

GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION: HIP HOP CONSTELLATIONS

As guest editors we welcome you to this special issue of *Suomen Antropologi*, dedicated to presenting new anthropological and ethnographic approaches to the study of hip hop. We organize these emerging ideas around the notion of 'hip hop constellations', as a way to analyze popular music as significant but contingent social practice. Exploring the diverse ways in which hip hop is part of the formation of ties of belonging and action, the following articles converge around indigenous notions of value, temporality, and relationality with vantage points in the everyday lives of hip hop's protagonists. As such, the articles collected here show a renewed dedication to the empirical study of popular music as embedded social practice, and to the particularities of the conceptual worlds these practices produce.

This special issue has grown out of a new kind of consolidation of hip hop studies in the Nordic countries. We began to conceive the project at the interdisciplinary symposium, *Hip Hop Studies: Global and Local*, organized by the University of Helsinki's discipline of Social and Cultural Anthropology and the Finnish Youth Research Society, hosted by a unique institution called Music Archive Finland (formerly Music Archive JAPA), in Helsinki in September 2014. Here, a group of established and emerging scholars came together to discuss the relationship between the globalization of hip hop and its many diverse manifestations in localities around the world. The papers presented at the symposium offered rich material from across the globe, but as the day progressed it became clear that something beyond processes

of globalization and localization was making its presence felt. There was a quiet tension within the presentations and discussions. In analyzing the everyday concerns, negotiations, and practices of hip hop's protagonists, the papers suggested that the most ubiquitous discussion in international hip hop studies over the last fifteen years, variations on a political analysis of globalization, might not be the most salient issue.

In November 2015 the research network, Hip Hop in Finland: Genres and Generations, invited scholars to a larger, interdisciplinary, international conference in Helsinki, *Hip Hop Studies: North and South*. Here the desire to look beyond the 'glocalization' of hip hop was manifested in keynote lectures on topics such as aging and education, panels on themes including media technology and genre crossing, ethnographic film screenings, and during lively discussions in intermissions and over dinner. Pursuing these tensions and discussions, thinking through our understandings of the questions confronting the practitioners in our various research projects, and what is at stake for them, resulted in this special issue.

In it, we expand on an ever-increasing body of literature on hip hop around the globe, demonstrating the value of anthropological approaches in this field. Hip hop is traditionally conceived of as having four constitutive elements: DJing, rapping/emceeing, breakdancing, and graffiti, with conscious rappers adding a fifth, knowledge. Scholarly studies have predominantly focused on musical aspects of hip hop, as the consumption of

music has been the most manifest feature of its spread across the globe (Negus 1999; Condry 2006; Saucier and Silva 2012). Further, public discourses around hip hop music have often focused on lyrical content, as well as lyrical style and structure, making language a common concern for research on the subject (e.g. Alim, Ibrahim and Pennycook 2009; Terkourafi 2010, Potter 1995). Coplan's (2005) comment on the study of popular music in South Africa reminds cultural scholars not to be too literal minded when they embrace the verbosity of rap music, and this surely applies elsewhere as well.

In the study of hip hop in the everyday lives of practitioners and fans, the non-lyrical elements tend to be overlooked, although work has been done on graffiti (Kimvall 2014), DJing (Schloss 2004; Smith 2013), and breakdancing (Schloss 2009; Koutsougera 2011; 2015). Alex Perullo's (2011) study of the *bongo flava* hybrid rap crossover genre from Tanzania stands out in this regard for its inclusive analysis of the forms of dance, fashion, lyrics, and musical production that collectively constitute that particular music scene. Studies that place hip hop in relation to everyday lives and wider processes of change have recently moved readers' gaze beyond 'elements' and into complex processes of economy, aspirations, pain, and hope (Weiss 2009; Newell 2011; Shipley 2013). While the contributions in the present special issue also focus mainly on producers of hip hop music, they present music-making practices as everyday constellations; realms of action that conjure categories and are intersected by the economy, time, and forms of belonging that seem to define hip hop practitioners' lives.

