

Flip the Script

EUROPEAN HIP HOP
AND THE POLITICS OF
POSTCOLONIALITY

J. Griffith Rollefson

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*Audio, video, and other resources are posted on this book’s
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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Hip Hop as Postcolonial Art and Practice

Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness. By saying this I do not mean to suggest that taking on either or both of the unfinished identities necessarily exhausts the subjective resources of any particular individual. However, where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination.

PAUL GILROY

No one today is purely *one* thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or Black, or Western, or Oriental.

EDWARD SAID

We Moorish
More than ya ever seen

JUICE ALEEM

In Paris a group of young men gathers weekly to air their hopes and frustrations at a community radio station. Despite their diverse origins from all over the former French empire—Algeria, Cameroon, Cambodia, and beyond—they share a political consciousness. It shapes the contours of their debates, giving them a shared language and highlighting their shared goals. In Berlin a university student attends a lecture at the Center for Social Sciences. The young Ghanaian-German political scientist sits patiently, waiting for the discussion segment of the proceedings. When the time comes, he corrects the distinguished panelists, enumerating their misstatements carefully and eloquently,

clarifying matters of perspective. In London a young Kurdish woman posts a new track to her webpage, recounting recent struggles with her overbearing father. She has moved out, is living in a council flat, and is struggling to see what her next move will be. In all three of these scenarios, the common denominator is hip hop. It is at once a font of confidence and a form of defensive armor, a channel of expression, a critical lens, and a way of knowing and being in the world. Above all, it is a booming, bumping, lilting, and swinging sonic force that brings together, binds, and moves diverse communities.

Over the past thirty years hip hop has become a powerful expression of social solidarity and political opposition in Europe, especially among the children and grandchildren of migrants from the former colonies and peripheries.¹ In this book I demonstrate through sustained work with hip hop communities, and through close analysis of music and media, how European hip hop artists are employing the African American musical protest strategies of hip hop, both to differentiate themselves from *and* relate themselves to their respective majority societies. Through both the political struggle and commercial visibility of hip hop, Senegalese Parisians, Turkish Berliners, South Asian Londoners, and countless others are holding up mirrors to their societies to show their respective nations that they are not who they think they are. Drawing on recorded music and other media artifacts as well as interviews and observations from fieldwork centered in Paris, Berlin, and London, this book situates musical analyses in the postcolonial and globalizing contexts of the three cities, demonstrating how this black American music structures local concerns and enables syncretic expressions that are at once wholly local and definitively global.²

In the pages that follow I focus specifically on the ways that European hip hop gives voice to the ideal of equality through anti-assimilationist expressions of minority difference, a set of essentializing and paradox-laden creative strategies that expose the national conflation of race and citizenship in European national imaginaries.³ By using racialized discourses, hip hop youth are challenging the conventional distinctions between sameness and difference as a way of bringing into form the antinomies of inclusion and exclusion that structure conventional European national identities and their preoccupations with immigration, purity, and tradition. For all its “keepin’ it real” braggadocio and its curation by a global culture industry premised on the dissemination and monetization of authenticized difference, hip hop remains a remarkably historicizing cultural form. In Europe, hip hop challenges ahistorical notions of national belonging and responds to ever louder calls for tighter border controls with the postcolonial mantra: “we are here because you were there.”⁴ It

should not surprise us, then, that in the last thirty years hip hop has resonated loudly with postcolonial communities across Europe.⁵ Hip hop resonates in Europe for the same reasons it resonates in the United States: it demands a place at the table by sounding histories and experiences that do not bear hearing among polite company across the political spectrum. It has thus become a prominent cultural practice and a valued commodity with an ever-expanding global market.

In the following chapters I examine European hip hop from the perspective of postcolonial studies. But in so doing I also make the case that hip hop was a postcolonial culture from the jump. That is, from its prehistories in antebellum black musics of the United States and Caribbean sound system cultures of 1960s decolonization, to its birth among African American, Afro-Caribbean, and Latino youth in the defunded, postindustrial South Bronx, to its national and international dissemination through bootlegged mixtapes and global distribution networks, hip hop has evinced the postcolonial realities of asymmetry, hybridity, and paradox. Most important, it has flipped the script on those realities to combat homogenizing globalization and carve out a space for enunciative critique. As such, this book not only attends to the ways that hip hop has resonated in Europe, but will also help us hear US hip hop anew.

