Hip Hop, Youth, and Urbanism

"Hip hop is from the United States. So, in Vietnam they copy from gangster rap videos, right?" "Hip hop is violent and misogynistic. So, why should it be a good thing for young Vietnamese people to engage with hip hop?" These are some of the many concerned questions that I am often confronted with when telling people about my research on youth and hip hop in Vietnam. What these questions imply, among many other things, is what Jenny Mbaye (2014: 396) refers to as an overt focus on hip hop's origin, which results in a very specific "geohistorical understanding of hip hop." According to such thinking, all appearances of hip hop outside the setting of its particular geohistorical origin are considered to be mere appropriations, a mimicry of what is estimated as an original culture. In order to overcome such single referentiality, Mbaye (2014: 396) suggests that we think of hip hop as multi-polar and multi-referential. Meanwhile, such multi-referentiality has been acknowledged by many scholars, who conceptualize hip hop as an idiom or cultural form that travels transnationally, is locally adopted and integrated into local practices and materials, thereby creating new identities (Alim 2009; Androutsopoulos 2003; Pennycook 2007; Schulz 2012). Generally, the idea that boundaries between nations, cultures, and other forms of social organization are becoming more and more fluid, and that "flows" should be given much more analytical attention, are claims that have surfaced among scholars interested in culture, and particularly popular culture (Appadurai 1996; Condry 2001; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Yet, latent in many accounts of cultural flows, is a division between centre and periphery within globalized cultural networks. Since the United States is considered the cultural and commercial centre of hip hop, other localized hip hop markets, such as in Vietnam, remain at the periphery of the international music and dance market, struggling for international recognition.

Hip hop is comprised of four elements, including MCing, DJing, graffiti writing, and break(danc)ing,[1] and is often discussed in connection with social inequalities. Halifu Osumare (2001: 173) identifies hip hop as a "global signifier for many forms of marginalizations," while Mbaye (2014: 398) views hip hop as emerging from a "southern positioning," situated at "the margins of an assumed sociality and urbanity." This book takes the trope of southern positioning as a starting point for investigating how hip hop practices, and embodied dance practices in particular, have the potential to cross, subvert, and otherwise permeate seemingly fixed geographical, linguistic, bodily, and gender boundaries. The analysis is situated at a particular moment in history, 30 years after Vietnam's integration into the global economy and the rise of its private sector economy during the so-called Doi Moi period. In academic literature, Vietnam's current political economy is referred to as "late socialist" or "postsocialist" to indicate its transitional form. Both terms are used to capture tensions between the persistence of a one-party-rule authoritarian state on the one hand, and the introduction of a free market economy on the other (Harms 2011; Hue Tam Ho Tai 2001). Li Zhang (2012: 661) uses the term postsocialism to "refer to *conditions* of transformation and articulation of socialist and nonsocialist practices and logics regardless of the official labeling of the state." Both China and Vietnam have embraced market reform, commodification, and consumerism, while officially insisting on socialist ideology and one-party rule. By delving into dancers' everyday lives, this book aims to provide insights into "postsocialist assemblages from the margin" (Li Zhang 2012: 662).

Referring to Brian Larkin's (2013) work on uptake and desire of images and cultural forms, this research started out by asking why hip hop was taken up in Vietnam in the first place, and why young people particularly (although not exclusively) seem to enjoy hip hop. Hip hop began to be practiced in Vietnam in the early 1990s, shortly after the introduction of economic reforms. With the introduction of a privatized market economy, and the country's integration with the world economy, the circulation of people, commodities, and cultural artefacts—such as music, dance, film, art, and so on—began to intensify in unprecedented ways. Students began to study abroad in France, Australia, the

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1   Breakdance is a commercialized term for breaking or b-boying/girling. As I will show in the following, the fourth element of hip hop is much more diverse, comprising diverse street dance styles. In Vietnam, breaking, popping, locking, waacking, hip hop and house dancing are subsumed under the umbrella term of hip hop.

United States, Germany, among other places, and later returned to Vietnam with "information artefacts" (Star et al. 2003: 44), storage and display devices, such as music and video tapes. One of the first b-boys in Vietnam, b-boy LionT, recalls how, in the beginning, no one really knew what they were doing. He remembers that he and other young people merely mimicked the moves they saw on TV or abroad. This memory is one shared by many dancers. Many of the dancers I talked to were either the first to practice a particular style in Vietnam, or they referred to a teacher as the first to learn the bodily practices with which they were so fascinated. Hip hop appeals to young people, as its bodily practices offer room for creativity, innovation, and self-development. Another pioneering b-boy, Phuong Silver Monkey, who like LionT has been a practitioner of hip hop since 1992, explains that "in this music genre, you are free to develop yourself."

Historian David Marr (2000) contextualizes this yearning for development of the self and individual freedom in his work:

> "The trend in the 1990s has been towards diversity and freedom of choice, certainly in comparison with the Stalinist command and control environment of earlier decades. In particular, young men and women are departing the village, loosening family ties, choosing their own occupations, and joining voluntary associations to a degree that would have been unthinkable only ten years ago. How persons in these uncharted waters proceed to look upon themselves is one of the important questions for the twenty-first century." (Marr 2000: 796)

This book provides insight into the uptakes, desires, and aspirations of young people, focusing on diverse street dance styles that are all in local terms summarized under the umbrella term "hip hop culture" (*văn hoá hip hop*). Analysing the actors, spaces, and infrastructures coproducing Vietnam's hip hop community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991), this book embeds dance practices within larger contexts of socioeconomic transformation, urban restructuring, and changing gender relations. Each of the book's chapters introduces a hip hop dance style, its practitioners, and the spaces that are coproduced in collective practice. The young street dancers whom I have met so far are all aware and fond of their particular dance style. Therefore, the reader will engage with breaking, popping and locking, waacking and hip hop dance, while considering each style's local underpinnings in Vietnam. Participating in dance classes, battles, and crew practices, as well as interviewing young street dancers, I found that, for many dancers, participating in hip hop cul-

