

Living Hip Hop:
Defining Authenticity in the Adelaide and Melbourne
Hip Hop Scenes

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Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Discipline of Anthropology
The University of Adelaide
October 2011

Thesis Declaration

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Acknowledgements

Although the completion of a PhD can sometimes feel like a solitary endeavour, this thesis could not have been completed without the support, encouragement and involvement of numerous people who I would like to acknowledge.

First and foremost I want to thank all the people who agreed to be interviewed for this research or who graciously endured my presence and my endless questions at Hip Hop gigs or other events. Everyone who was involved in my research generously gave up their time in order to share with me why they were involved in Hip Hop and what Hip Hop meant to them. Without you, I would have no thesis to write. I would also like to pay tribute to the many Hip Hoppers whose voices are not included in this thesis but whose passion and commitment is truly what keeps Hip Hop 'alive'.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Michael Wilmore and Dr. Alison Dundon for their feedback on numerous drafts and their patience and understanding. Your analytic insights and constructive criticism were invaluable. Of course, any mistakes are my own. I would also like to acknowledge Professor Peter Sutton for his assistance in the development of my research project and for his advice throughout my time in the field. More broadly, I am grateful for the helpful comments and comradeship offered by all of the Anthropology and Development Studies staff and postgraduate students at the University of Adelaide during my candidature. In particular, those who kept me sane with much needed coffee breaks!

To my parents, Gwen Rodger and Tim Rodger, thank you for encouraging me to always keep learning and to pursue my goals. To my brother, Andrew Rodger, thanks for introducing me to the Beastie Boys and, in many ways, inspiring my interest in music.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Adam Maud, who always believed I would finish this thesis and, more importantly, always believes in me.

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the Hip Hop scenes in the Australian cities of Adelaide and Melbourne. Based on fieldwork conducted from September 2006 to January 2008, my research builds on a growing body of scholarship that examines the production and consumption of Hip Hop outside of the United States of America. The central aim of this thesis is to examine how Hip Hoppers define, express, and actively work to sustain, living or authentic Hip Hop culture in Australia. However, it is not my intention to set out a definitive list of good or bad Hip Hop or to suggest that there is one authentic way to be a Hip Hopper in Australia. Instead, I emphasise the contested nature of authenticity and examine how different Hip Hop fans and artists use the concept of authenticity to legitimise their own beliefs and actions. My research illustrates that different Hip Hoppers have varied understandings about the origins, history and traditions that make up Hip Hop culture, and therefore, what living or authentic Hip Hop is. These differences can create tensions as Hip Hop enthusiasts debate how authenticity should be assessed in Australia.

In each chapter of this thesis I examine these deliberations, highlighting the power struggles that occur when people try to fix the meaning of Hip Hop and to disrupt or discount definitions that threaten their own understandings. I demonstrate that authenticity is an evaluative concept that is used to claim status and to formulate and defend cultural boundaries. My findings contribute to contemporary debates about the impacts of globalisation and localisation by examining how people make judgements about what is, or is not, authentic in an increasingly interconnected world. I argue that by studying how authenticity is formulated in a specific cultural setting we gain valuable insight into how people understand their social world and their position in it.

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