This book sounds a call for hip hop studies to engage more directly and systematically with the tools of postcolonial theory. Throughout the chapters that follow I make the case that postcolonial studies provide an essential set of strategies, theories, and methodological frameworks for attending to hip hop's histories and prehistories and analyzing its performative musical life as practiced today. Yes, hip hop remains exhilaratingly fresh as it continues to spread to every corner of the world. Yet, in continuing to be dazzled by hip hop's globalizing novelty as it expresses new collisions of local and global cultures we have a tendency to buy into the narrative that this thing called "globalization" is something new and unprecedented. As the postcolonial frame continually reminds us, it is not. If nothing else, postcolonial studies—such as this socio-cultural examination of hip hop in three of Europe's global cities—ask us to rehistoricize globalization in all its contexts from exploration, encounter, and exploitation, to structures of racialized imperial dominion, the rise of global capitalism, and its continuing neoliberal/technological disintegration of our borders. Never have the continuities between postcoloniality and globalization been clearer, as Europe faces a post-Brexit realignment and the nations of the world figure out how to liberate goods, capital, and media while limiting the flow of people. As I will show, hip hop sits at the confluence of dehumanizing neoliberal globalization and the gritty human realities of postcoloniality.

What's more, it offers a much-needed critique of the binary of neoliberal capitalism versus ethnoracial protectionism to which Western political discourse has been reduced.

**PILLAR 1: POSTCOLONIALITY AND /AS
DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS**

This book's examination of hip hop music and postcolonial politics in the three cities—and in their national and transnational contexts—proceeds from the thesis that the African American experience of double consciousness is the particularized American form of global postcoloniality's contradictions and asymmetries. This is the first pillar of my argument. To accomplish this central aim of the book, I articulate hip hop scholarship and the broader work of Paul Gilroy, Houston Baker, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ralph Ellison, Amiri Baraka, and other literature on black music and performance to the postcolonial frameworks of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Édouard Glissant, Gayatri Spivak, Frantz Fanon, and others. As I show, European hip hop's performed recognition that the African American experience of double consciousness is a localized manifestation of the postcolonial condition has created a space in which to imagine global solidarity among diverse populations.⁶ Notably, this continuity cultivates international nonwhite solidarity, difference, and struggle while at the same time challenging the paradoxical and particularized racial magics of national belonging by illuminating the hybrid realities of postcolonial nations. The example of hip hop in Europe is thus instructive as a cultural form that is ostensibly about militant opposition and resistance, but which functions in structures of linguistic and cultural inclusion, is widely commercially available, and circulates publicly through national bodies politic. In the pages that follow, I argue that hip hop cultivates a political consciousness closely attuned to the paradoxes of Western modernity and deploys the antinomial power of those paradoxes to various ends.

The book's analysis of European hip hop continues the work that George Lipsitz began in *Dangerous Crossroads*, where he wrote: "Hip hop expresses a form of politics perfectly suited to the post-colonial era. It brings a community into being through performance, and it maps out real and imagined relations between people that speak to the realities of displacement, disillusion, and despair created by the austerity economy of post-industrial capitalism."⁷ I demonstrate not only how hip hop is perfectly suited to articulating the real and imagined affiliations between postcolonial Europeans and African Americans, but how hip hop is itself a product of those postcolonial contradictions that

simultaneously claim and marginalize citizens. As both Lipsitz and Tricia Rose write, hip hop's contradictions are best understood through Antonio Gramsci's notion of the "war of position" that works "through existing contradictions" rather than militating to seize state power (the "war of maneuver").⁸ Hip hop is therefore both a product of the same postcolonial contradictions that continue to hyphenate citizens within their own nations and a form of cultural politics well suited to combat the inequalities inscribed upon those hyphens. Furthermore, it should come as no surprise that a postcolonial art form such as hip hop would engage those same commercial logics that first engineered racialized structural inequalities in the colonial-era slave trade—inequalities that live on as neocolonial structural racism in our postcolonial world.

Central to my task here is working through the contradictions of global capitalism, its culture industries, and our societies that center black music while marginalizing black people. It is glaring contradictions such as these—what I call "postcolonial paradoxes"—that animate the sonic and social discussion throughout the book. Indeed, in constructing my arguments around these paradoxes I follow hip hop's lead, arguing that this music powers its critiques on such postcolonial paradoxes—that it is fueled by harnessing, flipping, and releasing the unlimited potential energy of hypocrisy in our purportedly universalist Western society that is anything but. We will encounter these paradoxes, ambivalences, and false dichotomies throughout the text. Indeed, I try to engage and interrogate them at every turn—denying them normative status wherever practicable.

To analyze the seeming paradox of hip hop as a commercialized resistance music, for instance, the book employs the heuristic device "(African) Americanization." This critical apparatus reminds us of the complicated yet deeply implicated relationship between African American expressive culture and American consumer culture. Furthermore, it focuses our attention on the contradictory processes by which black music simultaneously centers and marginalizes African Americans in national cultural life. By drawing out the oft-occluded blackness of American culture in this parenthetical construction, we can unpack the racial contradictions inherent in that set of commercially available cultural forms known collectively as "black music" and come to a new understanding of hip hop's global resonance. Indeed, I argue that hip hop artists in postcolonial Europe seize on the commercialized forms of black American culture to elaborate their own affiliations with the lived realities and mediatized images of African American struggle, gain visibility in their own local and national contexts, and ultimately reterritorialize the music and politics to suit their own exigencies.