ture meant leading a good life. Hip hop serves as a vehicle for developing the self, while simultaneously dealing with uncertainties of late socialism. Living a dancing life has implications far beyond the body and self, as it calls into question and simultaneously adheres to an ethics of striving identified by social anthropologist Minh Nguyen (2019). The ethics of striving is comprised of personal achievements, which finally materialize in the accumulation of private wealth, while at the same time receiving social recognition. While indulging in hip hop may not be the conventional lifestyle aspired to by youth in contemporary Vietnam, it becomes clear from the ethnographic evidence that striving in hip hop culture is as much about self-development as it is about creating community and achieving recognition from one's peers. To be sure, the dancers' parents often imagined more conventional lifestyles for their children. Yet, notwithstanding quarrels with members of the older generation, and obstacles presented by the economic precarity of dancing labour, young people between the ages of 20 to 40 continue to follow their passion for dance. Accordingly, I will discuss the overall meaning(s) of hip hop in Vietnam, including dancers' aspirations as well as the anxieties and obstacles they face for doing what they love most: dancing. While I talked to male and female dancers, my research has a gender bias, as I was particularly on the lookout for female protagonists – perhaps owed to my own biography as a lover of hip hop ever since my teenage years. That is why each chapter dedicated to a particular dance style also includes a section on gender performance and relations. Apart from my own intimate relationship with hip hop, my interest in the topic in a Vietnamese context resulted from attention to intersections of embodied practices, performance genres, and gender identities. The hip hop genre is generally considered masculine, occurring in men's spaces, and shaped by norms of aggression and fierce competition – as seen in battles. Women who come to inhabit such spaces are too often viewed as deviating from the norm, especially in dance, as the aesthetics of many dance styles presented in this book are most often assigned to young, energetic, masculine bodies. However, when female artists "comply" with the genre, and adapt to norms of the genre, they radically challenge the masculine domination in hip hop (Berggren 2014: 245), overcoming the binary view of gender altogether. However, as a female participant to this research rightfully pointed out: "I don't think it's about young women, but about people who want to enjoy their life and develop themselves (…). My passion is for dance and I want to do what I want. I want people to know what I need for myself." Accordingly, this book is about young people of diverse genders following their passion. Over 15

years of conducting field research in Vietnam, I noticed the diversification of life styles, fashion, music, and dance styles among urban youth. Over the last decade, Hanoi's youth seems to have become more visible in public spaces, more diverse, and, in a way, louder and more tangible than the first time I visited Vietnam at the turn of the millennium.

Who is young in Vietnam?

The United Nations defines youth as persons aged between 15 to 24 years old (UN 2018). The Vietnamese term for youth, *thanh niên*, originally only denoted young men, but later came to include young women, as well. The Vietnamese dictionary, *Từ điển tiếng Việt*, published by the Institute for Foreign Languages (*Viện Ngôn ngữ học*) in 2003, defines *thanh niên* as "young people, who find themselves in the stage of maturation (Pham 2011: 38). In his book *Thanh Niên*, historian Pham Hong Tung (2011) explains that, according to the Youth Law, individuals between 16 to 30 years old are considered youth. According to this law, the age of 16 is considered the age of criminal responsibility (Drummond and Nguyen 2008). Apart from legal age indices, family status is another determinant of youth in Vietnam, as unmarried and single persons are typically classified as youth. In fact, in a study of youth in Hanoi, many respondents mentioned marriage as marking the end of the stage of youth (Valentin 2008: 80). However, law and regulations are insufficient frames for understanding youth, especially as the experiences of those designated "youth" often diverge from the legal contexts. Karen Hansen (2008) reminds us that, both in the Global North and South, people younger than the legal age work for wages, have sexual relations, and bear children. At the same time, many people stay in their parents' or relatives' homes far beyond legal age of adulthood. In urban Vietnam, young people do not necessarily intend to establish their own independent households before or after marriage, as many instead seek to reside with their extended families for various economic and cultural reasons, such as to fulfil socially assigned rules as daughters, sons, in-laws, and so forth (Hansen 2008) – not to speak of the exorbitant rents they would have to pay for small apartments of their own in the city. In her study of youth in urban Vietnam, Karen Valentin (2008: 79) found that, although youth is a category generally denoting both social constraint and freedom, young respondents mostly referred to the responsibilities they had as young Vietnamese. For instance, they mentioned preparation for professional careers, marriage,

financial support for elders, and law-abiding citizenship, while contributing to the development of the nation. The responsibilities cited by these young Vietnamese people align with the ideal of the socialist moral subject (Nguyen 2019; Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012), which will be discussed in-depth in chapter 8, "SELF-ENTREPRENEURISM AND SELF-FASHIONING."

With over half of the population being younger than 25, these young people have not experienced the hardships of the Indochina Wars or the famines of the 1980s. All they know from this period derives from stories told by their parents and grandparents, as well as from diverse media reports and school curricula. In contrast to the previous generation, the younger generation born after Doi Moi grew up in the context of accelerating economic growth. As a result, Vietnamese youth, like youth in many places around the world, has been accused of an overt focus on consumption. However, Christina Schwenkel (2011) cautions against assumptions often made by government officials and members of older generations, who believe that young people who grew up in times of peace and prosperity do not understand, nor recognize, the older population's sacrifice to liberate the country.

In fact, young people in late socialist Vietnam experience the war's enduring aftermath, too. Schwenkel reminds us that Vietnamese youth embody values central to the revolution, such as betterment and development. Yet, in contrast to older generations, they draw on capitalism as a tool to achieve the ends of national sovereignty, prosperity, and progress. With her argument, she already alludes to the dovetailing of authoritarianism with neoliberalism, which she later discusses in a special issue on neoliberalism in Vietnam (Schwenkel 2012), situating her findings within the larger context of late socialist societies (Ong 2008; Li Zhang 2012). Further, Schwenkel considers young people's conspicuous consumption not so much an indicator for the loss of cultural values and norms, but rather as an engagement with capitalism and the global market that is a more effective way to fulfil their familial and national duties (Schwenkel 2011: 133). Making use of the newly gained freedom of movement within Vietnam, and migration abroad, many young people have departed for the cities. The result is a pluralization of destinations, and sources of income in the cities, as well as multiple trajectories toward the future (Simone 2019; Skelton 2002). The socialist state has always had an eye on youth, trying to mobilize young people for its own ends. The Communist Party regards youth as the pillar of the Vietnamese nation (*Thanh niên là giường cột của nước nhà*). The political legacy of the youth dates back to the revolution and the independence movement. In 1925, the Revolutionary

Youth League of Vietnam (*Việt Nam Thanh Niên cách mạng đồng chí hội*), was founded in Canton by old emigrants, including former followers of Phan Boi Chau and communists like Nguyen Ai Quoc, who became renowned as Ho Chi Minh. The Revolutionary Youth League was founded at a time of great political turmoil in French Indochina. In the same year, the elderly Phan Boi Chau was arrested by the French in Shanghai and brought back to Hanoi to stand trial, while Phan Chu Trinh passed away shortly after, with his funeral attracting thousands of people (Chesneaux 1955: 70-71). Prior to the founding of the Revolutionary Youth League, both Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh had already engaged in intellectual movements and political actions. Both scholars had turned from Confucianism to Western rationalism. Informed by the writings of Rousseau and Montesquieu, they preferred the republic over the monarchy and the Romanised Vietnamese script, *Quốc ngữ*, developed by Roman Catholic missionaries in the 17th century, over the Chinese script.

