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## Baking Bread and Burning Rainbows

*Mister D., Hip-Hop, and the Critical Sampling of Polish Culture*

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**ABSTRACT** On her 2014 debut album, *Społeczeństwo jest niemiłe* (Society is Mean), Polish author Dorota Masłowska introduced audiences to Mister D., an alter ego who brought Masłowska's trademark cutting social critique to an eclectic mix of hip-hop and pop musical tracks and videos. Analyzing the music video for "Chleb" (Bread) and the accompanying album art, as well as the stand-alone single "Tęczą" (Rainbow), this article demonstrates how Masłowska's sampling of familiar hip-hop tropes and nationalist narratives exposes the component parts of our everyday and reveals how quotidian performances of gender, sexuality, and nationality combine in the perception of authenticity. This analysis is framed within discourses on sampling, parody, and humor in hip-hop to highlight the critical potential of her play with recognizable types and the subversive potential of "playing the part." In her visual and verbal collage, Masłowska employs the logics of hip-hop sampling to piece together elements of extant culture and conventions alongside original material to produce a text that speaks to the present while drawing on the past. In so doing, Masłowska's critical and recombinant performance destabilizes the very idea of the authentic, revealing its artifice and insisting on an art and nation that is open to innovation and recognizes its own construction.

**KEYWORDS** popular music, performance, Poland

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In 2014, the Polish publisher Raster announced the debut album from Mister D., a record of "punk, hip-hop and dance music" they promised would be full of "sex, dough, problems, contempt."<sup>1</sup>

The artist behind the release, Dorota Masłowska, was at the time primarily known as a literary figure—the "enfant terrible" of Polish letters.<sup>2</sup> Masłowska released her debut novel in 2002 at the age of nineteen and won the nation's highest literary prize four years later for her follow-up. Combining the vulgar vernacular speech of the generation born in the final years of communist Poland with a mix of commercial jargon, pop culture

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1. "Publications/Records," Raster, accessed 10 April 2019. <http://en.rastergallery.com/publikacje/plyty/>. Raster is one of the preeminent contemporary art galleries in Poland. They also publish art books and a small collection of musical recordings.

2. This description is found in both Polish and foreign press. For example: Justyna Sobolewska, "Rozmowa z Dorotą Masłowską" [Conversation with Dorota Masłowska], *Polityka*, 5 June 2012, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/1527533,1,rozmowa-z-dorota-maslowska.read>; Fabian Burkhardt and Anna Zamejc, "So Close, Yet So Far: Polish Writers On Ties with Russia," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 19 June 2010, [https://www.rferl.org/a/So\\_Close\\_Yet\\_So\\_Far\\_Polish\\_Writers\\_On\\_Ties\\_With\\_Russia/2076482.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/So_Close_Yet_So_Far_Polish_Writers_On_Ties_With_Russia/2076482.html).

references, and nationalist rhetoric, the novels were praised for their inventive prose and sharp social critique, while also raising concerns from some critics about their vulgarity and grotesque reflection of contemporary Poland.<sup>3</sup> In the years that followed, Masłowska produced a dazzlingly diverse body of work ranging from plays, through anti-racist children's poems and critical essays, to illustrated "hip-hop novels" that echo freestyled verse and introduce readers to "MC Dorota"—a fictionalized version of the author performing as a "hip-hop cat."<sup>4</sup> Though her commitment to social critique, keen ear for vernacular speech, and experimentation with lyrical forms resonate with the project of many rappers, Masłowska as hip-hopper initially only appeared on the pages of her novels. With the release of her album *Spoleczeństwo jest niemile* (Society is Mean) and the creation of "Mister D.," Masłowska brought her hip-hop persona to life.

Like the literary works in Masłowska's oeuvre, her work as Mister D. on *Society is Mean* offers a critical perspective on contemporary Poland with tracks addressing politics ("Prezydent" [President]), consumerism ("Hajs" [Cash]), celebrity ("Kinga"), and the church ("Zapach Boga" [The Smell of God]). Both the album and its breakout single "Chleb" (Bread) present vivid—and often chaotic—collections of recognizable symbols and narratives drawn both from Polish traditions and contemporary culture. Analyzing the music video for "Bread" and the accompanying album art, as well as the stand-alone single "Tęcza" (Rainbow), this article reads Masłowska's parodic performance of both Polish and hip-hop conventions as a critique of the power commercial, national, and religious symbols hold in shaping an understanding of the everyday.<sup>5</sup> Authenticity—be it national or genre—is neither innate nor rooted exclusively in tradition, Masłowska's art suggests, but rather the product of cultural and historical sampling. Masłowska's visual and verbal collages employ the logics of hip-hop sampling in piecing together elements of extant culture alongside original material to produce a text that speaks to the present while drawing on the past. In this critical and recombinant process, Masłowska destabilizes the very idea of the authentic, revealing its artifice and insisting on an art (and nation) that is open to innovation and recognizes its own construction.

3. Her Nike Prize-winning second novel, *Paw Królowej* [*The Queen's Peacock*], for example, was lauded by some for its linguistic "virtuosity" and derided by others for its "cynicism, ugliness, and stupidity." See: Joanna Derkaczew, "Nike 2006 dla Doroty Masłowskiej (wideo)" [Nike 2006 for Dorota Masłowska (Video)], *Wyborcza.pl*, 1 October 2006, <https://wyborcza.pl/1,75410,3656377.html?disableRedirects=true>; Marta Sawicka, "Paw warszawki" [Warsaw Peacock], *Wprost*, 29 May 2005, <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/76895/Paw-warszawki.html>; Amy Drozdowska, "Nike Literary Prize for Masłowska," *Polskieradio.pl*, 12 October 2006, <http://www2.polskieradio.pl/co/dokument.aspx?iid=43159>.

4. The final lines of Masłowska's 2005 "hip-hop novel" *The Queen's Peacock* accuse the fictionalized "Masłowska" of "trying to play the hip-hop cat" for profit and attention. The charge serves to underscore the degree of calculation that might shape "authentic" performance. See: Dorota Masłowska, *The Queen's Peacock*, trans. Benjamin Paloff (fragment on *BookInstitute.pl*), <http://dev.bookinstitute.pl/ksiazki-detaj.literatura-polska,6778,the-queen%E2%80%99s-peacock.html?tmplng=en>.

5. I have chosen to focus my analysis on the music videos for "Bread" and "Rainbow" to allow for a close reading of Masłowska's detailed sampling of familiar sights, sounds, and stories. For a broader analysis of the complete track list, see: Mateusz Świetlicki's "High, Pop, or Trash? Mister D.'s Rude Society of Submissive Consumers," *Literatura Ludowa* 6 (2017): 39–51.

This reading of Masłowska's sampling resonates with that of scholars who have noted her interest in incorporating elements of common narratives and familiar images into her work. Justyna Wrzochul-Stawinoga, for example, argues that the "fragmented and mosaic-like character" of "Bread" is central to its depiction of contemporary Polish life.<sup>6</sup> Mateusz Świetlicki describes such composition as "recycling cultural trash and combining literature with music and visual art," and suggests it allows Masłowska to "reach new audiences and cross the line between high and low culture."<sup>7</sup> Rather than employing this frame of "trash culture," which foregrounds the interplay between high art and pop culture and implies the recycled materials are "waste products," this article turns to the language of hip-hop sampling and remixing to describe Masłowska's attempt to create engaged art through the creative selection, replaying, and recontextualizing of extant culture—be it trash or national treasure. In so doing, it argues that reading "Bread," "Rainbow," and their accompanying album art as a product of cultural and political sampling—informed by the logics of hip-hop sampling—illuminates Masłowska's insistence on depicting a reality that is perpetually informed by what has come before, yet nevertheless able to make from that tradition something new.

