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*European hip-hop: an in-depth analysis of the
development of hip-hop in France, Italy and
Germany during the 1980s and 1990s*

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Abstract

This dissertation will provide an in-depth analysis into the development of hip-hop in three European countries: France, Italy and Germany, during the 1980s and 1990s. Drawing from the ideas of important theorists such as Andre Prevos, Tony Mitchell, Mark Pennay, and Dietmar Elflein, and a variety of relevant online articles, documentaries and films, it will show how each country adapted the musical idioms and styles of American hip-hop to create unique offshoots. Discussing the key artists within each country, and how hip-hop impacted on society. The key theories of Globalisation and Americanisation will be used to show how hip-hop arrived into Europe from America, and an overall background of the birth and growth of hip-hop from the depravity of the New York projects will also be given.

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Introduction

Hip-hop is more than just a musical genre; it is a culture, and a philosophy of life. It incorporates rapping, breakdancing, graffiti art, fashion, the way a person walks and talks, and their political attitude. It brought diasporic communities in New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s together, and gave a voice to the African-American and Hispanic people, to speak up against the racial discrimination and marginalisation they faced on a day-to-day basis. It became a global phenomenon, and inspired youths from all over the world facing similar social and economic circumstances to use music as a form of escaping and revolting against society.

In this dissertation the focus will be on European hip-hop, discussing the growth and development of hip-hop throughout the 1980s and 1990s in three countries – France, Italy and Germany. Each country developed a strong hip-hop scene, which at first emulated the styles and characteristics of American hip-hop, but then adapted and experimented with the musical idioms to create unique offshoots. By using local dialects, discussing local social and political issues, and incorporating different cultural musical styles and influences, each hip-hop scene grew into a self-sufficient culture, far removed from American ideologies and styles. This will be analysed in the following chapters, as outlined below:

Chapter number two will focus on the hip-hop scene in France, looking at rap in the banlieues and the key artists MC Solaar and IAM. Also discussing how

hip-hop brought together diasporic communities from Africa, Algeria and the Middle East, and helped to shed light on the living conditions of people in the poorer areas of France.

Chapter number three will discuss Italian rap, analysing how hip-hop emerged out of the semi-legal social centres and developed into a key political movement, inciting riots against the Christian Democrat government of the early 1990s, and the Berlusconi government in 1994.

Chapter number four will look into the fragmented hip-hop scene in Germany, from nationalist movements to Turkish rebellion, the chapter will piece together the development of hip-hop in a country still feeling the effects of the Second World War.

However, before looking into those it is important to first understand how hip-hop arrived into Europe. In the first chapter this will be explained by looking into the key theories of Globalisation and Americanisation. The chapter will start off broad by looking into these two theories, giving a definition and explaining the effect of both, and then funnel down by giving a detailed background of the origins of hip-hop and how it made its way into Europe.

Chapter one

Globalisation:

Globalisation is the worldwide perception that the world is becoming smaller due to the advancements in technology of travel and communication. Lee and Vivarelli (2006) state that it:

“is a broadening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the environmental. At issue appears to be ‘a global shift’; that is, a world being moulded, by economic and technological forces, into a shared economic and political arena.”

This idea of living in a shared world is agreed upon by many of the theorists in this area of study; Held and McGrew (2003) call it *“the emergence of a global civil society.”* This is largely down to the development of new technologies, such as satellite TV, the Internet and social media, which have increased this sense of shrinkage. It is also due to the decreasing costs of transportation, which have led to a closer integration of the economies of the world. The result has given national cultures a more cosmopolitan feel, due to *“the transgressing of national boundaries by symbolic goods and peoples.”* (Begg, Draxler, Mortenson 2008). The effect of this interconnectedness has led to homogenisation, whereby national and cultural distinctions are being eroded. Some believe that this has caused a deterritorialisation from the locality, but Stevenson (1999) contests this, stating:

“that may be one consequence of the successive changes, but it is hardly the only cognitive response. That we become aware that our sense of belonging to a concrete locality is of a contingent and imaginary nature hardly changes the fact that we actually live and work in a geographically defined place, in which we go about our day-to-day lives.”