In 1905, Phan Boi Chau decided to migrate to Japan where he founded the League for the Renewal of Vietnam (*Duy Tân hội*) (Chesneaux 1955: 68). Eventually, the movement was comprised of educated middle-class men. As a consequence, the Revolutionary Youth League set itself apart from previous movements owed to its social configuration and political goals. The league aimed at gaining independence, while simultaneously seeking to improve people's livelihoods. This latter goal won the movement support from the industrial working class, which had emerged at the beginning of the 20th century due to the expansion of mines in Tonkin (Northern Vietnam) and plantations in Cochinchina (Southern Vietnam). Eventually, members of the Revolutionary Youth League led the waves of 1928 and 1929 strikes in Tonkin's major cities, Hanoi and Hai Phong (Chesneaux 1955: 70-71). From Vietnamese independence in 1945 until today, the youth has constituted an enduring focal point in the country's political rhetoric, beginning with the writings of Ho Chi Minh, which are cited time and again. During the Eleventh Party Congress, held in 2017, Nguyen Phu Trong—the former general secretary and president of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam since October 2018—called the youth "the masters of the future, the pillar of the country" (*Thanh niên là người chủ tương lai, là giường cột của nước nhà*) (Doanthanhnien 2017). The importance ascribed to Vietnamese youth is also indicated by the existence of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, which claims 3.5 million members. Under direct control of the Communist Party, the Youth Union serves as a preparatory school that grooms young people for future party membership. Membership is only

granted upon a selection process that considers school performance, family background, as well as behaviour and morality (Thayer 2009; Valentin 2008).

The socialist state's focus on urban youth has also been outlined by Jennifer Cole's (2010) research in Madagascar, where urban youth are sent to the countryside for one year. In Vietnam, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union regularly organizes trips to visit "heroic mothers" in faraway places, bringing them food and gifts for their service to the country. At the same time, the Youth Union involves urban youth in urban development projects focusing on environmental and social issues, seeking to provide members with "meaningful" social activities in their leisure time (Valentin 2008: 91). In general, many students regularly engage in youth volunteer activities, such as charity and volunteer work for those who have made sacrifices for the nation (Schwenkel 2011). Apart from mass organizations, various universities clubs and volunteer organizations offer students activities to occupy their spare time, creating a collective identity by serving the nation. Recently, the state has taken to promoting popular culture in order to attract more young people, such as inviting famous singers to national celebrations. Likewise, the Youth Union organizes popular events, such as dance competitions, or singing contests in semi-public places such as stadiums, schools, and cultural centres (Valentin 2008). Apart from these mass organizations, universities and high schools increasingly offer dance clubs, as well. Beside these organized activities aimed at structuring young people's spare time, the urban youth increasingly organizes itself. After school or work, young people often meet in Hanoi's public spaces to meet friends and to participate in diverse sports activities and street dance. They make use of a wide array of resources, knowledges, and sources of income generation. In his account of young people in a precarious urban environment, Abdoumaliq Simone (2019: 27) explains that they "decouple themselves from a fixed set of aspirations and development trajectories and instead use the infrastructures of the city as a means not so much to 'settle' within as to 'traverse' territorial and institutional boundaries." They transgress such boundaries, for example, through their dance practices. A mapping of the dance events that I encountered during my field research in 2018, together with events that I followed on social media, reveals the dancers' high mobility and territorial flexibility. Almost all of the events took place within the administrative boundaries of the city of Hanoi. Only one of the events was organized outside of Hanoi, in the neighbouring Hung Yen Province. Interestingly, this event was not organized by a particular crew, as were many other events that I joined, but was rather coordinated by a private company and sponsored by

the Austrian energy drink company, Red Bull (see chapter 4, "BREAKING"). What particularly struck my interest was how young people traversed institutional boundaries, in particular as young women negotiated and transgressed normative gender roles. Although in their mid- to late-twenties, most of the women I met were single or in relationships, but few had married and none of them had children. Due to the emphasis placed on women's reproductive role – as literal bearers of the nation – women in Vietnam are expected to marry in their twenties, and quickly thereafter bear children (Drummond and Rydstrøm 2004; Schwenkel 2011). Consequently, many female dancers explained that their decision to dance did not always align with their parents' expectations, as they were critical of their children's participation in street dance. Nonetheless, many of the female dancers were finally able to gain their parents acceptance, and sometimes even their recognition.

So, who then is "young" in Vietnam? The discussion of youth in Vietnam shows that legal or age-based definitions are insufficient to explain what is going on *in situ*. Youth is a fluid category, culturally contingent, as well as relational. Who is considered youth varies according to the local context, is highly contested, and constantly changing (Durham 2004; Hansen 2008). Drawing on linguistics, Deborah Durham (2004) suggests that youth is a social shifter. In linguistics, the term shifter denotes something that has both a referential and an indexical or deictic function (Jakobson 1971; Silverstein 1976). Referential meaning points to something in the world that is independent of a particular use. By contrast, the indexical aspect of a shifter can only be comprehended in the context of a particular use in a situated social interaction. With each use, the meaning of the shifter changes. Deictic terms establish a variety of relationships, for instance, determining the spatial relationship of a speaker to an object, temporal relations among parts of an utterance, social relationships between a speaker and listener, and so forth. In sum, social shifter denotes young peoples' changing positions in relationships with others as well as in space. Moreover, shifters allude to the fact that youth is a category always under construction. While "youth" might be stable as a signifier, the signified to whom it can be assigned, including those who understand themselves as such, remains highly contested, political, and is constantly negotiated (Durham 2004: 591-593). As shifters work meta-linguistically, they draw attention to particular relations within a structure of relations, and moreover, to the structure itself (Durham 2000: 116). This idea of a shifter pointing toward the overall structure also emerges in the Vietnamese community of practice and speech community. In Vietnamese, terms of self- and second

person address are defined relationally, and vary according to the age, gender, and status of interlocutors, as well as the context of the speech act. From a sociolinguistic point of view, whomever is considered young in Vietnam is decided on *in situ*, in relational, mostly asymmetric, terms. Consequently, youth as a social shifter is highly dynamic, constantly changing, and yet referential as in the state rhetoric outlined above.

Of course, age has a lot to do with the definition of youth. Accordingly, Durham (2004: 601) suggests putting age at the centre of social analysis, since

> " (…) in arguing over youth, or age, people must address not just the relationships themselves but also the nature of sociality as it is envisioned and made to matter in their lives. Finding youth, or maturity, involves exploring what it means to be a person, what power is and how it is exercised, how people relate to one another, and what moral action might be and who may engage in it and how."