#### MAKING MUSIC, SAMPLING CULTURE

Of her decision to turn to music, Masłowska expressed a feeling of being "paralyzed as a writer" and wanting to push herself to "learn something from scratch, to combine, to do gymnastics."<sup>8</sup> The creation of her new musical persona, "Mister D.," allowed her to do just that as she wrote and performed the eleven tracks on *Society is Mean* on her own using the GarageBand program that came standard on her computer. Though she describes herself as "not particularly musically skilled," *Society is Mean* proved to be an eclectic collection that captivated audiences in Poland and abroad with its mix of musical styles and creative combination of familiar pop cultural and national tropes.<sup>9</sup> The record reached the number nine spot on the Polish sales chart (OLiS) the week after its release, was performed live at shows around Poland, and led to Mister D. being named "2014 Polish Artist of the Year" by the popular Polish web portal, *Onet.pl*.<sup>10</sup>

While the record offered Masłowska a novel creative outlet, its mélange of cultural critique, hip-hop styling, and rhetorical sampling was not entirely new to the author, nor

6. Justyna Wrzochul-Stawinoga, "The Depiction of Contemporary Society in Dorota Masłowska's Music – Mister D.," *Culture – Society – Education* 13, no. 1 (2018), 251.

7. Świetlicki, "High, Pop, or Trash?," 40.

8. Agnieszka Kowalska, "Córka Rydzyka śpiewa własne piosenki, czyli Dorota Masłowska nagrała płytę [ROZMOWA]" [Rydzysk's Daughter Sings Her Own Songs, or Dorota Masłowska Recorded an Album [Conversation], *Wyborcza.pl*, 21 February 2014, [http://wyborcza.pl/1,75410,15498546,Corka\\_Rydzyka\\_spiewa\\_wlasne\\_piosenki\\_czyli\\_Dorota.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,75410,15498546,Corka_Rydzyka_spiewa_wlasne_piosenki_czyli_Dorota.html).

Original: *Najbardziej kreatywna jestem, kiedy muszę się czegoś uczyć od podstaw, kombinować, gimnastykować*

9. Masłowska discussed the events leading to her turn to music at the University of Michigan in 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcBmROENNV4&t=3696s>.

10. "Najlepsi 2014: Artysta, Płyta, Piosenka i Teledysk Roku," (The Best of 2014: Artist, Album, Song, and Music Video of the Year), *Onet: Muzyka*, 30 December 2014, <https://kultura.onet.pl/muzyka/teledyski/najlepsi-2014artysta-plyta-piosenka-i-teledysk-roku/wcrh6by>.

the Polish music scene. Masłowska's literary oeuvre consistently engages with questions of genre, national character, and global mass culture. So too does the history of Polish hip-hop reflect ongoing negotiations of global genre expectations and local cultural traditions and social concerns. With the release *Society is Mean*, Masłowska brought her own brand of creative social critique to a Polish hip-hop scene that had been mingling international influences with Polish tradition for decades.<sup>11</sup>

As Polish artists looked to make hip-hop their own, they followed a familiar global pattern of localizing the genre while maintaining links to its point of origin.<sup>12</sup> Driven by hip-hop's imperative to "keep it real," many early Polish hip-hop musicians looked to blend the hallmarks of the global genre—including its call for authenticity—with their own experiences and cultural history. Darryl "DMC" McDaniels, founding member of the pioneering American group Run-DMC, asserts rappers should "rap about shit they [know] about," rather than trying to imitate artists whose experiences are different from their own.<sup>13</sup> To these ends, some Polish musicians seized upon the historiographical potential of the genre and looked to their nation's tumultuous past for both inspiration and lyrical material. Others sampled the sounds of Poland's past—from Chopin to disco—to tell stories about its present.<sup>14</sup> Authenticity was thus performed both formally through the practice of sampling and topically in the narratives of Polish community and history. Poles not only weighed in on "shit they knew about," but did so in the spirit and using the tools of hip-hop.

Though many Polish artists made a case for themselves as "keeping it real," such a concern with authenticity was not and is not universal within the Polish hip-hop scene—just as it is not universal more broadly. While some rappers worked to cultivate an "authentic" hip-hop persona—based in fidelity to hip-hop traditions and narratives of lived experiences—others prioritized commercial appeal and did not shy away from blending hip-hop influences with

11. Hip-hop spread to Poland in the late 1980s via music videos played on the public broadcasting channel TV "Dwojka" and cassettes sent from friends and family living in the United States. The first Polish radio show to broadcast hip-hop began in 1993, when journalist Bogna Świętkowska returned from travels abroad with an ear for the genre. By the late 1990s, most Polish hip-hop fans were listening almost exclusively to recordings from Poland. For more on the history of hip-hop in Poland, see: Andrzej Buda, *Historia kultury hip-hop w Polsce: 1977-2002* (History of Hip-Hop Culture in Poland: 1977-2002), (Głogów: Andrzej Buda, 2001); Renata Pasternak-Mazur, "The Black Muse: Polish Hip-Hop as the Voice of 'New Others' in the Post-Socialist Transition," *Music & Politics* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2009); Michael L. Torrence, "Polish Hip Hop as a Form of Multiliteracies and Situated Learning" (Ph.D. diss., Tennessee Technological University, 2009).

12. James Lull describes such localization as a process of forming "cultural territory." Jannis Androutopoulos and Arno Scholz use this framework to analyze the progression from "deterritorialization" to "cultural melding and mediation" that occurs in global hip-hop scenes as the genre is hybridized and indigenized (Androutopoulos and Scholz, 467). See: James Lull, *Media, Communication, Culture: A Global Approach* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Jannis Androutopoulos and Arno Scholz, "Spaghetti Funk: Appropriations of Hip-Hop Culture and Rap Music in English," *Popular Music and Society* 26, no. 4 (December 2003).

13. Darryl "DMC" McDaniels, "The Immortals: Beastie Boys," *Rolling Stone*, 21 April 2005. The context for this directive was a reflection on the Beastie Boys, whom DMC praises for "rapping what they knew."

14. Ryszard "Peja" Andrzejewski, for example, raps about Polish history on his 2011 track "Poznaćczyk." The hip-hop group Klimat's 2004 recording "Portret" (Portrait) features a sample from Chopin's *Funeral March*. For more on Polish hip-hop's sampling of national culture, see: Alena Gray Aniskiewicz, "Cultural Remix: Polish Hip-Hop and the Sampling of Heritage" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2019); Pasternak-Mazur, "The Black Muse."

other popular music genres. Artists such as Mezo or the group Jeden Osiem L, for example, achieved commercial success in the early 2000s but found themselves accused of not being “real rap.”<sup>15</sup> Such commercially-oriented music was often derided as “hip-hopolo” and joined the ranks of other pop-hybrids (dance-rap, disco-polo) that drew on hip-hop influences without the overriding concern for authenticity.<sup>16</sup> Despite an ever-diversifying understanding of what constitutes hip-hop authenticity, notions of “keeping it real” continue to circulate as a critical frame, even as the “real” becomes harder to articulate.<sup>17</sup> Drawing on both “old school” hip-hop authenticity, as well as versions of the genre shaped by commercialization and international influences, Masłowska’s *Society is Mean* similarly destabilizes notions of authenticity in service of her playful critique of conventions.<sup>18</sup>

