

Preface

*James Barber, Christian Büschges, Dianne Violeta Mausfeld,
and Britta Sweers*

This book is the outcome of a research project that in one form or another has been in the works for more than a decade. Original ideas and discussions leading up to the project first manifested at the University of Bielefeld (Germany) in 2009, bringing together historians Christian Büschges and Sebastian Knake, and Wilfried Raussert from literary and cultural studies. In 2016, these early sketches were then taken up by and expanded upon considerably by Christian Büschges and ethnomusicologist Britta Sweers at the University of Bern. In 2018, the culmination of this decade-long process was realized through the Swiss National Science Foundation-funded research project “Hip Hop as a Transcultural Phenomenon. Jamaican and Latin American cultural signifiers in US Hip Hop (New York and Los Angeles, c.1970s–1990s).”

The empirical basis of the project was made up of two doctoral research case studies, focusing on New York and Los Angeles, led by James Barber and Dianne Violeta Mausfeld, respectively. Both candidates brought with them their individual experiences and expertise on hip hop, as long-time fans into the mix, besides research interests in other areas of popular music. Barber completed his undergraduate studies in Sociology and an MA in Global Studies, while Mausfeld has a background in Latin American and North American Studies. In addition, Barber has been heavily involved in the reggae and sound system scene in the UK, and later in Germany, since his teenage years, and also active as a part-time music event promoter, vinyl enthusiast, reggae ‘selector’ and DJ, and attendee at countless musical festivals,

concerts, club nights, and raves since the early 2000s. Mausfeld's very first concert experience was a show in her hometown Hamburg in the mid-1990s from local group Fettes Brot. It was during a high school stay in the Houston area in 2000/2001, however, when she really fell in love with rap music, being exposed to the sound of the "Dirty South" by DJ Screw, Mystical, Ludacris, and UGK. The research team was completed by student assistants Céline Arnold and Rea Vogt, and the tireless efforts of Keith Cann-Guthauser, master organizer and good soul of the Department of Iberian and Latin American History who oversaw all the administrative and infrastructural aspects of the project's coordination. Thus, the project brought together inputs from professors, doctoral and MA students, and other staff members from a wide range of nationalities and cultural backgrounds.

The case studies within the project sought to address the diasporic presence of Caribbean and Latin American communities in the US, in New York on the East Coast and Los Angeles on the West Coast, respectively, between the period of the mid-1960s up to the mid-to-late 1990s. Both Barber's research in New York and Mausfeld's research in LA were at the beginning of the project framed in terms of how cultural signifiers related to these communities, be they religious symbols, musical practices, musical genres and examples adopted by the hip-hop DJ and producer, production techniques and technology, lyricism, fashion, style, and aesthetics, and how these have intersected with the creation and development of hip-hop culture and practice. Building on this initial analytical framework, both studies evolved into independent research projects that were continuously shaped through fieldwork, archival work, and presentations and exchanges with colleagues at academic workshops and conferences.

Barber highlights reggae's reception in New York following the "second mass migration of the Jamaican working class" (Patterson 1994: 107) to the US beginning in 1965, highlighting the Jamaican contributions and influences to early and evolving New York hip-hop culture. In addition, he examines the wider West Indian and pan-Caribbean currents that shaped reggae's initial reception in New York, and eventual dialogue and fusion with hip-hop culture and practice. The height of these overlaps

led to the development of an overlooked subgenre of New York reggae and hip-hop fusion, generally recognized to have emerged across the 1980s through to the mid-1990s, and sometimes referred to as “ragga-muffin hip-hop” (Marshall and Foster 2013: n.pag.). In this volume, Barber presents a snapshot of his time spent in New York in Spring 2022, vividly describing musical events he participated in and the significance of the grassroots archives of two crucial actors he connected with. He highlights the significance of their materials to researchers, academic and otherwise, in representing the underground music sub- and multi-cultures of reggae and hip hop, and the intersections between the two, in New York.

At the project’s other pole, Mausfeld traces the history of the “Chicano hip hop” subgenre in Los Angeles, highlighting the imprint Mexican American urban culture has had on West Coast hip hop at large. Like Barber, her chapter in the volume is based on ethnographic interviews she conducted during extensive research stays in LA, as well as a critical analysis of a wide range of issues of the pioneering US hip-hop magazine *The Source* that she came across during archival research between 2019 and 2023. The research team and editors of this volume are delighted to feature aspects of both projects in this edited collection. Kick-started by the conference “Hip Hop Transcultural: Constructing and Contesting Identity, Space, and Place in the Americas and Beyond”¹ in October 2021, the volume has been in the works for several years, and we are grateful and thankful to all our contributors and fellow conference participants who have put forward some excellent and thought-provoking examples of hip-hop culture in and between hip hop’s local center(s) and global ‘margins.’

