

Global Hip Hop Studies  
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## EDITORIAL

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# Feudal city walls or global village? It takes a nation of millions to hold us back

Welcome to *Global Hip Hop Studies (GHHS)* 1.2, late on account of a global pandemic that continues to threaten lives and livelihoods around the world. Like so many people facing hardship in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, artists face the challenge of negotiating public health risks and lockdowns, on the one hand, and the struggle to make a living as performing and creative artists in a world that is already shaped by commercial imperatives, on the other hand.

In our editorial to *GHHS* 1.1, we reflected on the significance of launching a global journal of hip hop studies at the very moment that the logic of ethnonationalism seemed to be shaping public discourse and policy. COVID-19 seemed to add to the problem as nation states closed borders in efforts to slow down the spread of the virus, but it also inadvertently reasserted national borders and the metaphorical 'feudal city wall', to which former US president Donald Trump actually made literal reference during many of his campaign

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speeches. Of course, the metaphor of the feudal walled city is also apt when we think of the United Kingdom's embrace of Brexit at a time when it would make sense for it to stand with the European Union in the current global crisis. The rejections of Marshall McLuhan's utopian view of globalization gave way to the rise of right-wing politics, Balkanization and key instances of police brutality directed particularly at Black subjects and people of colour in both Black minority (United States, United Kingdom) and Black majority contexts (South Africa) – some would say that the reassertion of conservative, bigoted values came as a backlash to the efforts of social movements, such as #RhodesMustFall, #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo.

Add to this mix the problem of vaccine nationalism as wealthier nations both hoard vaccines and refuse to support South Africa, and India's proposal that COVID-19 drug patents be waived. The TRIPS waiver of COVID-19 drug patents would speed up the production and distribution of vaccines in the Global South and, thereby, stem the rapid spread of the virus, globally. The longer wealthy nations and pharmaceutical monopolies delay the circulation of vaccines in their pursuit of profits, the greater the chances that the virus will mutate and render current vaccines ineffective. With the rise of vaccine apartheid and the dominance of right-wing politics in mind, the utopian notion of globalization as a global village is under threat.

The current reality is decidedly dystopian. It is easy to be pessimistic at this historical juncture. But, for us, the very fact that we are presenting *GHHS* 1.2 to you, the reader, tells us that artists, activists and scholars are resilient in the face of adversity. Even as the world came to a virtual standstill and national borders shut down, hip hop heads kept creating, networking and engaging – often in new ways and in new virtual spaces. No feudal city walls will divide us. It takes a nation of millions to hold us back, to sample and remix Public Enemy.

We would like to thank contributors to *GHHS* for their patience and to thank our peer reviewers and editorial team for being so generous with their time, labour and expertise as they negotiated successive lockdowns, precarious working conditions, public health risks and personal battles with health and loss. We appreciate your investment in this global project.

*GHHS* 1.2 is a testimony to the ideal of a form of globalization where our collective histories of conquest and division as well as racialized and gendered inequality are overcome to create transnational partnerships and networks of knowledge production. This issue features scholarship on Chicago drill rap's social mediascape alongside work on the localism of Korean hip hop videos, the place of hip hop in the Gabonese political landscape, the legacy of anti-fascist activism in Italian hip hop and a selection of shorter format pieces focusing on hip hop visuals, books, media and events.

In *GHHS*'s visually centred Show & Prove section, our newest section editor, graffiti writer and scholar, Jacob Kimvall, puts the global upwelling of MF DOOM commemorative pieces into global and historical perspective. The piece reflects on the community-centred praxis of graffiti memorialization before offering some conclusions about why DOOM's madvillainy was so inspiring to graffiti writers around the world. Through a look at a selection of historical pieces and a pair of recent MF DOOM memorials in his hometown of Stockholm, Sweden – where he's at – Kimvall helps us understand the power of the mask.