Whether artists sought to prove their commitment to the fundamentals of the genre or simply to create danceable pop hits, Polish hip-hop preserved the music’s roots in sampling. Russell A. Potter posits citation as “the fundamental practice of hip-hop,” describing it as “the relentless sampling of sonic and verbal archives.”<sup>19</sup> These practices, he suggests, are a “kind of genealogical research.”<sup>20</sup> Jennifer C. Lena similarly describes sampling as “a way of paying homage and a means of archival research.”<sup>21</sup> Engaging sonic and narrative archives, hip-hop sampling allows artists to express themselves by exploring their personal and artistic genealogy.<sup>22</sup> Aside from its potential to create interesting sounds and catchy beats, sampling opens a space to both honor and critique the past. Some samples resonate with the message of the track and suggest a unified cause across generations. Others engage sampled audio as a tool of critique, marking the divide between the position of the sampled audio and sampling artist. Such critical sampling often mirrors the dynamics of parody, what Linda Hutcheon describes as an “ironic distance” that makes “imitation a means of freedom, even in the sense of exorcizing

15. Tomasz “CNE” Kleyff, “Rzut oka wstecz,” (A Glance Back) in *Antologia Polskiego Rapu (Anthology of Polish Rap)*, ed. Dominika Węclawek, Marcin Flint, Tomasz Kleyff, Andrzej Cała, and Kamil Jaczyński (Warsaw: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2014), 18.

16. For more on the pop-rap hybrid of hip-hopolo, see: Renata Pasternak-Mazur, “Silencing *Polo*: Controversial Music in Post-Socialist Poland” (Ph.D. Diss., Rutgers University, 2017).

17. Murray Forman offers a perspective on shifting notions of “keeping it real” in hip-hop discourse in: “‘Things Done Changed’: Recalibrating the Real in Hip-Hop,” *Popular Music and Society* (2020): 1–27.

18. The South African hip-hop group Die Antwoord, in particular, often is noted as a creative influence in Masłowska’s work as Mister D.

19. Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 53. For examples of analysis on hip-hop’s engagement with and sampling of earlier artistic traditions in the American context, see: Reiland Rabaka, *Hip Hop’s Inheritance: From the Harlem Renaissance to the Hip Hop Feminist Movement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011); Salamishah Tillet, “Strange Sampling: Nina Simone and Her Hip-Hop Children,” *American Quarterly* 66, No. 1 (March 2014): 119–37.

20. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars*, 53

21. Jennifer C. Lena, “Meaning and Membership: Samples in Rap Music, 1979 to 1995,” *Poetics* 32, no. 3–4 (June 2004): 305.

22. It is worth noting that not all sampling is done to “make a point.” Much is simply based on the sonic qualities of the sampled recordings; and while this too creates an artistic lineage, the “genealogical” and self-reflective elements are less pronounced. Kodwo Eshun, for example, describe samples that are “indifferent to tradition” in a “functionalism that ignores history” (14). For more on sampling and the relationship between content and form, see: Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet Books, 1999); Amanda Sewell, “A Typology of Sampling in Hip Hop” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2013).

personal ghosts—or, rather, enlisting them in their own cause.”<sup>23</sup> Sample-based hip-hop similarly “enlists to its cause” texts from the past and gives artists a means to talk back to the historical record by replaying it while maintaining a critical distance. It is this irony-infused “talking back” that characterizes Masłowska’s creative cultural sampling.

A citational relationship with the past—sampling history to frame identity in the present—existed in Poland long before the advent of hip-hop. The poet-soldiers of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising against Nazi occupation “revived Romantic tropes of personal sacrifice for an idealized Poland,” thus sampling the verse and artistic persona of earlier poets.<sup>24</sup> Decades later, protests against communist rule were sparked by the performance of nineteenth-century dramas and buoyed by narratives of the struggles that had come before.<sup>25</sup> Today, the narratives of historical conflicts are replayed by conservative politicians to galvanize support for nationalist politics.<sup>26</sup> In its frequent replaying and recontextualizing of historical narratives, Polishness has long been “sampled-based.” Hip-hop offered a contemporary means to express, and perhaps critique, recurrent national narratives. In her richly citational work, Masłowska draws on both Polish and hip-hop traditions of historical sampling but refuses to let them be taken as the ultimate arbiters of authenticity. Instead, she denaturalizes and demands critical attention be paid to the tropes that have come to define “authentic” Polish and hip-hop identities. In so doing, she insists on a nation and an art that are self-reflective and open to change.

#### INTRODUCING MISTER D.

Introducing audiences to her new musical persona, “Mister D.,” the cover art for Masłowska’s *Society is Mean* bombards them with signs of hip-hopness—a flashy car, “blingy” accessories, a fur coat, big dogs, and a new rap alias (Fig. 1). Though it features familiar elements, the tableau is striking in its incongruous and exaggerated collage of genre tropes. At its center, the common image of the rapper and their ride is slightly altered as Masłowska’s vehicle is positioned as a chariot, drawn by large dogs. The canines featured on Masłowska’s cover appear to be American Staffordshire Terriers, a breed closely related to the pit bulls so popular among American rappers.<sup>27</sup> Masłowska, ever

23. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 35.

24. Stanley Bill, “The Splintering of a Myth: Polish Romantic Ideology in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries,” in *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918*, eds. Tamara Trojanowska, Joanna Niżyńska, and Przemysław Czapliński (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 56.

25. In 1968, a staging of Adam Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* (*Forefathers’ Eve*), published between 1822 and 1860, in Warsaw was banned over concerns from officials that the anti-Russian sentiments of the drama might be taken as contemporary political commentary on relations with the Soviet Union. The incident sparked student protests that were violently suppressed.

26. Opponents to LGBT rights, for example, have framed the movement for equality as a threat to Polishness akin to Bolshevism, Nazism, and historic invasions by Sweden, Germany, and Russia. See: Elżbieta Korolczuk, “The fight against ‘gender’ and ‘LGBT ideology’: new developments in Poland,” *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2020): 166.

27. Pit bulls are featured on albums’ covers (DMX’s *Year of the Dog . . . Again*), in music videos (Jay-Z’s “99 Problems”), and in publicity shoots (BigBoi on *Dub*). Świątlicki points out that the breed is also popular in the



FIGURE 1. Mister D. *Społeczeństwo jest miemiłe* cover art (2014).

ready to amplify a convention, features not one, but three of the large dogs chained to her car. The visual hyperbole here serves as a playful wink to her audience; she is playing the part of the rapper, but doing it bigger—and also not quite right. Her dogs, though numerous, are not the snarling watchdogs that Karen Delise described as “the ultimate accessory” in hip-hop, where she argues the breed has become “an extension of your manhood.”<sup>28</sup> Instead, dwarfed by her three smiling pups, Masłowska both evokes and subverts the symbolism of the pit bull in hip-hop as a dog that reflects a “street” sensibility and aggressive masculinity. Here, Masłowska performs what Simon Dentith identifies as a central aspect of parody as she “seize[s] on particular aspects of a manner or style and exaggerate[s] it to ludicrous effect.”<sup>29</sup> In exaggerating convention, Masłowska has made it ridiculous and thus made us question why we ever took it seriously in the first place.