In the end, the study narrates how hip hop came to express the dreams and frustrations of postcolonial Europeans. But in doing so, it also tells us something larger about the struggle for hip hop's soul—a fight commonly reduced to the mediatized frame of “political consciousness” versus “gangsta bling.” Instead, this postcolonial analysis of European hip hop teaches us that this perceived contradiction at the heart of hip hop is, in fact, not a contradiction at all but a logical manifestation of the same colonial structures that powered Enlightenment progress on the backs of slaves and colonized peoples the world over. Indeed, the codependence of Enlightenment thought and the colonial imperative (“The White Man’s Burden”) is the fundamental paradox of this book—a twinned emergence that Denise Ferreira da Silva posits as productive of the similarly bound concepts of globality and race.⁹ What’s more, this paradoxical codependence of progressive rational ideology (Enlightenment) and regressive racial ideology (whiteness) suggests that whiteness and/as lightness might best be understood as the master trope of Western modernity.

As such, in the pages that follow I examine the ways that European hip hop works through and against these national-universalist contradictions to destabilize the received idea of Europe. By listening closely, I suggest we can hear how European hip hop artists employ the paradoxes of postcoloniality to power their critiques and rewrite Europe in all its complexity. Indeed, it is this dynamic that makes the music I discuss in this book truly *European*, as artists perform their complex and paradoxical societies and fight to be seen, heard, and understood in and of their local contexts. To be sure, this study could have examined a broader swath of European hip hop scenes—stretching from Andalusia to Athens and Kristiansand to the Caucasus.¹⁰ Yet in this book I am less interested in gathering a diversity of voices solipsistically deemed European by virtue of their geographic location within the confines of a place defined as Europe and more interested in testing the hypothesis that Europe is defined through its dynamic, but deeply implicated relationship with its others.¹¹ That is, today’s Europe is most clearly defined not by continental boundaries, the EU project, or the respective national cultures and ethnic identities that animate those imagined and real boundaries but, rather, through the profound and ubiquitous resonances of Europe’s imperial histories on the global stage. In short, this thesis suggests that Europe is defined first and foremost by the asymmetries of its postcolonial realities—both at home and abroad. As such, by listening closely to the ways that postcolonial citizens in Europe express their solidarity with African Americans, *Flip the Script: European Hip Hop and the Politics of Postcoloniality* argues that we can hear in hip hop the hybrid realities and assymetrical expressions of a global double consciousness.

PILLAR 2: THE PARADOX OF
COMMERCIALIZED RESISTANCE MUSIC

A second pillar of this book is to unseat the simplistic categorization of hip hop as solely protest music. While much of the music we will examine is just that, I want to paint a more nuanced portrait here, clearing space for a diversity of voices and allowing for the agency of all forms of hip hop. As Leonard Schmieding's and Adriana Helbig's recent work on Eastern European hip hop shows us, commercial hip hop can resonate in very different ways in different contexts.¹² While hip hop tends to be read as a marginalized "resistance vernacular" in the West, it is also a manifestly mainstream cultural commodity and an alternative form of assimilation into national discourses, languages, and economies—a contradictory tendency in hip hop often neglected in its scholarship.¹³ As such, in this book I avoid the "good hip hop/bad hip hop" binary and the critical laziness that valorizes the former for its political consciousness just as it dismisses the latter for its materialism and violation of politically correct orthodoxies.

This zero-sum game has played out ad nauseam on both the political right and left, providing a steady stream of unproductive commentary from voyeuristic pundits and committed hip hop scholars alike. Instead, analyzing the structural basis for this discourse that has no middle ground will help us find value and insight in unexpected places and help us avoid hearing hip hop as politics alone—indeed, this music and its culture have always been much more. Despite its powerfully liberating core message, hip hop—especially in its commodity forms—helps spread misogyny and homophobia while glorifying violence and celebrating materialism. But after more than thirty years of being a hip hop head, I have a problem with cultural analyses that artificially separate the good "conscious" hip hop from the bad "gangsta" rap. As most of us in the world of hip hop know, some of the best hip hop will still cross the line from time to time, and some of the worst on the surface can actually have the biggest heart and do the most political and cultural work.¹⁴ For one deafeningly obvious example of the easy coexistence of an emancipatory postcolonial critique at the center of an ostensibly materialist hip hop album we need look no further than the first lines of "No Church in the Wild" from Jay-Z and Kanye West's "luxury rap" chart topper *Watch the Throne*, where Jay raps: "Lies on the lips of a priest / Thanksgiving disguised as a feast."¹⁵ Such productive contradictions resonate loud and clear throughout hip hop's history.

