to look beyond such stereotypes when encountering ‘the Other’. The outcome of

and reactions to such discourse may, however, not always be what the artist initially ‘meant’ and aimed for; in fact, for some part of the audience, the stereotypes may become reinforced and ‘justified’ through humoristic performances (cf. Weaver, 2010). What I consider crucial, then, in ongoing and future research on Finnish rap artists of migrant background is to also investigate and take into consideration the uptake and reception of the audience: how do they interpret the performances? What kinds of meanings and functions do they attach to the stereotypes? (see Leppänen & Westinen, forthcoming).

### ***‘New’ ethnicities in superdiversity?***

‘New ethnicities’ was originally used by Hall (1988) to refer to the *diversity* of ‘black’ subject positions and experiences in the British context. Since then, scholars have used the term to describe the multitude and complexity of identifications of young, globalized youth of different ethnic backgrounds (Back, 1996; Harris, 2006; France, 2007). In the Finnish context, the term has also become relevant in examining how young people of migrant background negotiate their space as somewhere ‘in between cultures’ (Bhabha, 1994), between and alongside the traditional and stereotypical Finnishness and the stereotypical, immigrant Other (see also Lehtonen, 2015, p. 51; Lankinen, 2015, p. 273).

Via multisemiotic (digital and physical) performances, artists such as MB represent themselves as fully belonging neither to their own or their parents’ origins nor to Finland: they bring about a critical voice to raise awareness on multiculturalism and integration (cf. Westinen, 2016, 2017). Thus, they also actively provide ‘new’ perspectives on Finnishness (cf. Oikarinen-Jabai, 2013; see also Rastas & Päivärinta, 2010) while gaining control over their own representation and resisting and critiquing dominant discourses over what it means to be a Finn in contemporary Finland. The concept and idea of *superdiversity* characterizes

such complex and diversifying sociocultural contexts (including the digital one) along with people's (diverse) trajectories, mobilities, resources and networking – how various identity categories (e.g. 'migrant', 'origins', 'nationality', 'ethnicity') should not be taken for granted but explored (cf. Arnaut et al., 2016, pp. 1–17). As Arnaut (2012) has argued, understanding superdiversity as a perspective and a lens through which to see things, enables us to conceive diversity as a social practice and discourse, i.e. “a widely spread, globally recognizable and legitimate discursive space in which people from very unequal positions imagine, formulate, and work on their individual and collective identities” (p. 7). Such a view always demands ethnographic openness (Arnaut, 2012; Arnaut et al., 2016), in both digital and physical contexts. In continuing to explore the complex and multifaceted (non)belonging processes in emergent Finnish migrant hip hop such a research agenda is crucial.

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