Her choice of ride reflects a similar play with conventions, switching out the expected lowrider or luxury car for a gold-plated Fiat 126 with crocheted seat covers. In Poland, the Fiat 126 is known as a “*Maluch*,” which translates as “little one” or “youngster” and hardly connotes an assertive, aspirational hip-hopness. This is not a car that will intimidate

Polish *dresiarz* subculture, another point of reference for Masłowska’s “Mister D.” aesthetic. See: Świetlicki, “High, Pop, or Trash,” 45.

28. Allen G. Breed, “Pit Bulls and the Hip-Hop Culture,” *Madison.com*, 30 July 2007, [https://madison.com/news/pit-bulls-and-the-hip-hop-culture-the-pit-bull/article\\_fbab3840-fe2f-58bf-83b2-2b3c990e22cd.html](https://madison.com/news/pit-bulls-and-the-hip-hop-culture-the-pit-bull/article_fbab3840-fe2f-58bf-83b2-2b3c990e22cd.html).

29. Simon Dentith, *Parody* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 32.

others with the roar of its engine, but rather one whose starting noise has been compared to a weak cough. Produced in Poland between 1972 and 2000, the small car was intended to make private automobiles accessible to ordinary Poles and demonstrate progress after a period of austerity. Though once a hot commodity that could take years to acquire, it is now a nostalgic remnant of a past Poland.<sup>30</sup> In choosing the iconic car to usher in her hip-hop persona, Masłowska offers a self-conscious performance of Polishness trying to adapt to a global culture but failing to fully make it work.<sup>31</sup> Riding into the contemporary genre in a historical relic, Masłowska embodies a nation looking to move forward, yet unable to escape the past.

Masłowska's play with genre and gender conventions extends beyond the iconography of her album to her choice of hip-hop moniker. Having previously written herself into texts as "MC Doris," Masłowska's debut as Mister D. reflects a further engagement with hip-hop naming practices, where performing under an alias is quite common. Leading Polish rappers like Peja (Ryszard Andrzejewski), O.S.T.R. (Adam Andrzej Ostrowski), and Sokół (Wojciech Sosnowski) perform under assumed names, as do many American rappers. Masłowska's choice of "Mister D." reflects the practice of combining an initial or nickname with a descriptive title—as seen, for example, in the names Master P, Lil Jon, Mister Cee, and Young MC.<sup>32</sup> Introducing the character of Mister D., Masłowska is performing an element of hip-hop culture. Though her rap alias reflects genre conventions, it is nevertheless incongruous with the figure it represents. Masłowska is not, after all, a "mister." Nor is the English of "mister" her native tongue. Like her collection of smiling dogs, Masłowska's pseudonym reflects an engagement with gendered genre tropes, but does so in a way that underscores her difference.<sup>33</sup> In drawing attention to the divide

30. For a sense of this nostalgic reflection on the car, see: Slawomir Poros, "The Fiat 126p: When Poland Borrowed From Italy To Create A Pop-Culture Icon," *Petrolicious*, 26 February 2018, <https://petrolicious.com/articles/the-fiat-126p-when-poland-borrowed-from-italy-to-create-a-pop-culture-icon>.

31. The "not quite rightness" of this image might also be read as representative of broader Polish anxieties about the nation's belonging within western Europe. Analyzing post-1989 Poland, Agata Pyzik, observes that "what followed the fall of the decaying communist economy around 1989 in most of the East, was the express adjustment to Western capitalism, where features like conformity to all that's new and the rejection and despising of everything associated with the old regime (like collectivity, for instance), were the ticket to a career" (14). This desire to conform to Western trends led to what she calls a "new kind of 'brand'" in Poland, "fake brands that were like-but-not-quite" those imported from the West (19). Like the Abibas (not-quite Adidas) and Diar (not-quite Dior) that once populated the Polish market, Masłowska's gold Fiat gestures towards a familiar Western cultural and commercial touchstone but is not able to fully shed its historical specificity and roots in a culture removed from the origins of the trend. See: Agata Pyzik, *Poor But Sexy: Culture Clashes in Europe East and West* (Zero Books: Winchester, UK, 2014).

32. Hip-hop naming practices have proven ripe for imitation and parody. A search for "rap name generators" offers dozens of options for creating a personalized "rap name." Flowcabulary.com, for example, offers options for those looking to generate a rap alias, including "Mister + Your First Initial" ([https://www.flocabulary.com/rap\\_nickname\\_generator/](https://www.flocabulary.com/rap_nickname_generator/)). The formulaic quality of these names has become a joke both inside and outside the world of hip-hop performers, with the musician Childish Gambino (Donald Glover) joking that he created his name with an online generator, and Saturday Night Live producing comedic shorts about the fictional rapper Lil Doo Doo.

33. This sort of play with genre expectations reflects a technique of "foregrounding gendered marginality through humor" that Charles Garrett observes among some American women hip-hop artists, who use humor to playfully perform and subvert conventions. See: Charles Hiroshi Garrett, "'Pranksta rap': Humor as Difference in Hip Hop," in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, eds. Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, Jeffrey Kallberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 327.

between this public persona and her personal character, Masłowska also highlights the degree to which assumed monikers might obscure the individual behind the name. Though it is a genre that often elevates authenticity, hip-hop is also full of larger-than-life public personae. In so clearly displaying the divide between public and personal identities, Masłowska foregrounds the performative elements of such rap personalities. She plays the part, but in so doing, also never lets us forget that she is *playing*—this is not a performance of unmediated access to the artist.

As an introduction to Masłowska's hip-hop character, the cover of *Society is Mean* establishes the parodic dynamic that infuses the album and exemplifies the sampling of conventions so common to Masłowska's work. She does not discard genre or nationalist tropes, but rather employs them in a project of comical critique. Reflecting on the early work of the Beastie Boys, Charles Garrett notes that the American hip-hop group constantly "played with established meanings and sought to upend audience expectations," adding that their humor is "created when a sense of anticipation is confounded by the unexpected."<sup>34</sup> This is, in many ways, also what Masłowska is doing as she plays with established meanings, seeking not only to "upend audience expectations," but also to make the audience critically consider the sources of those expectations. Playfully regurgitating the elements of national and artistic authenticity, she works against a vision that would posit them as essential or unchanging.

#### MISTER D. MAKES "BREAD"

Masłowska's interest in sampling and remixing elements of the everyday comes to the fore in the video for "Chleb" (Bread), the second single off *Society is Mean*. What begins as a story about daily life in the city ends with Masłowska crying tears made of breadcrumbs as a fantasy version of herself rides off into the mountains on the back of a giant dachshund. Amongst these unexpected twists, the clip samples familiar music video tropes to create a bizarre reflection on contemporary Poland that magnifies (literally, at points) elements of Polish culture not only to reveal its component parts, but also to expose the artifice behind much of what are deemed "authentic" elements of both Polishness and hip-hopness. The national and cultural touchstones we ingest as our daily bread, Masłowska suggests, are an ever-changing amalgamation of sampled influences, not an essential, invariable source demanding fidelity.

In the years since its release on 24 March 2014, the music video has amassed more than nine million views and eight thousand comments, many from people perplexed by what they have seen.<sup>35</sup> One viewer suggests, "It's a very sad song about Polish reality . . . this is what it really looks like;"<sup>36</sup> another reads the video as a "very successful joke;"<sup>37</sup>

34. Ibid., 320.

35. As of 25 February 2021, the official video on Mister D.'s YouTube page had 9,164,900 views and 8,034 comments. "MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK – CHLEB (official video)," posted by Mister D., 24 March 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1-z48cJDbc>.