In the first article, "We (mostly) carry guns for the internet": Visibility labour, social hacking and chasing digital clout by Black male youth in

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Chicago's drill rap scene', Jabari Evans makes the case for the agency of hip hop artists in Chicago's drill rap scene by exploring the ways in which they employ social media to establish their artistic profiles. The article offers meaningful insights into the ways in which marginalized African American artists are able to leverage off the network power of social media, celebrity and branding exercises to establish themselves in a music industry and neo-liberal economic context that continues to be hostile to Black subjects. One might say that these artists have hacked an industry and available technologies that may not have been created with them in mind at all.

In 'From *Hanok* to *Hanbok*: Traditional iconography in Korean hip hop music videos', CedarBough T. Saeji explores the ways in which recent Korean hip hop music videos cut and mix signifiers of traditional Korean culture and history with more contemporary elements of hip hop and Korean popular music. The article is particularly interesting in light of the cultural imperialism thesis as the global appeal of hip hop could be used as evidence for the thesis that one of the ills of globalization is the homogenization of culture. Instead, Saeji's article is a reminder of the agency of artists in diverse contexts. It is also a reminder that cultures are made and remade, that they are not cast in stone – essentialist views of cultures and tradition hardly apply here. However, the author acknowledges that representations of a traditional Korea play a role in making the country attractive to local and international tourists, especially via social media platforms, such as Instagram. There certainly is room for a critique of cardboard-cut representations of the country; however, the author emphasizes the agency of the musicians under discussion – not unlike the argument presented by Jabari Evans in his article on drill rap.

In an article titled, "Faut que ça rappe!": Musical revitalization, social healing and the politics of performance in the Gabonese rap world (2009–20)', Alice Aterianus-Owanga proposes the concept of 'music revitalization' in an exploration of artistic agency in Gabonese hip hop. The article makes sense of the ways in which local meanings are created in the use of hip hop to address politics and religion, situating hip hop's politics of authenticity as a key index of who speaks for 'the people' in their dynamic interplay with powerful institutions. As with the articles by Evans and Saeji, Aterianus-Owanga makes the case for agency and provides meaningful insights into the ways in which artists use digital media technologies to frame their ideas and enable community.

The final article in *GHHS* 1.2 examines the intertwined roots of hip hop community and social activism in Italy, with Enrico Zammarchi's piece, "If I see a black dot, I shoot it on sight!": Italian rap between anti- and neo-fascisms'. The article examines the historically pivotal role of the left-wing *centri sociali* ('squatted centres') in the development of early Italian hip hop, suggesting that a new generation of rappers have taken up the anti-fascist mantle. Focusing on the *letteraturap* ('literature-rap') of Kento and Murubutu, Zammarchi shows how these artists have reinvigorated left-wing activism as a response to both the toothless complicity of the parliamentary Left and a growing tide of Italian neo-fascism. Yet, through his analysis of the hip hop group Drittarcore, Zammarchi also shows how neo-fascist groups like CasaPound have appropriated and reinvented hip hop arts to appeal to young people and advance their own bigoted ethnonationalist project. To be sure, the appeal of the feudal city wall remains powerful in this time of global precarity and uncertainty.

Our Book Review section for this issue begins with Jeanette Jouili's consideration of the global frame provided in the new book, *Representing Islam*:

*Hip-Hop of the September 11 Generation*, by Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir. It continues with Catherine Appert's review of Msia Kibona Clark's *Hip-Hop in Africa: Prophets of the City and Dustyfoot Philosophers* – another multi-sited study, here offering insights into hip hop's African identities and its transatlantic continuities. In the third piece for the global and disciplinarily wide range of titles considered in the Book Reviews section of *GHHS* 1.2, Pete Bearder introduces us to a book that has something to say that 'will be hard for some to hear' – Patrick Turner's unblinking intervention into hip hop's cipher of knowledge production and reproduction, *Hip Hop Versus Rap: The Politics of Droppin' Knowledge*.