The questions of personhood, morality, and social embeddedness are central to inquiries into the subjectivities of hip hop dancers in the city. In a similar vein, in his monograph, *Spaces of Youth: Work, citizenship and culture in a global context*, sociologist David Farrugia (2018: 111) considers youth cultures as representing relevant sites for understanding shifts in the articulation of social subjectivities and collectivities through culture. He points to the modes of youthfulness that are valorised and devalorised by economies of symbolic prestige across and within different spaces and places. Farrugia identifies a bias in the research on youth culture towards Northern experiences, since the basis for youth cultural research is the notion of subculture, most prominently put forward by scholars from the Chicago School, and subsequently the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Scholars from the Chicago School already related the idea of subculture to the urban, while identifying deviance, or divergence from what was regarded as the norm, as the guiding principle (Cohen 1955; Gordon 1947). In the 1970s and 1980s, scholars from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies became increasingly concerned with the working-class youth. The notion of subculture in relation to youth considers young people's cultural practices and identifications as a response to the structural dynamics of post-war industrial capitalism. In particular, it relates young people's tastes and styles to their changing position within the class structure relative to their parents (Clarke et al. 1997; Cohen 1972; Farrugia 2018). Subcultures offered an alternative to class-based analysis and thus were considered as transitional states, shifting from their

parents' class-based identity toward commercialized mass culture. According to Gelder (1997) subcultures emerge as a means of resolving and expressing the crisis of class.

Apart from such post-war experiences in the Global North, the concept of subculture has been criticised for presupposing a "mainstream" culture from which the subculture diverges. Another point of critique is the idea that subcultures constitute socially enclosed totalities with clear boundaries, demarcating the difference of one subculture from another. Furthermore, the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies' focus on subculture failed to address dimensions of gender, internal stratification, upward social mobility, as well as cultural production (Gelder 1997; Farrugia 2018; Jacke 2009; Schulze 2015). Later on, the academic field of Post-Subcultural Studies or Popular Cultural Studies emerged, situating subcultures in their heterogeneous and hybrid environments, while considering them as temporally limited social phenomenon, without a necessarily enduring nature. Moreover, such studies considered fluidity and mobility as characteristic of subcultures (Jacke 2009; Schulze 2015). In *Hardcore & Gender*, Marion Schulze (2015) chooses a processual approach to the study of subcultures. Choosing an emic perspective, Schulze is interested in the subculture's "doing." Accordingly, she focuses on how actors create social cohesion within the group, and demarcate the group's boundaries in relation to others. Overcoming the assumed linkage of subcultures to territory, moreover, Schulze suggests that subcultures act translocally and transnationally, while taking up elements from diverse social worlds. According to Farrugia (2018), the emphasis on the mobility and fluidity of cultural flows signifies a general shift in social theory. With respect to subcultural theory, this means an "emphasis on the contingent articulations of aesthetic styles and collective identifications through the deterritorialisation of cultural symbols in an era of globalization" (Farrugia 2018: 112). As stated earlier, hip hop has been recognized as involved in cultural flows, being taken up and integrated locally, creating new identities. For instance, the idea of the Global Hip Hop Nation is an imagined community of hip hop practitioners and peers, in which nation still refers to a territorial or at least political-administrative entity.

In this book, instead of referring to the notion of subculture outlined above, or sticking with the term Global Hip Hop Nation, I consider practitioners of hip hop's diverse dance styles as constituting communities of practice. Etienne Wenger (1998) defines a community of practice as a group that develops through mutual engagement in a joint enterprise, creating a common

repertoire. In contrast to the term community, which usually suggests a unity, a degree of social cohesion, or sameness (Cox 2005: 532), the community of practice does not necessarily imply "co-presence, a well-defined, identifiable group or socially visible boundaries" (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98). It may or may not be spatially contained. Accordingly, a community of practice forms around a certain practice rather than a particular locality. Still, communities of practice are situated and local insofar as any activity is situated (Cox 2005; Lave and Wenger 1991; Star 2003). Situated learning and the sharing of knowledge, including the rapid flow of information and the propagation of innovation, are important features of communities of practice. Against this background, this book examines the community of practice emerging around the embodied practices of diverse hip hop dance styles in Vietnam. Apart from focusing on the embodied practice of dance, this book also engages with a sociolinguistic understanding of language as social practice. Language in dance co-constitutes and communicates belonging to a particular community of practice (Bucholtz 1999; Eckert and McConell-Ginet 1992).

Infrastructures of circulation

Technology and economics significantly contribute to the development of cultural forms, such as hip hop (Rose 1994). The hip hop practices of breaking and rap became known and practiced in Vietnam around the 1990s, shortly after the country's integration into the world economy. The country's economic opening, as well as technological progress, significantly contributed to the circulation of hip hop to and within Vietnam. In more recent years, the connection to social media, such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and the like, facilitates the exchange of music, videos, dancers, and knowledge about hip hop.

Before the country's opening-up, music primarily had a political and educational function, culminating in the creation of red music, and its counter-currency, yellow music, which was considered the deviation from the norm and the materialisation of capitalism, such as disco or funk music. After the end of French colonialism, a period in which the urban middle class particularly referred to French cuisine, fashion, and music as markers of social distinction (Dutton 2012; Peters 2012), and the First Indochina War, two regimes with different political orientations developed in northern and southern Vietnam. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam, with its capital in Hanoi and Ho

Chi Minh as its first president, was first oriented to China and since the 1970s toward the Soviet Union. Like many countries of the Eastern Block, the arts had a political function, and were aimed at addressing the masses rather than the small educated elite. Artists and musicians were required to adhere to this political orientation and adopt the style of socialist realism (Huynh 2005). In public spaces, socialist propaganda posters, the rhetoric of the mass organizations, and state media all propagated the ideal image of socialist man that the nation was supposed to follow (Drummond 2004). In this context, revolutionary music (*nhạc đỏ*) developed in the north. *Nhạc đỏ* literally translates as "red," which is also the colour of the Vietnamese national flag. Southern music prior to 1975, by contrast, was referred to as *nhạc vàng*, yellow music. In his monograph, *Fragments from the Present: Searching for Modernity in Vietnam's South*, Philip Taylor seeks to understand the meaning and origin of these two terms. He recalls how few people he spoke to were actually aware of the meaning of *nhạc vàng* and its origin. While most considered its origin Chinese, others thought it meant 'weak,' one 'feudal,' and another 'sick.' Yellow music had been influenced by French and American post-war pop music as well as rock ballads. Themes of yellow music were mostly focused on love as well as the enduring war. Red music, by contrast, was seen as borrowed from the Soviet bloc, Chinese, and Cuban music repertoires. Red or revolutionary music featured tropes of war, the longing for liberty, the collective fight for freedom, and the patriotism of the population (Taylor 2001: 39, 150). With the reunification of the country and the founding of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976, yellow music became the sonic icon of decadence and U.S. occupation. Consequently, yellow music was prohibited and confiscated when detected during any police searches. After the end of the Second Indochina War (1955-1975),[2] and following the country's reunification, many people, mostly from southern Vietnam, fled the country. Many found refuge in the United States and Europe, particularly in France and Germany, where they constituted a Vietnamese diaspora. The so-called *Việt Kiều* initially had little relation with their home country. Parcels and letters that they sent to relatives and friends back home often did not reach their addressees as they were often considered subversive materials (Taylor 2001). Simultaneously, citizens from northern Vietnam migrated as contract workers or students to countries of the

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2   In Vietnam the war is referred to as the American War, whereas the war is globally known as the Vietnam War.