36. Hania Wójcik, comment on "MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK." Original: *to jest bardzo smutna piosenka o polskiej rzeczywistości . . . no tak po prostu to u nas wygląda*

37. Misiąa M4, comment on "MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK." Original: *Bardzo udany żart*

while a third writes simply, “this song is Poland.”<sup>38</sup> This array of comments, ranging from interpreting the video as a sad reflection to laughing at it as a joke, reflects the ambiguity of Masłowska’s work, which engages signifiers of artistic authenticity and genre credibility while simultaneously revealing their vacuity. This ambiguity is perhaps referenced by the viewer who suggests the song “is Poland.” The comment touches on something central to Masłowska’s video: in its collaging of reality and fantasy, “Bread” reflects a Poland that is similarly a creation of lived experience filtered through familiar narrative tropes.<sup>39</sup> In Masłowska’s portrait of Poland, the languages of capitalism, nationalism, and Catholicism combine with pop culture narratives to provide the material for a “sample-based” nation—that is, a Polishness constructed from looped snippets of the past remixed with an ever more globalized present. Playing with this logic of sampling, Mister D.’s breakout single underscores the performative nature of “authenticity” and denaturalizes narratives of the “everyday” that are so often taken for granted.

The video begins by locating itself in a complex of apartment buildings—the recognizable concrete towers of the 1970s that remain a prominent feature of many Polish cities. The camera zooms in through a window to enter a small apartment, where, facing the camera, Masłowska delivers her opening lyrics with a flat, unaffected tone. She begins with a narration of her daily life: “That day I was going to take down the Christmas tree/ But I told my mother that first I was buying bread for dinner.”<sup>40</sup> Viewers see the Christmas tree in the small flat and watch as Masłowska first delivers these lyrics straight to the camera, then appears to use the lens as a mirror as she applies makeup in preparation for her trip to the shop. The walk to the store itself is similarly filled with signs of “real life” as Masłowska passes a kebab stand, seemingly endless apartment blocks, and a woman out walking her dachshund (Fig. 2). All of these images reflect the song’s urban setting and would be recognizable to viewers familiar with (Polish) urban spaces.<sup>41</sup>

With these gestures towards portraying urban life, the video for “Bread” not only suggests a lived authenticity, but also reflects genre traditions of representing authenticity, which are evident in music videos dating to the early days of hip-hop. Analyzing Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s 1982 video for “The Message” as an “*urtext*” of hip-hop culture, Greg de Cuir Jr. observes the “low-grade video technology” and “natural lighting and performances” of the video, which was shot on location in the South

38. zachar251, comment on “MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK.” Original: *ten utwór to jest Polska*

39. Konrad Sierzputowski offers a complimentary reading of Mister D., describing her videos as “non-narrative collages” that become a “distorting mirror of Polishness.” For more, see: Konrad Sierzputowski, “Sandwiches with Cash and the Scent of God,” in *Made in Poland: Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Patryk Galuszka (Routledge: New York, 2020), 165–76.

40. Original: *Tego dnia miałem rozbiierać choinkę/Ale powiedziałem matce że pójdę pierw po chleb na kolacje*

41. The symbols chosen to signify “real urban Poland” also suggest Masłowska’s interest in amplifying the degree to which Polishness is built on sampled elements of the national past and global influences. The instantly recognizable apartment blocks are remnants of post-WWII rebuilding and Soviet-led housing policy. The kebab stands that sell the popular snack were introduced to Poland via Germany’s döner kebab stands, which themselves reflect the influence of Turkish immigrants. These “quintessentially Polish” things would not exist in the country if not for international influences and historical change.



FIGURE 2. Street scene from the music video for Mister D.'s "Chleb" (2014).

Bronx.<sup>42</sup> Such naturalistic depictions of everyday life similarly characterize many Polish hip-hop videos.<sup>43</sup> With its urban setting and markedly "low-grade" technology, "Bread" demonstrates its engagement with this classic image of hip-hop realness. It is a realness, however, that de Cuir argues is highly mediated, noting that "The Message" "aspires to be 'real' through its aesthetic" and "in turn helps to create a strongly mediated image of what the reality of urban living is."<sup>44</sup> "Bread," like "The Message," contains aesthetic markers of "reality" and, like that earlier music video, reflects the degree to which such authenticity is mediated. It is this reflection of contemporary urban life that perhaps generates the video's reception as one that "shows . . . the whole current situation in Poland"<sup>45</sup> and leads viewers to comment, "Though I don't know Masłowska, I feel like she's a homie from my neighborhood."<sup>46</sup> This reaction to the video—of recognizing one's experience in the world depicted—speaks to Masłowska's ability to evoke the familiar,

42. Greg de Cuir Jr., "'The Message' Is the Medium: Aesthetics, Ideology, and the Hip Hop Music Video," in *Music/Video: Histories, Aesthetics, Media*, eds. Gina Arnold, Daniel Cookney, Kirsty Fairclough, and Michael Goddard (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 56.

43. See, for example: Eldo, "Granice" [Boundaries], 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcXcvijDgtc>; Fisz, "Polepiony" (Polished), 2000, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCxoX2YSd1M>; Paktofonika, "Jestem Bogiem" (I am God), 2001, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkMBOAtboN8>

44. de Cuir Jr., "'The Message,'" 56.

45. Weronika Sasza, comment on "MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK." Original: *ukazala w tym teledysku i w piosence cala terazniejsza sytuacje w Polsce.*

46. mateusz220, comment on "MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK." Original: *Chociaz nie znam osobiście Masłowskiej, mam wrażenie że jest ziomalka z mojego osiedla.*



FIGURE 3. Collaged setting from the music video for Mister D.'s "Chleb" (2014).

even as she makes it strange. In magnifying the artifice—and thus foregrounding the aestheticization of reality—Masłowska highlights the performance inherent in all depictions of “real” urban life. Whether presented by hip-hop artists to “keep it real” or politicians to define “real Poland,” such “authenticity” often obscures its intentional creation and myriad influences.

Even in “Bread’s” recognizable depictions of urban life, however, something is clearly not quite right. Images of Masłowska’s flat and the world outside its doors may have familiar features, but at no point are they presented as entirely realistic. They are composed as a collage of stock images and characters—housing projects emerge as a series of individual blocks placed together against a cartoonish blue sky, and figures like the dog walker and tracksuit-wearing youth appear as though cut out and dropped against the urban backdrop (Fig. 3). Masłowska is sampling familiar images throughout her production, and this aesthetic of collage reflects that practice of borrowing and recombining the familiar in service of something new.<sup>47</sup> She has inserted markers of “real life,” but does so

47. Patrizia C. McBride writes of the “double-coding engendered by montage, which lies in the ability of the assembled fragments to point back to the contexts out of which they were extracted as though they were affected by an incurable semantic cross-eyedness.” This description of visual collage echoes descriptions of both hip-hop sampling and parodic forms. In this way, the aesthetic of “Bread” mirrors and reinforces its message of experience as assemblage of existing narratives and images. The tropes and images sampled are specific to this story but also spin out associations to their points of origin. For more, see: Patrizia C. McBride, “The Game of Meaning: Collage, Montage, and Parody in Kurt Schwitters’ Merz,” *Modernism/modernity* 14, no. 2 (April 2007): 249–72.



FIGURE 4. Fantasy vs. reality from the music video for Mister D's "Chleb" (2014).

in a way where their edges show, letting the viewer in on the artifice and intentional construction. This might be understood as the visual equivalent of audio sampling—Masłowska portrays a “sample-based” reality. In so doing, she frames “Bread” as reflecting real experiences, while signaling that it does not do so realistically.