Soon after its release, Tony Mitchell's (2001a) edited collection *Global Noise* quickly became the canonical point of reference and inspiration for studies on 'Rap and Hip Hop Outside the USA', as the book was subtitled.

The collection presented studies of hip hop through the analytical frame of 'glocalisation' which 'takes place as local activities interact with the global form of rap and particular histories of different geographical scenes are constructed' (Mitchell 2001b: 32). Hierarchies of place and the legitimate movement and use of concepts, styles, objects, or practices between them became the central focus of analysis in hip hop outside of the USA. Research questions therefore focused on how hip hop is spread, and how the global American form is mediated, translated, or adapted in settings where non-Americans embrace it.

As evident in the events that gave rise to this special issue, the theories of globalization that emerged in the late 1990s remain relevant to the academic study of hip hop. The notion of glocalisation contributed new insights into how popular culture and processes of social change are interrelated. This paradigm has been particularly important in cultural studies methodologies, in interpreting how objects, ideas, sounds, and styles travel over distance and time, and how these movements appear as political and cultural phenomena. Yet within this focus on geography there is a tendency to reproduce presupposed ideas about what is significant for people who make, use, and enjoy hip hop, and the effects of hip hop as it is glocalised. There is a risk in the tendency to consider particular American forms of hip hop as 'global,' and other forms of hip hop 'local', to reproduce hierarchies of space and taste. American hip hop remains the unmarked category against which 'Other' forms of hip hop are understood.

However framed, the 'origin myths' of a hip hop that is American, a vehicle for the voices of marginalized ethnic minorities, and distinctly a 'culture of resistance', lingers in social scientific studies of hip hop (Appert 2016). But these

analytical frameworks of place, class, and ethnic empowerment in hip hop studies can serve to obscure the actual music-making practices of hip hoppers. By prescribing normative values, certain actions and statements can be labeled 'authentic' expressions of hip hop, as opposed to illegitimate innovations. Scholarly and fan discourses often overlap at this point, blaming these developments on the sometimes occult politics of the culture industry.

In this special issue, we present analyses of everyday lives with hip hop that move between Sweden and Chile, and in Denmark, Mexico, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. In conventional hip hop scholarship, and in the minds of some readers, perhaps, such a collection would still warrant the subtitle 'Rap and Hip Hop Outside the USA,' sixteen years later. Here this subtitle is absent, and so too are some familiar theoretical devices: globalization, glocalization, Westernization, transculturation, transnationalism, translocalism (see for instance Pennycook 2007; Krogh and Pedersen 2008; Alim 2009; Lee 2010; Nitzsche 2013). We do not mean to deny the fact that many hip hop practitioners, fans, and haters across the world see America as the birthplace of hip hop. Nor do we deny that many hip hop fans are committed to tracing the emergence and spread of hip hop across the world or that geography and forces beyond the immediate present are relevant to the articles collected here. It is rather that we wish to frame the lives and expressions of hip hoppers around the world as something other than merely 'not American'.

Although questions of place feature in hip hoppers' lives and their cultural products, the articles in this special issue suggest that it is analytically productive to move beyond emic myths and examine what is at stake, and how central concepts come about in practice. In the foreword of a perhaps overlooked edited

volume on francophone hip hop from 2002, Adam Krimms aptly characterizes francophone hip hop as a totality unto itself, made up of particularities of great difference in the centers and fringes of a post-colonial francophone world. Exploring at once the totalities and particularities, '[n]either the rhetorical sinkhole of hybridity', nor the free market slogan of 'globalization' captures this dynamic' (Krimms 2002: viii).

