EDITORIAL

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Mapping the global hip hop nation at 50: Introducing the 'Hip Hop Atlas' Special Issue

ABSTRACT

In 2023, hip hop culture celebrates its 50th anniversary since its founding in The Bronx borough of New York City. The journal Global Hip Hop Studies (GHHS) *takes this historic date as an occasion to explore the culture's complex histories, narratives and meanings around the world in its Special 'Hip Hop Atlas' Double Issue. Initiated by American hip hop producer Greg Schick and co-edited with German hip hop scholar Sina A. Nitzsche, the double issue, for the first time in the journal's history, presents sixteen concise histories from all continents of the world including Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Germany, Ghana, India, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, Senegal, South Africa, Thailand and Ukraine. The articles explain to larger audiences interested in global hip hop culture when and how hip hop first arrived in a given country and how is has developed since its arrival. How does it combine global with local cultural, linguistic and musical forms to create unique style(s) and modes of expression? What role does it play today in its respective contexts? Providing an analytic overview of the*

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articles written by artists, scholars and educators, the editors argue that after more than 50 years hip hop's global evolution continues to be a powerful, fascinating and dynamic process which ranges from its existence as an established art form, popular culture and research subject in some world regions to moving towards such a status in others.

This year we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the founding of hip hop culture in The Bronx. We want to take this special birthday as an occasion to explore its histories, narratives and meanings around the world which result from the 'Hip Hop Atlas' project. This project was initiated by hip hop activist Greg Schick. For many years, Greg has worked with global and local artists for events and platforms, such as the World Hip Hop Market and Trinity International Hip Hop Festival (see an in-depth interview by Murray Forman in this double issue). True to hip hop's inherent interdisciplinarity, the 'Hip Hop Atlas' is the result of a collaboration with Sina A. Nitzsche, founder of the European Hiphop Studies Network, whose research analyses hip hop culture through a cultural and media studies lens (Nitzsche and Grünzweig 2013; Nitzsche 2020). The objective of this project is therefore to provide a much needed and concise overview over the development of hip hop cultures around the globe: when and how did hip hop first arrive in a given country? How has it developed since its arrival? How does it combine global with local cultural, linguistic and musical forms to create unique style(s) and modes of expression? What role does it play today in its respective contexts?

For the first time in the short history of our journal *Global Hip Hop Studies* (*GHHS*), we present sixteen concise histories from all continents of the world. We argue in this Special Double Issue that hip hop's global evolution continues to be a powerful, fascinating and dynamic process which ranges from its existence as an established art form, popular culture and research subject in some world regions to moving towards such a status in others. This double issue therefore echoes the idea of general editors Adam Haupt and Griff Rollefson, that 'hip hop is a manifestly global and intercultural phenomenon that takes many creative and critical forms' (2020: 3) as well as modes of development.

Almost fifty years after its creation in The Bronx, hip hop has widely impacted many spheres of life as well as scholarly studies around the world. Countless in-depth books and edited volumes have been published about hip hop in different regions and contexts (Alim 2009; Clark and Mwanzia Koster 2014; Castillow Planas 2016; Nair and Murali 2008; Ntarangwi 2009; Saucier 2011, to name but a few). The 'Hip Hop Atlas' issue profits from this knowledge of global hip hop culture and global hip hop studies. Collaborating on the texts, however, it soon became clear to us that while some regions and communities have experienced considerable research and public attention over the past decades, others are still somewhat underrepresented in the *GHHS* nation. Our Special Double Issue is not an exception in this regard, as we tried to focus on representing major world regions which in themselves are multifaceted.

We also noticed that there are hardly any short overviews of national scenes for readers who want to learn about major developments, pioneering artists and recent developments in a nutshell. This double issue will help researchers, students and interested audiences unfamiliar with hip hop cultures in different countries to get a first glimpse into their historic development and current debates through different analytic lenses from established artists and scholars.

We are happy to present this multiplicity of histories, narratives and voices written by experts in the culture.

The atlas metaphor of this Special Issue serves as a conceptual tool to organize the contributions. From a spatial perspective, an atlas is a book which provides concise overviews over the world's manifold geographies in maps, charts and figures. The authors in this issue present spatialized narratives of hip hop histories and communities from all over the world. Aligned with existing hip hop research on spaces and places (most notably, Forman [2002]), they examine how globally circulating rap music and hip hop culture contributed to the development of local, regional and national communities in the past. They also explicate how hip hop continues to be one of the most powerful voices of protest, celebration and community organizing principles to date. Similar to an atlas, the contributors provide valuable resource lists of artists, albums and other hip hop 'gems' in addition to the short overviews. This way, readers can learn about a wide variety of global hip hop communities in a nutshell. In order to explore the sonic landscapes in greater detail, we also compiled a Spotify playlist out of the contributors' suggestions which can be accessed at https://open.spotify.com/playlist/7M7wx7m1c7r6YPDTv38iLT?si=AMDOrVtDT_mHLZFPmdi0Qw or by scanning the QR Code below.

The hip hop histories presented in our Special Issue are shaped by the unique positionality of our authors as artists, archivists, bloggers, breakers, curators, emcees, deejays, fans, observers of the culture, practitioners and radio hosts as well as researchers. Their histories are by no means intended as fixed, static and all-encompassing overviews. Instead, they show the rich variety of voices and perspectives that have comprised hip hop studies since its humble beginnings roughly thirty years ago. They want to inspire knowledge-hungry young people with introductions to these far-flung communities of the global hip hop nation while encouraging advanced readers to rethink established narratives, histories and paths of knowledge as they read across these scenes, communities and perspectives.