He believes that a ‘reterritorialisation’ occurs, *“whereby people attach themselves socially and emotionally to the transformed locality and new social networks that have become part of it.”* (1999)

What appears to be happening to cultures is the emergence of Glocalisation, where something that is global is mixed with the local. This has created different hybrids around the world as brands and products are perceived differently. For example, American products in the Caribbean are seen as symbols of wealth, in Asia they are represented as signs of freedom. Watson (1997) discussed the impact of McDonalds in Asia, saying it *“does imply a certain degree of homogenisation, but equally important”* he argues, *“people who visit McDonalds associate the restaurants with a variety of cultural values and incorporate it differently into the local culture.”*

Globalisation is a complicated and complex theory, and with the emergence of media technology and the Internet it becomes even harder to define and explain, Lee and Vivarelli go as far as saying, *“The ‘big idea’ of the late twentieth century – lacks precise definition. More than this, it is in danger of becoming, if it has not already become, the cliché of our times”* (2006), and as Negus (1994) states:

“Globalization is often little more than a rhetorical ‘buzz word’ which has tended to become a bland wallpaper term used to cover the cracks, conflicts and discontinuities in the world as the planet is reduced to a cosy ‘global village’.”

Nonetheless, Globalisation is an important driver when looking into how a genre and culture born in New York made its way into the eyes and ears of Europeans so quickly.

Americanisation:

Whereas Globalisation gives off the perceived idea that the interconnectedness of the world is a global phenomenon, Americanisation argues that this is not the case at all, and that Globalisation is just a round term and a false representation of what is really happening, as Giddens (1999) explains, that for those:

“living outside Europe and North America, it looks uncomfortably like Westernisation – or, perhaps, Americanisation, since the US is now the sole superpower, with a dominant economic, cultural and military position in the global order. Many of the most visible cultural expressions of globalisation are American – Coca-Cola, McDonalds. Most of the giant multinational companies are based in the US too. Those that aren’t all come from the rich countries, not the poorer areas of the world. A pessimistic view of globalisation would consider it largely an affair of the industrial North.”

It is hard to disagree with this statement, when looking around at the effects of Globalisation; the dominant force is undoubtedly America, which many believe

has resulted in cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism is when the culture of a more powerful country, such as America, has a greater influence over the culture of a less powerful country. This unequal cultural flow has been increased due to the advancements of technology; the ease at which cultures can be imported is of concern, especially when:

“the cultural producers tend to be a handful of countries with heavily developed television and motion picture industries. In recent years films, videotapes and newspaper copy do not always have to be hand-carried across national borders. Electronic transmission and satellite technology have led to a phenomenon known as trans-border data flow. The internationalisation of CNN (the Cable News Network) and MTV (Music Television) are prime examples. Not only are unique cultures being threatened by the information of foreign visual media programming, but stereotypes are being formed and perpetuated about people and lifestyles in the countries where this programming is produced.” (Golding, Harris 1997)

This is the downside to Americanisation, the perceived ideas of what American culture is through the brands, products and celebrities that are imported around the world. American culture is now being defined by these ideas and according to Lasn:

“American culture is no longer created by the people. Our stories, once passed from one generation to the next by parents, neighbours and teachers, are now told by distant corporations with ‘something to sell as well as to tell.’ Brands, products, fashions, celebrities, entertainments – the spectacles that surround the production of culture – are our culture now. Our role is mostly to listen and watch – and then, based on what we have heard and seen, to buy.” (1999)

In his book, 'Culture Jam', he discusses the impact of Globalisation in the mass media, saying that it is now the main influencer in defining people's personalities; his belief that America, in particular, has become a consumer-based society.

This theory can be useful when looking at how hip-hop was marketed to the rest of the world in the early 1980s. Europeans, like the rest of the world, would have strongly observed the personalities of the people, the clothing brands that the artists wore, and the products that they brought, through the films, TV programs, and the music used to document the culture. Hip-hop affiliated brands such as Tommy Hilfiger, Ralph Lauren, Fubu and Cross Colours became identity markers for hip-hop artists and fans. The whole idea was to look 'fresh' explained by Jenkins as coming from:

"something fresh out of the box. In the inner city, it means you have money and you can afford to buy these products. Beyond that, looking clean and crisp is a big part of the urban aesthetic. Something looking brand new says a lot about who you are." (2015)

The importance of showing that you have money came from the very origins of hip-hop where a lot of people had nothing. Americanisation has facilitated the growth of hip-hop worldwide. Their dominant media industry has allowed such elements as clothing to be publicised and marketed to a global audience within an instant. The term 'fresh' soon became part of the universal rhetoric for dressing cool.

It is without a doubt that both Globalisation and Americanisation accelerated the growth of hip-hop and its characteristics to a worldwide audience, but before discussing its arrival into Europe it is important to give an in-depth understanding of where hip-hop came from, and what it came out of.