Soviet Block.[3] Along the way, contact to other cultures and forms of thought were established. Although in line with socialist ideology, the government yet again sought to control these outside influences.

At the same time in the 1980s, political songs became less and less popular in Vietnam, particularly with the youth. Concerned with the crisis of popular music in Vietnam, a conference was held on the topic of "Youth—Music—Our Time" (*Tuổi Trẻ—Âm Nhạc—Thời Đại*) in 1982. The aim of the conference, which was attended by senior members of the Musicians' Union and the performing arts, was the development of a vibrant popular song culture in order to attract young people. A major debate evolved around the question of rhythm without mimicking neo-colonial music from the West, such as disco music. In response, Do Nhuan, the general secretary of the Musicians' Union, suggested that musicians draw on the nation's rich rhythmic repertoire (Norton 2015: 13).

The Doi Moi reform of 1986 not only brought a shift in economic policy, but also in the cultural sphere. One year after the party congress, Nguyen Van Linh frankly acknowledged during a meeting with writers that the party leadership acted in an authoritarian manner when it came to literature and the arts, calling on writers to criticize negative aspects of society. As a result, more and more artists and writers began to develop a more critical stance (Norton 2015: 14). Moreover, Vietnam's opening toward the world economy also facilitated the circulation and import of cultural artefacts from non-socialist countries, mostly through networks of the Vietnamese diaspora. Critically observing the influx of Western popular culture to Vietnam, the party-state returned to antagonizing what it referred to as "Western" cultural influences. Finally, in 1996, the VIII Party Congress initiated the "Foreign Social Evils Campaign" (Logan 2000: 254). Western influence was believed to result in a deterioration of cultural norms and traditional values – a discourse that was shared widely across Southeast Asia at the time.[4] Among other problems,

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3   Vietnamese soon to depart for Eastern Europe imagined what their life there would be like, and upon their return told their friends and families what they had encountered. A common trope in these memories is the scent of the West (*mùi Tây*) (Nguyen Thu Giang 2019b).

4   Main proponents of the Asian values debate, Singaporean and Malaysian Prime Ministers Lee Kwan Yew and Mohamad Mahatir propagated that Asian values were not necessarily coherent with Western ideals of democracy and called for a specific political order of Asian societies (Croissant 2015).

state authorities identified premarital sex, prostitution, drug addiction, gambling, and crime as social evils that negatively affected the moral traditions of the country. In other words, social evils were understood as a "dirty" external influence on the (inner) moral order, brought about by globalization. Accordingly, the Foreign Social Evils Campaign particularly became a means for regulating female bodies, gender, and sexualities (Tran 2014). In terms of media and popular culture, the Foreign Social Evils Campaign prohibited the adoption of the English language on billboards, and the consumption of Western music and media. Instead, Vietnamese folklore, including traditional songs and dances, were broadcast on national television (Valentin 2008; Logan 2000; Nguyen 2019). Further measures included raids against entertainment venues, such as karaoke bars and dance halls (Tran 2014). In other words, it became more difficult to physically encounter foreign cultural artefacts, and even more difficult to share musical preferences with others. This stands in stark contrast, for example, to Japanese hip hop, which actually flourished in Tokyo's club culture (Condry 2001). However, the Foreign Social Evils Campaign did not prevent the circulation of cultural commodities into and within Vietnam. In the circulation of hip hop music and artefacts, individuals, most of them Vietnamese exchange students abroad, took on particularly important roles. Studying abroad in Germany, France, Australia, and Great Britain, on their return back home to Vietnam, they brought "information artefacts" (Star et al. 2003: 244) with them, including storage and display devices, such as video tapes and mix tapes. In sum, hip hop artefacts circulated in Vietnam through the mobility of youth cultural symbols and practices, as well as spatially distributed economies of symbols, tastes, and distinctions, operating through flows that transgressed both territorial boundaries (Farrugia 2018) as well as efforts to police what were perceived as negative foreign influences. Translocal connections between otherwise distributed actors emerged in the process, including actors situated at the peripheries of metropolitan centres of the production and consumption of hip hop.

Uptake and desire in the circulation of cultural artefacts

Larkin (2013: 241) considers circulation "not simply as the unfettered movement of objects disseminated instantaneously and globally by new digital technologies, but as involving complex acts of identification and translation, dependent on the fragile, uncertain nature of uptake." Accordingly, Larkin not only considers the material infrastructures of cables and wires as medi-

ating circulation, but also the meaning-making that occurs in local contexts, through which objects and subjects enter into and engage circulation. With respect to subjects and subjectivities, Larkin urges analysts to consider practices of uptake and rejection. Drawing on the example of Hindi film entering into Hausa culture, he argues that uptake is always driven by desire. Circulation then involves "complex acts of identification and translation," as well as commensuration, as these images move across cultural differences (Larkin 2013: 241, 245). As a consequence, the uptake of hip hop in Vietnam was and still is not only mediated by technical means, such as mix tapes and video cassettes, and social media more recently, but also by individuals' desire and willingness to take on new cultural practices. When recalling her musical influences from the USA, a female rapper Suboi says "I listened to Pop, Rock, Rap, Blues, Jazz, but I stopped at Hip Hop. This is, you know, the music of rebellious people, you know, I need that in my life" (Interview Viet Talk 2015). In a similar vein, male hip hop dancer Phuong Silver Monkey, who is considered an "OG" (đại) on the Vietnamese hip hop dance scene, says "Hip hop is very free. In hip hop music, you can easily create with all the skills that you have... In this music, you are free to develop yourself" (Hanyi 2014). In other words, hip hop appears to cater to the desires and aspirations of young people in late socialist Vietnam. Such aspirations concern the two concomitant processes of developing the self, and being a social person, creating (new) forms of sociality that often depart from collectivist socialist ideals.

Dance scholar Thomas DeFrantz (2016: 71) discusses the uptake of dance styles in relation to the circulation of theatricalized social dance forms, such as krumping, waacking, or voguing:

"These forms emerge in local public spheres, where music and dance arise together, each driving the other to light. Some dedicated dancers practice the emerging style until a repeatable basic form solidifies with a name everyone can remember; this simplified dance travels from neighborhood to neighborhood, until landing, inevitably, in some national media orbit. After being exposed on a national stage, expert practitioners develop incalculable choreographies of the form: advanced versions of the movements that extend its expressive capacities. Meanwhile, most of us do a very simple version of the dance for a few months. Some forms become more extravagant in their theatrical capacity, though, and even more expert dancers realize even more eccentric embodied possibilities previously unknown. I say eccentric to underscore the hand-made, extravagantly detailed, expert versions of Black

social dances that inevitably develop. These versions bear little resemblance to the dance that was briefly practiced by a larger population."