At the outset of her pathbreaking study *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop*, Imani Perry explains to the uninitiated reader: "if the book

title were lyrics, the double entendre would be obvious: prophet/profit.”¹⁶ The art form thrives on such double entendre and inversional practices. Usually these practices of doubling and “flippin’ the script” imply both meanings. Famously, “bad” almost always means “good” in hip hop parlance, but, notably, in this construction bad remains a constituent part of good. In the same way, a DJ’s sample of the French national anthem, “La Marseillaise”—musical icon of French egalitarian ideals—might be invoked on a French hip hop track to signify that nation’s hypocrisies while also drumming up the patriotic sentiment that might motivate the nation to live up to those ideals.

These double meanings gain form not only in the ways that MCs and DJs doubly signify their lyrical, sonic, visual, and performative rhetoric, but also in the ways that hip hop is understood as both a minority resistance vernacular and a mainstream cultural commodity. To be sure, rap music emerged as a localized sonic response to the African American experience of structural racism, but as Gilroy challenged hip hop scholars over twenty years ago:

In what sense might Hip hop be described as marginal today? Those who assert the marginality of Hip hop should be obliged to say where they imagine the centre might now be. Hip hop’s marginality is as official, as routinised, as its overblown defiance; yet it is still represented as an outlaw form. *This is a mystery that aches to be solved.* Further clues may be furnished by delving into uncomfortable issues like hip hop’s corporate developmental association with the “subcultures” that grow up around television, advertising and cartoons or by interrogating the revolutionary conservatism that constitutes its routine political focus but which is over-simplified or more usually ignored by its academic celebrants.¹⁷

This daunting duplicity—this “mystery”—is at the center of this book’s examination of hip hop in Paris, Berlin, and London, a puzzling contradiction that we might call “the paradox of commercialized resistance music.”

In the first chapter of Perry’s book, “Hip Hop’s Mama: Originalism and Identity in the Music,” the hip hop scholar also tasks herself with establishing that, despite the art form’s manifestly hybrid and well-documented transnational genesis, it was and remains “black American music.” I agree. As we will see throughout this book, a great deal of hip hop’s global power stems from its continued meaning and relevance as an African American art and practice—with all of the real and iconic struggle that this naming implies. And as Perry rightly suggests, in considering hip hop’s power we must also focus on the economic structures that have centered black music while marginalizing black

people. As a point of departure for the present introduction, however, let us consider one of Perry's arguments in support of her contention that hip hop is black American music.

In addressing critics who become queasy when confronted with the very idea of "black music" as an overly simplistic and essentializing notion, Perry asks why the term must imply "100 per cent black." She writes: "To deem something French or English rarely implies that there were no Germanic cultural influences, or Irish, or even Algerian. Why, then, is it so troubling to define something as black?"¹⁸ Perhaps defining inherently hybrid music as black is troubling because it reminds us of the racial (il)logics of the ideology of hypodescent (the "one-drop rule") and its historic deployment in US legal frameworks. This is a point of some importance, and is one to which we will return. For our purposes here, Perry deems the terms "French" or "English" as implicitly hybrid—much to her credit. Yet, to suggest that discourses of racial purity are anything but rampant in today's Europe misses the mark badly. From the Front National mantra "France for the French" to the rise of UKIP, its Brexit insularity, and jingoistic reportage about Sharia law as a pestilence upon the English body politic to German assimilationist handwringing about *Leitkultur* (mainstream/dominant culture) and "the migrant crisis," Europe is in the midst of a cultural sea change rife with reactionary nationalist movements that deploy the idea of purity not rarely, but often.

In the pages that follow I will show that Perry's conclusions are correct—that even in Europe, *especially* in Europe, hip hop is black American music—if not always for the reasons she suggests. More important, I will endeavor to show how an investigation of hip hop in Paris, Berlin, and London might help us solve the "mystery" of commercialized resistance music. In so doing, we might just crack open some of the larger paradoxes about race, nation, and empire.