American Hip-Hop:

Hip-hop came at a time when the African-American community had been crippled by some of the effects of Globalisation. Cheaper transportation costs caused a lot of companies in America to leave, deciding that the cheap labour and lower minimum wages that poorer countries offered would be more profitable than staying in America. As Kelley (2006) explains:

“between 1973 and 1980, at least 4 million jobs were lost to firms moving outside the US, and during the decade of the 1970s, at least 32 million jobs were lost as a result of shutdowns, relocations, and scaling back operations. The decline of manufacturing jobs in steel, rubber, auto, and other heavy industries had a devastating impact on black workers.”

American companies such as Ford Motor and Coca Cola relocating, left substantial shortages of work, and forced many into unemployment, this being mostly low skilled, badly educated people from ethnic backgrounds, the spiralling effect of no income led to poor living conditions and a general lack of hope. This was exacerbated with the increased migration of Africans, Latin Americans, and Caribbean's into inner cities such as New York. The American dream as portrayed by popular brands, films and TV programmes,

had lured many to it, but instead they were met by mass unemployment, racial segregation and forced to live in the ghetto style projects with the African-Americans. This melting pot of different cultures all crammed together and the harsh society they faced would give birth to a culture and musical style known as hip-hop.

“In the 1970s New York, graffiti, rapping and breaking became the prime expressions of a new young people subculture called hip-hop. Graffiti is the written word, there’s the spoken word of rap music, and then there’s the acrobatic body language of dancers, like breaking.” (Style Wars, Narr: Sam Schlach. 1983)

The musical influences of hip-hop included Funk, Soul, Jazz and Reggae, even popular Dance and Rock music are deemed as influential styles that shaped the hip-hop sound. In its most basic form, as Raimist reminds us, hip-hop started off as

“a group of kids sitting on the stoop, standing on the street corner, that have a lot to say...but they don’t have the tools, expensive things to create art. So they started beating on the sidewalk, beating on a garbage can, telling their stories in poems and in raps, painting on the walls.” (2006)

The low job prospects and dire surroundings that many lived in led to a disillusioned youth, who needed an outlet to express themselves, and without the money to buy guitars, drums and studio time, they used the environment around them and their own bodies to do this, as Raimist explained above.

In its more elaborate form, hip-hop grew out of the massive bloc parties that pioneering DJ's such as Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash and Kool Herc used to throw, gathering together all of the different communities into one was an important element in the birth and growth of hip-hop. This later developed into the art of the MC and producers using samples from popular music to create beats. Its DIY attitude, along with its anti-political/social stance appealed to many who felt oppressed and increasingly downtrodden by the police, politicians and the society around them. It grew into a culture and a way of life, as Shusterman (2005) explains, hip-hop is:

“a whole philosophy of life, an ethos that involves clothes, a style of talk and walk, a political attitude, and often a philosophical posture of asking hard questions and critically challenging established views and values.”

Hip-hop began to take root across different parts of America and then overseas to countries as far and wide as Japan, France, Australia and Sweden, the new technologies in media and progression of the Internet facilitating the speed at which the culture spread. Influential films depicting the lifestyle and different elements of hip-hop such as Wild Style (1983) and Boyz in the Hood (1991) helped to show the image and characteristics of hip-hop to a worldwide audience. Television programmes like Yo! MTV Raps (1988 – 2004) and worldwide tours from popular groups such as Public Enemy and N.W.A. (henceforth known as Niggaz With Attitude) increased the popularity of the genre, and thus the hip-hop culture overseas was born. One of the

reasons why hip-hop caught on so quickly, as Arnold (2006) explains, is because:

“the freedom of expression inherent in hip-hop has been somewhat of a universal language. As such, its relevancy to the struggles of young people all over the world in their fight for their own identity and liberation from political, social, and economic oppression – by any means necessary – is undeniable.”

Hip-hop became a global phenomenon with many prominent scenes developing all over the world. Europe, in particular, with its close affiliation to America and the economies to move with the advancements in technology, grew several strong hip-hop scenes.

Hip-Hop in Europe:

In its initial stages throughout the 1970s and 1980s, many hip-hop scenes in Europe just mimicked the styles of American models, adopting the image and characteristics that they had seen via films such as *Style Wars* (1983), *Beat Street* (1984) and the aforementioned *Wild Style* (1983), and copying the musical idioms heard from the likes of Grandmaster Flash, The Sugarhill Gang and The Furious Five. Hip-hop created by European artists, therefore failed to connect with the majority of people, fluctuating in and out of mainstream media attention with only a few novelty hits appearing in the charts. The popularity of hip-hop in Europe was strongly focused on the material coming out of America. This led to European artists re-thinking their creative output, and out of the mainstream media light, they began to adapt

and experiment with the musical forms and idioms of American hip-hop. It had gone *“from an adoption to an adaptation.”* Mitchell (2001).