While these aesthetic choices immediately mark the video as somewhat removed from reality, it is not long before the world of “Bread” becomes distorted beyond the point of recognition. Upon passing the familiar kebab seller and senior citizens on the street, Masłowska encounters two children dressed as strawberries standing in the dumpster, waiting to give her a stuffed animal, which she then cradles as the city drops away and she is framed against a pure blue sky. This departure into the fantastic becomes even more apparent when Masłowska sees a young man “sitting on a bench with a Tiger [energy drink] as usual.” Though she frames the scene as quotidian, it is depicted on screen as anything but. As the young man “stares at [her],” Masłowska’s vocals become a breathy chorus of “I’m walking, he’s staring,” and she and her would-be paramour are transformed into idealized versions of themselves (Fig. 4).<sup>48</sup> Here, the familiar—a group of young men sitting around checking out passing women—becomes fantasy.

Though depicting no recognizable reality, elements of this fantasy are nevertheless familiar. With her heavy makeup, bold jewelry, and skimpy clothing, Masłowska’s fantasy double, played by the Polish model Anja Rubik, mirrors elements of the “video vixen”—the scantily clad women who became a fixture of hip-hop music videos in the early 2000s.<sup>49</sup> Both she and her tracksuit-wearing partner also evoke the stereotypical *dresiarze*, a Polish subculture named for the tracksuits (*dresy*) that are a feature of their

48. Original: *Jak wychodzę, on jak zawsze siedzi na ławce, z Tiger'em i się na mnie . . . / Patrzy, ja idę, on się patrzy . . .*

49. For more on the “video vixen” as a hip-hop type, see: Kaila Adia Story, “Performing Venus ~ From Hottentot to Video Vixen: The Historical Legacy of Black Female Body Commodification,” in *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip-Hop Feminism Anthology*, eds. Gwendolyn D. Pough, Mark Anthony Neal, and Joan Morgan (Mira Loma, CA: Parker Publishing, 2007): 389–408; Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

style.<sup>50</sup> In referencing these types, the fantasy elements of “Bread” comment on the ways in which experiences are filtered through the images projected in popular culture. As she imagines her interactions with her male companion, Masłowska’s character instantly conjures familiar scenes of seductive women and strong men gazing into each other’s eyes, holding hands on the beach, and riding off into the sunset. These images are born of familiar narratives—cultivated by both contemporary popular culture and traditional heteronormative gender roles—but they are also made strange. It is as if there is a glitch in Masłowska’s fantasy, one that foregrounds the implausibility of the familiar narratives and refuses to allow them to appear as natural. It is here that she signals her remove from the tropes she cites, positioning her work as commentary, rather than pure imitation. Establishing the contrast between fantasy and reality—both visually and in the style of lyrical delivery—Masłowska underscores how unreal such fantasies are.

Just as the visuals of Masłowska’s video foreground the difference between her work and the models it references, so too does the narrative of her song. The lyrics depart from their familiar “girl meets boy” story as Masłowska and the young man on the bench begin to talk. Returning to her deadpan delivery, Masłowska describes her character’s nerves—her “tongue is tied” and her “legs bend under” (descriptions rendered literally in the video).<sup>51</sup> Rather than the expected flirtation, however, the two talk mostly of bread. The young man’s mother bakes bread at home—she “used to always be fucked up,” but since she started baking “there’s a smile on her face” and “she does not dream of death anymore.”<sup>52</sup> Now, with his mother in intensive care, the boy is looking to sell her bread machine. Having purchased it, Masłowska’s character is consumed by baking, describing a life where “all I do is bake/From floor to ceiling there are loaves [ . . . ] Instead of tears, crumbs roll down my face.”<sup>53</sup> Here, the story becomes one of overabundance as Masłowska churns out bread.

In this, Masłowska not only subverts the expected themes and trajectory of popular song, but also performs a parody of Polish womanhood. In buying the young man’s mother’s bread machine, Masłowska takes on the symbol of her domesticity. Baking bread, we have been told, was the thing that gave the mother’s life meaning—an exaggerated portrait of the contentment promised by traditional views that locate women in

50. The video for “Bread” foregrounds this connection, with the credits listing the central figures as “Dresiara” (Masłowska), “Princess Dresiara” (Rubik), “Super Dresiarz” (Niezwistny), and “Dresiarz” (Garnecki). This is not the first time Masłowska’s work has been associated with *dresy*—her first novel was frequently discussed as the first literary work concerned with the youth culture. For more on *dresy* (as a style and culture), see: Piotr Brzózka, “Wszyscy byliśmy dresiarzami! Czyli historia szalonej mody na dres” (We were all *dresy!* Or, the crazy history of tracksuit fashion), *Slaskie.NaszeMiasto.pl*, 5 August 2011, <http://slaskie.naszemiesto.pl/artukul/wszyscy-bylymy-dresiarzami-czyli-historia-szalonej-mody-na,1025915.artgal,t,id,tm.html>; Wojciech Staszewski, “Umarł dres, niech żyje dres! (Uwaga! Tematyka młodzieżowa! Podczas czytania należy rapować)” [The tracksuit is dead, long live the tracksuit! (Attention! Youth topics! When reading, please rap)], *Wyborcza.pl*, 27 August 2003, <http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/1,127290,1635993.html>; Jacek Tomczuk, “Nowi dresiarze” (New Dresiarze), *Newsweek.pl*, 1 January 2014, <https://www.newsweek.pl/styl-zycia/dres-nowi-dresiarze-modne-dresy-newsweekpl/zksm3r2>.

51. Original: *język mi się płącze,/nogi się pode mną gną*

52. Original: *Kiedyś ciągle najebana,/teraz uśmiech ma na twarzy,/chleb se wypieka, o śmierci już nie . . ./Marzy*

53. Original: *Od tamtej pory, nie, tylko wypiekam,/aż góra bochenków po sufit zalega,/z chleba upiekłam ściany, krzesła i obrazy,/zamiast łez okruszki, toczą się po mojej . . ./Twarzy*

the home. The final portrait of Masłowska crying tears of flour and surrounded by bread is one of excess and offers a modified portrait of the “brimming-over abundance” Mikhail Bakhtin associates with fertility and growth in grotesque realism.<sup>54</sup> Here, idealized visions of motherhood and femininity are reduced to a material plane, but even that depiction is twisted in Masłowska’s transgressive vision. The relationship between her and the young man does not produce children; it produces bread.

Though Masłowska ends the video weeping crumbs, her double happily ascends over the city and into space. The fantasy tropes that guided the action have in fact ended in fantasy for Masłowska’s double, though they have left her overwhelmed with excessive bread in “real life.” It is a strange image and offers little clarity. In her abundant sampling of images, Masłowska has created a world virtually unrecognizable, even if composed of (mostly) familiar elements. She thus challenges the coherence of the symbols and narratives with which we constitute understanding.

In Masłowska’s art, this disruption of familiar ways of seeing and understanding reflects a critique of the systems—both political and cultural—that engage such narratives as essential and unchanging. In “Bread,” the lack of clarity about the message *is* the message—that what we often read as indelible symbols are themselves malleable signifiers susceptible to shifting agendas and the products of constant cultural sampling and reinvention. In amplifying and distorting otherwise mundane elements of life, Masłowska destabilizes their apparent naturalness and reveals the artifice and construction behind their use as symbols of authenticity—be it of art or nation. Here, authenticity and identity are objects of play, not worship.