As a vital part of the umbrella project “Hip Hop as a Transcultural Phenomenon,” the conference was originally scheduled for the Fall of 2020 and, like so many other conferences, workshops, archive- and

1 Further information on the conference and the project can be retrieved on the website of the Institute of History of the University of Bern: http://www.hist.unibe.ch/forschung/forschungsprojekte/hip_hop_as_a_transcultural_phenomenon/index_ger.html.

fieldwork trips (not to mention wider everyday impacts) was deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. These events also acutely affected the individual research projects and fieldwork stays undertaken by Barber and Mausfeld, which in both cases became somewhat suspended in time. After further postponing the conference several times to the Fall of 2021, as traveling was still difficult and academic life was largely taking place in online or hybrid spaces, it was decided to host the conference in an online format. An earlier call for papers had already yielded a highly promising range of proposals, enabling the organizers to bring together a stellar line-up of prominent hip-hop scholars from a variety of fields, universities, countries, and backgrounds. The conference united these perspectives together with those of contemporary hip-hop practitioners, archivists, enthusiasts, educators, and researchers, with many participants belonging to one or more of these camps. Despite the online format, the conference presented a platform for lively and enriching discussions about the ways hip hop has manifested and is being studied around the globe.

Conference keynotes were provided by P. Khalil Saucier, professor of Critical Black Studies at Bucknell University, and Martin Lütke, assistant professor of American Studies at Freie University Berlin, approaching the transculturality of hip hop from different national and regional perspectives, reflecting a diverse range of viewpoints and opening up a transatlantic dialogue to set the tone for proceedings. Originally selected as a keynote speaker, pioneering hip-hop studies scholar Murray Forman was eventually unable to participate in this capacity, but attending the conference as a participant enriched the panel discussions with his expert inputs and humor. We were equally delighted to connect with J. Griffith Rollefson's hip-hop research project, "CIPHER: The International Council for Hip Hop Studies," based at the University College Cork, Ireland.² The team's roundtable featured a freestyle performance by Orphelia McCabe, which fittingly concluded the conference and reminded everyone just how much we had missed live music and perfor-

2 Further information can be found on the project website: <https://globalcipher.org/>.

mance during the pandemic. It also brought to the fore the importance of bringing together hip-hop academics and artists, a subject taken up further by several authors in this volume.

The present edited volume includes chapters by authors who presented their work at our conference in 2021, with some based on the authors' original presentations, and others bringing new issues to the table that nonetheless still fit within the locus of "Remixing the Hip-Hop Narrative." Although she was eventually unable to contribute a chapter to this volume, a special shout-out to Tasha Iglesias as it was her conference paper entitled "Disrupting the Narrative: Exploring the Latin Influence on the Foundation of Breakin'" that in part inspired the title for this collection. Furthermore, Iglesias' and Travis Harris' (2022) statement was also drawn upon when considering the argument in favor of the capitalization of hip hop in line with foundational Bronx MC and hip hop's "Teacha" KRS-One's original call. The ideas outlined in this text stimulated debate as to our own position in this regard, not solely as hip-hop aficionados and researchers, but also as editors that are somewhat bound to observe accepted grammatical, linguistic, and stylistic standards (however much we may also take issue with these conventions ourselves). While we undoubtedly support KRS-One's position as a central hip-hop authority and indeed cornerstone of the culture, and Harris' and Iglesias' position in following this, after much debate, for the purposes of editorial consistency we have decided to compromise by using the term in lower-case, unhyphenated. We also discussed the fact that while KRS One's claims certainly stand, where does that leave other music cultures such as reggae and salsa, as just two examples? They too, are nowadays established music genres, but like hip hop, their foundations are grounded in everyday, lived music *cultures*. Perhaps in this case we might move to suggest that for both consistency, and equal respect for all BIPOC and marginalized music cultures, repeatedly sidelined and underrepresented within broader popular music histories, that all such examples be capitalized in line with KRS One's, Harris' and Iglesias' calls.