PILLAR 3: HIP HOP AND/AS POLITICS

This book's third central pillar suggests that the same Enlightenment thinking that gave us the binaries black/white and vernacular/commercial (central to both pillar 1's double consciousness and pillar 2's good hip hop/bad hip hop binary) also gave us the art/life binary. That is, through the rational logocentrism of Western thought, music has been successfully extricated from the realm of the real—the political, the material—and placed on a cultural, and ultimately marginalized, pedestal. The argument is implicit throughout this study in its sustained attention to musical detail and the ways that the sonic both

encodes and facilitates the social. By continually highlighting the constructedness of those rationalized dyads—art/life, culture/politics, form/content, and music/text—I argue that we can embolden our disciplinary move past the musicological ideology of the “musical object” toward an understanding of music as performance—even if that performance is crafted, (temporarily) fixed, and etched in a musical score or the grooves of a vinyl LP, or digitally encoded into an mp3. Indeed, as Philip Auslander reminds us, “Regardless of the ontological status of recorded music, its phenomenological status for listeners is that of a performance unfolding at the time and in the place of listening. . . . Despite the physical absence of the performer at the time of listening, listeners do not perceive recorded music as disembodied.”¹⁹

To make this postdisciplinary move, I build on the foundational black poststructuralism of Houston Baker and the more recent work of Fred Moten, who in his *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* posits “the possibility of a critique of the valuation of meaning over content and the reduction of phonic matter and syntactic ‘degeneracy’” in African American expressive culture. As he suggests, “this disruption of the Enlightenment linguistic project is of fundamental importance since it allows a rearrangement of the relationship between notions of human freedom and notions of human essence”—a deformation of how we understand the relationship of “agency” and “structure.”²⁰ By positioning hip hop as performance rather than communicative text we can avoid the trap of “reducing the bloody ‘open hazardous reality of conflict’ to the ‘calm Platonic form of language and dialogue,’” that Gilroy (quoting Foucault) cautions us against as hip hop scholars.²¹ Indeed, in the pages that follow I model performances of “hip hop close readings” *in both form and content*. That is, I urge us to follow Baker’s encouragement to “heat up the observational space” in our work and to take seriously Moten’s insistence that black music *is* scholarship.²² In short, we must engage hip hop interpretive practices, enact hip hop’s “fifth element”—knowledge—more forthrightly, move past our subject positions as “scholars of hip hop,” and truly take on the mantle of “hip hop scholar” (a concept that many of us have been conscious of since we were “knee high to a duck”).²³

Gilroy’s critique charges us to understand hip hop more fully *as music* while taking hip hop both less seriously (*vis-à-vis* authenticities, “outsized” and unsubstantiated claims of resistance, and the like) and more seriously (with regard to craft, embodied desire, sonic strategies, political complexities and contradictions, etc.). Such a sustained attention to sonic details—including the spoken voice—will allow us to feel hip hop more intensely, attend to the im-

mediacy of hip hop's presence (in terms of geography, emotional urgency, and frequency response), and examine the understudied subject of *sometimes it's not what you say, but how you say it*. While this study is by no means deficient in lyrical analyses, the performance-centered approach will help us decenter hip hop lyrics to help us understand the relationship of texts to beats and will help us understand that the beats have their own sonic rhetorics, underpinning or providing contrast to those texts, visual cues, and movements that grab our attention most readily.

All told, the performative and postcolonial frame helps us to connect that seemingly unique doubleness of African American experiences to global populations, better understand the constructedness of race while holding fast against the realities of racism, engage hip hop's constitutive but occluded hybridities, destabilize the art/life split, and examine how this and related Cartesian binaries were not passive discourses, but essential and active players in the cultural and economic process that named Europe the mind and the world the body—a process that is not played out. It is my contention that in focusing on the ideological puissance and historical materiality of these ruptures, we can recenter what Christopher Waterman once called “the Excluded Middle,” solve Gilroy’s “mystery that aches to be solved,” and hear hip hop anew.²⁴

BLACK/WHITE, CONSCIOUS/GANGSTA,
ART/LIFE: A CHAPTER OUTLINE

I begin the first chapter, “*Faccuse*’: Hip Hop’s Postcolonial Politics in Paris,” tracking the postcolonial politics at play in Parisian hip hop, introducing common themes and sonic strategies that will arise in all three of this book’s metropolitical and national contexts. Drawing on my first fieldwork experiences with hip hop communities in Paris in the spring of 2007, I introduce the political discourses in and around hip hop during the run-up to the national elections that would see Nicholas Sarkozy—sworn enemy and favorite target of French hip hop—elected to the presidency. My aim here is to provide a workable background to understanding the cultural and political terrain at that pivotal time and offer a look at the network of shared ideas as well as the fractures and diversity within French hip hop at the time. The themes that emerge center around ideas of migration, assimilation, diversity, hybridity, fusion, and multiculturalism, with an ear tuned as much to the global and international as to the local and the national. Notably, the ways that the critiques are framed center around the national Republican ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. As

such, these artists explore the ideological contradictions of Enlightenment thought in the Parisian context as a way to both assert their differences from and claim their place in the nation.