While the blend of absurdity and mundanity that characterize “Bread” does not offer an explicit political critique, the notion that identities are fluid and cultures are the product of constant sampling has political implications in contemporary Poland, where “Polishness” is often enshrined by the conservative state as a fixed and natural character. Hip-hop artists themselves have contributed to this discourse by sampling the nation’s canonical texts and history in their performance of authenticity, thus reinforcing the notion of an eternal Polish character that relies on its fidelity to the past. In using visual and musical idioms of hip-hop to playfully explore the malleability of symbols, Masłowska subversively challenges the dominant narratives of both Polish hip-hop and Polish nationalism.

## THIS IS POLAND

Whereas “Bread” primarily samples elements of everyday life and popular culture, with the song “Tęcza” (Rainbow) Masłowska turns her focus more explicitly to the politics of the nation.<sup>55</sup> Repeating “this is Poland” on a track that finds her sampling the language of conservative Catholic nationalism, Masłowska offers a sharp critique of Polishness that

54. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 19.

55. “Mister D. feat Monsieur Z – ‘Tęcza’ (Official Video),” posted by KayaxTV, 11 November 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9XOtdXY9kQ>.

denies both the nation's construction and ability to change. Released as a stand-alone track on 11 November 2014—Polish Independence Day—the song addresses the burning of a rainbow installation a year earlier during an Independence Day march in the nation's capital. The installation in Warsaw's trendy Savior Square—"Tęczą" by Julia Wójcik—had become a focal point in broader debates about LGBT rights in Poland, and its destruction reflected an unwillingness by some Poles to accept a nation that made room for a rainbow alongside the traditional red and white.<sup>56</sup> With "Rainbow," Masłowska offers viewers a glitchy vision of the showdown between aggressive grayness and the colorful "threat" conservatives imagine. In a video that regularly deteriorates into indecipherable static, visual distortion mirrors ideological distortion as Masłowska contrasts two conceptions of Poland—one a colorful reflection of the diversity of its community, and the other a gray assertion of an unchanging nation eternally replaying its past.

Against a sparse, but propulsive beat, "Rainbow" finds Masłowska delivering an account of life as bleak as the accompanying video's black-and-white color palette—there is "Noise on the block/Trash on TV."<sup>57</sup> Looking for some relief, she thinks to head outside, but what does she find there? The rainbow. Confronted with the colorful symbol, Masłowska begins her screed. "Everyone would get pissed off," she asserts before asking, "Who was harmed when the norm was empty, gray?"<sup>58</sup> Though she had not appeared content with the gray reality described at the start of the video, she certainly was not asking for *this*.<sup>59</sup>

Dissatisfied with the presence of the rainbow, Masłowska repeatedly asserts a vision for how her narrator thinks Poland should look. With a sharply articulated rap, she insists, "It's supposed to be black and white/It's supposed to be black and white/And preferably gray-gray/One gray race/One gray mass."<sup>60</sup> This vision of Poland without color is an exaggerated distortion of the rejection of the rainbow and, more broadly, of difference. This is not Masłowska directly quoting nationalist rhetoric, but rather amplifying it and pushing it to its absurd extreme. It thus becomes a parody of those who would claim that diversity challenges traditional Polish values. Such nationalist thought, Maria Janion noted in 2006, is perpetuated by those who look to define the modern nation in a language that samples the rhetoric of Roman Dmowski's right-wing National Democracy movement from the first half of the twentieth century, with the exception being that

56. "Rainbow" was sponsored by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute and initially erected in front of the European Parliament in Brussels in 2011 to mark the Polish Presidency of the EU. After its relocation to Warsaw, the statue was destroyed several times—both by arsonists and errant fireworks. Though Wójcik insisted her work was not political and only intended to bring beauty to the city, opponents to its public display claimed it was a "symbol of deviancy" that promoted the LGBT movement. See: Agnieszka LeNart, "Julita Wójcik's Rainbow Vandalised in Warsaw," *Culture.pl*, 13 October 2012, <http://culture.pl/en/event/julita-wojciks-rainbow-vandalised-in-warsaw>.

57. Original: *w bloku hałas/w TV chata*

58. Original: *No każdy by się wkurwił [ . . . ] Komu to szkodziło, że normalnie było pusto, szaro*

59. It is worth noting that while Masłowska's accompanying statement associates the video with Wójcik's installation, the song makes no explicit reference to the work. It thus becomes a generalized—and thus even more ridiculous—assault on rainbows.

60. Original: *Ma być czarno- biało,/Ma być czarno- biało,/Ma być biało- biało/A najlepiej szaro- szaro*



FIGURE 5. Michał Piróg dances in the video for Mister D.'s "Tęcza" (2014).

they "replaced anti-Semitism with homophobia."<sup>61</sup> The "one gray race" the song advocates is a reflection of this rhetoric of exclusion and also serves as a warning that, without divergent perspectives, people become indistinguishable from one another, a nightmare of a "gray mass"—and not one, the lyrics point out, that has anything in common with a brain.<sup>62</sup> This is not, Masłowska stresses, a well-reasoned position.

After bemoaning the encroachment of color and restating the refrain calling for a black-and-white Poland, the strong beat of the track gives way to a breathy repetition of the word "rainbow" accompanied by a swirling synth line. Aurally evoking a disorienting dream, the video offers a vision of what a "rainbow world" might look like. Michał Piróg, a Polish dancer and choreographer, takes center stage, dressed in a shiny red tracksuit and mesh top and caressing a rainbow-colored dildo against his face (Fig. 5). He is soon joined by a group of similarly dressed dancers. Again, Masłowska appears to be sampling homophobic rhetoric and pushing it to its extreme, presenting their nightmare of a highly sexualized, rainbow-loving dancer who quickly amasses a group of followers.<sup>63</sup>

61. Maria Janion, in Jarosław Kurski, "Moje herezje antynarodowe – rozmowa z Marią Janion" (My Anti-national Heresies – Conversation with Maria Janion), *Wyborcza.pl*, 26 May 2006, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,3374302.html>. Original: *Choćby spór o to, czym jest współczesny, nowożytny naród. Język rządzących polityków to język neoen-decki, który zastąpił antysemityzm homofobią.*

In Janion's analysis, we see a theorization of the replaying of a nationalist rhetoric that defines the Polish nation by its majority traditions. Dmowski (1864-1939) argued that the newly independent Poland that emerged from the end of World War I should be defined as Polish-speaking and Roman Catholic, thus leaving no room in the nation for the sizable population of ethnic and religious minorities. While anti-Semitism still exists in Poland, Janion notes that homophobia has replaced it as the "acceptable" prejudice of conservative nationalists. Once again, a population is deemed "other" and foreign to the Polish nation, incompatible with the vision of a homogenous Polishness.