According to DeFrantz, these expert demonstrations of the dance style enter the archive, coming to represent the dance in later generations. DeFrantz alludes to two processes. The first is the process of circulation. Arjun Appadurai (1996) describes the movement of media away from the publics for which it was created into different arenas of social life as the "disjunctive" nature of media. This movement and redefinition of media from one place, situation, and community to others is characteristic of hip hop. Second, DeFrantz refers to the process of archiving. The practices of what Gates (1988: 51) calls "Signifyin(g)" and sampling are crucial elements of Black expressive culture generally, and in hip hop particularly. The constant referencing of texts, body postures, lyrics, and beats constitute an intertextuality and referentiality characteristic of hip hop culture. The practice of Signifyin(g) refers to "the manner in which texts seem concerned to address their antecedents. Repetition, with a signal difference, is fundamental to the nature of Signifyin(g)" (Gates 1988: 51). Building on Gate's definition of Signifyin(g), Andrew Bartlett considers sampling a form of highly selective archiving, linking, and digital sampling to the "African American diasporic aesthetic of careful selection of media, texts and contexts for performative use" (Bartlett 2004: 393). In other words, through the repetition of basic elements, such as beats, rhymes, and dance basics, dancers are able to innovate, and achieve a personal style. Innovative creation in hip hop is thus closely linked to the Deleuzian (2007) understanding of repetition as being inherently about difference.

Moreover, DeFrantz (2016: 72) scrutinizes the "slippery nature of Black expressive culture's archive." The movement of dance forms out of their originary social circumstances ultimately alters their capacity to underscore emergent social relationships, as exemplified in Madonna's appropriation of voguing, or krumping in her videos and stage tour choreographies. Put differently, Madonna's appropriation of these Black social dance forms indicates their common decontextualization, which occurs after the revelation of excellence in their performance. Such movement out of the publics in and for which such forms were created undermines the dances' capacity "to highlight individualized non-normative, resistant expressive modes." (DeFrantz 2016: 72). Finally, with regard to the uptake of performative forms, such as dance by new publics, power differentials and the transformation of meaning need to be examined.

Hip Hop in Vietnam: multiple communities of practice

Hip hop originated in the United States, and comprises four elements, including MCing, DJing, breaking, and graffiti writing. These practices quickly began to circulate after their emergence, and where taken up by practitioners around the globe. Such circulation leads Mbaye (2014) to shift the analysis away from an overt focus on the United States, and to consider the multipolarity and multi-referentiality of hip hop. The gerund form of the four elements already signifies the active practice of each specific discipline, which have been recognized in Hip Hop Studies as distinct cultural practices (Brunstad et al. 2010: 240; Cutler 2009: 331). Rose (1994: 26) attests to the coherence of hip hop style, pointing to the intertextuality between graffiti, rap, and breaking. In this book, I draw on the community of practice concept to illustrate how communities evolve around particular practices. The community of practice concept has been applied to the study of hip hop, but rather vaguely in the sense of an already existing entity. For example, Cecilia Cutler (2009: 81) refers to one hip hop community of practice, and Sarah Simeziane (2010: 96) to a cross-cultural community of practice. Elizabeth Betz (2014), in reference to Tony Mitchell (2007), includes some scaling when referring to an Australian hip hop community of practice. Yet, the term community of practice has been applied to hip hop with little differentiation and elaboration.[5] Rather than thinking of a singular hip hop community of practice, I suggest that distinct communities of practice have evolved around the four practices of MCing, breaking, graffiti, and DJing in Vietnam. In fact, the four elements show distinct trajectories and involve different infrastructures. Moreover, the particular infrastructures for each practice require different kinds and degrees of economic investment.

In the 1970s, MCing or rap evolved among the turntables of the first DJs who practiced in New York basements, clubs, and at block parties. The first MCs (Masters of Ceremony) animated the crowd, talking over the DJ. Aiming to raise the crowd's energy level, they called out rhymes: "Hip Hop y'all, and ya don't stop, rock on, till the break of dawn," thereby baptizing the term hip

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5   An exemption is Love (2014), who uses the concept of community of practice in the context of hip hop-based education in early childhood and elementary education. Accordingly, the term community of practice is applied in its original form as rooted in social learning theory (see chapter "URBANISM AND HIP HOP COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE").

hop (Bradley 2009; Chang 2006: 19; Price-Styles 2015). In Vietnam, the MCing community has developed since the 1990s, having been introduced through transnational networks, and particularly by those in the Vietnamese diaspora. Lee 7, a Vietnamese rapper who has lived most of his life in the German city of Munich, claims to be influenced by the track *Đời Anh Thanh Niên* (Life of a young man) by rapper Khanh Nho, a Vietnamese American from Portland, Oregon. In the track, Khanh Nho refers to the movie *Green Dragon* (2001), directed by Timothy Linh Bui. The movie depicts the experiences of Vietnamese refugees arriving in the United States after the fall of Saigon in 1975. Having himself experienced the hardships of leaving his home country, and being a rightless migrant together with his mother on their journey to Europe, Lee 7 can easily identify with the rap track. In 1997, together with another Vietnamese American rapper named Thai Viet G, Khanh Nho released what is regarded by many as the first Vietnamese rap track, "Vietnamese Gangs." Khanh Nho raps in Vietnamese, while Thai Viet G raps in English, thereby expressing their dual modes of belonging, both to their new home in the United States and to their natal country, Vietnam.

At the end of the 1990s, the first rap crew to form in Vietnam was known as VIETRAPPER.com. Rapper Andreee belonged to this collective. From 2002 to 2005, the rap collective known as Rapclub.com was very active in Hanoi, featuring some of the most well-known Vietnamese rappers, such as Lil'Knight (aka LK). Apart from LK, other members included Eddy Viet, Young Uno, Lil' BK, Chip Nho, and Ca Chep. Together, they formed the main hub of what is referred to as "Northside rap," meaning rap originating from Hanoi and Northern Vietnam, more broadly. By contrast, "Southside rap" refers to rap from Ho Chi Minh City and other cities in southern Vietnam. Southside rap only became prominent in 2006, when the rapper named VTA formed the FanHipHop (FHH) collective (Norton 2015). From 2006 to 2010, GVR became a major collective. While its main protagonists, including Lee 7 and Gizmo, originally come from Northern Vietnam, a rapper named Nah, who collaborated together with Lee 7 on various tracks, as well as a female rapper named Linh Lam, both come from Southern Vietnam. Accordingly, GVR unites rappers from both the North- and Southsides.