In the second chapter of this Parisian pair, “Nostalgia ‘En noir et blanc’: Black Music and Postcoloniality from Sefyu’s Paris to Buddy Bolden’s New Orleans,” I perform a close reading of Sefyu’s “En noir et blanc” as a way to bring into form the historical and discursive continuities between double consciousness and postcoloniality through the sonic contours and performed histories of “black music.” My aims here are foundational to laying out the basic terms and tenets of this book’s central argument, namely, that by listening closely to European hip hop we can hear that double consciousness is the particular African American form of the global experience of postcoloniality—the first pillar. In turn, by tackling such a large question through the lens of a single piece of music, we can see in detail how, through musical performance, hip hop births a new consciousness both attuned to this continuity and calibrated to undermine the asymmetries that both double consciousness and postcoloniality describe.

As with all of the analyses that follow, this close reading is placed within its contexts through extensive ethnographic fieldwork—in this case, fieldwork that sent me chasing the elusive Sefyu across Paris and its surrounding *banlieues*. The paths he led me down brought me in touch with hip hop communities that I might not have been able to connect with or learn from had Sefyu been an easy target. By coming to know the other MCs and DJs whom I met on this journey, I also came to see the web of musical, textual, and human interconnections that informed Sefyu’s music and politics. Indeed, I have since come to see the fieldwork process as something akin to the close reading process insofar as both scholarly approaches embed the researcher within networks that must be traveled and navigated in order to gain a greater appreciation of creative communities and their music.

In the third chapter, “Musical (African) Americanization: Strategic Essentialism, Hybridity, and Commerce in Aggro Berlin,” I further develop the theme of postcolonial hybridity as it relates to double consciousness in the historically charged context of post-Cold War Berlin. The chapter tracks the work of Aggro Berlin recording artist B-Tight (Robert Edward Davis), the son of an African American serviceman and an ethnically German mother. Beginning at a concert in the city’s Columbiaclub, the chapter examines the ways that hip hop’s performative musical structures activate a racial dialectic that implicates B-Tight and his multiracial German public. Here, I examine more troubling valences of doubleness on B-Tight’s track, “Der Neger,” to pivot to

the second pillar of this study's argument and investigate the commercialization of blackness with the heuristic frame of "(African) Americanization." In so doing, the chapter considers the postcolonial situation of Turkish-German *Gastarbeiter* (guestworkers) as well as the legacy of American occupation in these transactions.

The second in a pair of Berlin chapters, chapter 4, "*Heiße Waren: Hot Commodities, 'Der Neger Bonus,' and the Commercial Authentic,*" elaborates my examination of hip hop "commerce." I begin with an historical examination of the cultivation of authenticity in black music, tracking W. C. Handy's early codification of blues form, first in European musical notation and then in the emerging recording industry that commodified black musical authenticity for the masses. From this background, I turn to examine continuities in the 2004 mixtape *Heiße Ware* (Hot Commodity), featuring B-Tight and his Lebanese-Berliner label mate, Tony D. The analysis takes as its subject the performance of violently "hot" and misogynistic, nonwhite gangsta masculinities on the mixtape and examines the ways that the commercial product was designed to be "excessive" from its conceptualization to its performance and its marketing. The chapter thus tracks the record label's cultivation of what I term a "commercial authentic" in counterpoint with an unexpected continuity with the German press's reception of the historic visit of then-candidate Barack Obama to Berlin in the summer of 2008.

Chapter 5 further examines the gendered valences of consumer culture through the "third world" feminist heuristic, "terrorist chic." In "M.I.A.'s 'Terrorist Chic': Black Atlantic Music and South Asian Postcolonial Politics in London," I argue that the feminizing and dismissive term, which was widely applied to the music of M.I.A., reveals a deep ambivalence structured around fear and condescension. Through a close reading of the Sri Lankan Londoner's first album, *Arular*, and the discourse it generated, I argue that we can hear the very thing we are afraid we might—the sound of the authentically inauthentic. The chapter thus follows bell hooks's direction in suggesting that "fierce critical interrogation is sometimes the only practice that can pierce the wall of denial consumers of images construct."²⁵ The chapter further theorizes hip hop commerce through the lens of sexism and its intersections with racism and Islamophobia, while theorizing South Asian Brits into black Atlantic cultural politics, thus considering pillars 1 and 2 through the lens of gender politics.