62. Original: *Co jednak z mózgową wspólne wiele nie ma*

63. This vision of LGBT movements as characterized by hypersexuality and a desire to "convert" people is common among those opposed to the promotion of equal rights in Poland. See: Małgorzata Rusek, "Wykładowca z seminarium: Homoseksualiści to pedofile, a do LGBT należą też zoofile i nekrofile" (Lecture from the seminary: Homosexuals are pedophiles, and LGBT also includes zoophiles and necrophiles), *Radom.Wyborcza.pl*, 19 March 2019, <http://radom.wyborcza.pl/radom/7,48201,24561848,wykladowca-z-seminarium-homoseksualisci-to>

This colorful scene ends with a cut to footage of flames, collaged with the smiling face of Masłowska’s collaborator Monsieur Z (Maciej Szupica, a Polish video artist and musician). The brief glimpse into the imagined world of rainbows ends with fire. “This is Poland,” Masłowska declares reentering the frame. It is a jarring transition and one that underscores Masłowska’s critique of a nationalism based in exclusion—*this* is Poland, a nation basking in the flames of intolerance. As she goes on to describe Poland, Masłowska continues to engage this contrast between the fiery act of intolerance and assertions that traditional Polish (Catholic) values promote love and acceptance. Having repeated “this is Poland,” Masłowska continues, “we welcome all of you/these are our billboards,/these are our churches/and this is our plate for the stray wanderer,/and it’s black over everything,/that’s our rainbow that smokes and sways,/black/enjoy the barbeque.”<sup>64</sup> Here, Masłowska presents a series of what should be symbols of acceptance and warmth—the promise of welcoming all, the traditional empty plate left at the Christmas Eve table as a sign that no one should be turned away, a hospitable invitation to “enjoy the barbeque.” In mixing these symbols over the image of a flaming rainbow, however, she transforms them into their opposite and reveals the hypocrisy of “welcoming all” if “all” only includes those who blend into your “gray mass.” In this unsettling collage, Masłowska suggests that perhaps it is those espousing “traditional” values and nationalist sentiment who are in fact performing a parody of those beliefs—speaking of Christian charity, but implying anything but.

In her sampling of this nationalist and conservative Catholic vision of Poland, Masłowska exposes a specific vision of that nation—one that assumes an authenticity based in the perception of a divinely defined entity. This is a conception Janion contrasts with the notion of the nation as an “imagined community” born of and maintained by the exchange of ideas, history, and culture. Such a nation, Janion notes, is always “still in development.”<sup>65</sup> “Rainbow’s” gray Poland is instead fixed, reflective of those who do not want to see the nation as malleable, but rather “a community given by supernatural forces, a holy community, containing in itself a heavenly element, or a biological community.”<sup>66</sup> Such a reading of the nation sees change as a threat to identity, for tradition is framed as reflecting essential character.

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pedofile-a-do-lgbt.html?disableRedirects=true; Marc Santora, “Poland’s Populists Pick a New Top Enemy: Gay People,” *The New York Times*, 7 April 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/07/world/europe/poland-gay-rights.html>.

64. Original: *To jest polska/Witamy was wszystkich/To są nasze bilbordy/To są nasze kościoły/A to jest nasz ta-lerzyk dla zbląkanego wędrowca/A to czarne nad wszystkim/To co tak dymi i się kiwa/To jest nasza tęcza, cza, cza, cza/ Czarna/Zapraszamy na grilla*

65. Maria Janion, in Jarosław Kurski, “Moje herezje antynardowe.” Original: *Wówczas takie dziedziny jak historia idei, historia literatury, historia języka, historia sztuki bądź historia religii mają bardzo istotne znaczenie dla tego zespołu wyobrażeń, bo go bezustannie formują i sprawiają, że idea narodu jest cały czas w rozwoju.* The formulation of the nation as an “imagined community” was presented by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, NY: Verso, 1991).

66. Janion, in Kurski, “Moje herezje antynardowe,” Original: *Jeśli ktoś uważa, że naród to wspólnota dana przez siły nadprzyrodzone, wspólnota święta, zawierająca w sobie pierwiastek nadziemski, albo wspólnota biologiczna, to wówczas stajemy w obliczu dwóch skonfliktowanych wyobrażeń.*

Whether interpolating homophobic stereotypes, hypocritical values, or nationalist rhetoric, “Rainbow” exposes the chasm between stated values and actions and magnifies these attitudes to the point of absurdity. In this ironic critique of conservative nationalism, Masłowska’s perspective echoes Janion’s, revealing the inconsistencies with a vision of authentic Polishness that leaves no room for change—that insists the nation *is* something beyond what people make of it. As it engages with the assertion that “this is Poland,” Masłowska’s bleak picture of the colorless Poland stands as an indictment of the rhetoric of the conservative, “gray” Poland. In its place, then, viewers might imagine a nation that recognizes and celebrates both samples of its past and the remixing done by the present, rather than insisting on fidelity to an essentialized view of history. Such a reading of the nation as constituted by a network of shared narratives and language resonates with Masłowska’s broader interest in magnifying and exposing genre, identity, and notions of authenticity as products of collectively sampled ideas. Clinging to the notion of (national) authenticity that is anything but a social construct, Masłowska suggests, leads to a glitchy version of Poland where the expressed ideas of freedom and hospitality come to mean their very opposite. The sampling of traditions, much like the sampling of classic recordings, has the potential to either enshrine historical prejudices or imagine a future that uses the values and lessons of the past to create something new.

#### CONCLUSION: SAMPLING AUTHENTICITY

In her parodic engagement with extant narratives and symbols, Masłowska insists upon their multivalence. Simultaneously evoking convention, while also undermining it, Masłowska challenges an understanding of tradition that does not allow for multiple interpretations and applications. In so doing, she gestures towards a hip-hop approach to history—that is, one dedicated to hearing the past, but also to disrupting its narratives and learning its lessons. Unlike the Polish rappers and national politicians who replay historical narratives uncritically and insist upon fealty to tradition, Masłowska uses cultural samples as a critical and creative tool. Using familiar tropes to create a world that is both familiar and strange, Masłowska exposes the construction behind what is often taken as “natural” and demands that we take a closer look. In exposing the historical and cultural samples upon which contemporary Polishness is built, she offers a critique of those who resist change in the name of preserving the nation and its roots in tradition. Authenticity—be it national or artistic—is always a performance of borrowed tropes and narratives. Magnifying those tropes and exposing the construction behind the façade of authenticity, Masłowska forces her audience to reevaluate the notion of an essential national character. We would be better off, she suggests, recognizing that such identities are always constructed and thus enriched—not threatened—by change.

In this, Masłowska’s engagement of tradition—one guided by the logics of hip-hop sampling—offers a way to think not only about Poland’s relationship to its past, but more broadly, about how to consider the role of tradition in contemporary visions of community. Though particularly prone to replaying its past, Poland is certainly not alone in grappling with the degree to which visions of the past inform contemporary notions of

authentic national character. Such calls for fidelity to the past echo through claims that we must “respect our heritage” or protect “real values” regardless of who is excluded by that heritage or marginalized by those “values.” Again, hip-hop sampling offers the tools to move beyond such conservative relations to the past—both as a means to parody outdated rhetoric and amplify otherwise silenced narratives.

Through a close reading of Masłowska’s performance as Mister D. on the tracks “Bread” and “Rainbow,” this article argues that using the logics of hip-hop to sample the constitutive narratives of contemporary Polish culture, Masłowska both denies any “natural authenticity” that exists at the exclusion of others and magnifies the absurdity of national and genre conventions. In so doing, her project not only engages the tools of hip-hop, but also embraces its potential to disrupt entrenched narratives and posit new relationships to the past. From the beginning, Polish hip-hop was quick to blend the historiographic potential of the genre with the nation’s cultural narratives. Playfully appropriating the tropes of the genre, Masłowska critiques both the conservatism of much Polish hip-hop, as well as dominant visions of Polishness unwilling to look beyond chauvinistic readings of tradition. In her creation of familiar, but undeniably strange, Polish and hip-hop landscapes, Masłowska exposes authenticity as performance. ■

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