The ongoing increase in hip hop collectives shows that hip hop is becoming more and more popular in Vietnam, although they are subject to strict censorship. Rap lyrics that make reference to explicit violence, sex, and sensitive political issues are censored (Norton 2015). This is not surprising given that the first Vietnamese rap track mentioned above made explicit reference

to gang violence in the United States. Contributions on "Vietnamese gangs" on the Urban Dictionary website describe them as the most violent gangs with its members carrying weapons. One contribution characterizes "Vietnamese gangs" as consisting of small groups of close friends, being non-territorial, and resolving conflicts with their fists in the first round and with weapons in the second.[6] The trope of violence also shaped imagery of the MCing scene early on. Initially, Vietnamese rap was known to be obscene and insulting. Confrontations between rappers often turned violent (Margara 2014). However, this violent image of Vietnamese rap has recently been challenged by the success of female rappers, such as Suboi. Through their rap lyrics and videos, they appropriate male-dominated hip hop space. Suboi, a 29-year MC from Ho Chi Minh City, has been tagged "Vietnam's queen of Hip Hop" by foreign media. This self-address as "royalty" can often be found among women rappers in the United States. In her analysis of black female identity as expressed through rap performances in the United States, Cheryl Keyes (2004: 266) explains that self-reference as "Queen Mother" is used by female rappers in their lyrics, who consider themselves Africa-centred icons embracing black female empowerment and spirituality. That is how they identify themselves as African, woman, warrior, priestess, and queen. Yet, Suboi does not adopt categorizations derived from United States rap, but instead presents herself with her stage name, which combines "Su," a nickname given to her by her family, with "boi," a name that her friends gave her due to her "tomboyish" nature. She began singing in a high school rock band when she was 15 or 16 years old. After graduating from high school, she became a solo performer as a rapper. Initially, she produced tracks on her own by downloading beats, writing lyrics, and rapping to them. When she turned 19, she signed with a Vietnamese music label called Music Faces, which promoted Vietnamese artists (Viet Talk 2015). Working with the Dutch producer Gremlin, she released her first album *Walk/Bước* in 2010. By 2012, she founded her own company, Suboi Entertainment. Two years later in 2014, she released her second studio album, *Run*, this time only using an English album title. The transition in her album titles from *Walk* to *Run* symbolizes the dynamics of her professional and personal development. Opening her own label, she has become a self-entrepreneur, giving her the freedom to choose her own staff and to write her own lyrics.

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6   See urban dictionary: http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=vietnamese+gang.

Suboi raps both in Vietnamese and English, and claims to be influenced by Eminem, Kendrick Lamar, Will Smith, Erykah Badouh, but also by Le Huu Ha, a Vietnamese composer, and Elvis Phuong, a former star on *Paris by Night*. Having grown up in Saigon, she raps about her childhood, family life, and struggles she faced by not following the "conventional" respectable path for a young urban middle-class Vietnamese woman. Suboi is commercially quite successful, with a recent club tour through the United States.

Apart from commercially successful rappers, MCing is also practiced by young people at home and in public space. On YouTube, several videos have been uploaded showing Vietnamese kids gathering in groups on the streets, especially at popular ice-tea stalls (*trà đá*) where they freestyle rap lyrics. MCing requires the least economic investments for participation, as most young MCs play the music to which they rap on a mobile phone,[7] while in some cases another member might beat box. Moreover, they access the infrastructure necessary to produce rap tracks through digital networks, such as by downloading drum loops and autotunes from the internet (Norton 2015). Other than this minimal technical infrastructure, MCs also require practical knowledge in order to participate in the community of practice. MCing also differs from dancing in terms of the infrastructure necessary to practice rap. While face-to-face interactions in public spaces and dance studios are crucial to the sharing of knowledge and membership in a dance community of practice, rap battles and collectives mostly exist in the digital sphere, connecting actors from places around the world as diverse as Germany, the United States, India, and Vietnam. Nowadays, such connections are mostly built on social media platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube. Before these platforms were available however, the early Viet rappers used to connect via digital platforms such as Soundclick and Forum.

Compared to MCing, graffiti writing only became popular in urban Vietnam much later, beginning in Hanoi between 2002 and 2004. Only later would the arts, including dance practices, move to Saigon (Margara 2011). However, in the early 2000s, only a few pieces and tags marked the urban landscape. When I was living in Hanoi from 2005 and 2006, and again from 2007 to 2008, there was hardly any graffiti to be found in Hanoi's city centre, except for a few tags along Ly Thai To Garden. By contrast, six years later, in 2014 and

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7   The rate of mobile phone users in Vietnam makes up approximately 139 per cent of the population, with 127,318,045 mobile phone contracts counted in 2012 (Wearesocial 2012).

Piece on a wall in Tay Ho District

Source: Sandra Kurfürst (2018)

2015, graffiti and prints could be found on the walls of Ho Chi Minh City's major streets as well as in the West Lake District of Hanoi. Today, along construction sites and major streets, large pieces can also be detected. Daos501, a popular sprayer from Ho Chi Minh City, explains that soon after graffiti had been introduced to Vietnam, it seemed to disappear again. But around 2008 and 2009, his current crew members increasingly engaged in graffiti writing. In 2009, they founded "The Saigon Projects" to promote graffiti projects. The aim of The Saigon Projects is to connect graffiti practitioners so that they can achieve more visibility in the urban landscape.

Nonetheless, the community of writing practice appears to be much smaller, and expanding much more slowly, than the dancing community. One reason for this might be that the community of practice is still operating in the sphere of informality (as in many other parts of the world). As for breaking, the materiality and accessibility of space matters. Urban space provides the infrastructure for both practices. Yet, while breaking is socially accepted in public space, and tolerated by the late socialist state, drawing in urban space is punishable under the law. Sprayers will have to pay fines of up to 5 to 10 million Vietnamese Dong (177 to 354 Euro) if caught drawing in public (Margara 2011).

A further reason for the different trajectory might be the higher economic and social investments needed in order to participate in graffiti writing. Graffiti requires particular writing materials, such as spray paints and markers, which for a long time were quite difficult to acquire in Vietnam. Even if available, the colours often lacked quality. This changed with the opening of the online store NCStore in 2012, which sells inks, markers, as well as magazines and ballcaps in Vietnam (Margara 2015). Organizing colours and collectives, Vietnamese writers engage in infrastructuring work. Geoffrey Bowker (1994) refers to infrastructuring work as a set of techniques – administrative, social, and technical – that assist completing certain jobs, in fact institutionalizing particular manners of doing things. In the community of writing, infrastructuring work involves both processes of institutionalization and commoditization. First, institutionalization refers to establishing regular meeting points, the exchange of techniques among practitioners, and the organization of graffiti events, such as *Style Jam* organized by The Saigon Projects. Meanwhile, dedicated hip hop dancers have organized dance battles, which have also included graffiti writing sessions. Second, graffiti tools and writing materials are made accessible in Vietnam through the expansion of consumer commodity markets. This process of commoditization involves a social dimension, as well. Members of one crew will chip in on costs in order to purchase the colours (Zink 2013: 109), thus making the practice affordable to all the members.