In chapter 6, "*Marché Noir: The Hip Hop Hustle in the City of Light,*" I conclude my examination of the interrelated conscious/gangsta and vernacular/commerce binaries in hip hop and turn my focus to the art/life binary. I begin in the hip hop community of a Parisian radio station and its weekly

Marché Noir live hip hop show, examining the ways that such communities are formed. By tracking the group Blackara and their self-defined “*arriviste*” (hustler) ideology, I attempt to register how hip hop becomes both a vocation and a lifestyle, a performed hustle and a performative avocation. As we will see, hip hop is simultaneously a music, a culture, and a way of being in and knowing the world. The chapter interrogates the sonic form of Blackara’s “*arriviste*” hip hop consciousness and tracks the valences of black conspicuous consumption as a subversive act in this capital of *haute couture* by considering Blackara’s postcolonial gaze from the city’s margins. The chapter concludes by looking at the music of *Marché Noir* regulars associated with the *Capitale Sale* (Dirty Capital) record label.

In the final pair of chapters I return to hip hop in the United Kingdom, centering on the music of Juice Aleem. The aim here is to make explicit some of the implicit arguments from the preceding chapters about how hip hop consciousness comes into form through musical performance. In chapter 7, “‘Wherever We Go’: UK Hip Hop and the Deformation of Mastery,” I begin with a cultural history of UK hip hop based on interviews in the city and analyses of hip hop’s music and industry in the nation. The focus then turns to New Flesh frontman Aleem, highlighting and interrogating his loaded statement that “England has had a love affair” with black musics. As the debate around the industry term “urban” indicates, the country is still not comfortable with its relationship with “black music” as such, just as it remains uncomfortable with black Britons. Through close analysis of the New Flesh album *Universally Dirty* (2006), and its hit track “Wherever We Go,” I examine how Aleem performs this uncomfortable and unfinished relationship, encoding and embodying his critique in the musical contours of a deformational mastery of the form/content binary. I argue that by listening closely to his music, we can hear the political antinomies of the term “black British,” and better understand how such musical expressions both encode and enact the mutual implication of the sonic and the social.

In the final chapter, “‘Straight Outta B.C.’: Différance, Defness, and Juice Aleem’s Precolonial Afrofuturist Critique,” I offer a theorization of these continuities premised on Aleem’s concept album, *Jerusalem Come* (2009). Here I examine the “emergent” possibilities of musical performance, using Raymond William’s influential categories of the “residual,” “dominant,” and “emergent” (as well as the “archaic”), to examine Aleem’s space- and time-traveling global and interhistorical critique. By articulating Gilroy’s concept of “anti-anti-essentialism” to Jacques Derrida’s concept of “*différance*” and Homi Bhabha’s

“evil eye/I,” I arrive at a new theorization of hip hop performativity built on the hip hop concept of “defness.” In brief, through a detailed examination of Aleem’s “emergent” album, *Jerusalem Come*, I suggest that where *différance* exposes the difference and deference of meaning, “defness” reasserts, if not definite meaning, the definitive agency of the speaker. In hip hop a def rapper is one who, despite and through his or her alterity, commands the art of speech and renders those who do not wish to hear him or her deaf. Defness thus presupposes that black performance is an immanent critique. Following Gayatri Spivak’s foundational critique, defness presupposes that most will not hear. But defness also presupposes that there are some things that cannot be taken away.

I end the book by considering a continuity between hip hop and postcolonial studies that I call the “mechanics of the double bind” and building this continuity into a conclusion titled “Hip Hop Studies and/as Postcolonial Studies.” After a brief assessment of the promise of global hip hop studies I issue a call to hip hop scholars premised on the three pillars outlined above. In so doing, I outline an interdisciplinary project that will help us push against the physical and conceptual boundaries that tend to isolate us from one another. To give force to this call and elaborate what it might look like in practice, I turn to an emergent (for me) realm of investigation—Irish hip hop. Having recently moved to the Emerald Isle, I track the ways that Irish artists use hip hop to perform their postcolonial critiques through local and national revolutionary histories, refigurations of Irish language and traditional music, and the sonic and rhetorical contours of hip hop. The MCs that I examine construct an internationalist identity perched on the moral high ground of American civil rights discourse while critically engaging national stereotypes and militating against occupation of their “paradise,” the Emerald Isle. As such, in the chapters that follow, I employ a variety of methodologies to build an array of disparate voices into a cohesive theory of hip hop and postcoloniality—a theory built upon the doubly bound mechanics of counterhegemonic movement.