The contributions in this Special Double Issue affirm that rap music and hip hop culture arrived in the national contexts by way of popular culture and

Figure 1: The 'Hip Hop Atlas' playlist – Spotify QR-code.

media as much as by personal connections and networks. As many authors here suggest, film was the breakout media which introduced the culture locally. The release of films including *Wild Style*, *Style Wars*, *Beat Street*, *Breakin'* and *Flashdance* among others in the early 1980s introduced young audiences to the hip hop movement in Australia, Brazil, Chile, Canada, Germany, Japan, South Africa, Ireland and the Czech Republic. Youngsters in India, Japan, Argentina and the Netherlands listened to songs and cover songs of Sugarhill Gang's 'Rapper's Delight' (1979) or the later track 'Ice, Ice, Baby' (Vanilla Ice, 1990) while the circulation of mixtapes and emergence of hip hop collections in record stores helped familiarize the music within the scenes in Ghana and Thailand. Community radio stations in Canada played rap music and broadcast their knowledge about the culture whereas in the Czech Republic, younger audiences listened to German and Polish stations for latest releases and artist interviews.

Besides popular media channels, hip hop culture also spread via personal networks. Research from Ghana and Senegal, for instance, shows that the emergence of rap and hip hop culture is tightly interwoven with migration to the United States: The Ghanaian diaspora in the United States provided the necessary access to the culture. As mostly wealthier families in both countries had access to those resources and networks, affluent young people were the first ones to start rapping or breaking in the 1980s. Similarly, hip hop hit Ireland via personal and diasporic links, just as roots reggae had arrived in the suitcases of Caribbean sailors a decade before.

While the contributions affirm the importance of local spaces and places for hip hop's emergence and development, new and social media had a deep impact on many hip hop communities (see *GHHS* 2.2 on hip hop and the internet for a deeper analysis). The internet opened new modes of production and distribution as it allowed artists to tightly connect the global and the local. As the authors in this double issue explain, artists in Argentina, Australia, Chile, India, Japan, the Netherlands and Ukraine use online platforms, such as Spotify, SoundCloud, Instagram and Tik Tok, to organize their events, build their infrastructure, distribute their ideas, music and merchandise, present their activism, establish new networks and foster artistic and technological innovations. Social media also allow for aesthetic experimentation as well as a digitized circulation of archival materials.

Over the past 50 years many hip hop communities, traditions and cyphers have formed around the world, our writers suggest. While in the beginning, many artists were inspired by American rap music and even rapped in English first, they eventually switched to their own languages to address their issues and to connect with local identities creating a wider linguistic, musical and cultural diversity. Artists in Canada, Germany, India, Ireland and Senegal use rap music to express themselves in local tongues and distance themselves from English, French or other colonial influences, to form their own identities, cultures and industries. Brazilian artists have 'emphasized translating as the method to create new Black identities and new, cool personae for the periphery neighborhoods' (p. 35 in this issue) creating their own localized versions. Thai audiences increased their affective connections to rap music because they could engage in the culture with their own languages and with their symbolic reference points. Indeed, in this Special Double Issue's lone album review, Gustavo Souza Marques shows how Brazilian MC Coronel has, himself, changed identities over the course of his long career.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the authors point out that hip hop continues to be used as a powerful medium to express critiques of unequal racial, social

and cultural power relations. Contributions on Australia, Argentina, Chile, Senegal and South Africa highlight the culture's political dimension as a powerful voice against racial, gender, sexual and class oppression. Amidst the Russian-led war against Ukraine which aims to destroy the nation's cultural heritage, hip hop continues to be a source of identity formation and reaffirmation. Hip hop in Ukraine engages in a discourse of freedom from oppression and offers its own takes on geopolitical developments. This 'voice of protest' narrative formulated by many authors is one of the most popular and well-known narratives that also explains the ongoing vibrancy and global relevance of the culture.

The contributions convincingly affirm that global hip hop at 50 has entered the dominant culture in many contexts. It increasingly appears in spheres outside of hip hop, such as TV commercials, kids' shows, and even art museums as exhibition reviews by Karim Hammou and Caleb J. Gale show. Today, global hip hop exists in a wide variety of forms and genres which are expressed in an array of languages. True to its roots, hip hop continues to grow, innovate, celebrate and update cultural heritages, local traditions, and revise existing spatialized narratives by giving them fresh new beats, looks and moves. This Special Double Issue therefore includes one full-length research article by Kalonji Nzinga, that explores hip hop's 'Lyrical (Re)citation' – the remembering, recycling and revoicing that continually updates hip hop's 'something from nothing' genesis stories and keeps the culture fresh.

We invite readers to explore national, regional and localized hip hop cultures in greater detail in this Special Double Issue, engaging with the authors' exciting stories, and learning about the different spellings and meanings of hip hop around the world. We encourage them to take these contributions as mere starting points on their own journeys as 'hip hop heads, artists, activists and scholars both in and beyond the United States' (Haupt and Rollefson 2020: 3) to explore their own and build new local histories. As such, we hope to show in this anniversary Special Double Issue celebrating the culture's 50th anniversary that the existence of these localized hip hop cultures around the world embolden a redefinition of what it means to be 'hip hop'.

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Greg Schick is an event and media producer focused on hip hop culture outside the United States. Since 2004, he has written about, filmed and created events for artists and scholars from more than 75 countries. From 2008 to 2022, he was a producer for the Trinity International Hip Hop Festival in Hartford, Connecticut. In 2014, he co-produced the One Mic: Hip Hop Culture Worldwide festival at the John F. Kennedy Centre for Performing Arts in Washington, DC. Schick has a Bachelor of Journalism degree from University

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