DJing constitutes an emerging community of practice in Vietnam, comprising music genres as diverse as hip hop, funk, reggae, or electronic music. It is frequently hard to determine the exact music genre played by any given DJ. DJ Jase describes his own sets as eclectic, explaining that he combines a wide range of styles from hip hop and funk to reggae. DJ Tri Minh considers himself a musician rather than an electronic music DJ. He uses traditional Vietnamese instruments that he combines with electro beats and the sounds of the city. Moreover, Tri Minh collaborates with the dancer, teacher, and choreographer, LionT, writing the music for his shows. These two examples allude to the diversity and heterogeneity of music genres practiced in the DJing community.

Together with graffiti writing, DJing requires the greatest economic investments. A prerequisite for DJing is access to and the availability of technical infrastructure. This infrastructure is comprised of turntables, mixers, computers, stereos, and so on. Furthermore, Hip Hop DJs need to have access to a large selection of records. Unlike graffiti, where individuals can share the

cost of spray cans in order to reduce the economic burden on the individual, the ownership of records is mandatory for DJs. Even if a DJ is able to afford the records, their availability may still remain a challenge. In 2015, there were only two record stores in Hanoi, of which one had a large collection of jazz rather than hip hop music. In Ho Chi Minh City, several shops including The Tea Time LP, diathan, Giadinh Audio, and a coffee music shop sell vinyl records. These record stores offer jazz, pop, and rock, but hardly any hip hop music. In general, Vietnamese produced records, and particularly of contemporary music records, are very rare. The need for technical infrastructure to practice DJing hints at what Star et al. (2003: 244) refer to as the "convergence" of information artefacts and communities of practice. According to Star et al. (2003: 244), communities of practice and information artefacts will converge if "use and practice fit design and access," as both define each other over time. Convergence denotes their mutual constitution. Put differently, the technical infrastructure becomes part of the practice shared in common.

The institutionalization of the community of practice takes place through the organization of events. In 2007, DJ Jase from Saigon founded his own booking company, Beats Saigon, with the aim of organizing his own parties. Likewise, in 2007, DJ Tri Minh founded the Hanoi Sound Stuff Festival, which brings together local artists as well as DJs and musicians from abroad. Both emphasize the need for innovation in Vietnam's DJing scene. DJ Jase calls on local DJs to engage more with urban genres, such as dubstep, Drum'n'Base, and hip hop. In Hanoi, the Hanoi Rock City venue provides room for musical diversity and innovation (Margara, Van Nguyen 2011).

The term breaking, or breakdance, is commonly used as a proxy for hip hop's dance element. Jeff Chang (2005) notes that, while it is true that breaking developed in the 1970s in particular New York neighbourhoods, half of the dance styles associated with hip hop, such as locking, popping, or waacking, evolved on the West Coast of the United States, and were part of a different cultural movement. In the 1980s, media coverage increasingly lumped the New York-based practices of b-girling/-boying and uprocking together with popping and locking, labelling them all "breakdancing." As a result, the West Coast funk movement was overlooked, as hip hop was publicly viewed as the progenitor of funk.

In Vietnam, a variety of dance styles such as hip hop, house, waacking, popping, locking, and breaking is practiced across the country. While members of the community of practice are certainly aware of the specific styles that they each practice, they subsume these different dance styles under the

umbrella term "hip hop." Still, each dance style has been subject to different trajectories of uptake. While breaking and hip hop dance were the first styles to be practiced early in the 1990s, waacking, locking, and house dance were practiced much later, beginning in the 2010s.

Yet, this does not mean that the boundaries between dancers and their dance practices are fixed; rather, the boundaries between styles are permeable and constantly crossed, as dancers search for innovations to create their own unique styles. Many dancers reported that some styles have been practiced for quite some time, but that, early on, most practitioners did not know what movements belonged to which styles. For example, before waacking was known in Vietnam, some dancers would already integrate waacking moves into their dance routines, but without knowing what to call them. Waacking seems to appeal to dancers in Hanoi, as it can be easily combined with moves from other dance styles, such as hip hop or house dance. Likewise, the terms of belonging are not exclusive, meaning that a single dancer can be a practitioner of various dance styles, belonging to various crews and thus participate in different dance battle categories. The b-boy LionT, leader of the famous Big Toe Crew, is recognized as an "OG" of Vietnamese hip hop by dancers from diverse styles. He explains that he does not dance a single style, but rather that he likes to combine different styles. Overall, members of the dancing community refer to hip hop as an umbrella term, referring to *văn hoá hip hop*, hip hop culture. In this sense, hip hop becomes a boundary object, translating between the different dance communities. Susan Leigh Star and James Griesemer (1989: 344) define boundary objects as "objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites." Boundary objects can be abstract or concrete. Although they have differing meanings in different social worlds, their structure remains common enough to make them recognizable to more than one social world. As a result, they can act as a means of translation. Since practitioners of breaking, popping, locking, waacking, house, and hip hop dance all recognize each other as practicing some kind of hip hop dance, and thus belonging and contributing to hip hop culture in Vietnam, they seek opportunities to collaborate and create common platforms, such as dance festivals and battles, where they can share expertise, knowledge, and learn from one another.

Infrastructures and communities of practice

At the nexus of the postindustrial city, hip hop becomes bound up with technological progress and social marginality (Rose 1994). In this ambivalence, infrastructures are incremental to communities of practice, as they contribute to the production of new identities and subject positions. In rap lyrics, MCs talk about urban infrastructures like subways and streets, as well as urban forms of sociality, such as the crew or posse. Graffiti writers spray walls and tag trains, trucks, and playgrounds, whereas breakers perform power moves on sidewalks, improvising outdoors youth centres. Additionally, DJs tap into public electricity infrastructures by connecting their customized turntables to street lights. The practice of tapping into the electric grid can be understood as a "quiet encroachment of the ordinary," a phrase introduced by Asef Bayat (2004) to capture subaltern politics under conditions of globalization. By "quiet encroachment," he refers to mainly individual, and only episodically collective, actions aimed at fulfilling basic needs. Such actions are driven by existential needs, and are not taken at the costs of themselves or the fellow poor, but of the state, the rich, and the powerful (Bayat 2004: 90). An example would be the urban poor's tapping of municipal power lines in order to achieve access to electricity. While members of the hip hop community in 1970s New York were considered marginal urban dwellers, their actions, such as the encroachment on public infrastructures, occurred with a great deal of publicity. Such publicity was exerted with respect to the soundscapes produced by MCs and DJs, as well as the physical assemblage of dancing bodies in public space. Accordingly, infrastructures become part of a community of practice – and even members, from the perspective of actor-network theory. Without the materiality of public space, the technical equipment of turn tables and amplifiers, downloaded beats and microphones, spray paint, walls and public transport, the communities of practice built up around hip hop's four elements would not be able to exist. These infrastructures facilitate the cultural practices of dancing, DJing, MCing, and graffiti writing, while at the same time helping to sustain the community of practice over time. As most of the practices themselves are of an ephemeral character, the infrastructures render them visible, audible, tangible, and durable.