SITUATING THE RESEARCH

Before I begin in earnest, there are matters of perspective, methodology, and terminology to which we should attend. Although my interests in European hip hop stretch back to my first exposures to the sights and sounds of the art form in Tübingen, Germany, circa 1992 and grew with my first Fettes Brot, MC Solaar, and Roots Manuva albums in the mid- to late 1990s, my formal

study of this music and its politics began in 2003. These “same, but not quite” European versions of the music captured my imagination as a white, inner-city American kid who grew up with hip hop—and with America’s racial baggage. Although my decade of fieldwork with European hip hop communities has helped nuance my understanding of the different contexts of this music and culture—and the different contexts of race and racisms—and although I now live and teach in the European Union, my perspective remains an American one.²⁶

Perhaps it is important that this perspective is an *expat* American one, one that feels from afar a powerful and heightened pull toward and revulsion from the United States in this BlackLivesMatter/Trump moment, but I suspect in some ways it makes my perspective all the more American. I remark on these basic biographical details, above all, to situate this book in an important, inspiring, and expanding body of hip hop scholarship in which I am an emerging and, in many ways, authoritative, but by no means final, voice on the subject and subjects. In this book I won’t try to pretend that I’m without my own bias and baggage. I will, however, try to spend time listening closely to the music and the communities that produced it, taking seriously the beats, the rhymes, and the lives that they encode and amplify. I hope the reader finds my analysis as compelling and audacious as the artists I take as my subjects.

Regarding my methodology, as I’ve suggested above, the book is both informed by close readings of music and media and grounded in fieldwork centered in Paris, Berlin, and London.²⁷ It is thus reflective of my disciplining as a musicologist and ethnomusicologist and indicative of my efforts to bring the best of those fields into the critical terrain of cultural studies. That said, my eclectic methodology was born of necessity and is premised more intuitively on an emergent sense of knowing what needs to be done as a hip hop head who has a great respect for the music, finds the artform infinitely deep and wide, and wants to do justice to the music, the culture, and the people who make and live it. Although much of the analysis is rooted in my 2006–8 fieldwork with European hip hop communities, listening carefully to and living with European hip hop (both figuratively and literally) in the intervening years has greatly augmented the methodology. That is, hip hop’s critical discourses have themselves helped me develop a wide-ranging and bespoke set of tools to render the music, culture, and people in all their human complexity—in full audio spectrum, in living color, and in three dimensions (four in chapter 8).

Finally, the terminologies I employ throughout the study work purposefully to push the discourse about performance, culture, and postcoloniality into new terrain. Here, too, I follow hip hop’s lead by creating new terms,

engaging in productive misreading, militating against fixed meanings, and otherwise working to push hip hop's performativity into the realm of usable theory—or better: to recognize this performativity as critical theory, to recognize hip hop as scholarship. As in the title, I refer to this music as *European* hip hop throughout the text. While my use of this nomenclature is not meant to privilege the Northwestern and Central European iterations of the form that I examine, it does amount to a conscious intervention in reframing who gets to speak as a European. In many ways, the three epigraphs above set the discursive stage for my interventions in the pages that follow. The first, from Gilroy's opening to *The Black Atlantic*, grapples with issues of Europeanness and double consciousness. The second, from the last paragraphs of Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, deals in hybridity and paradox. The third, from the second track of Juice Aleem's *Jerusalaam Come*, performs essence and transcendence. Notably, all three center the discursive terrain on which battles around identity are waged. Yet, so too do all three lay bare the contextual and performative slippages that forever subvert language's ability to capture the excess, plurality, and dynamism of our "unfinished identities."

In the chapters that follow, I endeavor to track how European hip hop artists are at the vanguard of this discursive contest. Their secret weapons: a hard-won understanding of the ways that language has been deployed to exploit and oppress and an equally canny ability to perform, embody, recontextualize, and otherwise bring language into sonic form—to bring language to life. In titling the book *Flip the Script* I call upon a widely known hip hop term and the set of knowledges, practices, and politics to which it refers. As we will see, the idea of "flipping" models the theoretical mechanics of the textual and conceptual content I analyze in the pages to come. What's more, it has the added benefit of accruing deeper meaning and complexity over the course of the chapters as we learn all of the *performative* ways that hip hop artists find to invert, deform, resignify, and otherwise trouble Enlightenment discourses, Eurocentric written histories, and the presents and futures that they *script*. This simple touchstone will help us understand new valences of multicultural capitalism in chapter one, it will gain significance as we explore the syllabic flipping of French *verlan* wordplay in chapter 2, and continue to build steam through the strategic essentialisms of Berliner MCs in chapters 3 and 4, the hyperpresent absence of M.I.A. in chapter 5, the conspicuous consumption of chapter 6, and the deformation of mastery and performative, "def," critique of European imperial histories in chapters 7 and 8.

In Europe's present context of perpetual crisis (that is always already racialized)—from refugee crises and constant fears of terrorism to the rise of

neonationalist parties, the isolationist Brexit fruits they bear, the normalization of boom-and-bust economics, and the new reality of permanent austerity—it is the sons, daughters, and grandchildren of settlers from the former colonies and peripheries of Europe who are on the front lines and are best equipped to offer new insight into current affairs . . . if we have the sense to listen. And make no mistake; these local insights will take wing on the global commercial networks of popular culture through the sonic force of hip hop.

What does twenty-first-century Europe sound like? Let's have a listen.