Taking seriously the voices and experiences of hip hop's protagonists as 'totalities' and 'particularities', contributions to this collection demonstrate how meanings and worlds are created through hip hop, by hip hoppers. The articles collected here show a renewed dedication to the empirical study of popular music as a form of embedded social practice, and thus to the particularities of the conceptual worlds to which these practices give rise among hip hoppers across the globe. In this special issue we attempt to resist the temptation to prescribe what is important about cultural phenomena as a result of their geographical location. This re-frames and re-examines debates about the organization and mobilization of hip hop as a 'constellation' of world-spanning creative activity.

We take the notion of the 'constellation' from Walter Benjamin, and hope that by invoking the work of one of the patron saints of the study of popular culture we can encourage the rethinking of approaches to contemporary popular cultural studies in general and hip hop in particular. More concretely, when pondering the emergence of the 'peculiar' or 'ironic constellation' that became the art of photography, Benjamin (2008 [1936]: 303, 309) notes that it was precisely those early innovators pursuing the practice in relative obscurity for explicitly commercial ends, 'without artistic pretensions', who ultimately gave birth to the new artistic form. Similarities with the 'Black neighborhood

party music' of New York City in the late 1970s, which spawned worldwide hip hop culture (Banfield 2010: 173), seem to us quite obvious. As we read Benjamin, constellations appear as tension-fraught and sometimes ambiguous arrangements of ideas, objects, images, and practices, situated in time and space. '[I]deas are to objects as constellations are to stars', writes Benjamin (2009 [1928]: 34), in one of the few passages in his scholarship that explicitly describes how he understands this concept. Picking up the constellation as an approach to understanding the complexity and playfulness of hip hop practice, Winters (2015: 169) explains that, 'like a constellation, an idea brings to light the multiple ways that objects can relate to each other; an idea can illuminate and express the affinities, connections, and differences among various objects and concepts'. Or, as Adorno (1997 [1966]: 163) elegantly phrased it, emphasizing an almost Latourian historical materialism, 'cognition of the object in its constellation is cognition of the process stored in the object'.

In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin (1999) represents his world, and his theories about this world, as constellations or fragments. Even if unintended as a final product, it underlines the work of the aesthetic engineer, the author, of stitching together form and content. But it also shows us that the author is but one element in constellations of cultural production, and that processes of use, reception, re-inscription, and invention bring about effects and consequences in multiple ways. This foregrounds the work of relating disparate entities, of capturing the processes of life in momentary constellations. Thinking with 'hip hop constellations' here helps us to analyze the contingencies, ambiguities, and open-endedness of musical practices. The notion of hip hop constellation takes shape as both a verb and a noun; the constellation is

both a situated process of negotiating meanings, outcomes, and hopes, and the result of these processes around which our interlocutors live and create hip hop.

We see the central contribution of the ethnographic approaches taken in this special issue as shifting the analytical focus in studies of hip hop from textual or semiotic analysis of lyrics and performances to hip hop as social practice. The task is to make the lived realities of our interlocutors the basis for theorizing about hip hop rather than simply illustrating the 'glocal' processes of globalisation. By asking what is at stake for the people with whom we work, we can investigate what hip hop is, and how it becomes meaningful in very different situations and for very different people, as opposed to explaining why it is meaningful—or why it *ought* to be meaningful—for academics. In this way, we might see the dichotomies or binaries in hip hop and popular music studies—'local' and 'global', 'real' and 'fake', 'underground' and 'mainstream', 'conscious' and 'commercial'—as tensions which are the engine of hip hop itself, rather than as analytical or political problems for scholars to solve, or normative scales upon which we attempt to place specific empirical examples.