Our Media & Events Reviews section begins with Max Tretter's analytical review of Haftbefehl's album, *D.W.A. (Das weisse Album, 'The white album')* – an offering from the German rapper of Turkish and Kurdish backgrounds that is a performatively self-reflexive account that straddles 'street rap and social criticism'. Second is Aisha Gallion's ethnographically rich consideration of Benny Starr's live recording at Charleston Music Hall, Charleston, SC on 22 September 2018 through the lens of bell hooks' trenchant classic, *Talking Back*. Bringing this set of articles that extends the purview and impact of the standard media review to a close is a review essay of the hit musical *Hamilton* by Brea Heidelberg that asks us to check our celebrations and continue confronting the colourism that persists in different sectors and contexts across the globe.

Looking ahead, we are happy to announce three forthcoming Special Issues over the next three years, the CFPs of which will be shared in this issue and are also live on the journal's website, <https://www.intellectbooks.com/global-hip-hop-studies> under 'Submission Guidelines'. In order of production, the first Special Issue is 'It's Where You're @: Hip Hop and the Internet', co-edited by Raquel Campos and Steven Gamble. The Special Issue will explore the 'relationship between hip hop and the internet, offering new perspectives on digital communication technologies and their impact on hip hop culture' and will analyse 'the impact of hip hop culture on global online life, especially in non-western contexts' – a particularly timely topic that will look to reflect, comment and build on hip hop's online turn over the last years of global lockdowns and pause of in-person concerts and IRL ciphers.

The second Special Issue, the double issue 'Knowledge Reigns Supreme', is co-edited by Justin Williams, Sina Nitzsche and Darren Chetty and seeks to include articles, reviews and alternative format pieces addressing the role of knowledge across the elements of global hip hop culture. It will ask contributors to address questions about the role of knowledge in global hip hop culture: how is it mediated across other elements, social groups and cultural borders? How is knowledge passed on from one hip hop generation to another? What is the role of hip hop knowledge in educational institutions around the globe and how can it be used for the benefit of artists and the community? In short, the guest editors ask us to bring all of our diversely disciplined and community-centred energies to bear in considering 'What can we as researchers, activists, and artists learn from knowledge practices in global hip hop culture?'

Finally, in acknowledgement of hip hop's inclusion into the Paris 2024 Olympics, the third Special Issue, 'Breaking and the Olympics' – co-edited by Mary Fogarty and Jason Ng – will drop in the run-up to the games and plans 'to not only explore contemporary debates about breaking in the Olympics, but also to develop critical discourse that can offer insight to practitioners, cultural organizations and the IOC'. The co-editors are 'especially interested in

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research projects that engage in local, regional and national perspectives and can provide useful resources transnationally for those involved in this milestone cultural moment'. Because of overwhelming interdisciplinary interest in the subject, this special issue (to be published in the lead up to the games in 2023) has expanded into a double issue that will first address pragmatic matters that the IOC might take up to follow hip hop's lead in making this an equitable, sustainable, and community-centred moment in Olympic history, while the second issue will turn to more cultural analysis about this significant moment in hip hop history.

We're thrilled to have such a wide-ranging and timely set of Special Issues forthcoming, and hope interested scholars and artists will contact the guest editors to get involved in reviews and shorter format pieces (as deadlines for articles have passed). As always, we are open to general submissions for our rolling calls as we regain our momentum and commence with a twice yearly publication schedule for *GHHS*. Again, thanks for your patience as contributors and readers as we get back on track – 'crispy n clean'.

Finally, with so many lives lost during this difficult time, we think it appropriate to pay homage to all who have lost loved ones and continue to face hardships – be they financial, emotional, psychological or otherwise. We stand with you on these shifting sands and trust that our solidarity will be our strength.

We also take the opportunity to pay tribute to some of the hip hop luminaries who have left our realm during this time – MF Doom, DMX, Pop Smoke, Malik B, Chynna, Black Rob, Shock G, DJ Killa B, Nish, Adolpho 'Shabba Doo' Quiñones, John 'Ecstasy' Fletcher (Whodini), Mark Anthony 'Prince Markie Dee' Morales (Fat Boys), Robert 'Rocky' Ford, Jr, Big Floyd and all those who put their mark on the world through hip hop arts, activism and knowledge production.

One love.

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