In offering the idea of 'hip hop constellations' we have collected articles that make explicit and implicit arguments about common topics within the study of popular music in general, and hip hop in particular. It is obvious that however hip hop is characterized—genre, subculture, movement, family, or nation—it is at once something that engages social orderings of institutions and space, histories, mythologies, beliefs and philosophies, technologies of production and reception, and traditions of performance, sounds, music, and movements. We endeavour to bring forth the multi-faceted nature of hip hop as it takes on the shape of

everyday life in disparate global locations. In showing a bias towards anthropology, however, we are foregrounding a people-centred approach to hip hop that privileges the everyday practices and horizons of hip hop's protagonists in different parts of the world. The comparative edge here lies not in a foregone conclusion—that hip hop is global and therefore these sites and lives are connected—but rather in exploring how hip hop artists, fans, and activists experience and practice themselves as elements in and purveyors of larger hip hop constellations.

Discussions about the value of hip hop often center on the question of authenticity and 'realness' of expressions. In two of the papers collected here, hip hop is discussed as value in a wider sense, as complex assemblages through which rappers seek to fashion themselves as legitimate members of society. Tanzania's first president, Julius Nyerere, and the hip hop legend Tupac Shakur were both gangsters. Or so goes the argument among Tanzanian rappers in David Kerr's article about the concept of gangster and value production in Dar Es Salaam. The strategies of invoking socialist *ujamaa* ideals and symbols in hip hop powerfully demonstrates how African, urban youth—'gangsters'—are not only marginal or oppositional in relation to mainstream society but actively seek to become valuable persons who are part of, and complicit with, conventional forms of sociality. The article by Tuulikki Pietilä describes hip hop as conceivable as a form or source of capital. By teasing out the tensions between conscious hip hop and other genres, such as house music, the article reveals that what is termed 'subcultural capital' not only produces distinctions in the way Pierre Bourdieu (1984 [1979]) uses the term, but also places music practitioners in a landscape of different political and moral positions towards life in contemporary South Africa.

Two contributions to this special issue engage hip hop constellations as forms of temporality and part of how hip hop shapes experiences of the past. Andrew Green makes productive use of Michael Herzfeld's (2005) notion of 'structural nostalgia' to examine the social practices and cultural meanings embedded in Mexican home-recorded hip hop, especially through the foundational hip hop process of sampling which, Green argues, 'allows hip hop creativity to be understood as a means of reviving or reconstructing the musical past'. A somewhat different approach to the past is invoked by Chilean-Swedish hip hoppers in Susan Lindholm's article. She illustrates how what she refers to as 'memory work' invokes histories of international solidarity, migration, and social marginalization, sometimes in the very same song or music video. Centrally, the Chilean political folk song tradition, *nueva canción*, continues to reappear as a way of remembering the entanglement of the histories of Chile and Sweden, coming to form the basis of contemporary production of both Chilean-Swedish and Swedish hip hoppers.

Lastly, the articles by Kristine Ringsager and Nanna Schneidermann trace how hip hop activists seek to negotiate difficult issues of relatedness and power and how these negotiations flesh out hip hop worlds and livelihoods. In Kampala, Uganda, tension-fraught ideas of consanguine kinship are at the center of hip hop constellations for hip hop activists. The idea of hip hop as 'family' allows otherwise socially and geographically distant people to collaborate and foster intimate ties. However these relations need intense work and place hip hop practitioners in often ambiguous and difficult situations of unequal power. The important notion of cultural relatedness offers a way of thinking about hip hop constellations as scalable theories addressing global connec-

tions, by way of hip hop's own patterns of kinship. A different form of relationship is examined in Kristine Ringsager's analysis of 'the feature', describing the uneasy alliances between hip hop artists and the Danish welfare state. Hip hop artists are employed in after-school projects that seek to 'integrate' male immigrant youth perceived as in danger of becoming marginalized, radicalized, or institutionalized. These negotiations constellate hip hop as a social technology that, on the one hand, creates jobs for hip hop artists, but also risks naturalizing processes of othering between the state and 'problematic visible minority youths'.

This collection of papers invites you to explore the unruly and fragmented constellation of hip hop, to engage with the empirical richness of the analysis of everyday lives lived with hip hop, and to emphasize understandings of musical practices as always dynamic and contextual.

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