Hip-hop created by European artists gained some credibility, and underground scenes developed from countries all over the continent. Hip-hop as an art form is based around protest, and artists began to harness this by tackling their own local issues, infusing musical sounds from their own cultures mixed with the original hip-hop sound. They connected with hip-hop when it first arrived and were now beginning to find their own voice within it.

As Joy of Zoo Sound observes:

“we felt exactly like (the people portrayed in Beat Street). Of course we had cash for the doctor, and here it didn’t rain (through the roof of) the apartment, and we didn’t have any gangsters on the street, but our life was just as dreary.” (2006).

He speaks from the perspective of growing up in East Germany, and like him and many others growing up under oppression and segregation, hip-hop gave them a voice and the inspiration to speak out about it.

Focusing on three scenes within Europe, the following chapters will show the diverse nature of European hip-hop, its musical alignment with the original hip-hop sound to come out of the 1970s and 1980s, but its output far removed from that of the American version.

Concluding thoughts:

In short, Globalisation has made the world smaller, technological advancements have made information and products from all over the world more readily available. Americanisation suggests that most of the information and products are from America, or the Western countries. Both are key components in understanding the growth of hip-hop in Europe, but why? Globalisation allowed the characteristics to be spread: the music, the graffiti artists, the breakdancers, and the fashion. Americanisation allowed the audience to have an understanding of the culture, from the geographical places discussed, to the clothes worn. Its dominant media industry increased the cultural flow of hip-hop, enabling the styles and characteristics to reach more eyes and ears across the globe.

Hip-hop was the voice of the underprivileged; the 'black' man of society, its ethos of speaking up against authority figures and social issues connected with many of the diasporic migrant and lower class populations across the world. The mix of this connection with the American artists, and the added growth of Globalisation facilitated the arrival of hip-hop in many parts of the world, the focus of this dissertation being on its arrival and adaptation in three countries in Europe: France, Italy and Germany.

Chapter two – Francophone Rap

Introduction:

One of the countries that acknowledged and embraced hip-hop with the most vigour was France. This was accelerated by the popularity of the television show called H.I.P.H.O.P, which aired every Sunday throughout the country in 1984 – pre-dating Yo! MTV raps in America by four years, suggesting that the mainstream French culture was more willing to accept hip-hop than America was at the time. The show was mostly centred on the breakdancing and popping elements of hip-hop culture, although when global hip-hop stars such as Kurtis Blow and Afrika Bambaataa were touring in Europe, they would stop by the show for interviews. It was pivotal in the development of French hip-hop, and planted the styles and characteristics of it into the minds of the French mainstream audience. Other early influences include the music released from the likes of Boogie Down Productions, LL Cool J and Run D.M.C, and the teachings of Afrika Bambaataa with Zulu Nation. The first wave of French rappers included mainstream pop artists such as Chagrin d'Amour, whose single 'Chacun Fait (C'Qui Lui Plait)', released in 1981, was one of the first songs released by a French group to take on the musical idioms of hip-hop.

Rap in the banlieues:

Throughout the 1980s the popularity of hip-hop in France grew, and there were many more examples of crossover hits like Chacun Fait (C'Qui Lui Plait). It was not until a more visceral style of hip-hop, released by American hip-hop groups Public Enemy and N.W.A arrived, that French hip-hop took a more political stance. Like hip-hop in America, the genre developed into a political movement, and was used as a tool to protest against the treatment of poverty-stricken citizens, racial segregation and racial discrimination. It took root mostly in the poorer parts of France, especially in the huge migrant populations situated in the suburbs of Paris, living in estates called banlieues.

As Cannon (1997) explains:

“studies of hip hop in France in the 1980s and 1990s suggest that not only is the most numerical participation in both production and consumption of hip hop ‘products’ among people of minority ethnic origin, but also that hip hop in France is characterized to a great extent by its role as a cultural expression of resistance by young people of minority ethnic origin to the racism, oppression, and social marginalization they experience within France’s banlieues and in major towns and cities.”

In an article, and interview, for the British newspaper the Guardian, Chrisafis (2015) describes one of the estates La Grande Bonne, in Grigny, as:

“a byword for hardship and inequality where about half of the 13,000 residents live below the poverty line, and one in two children leave school with no qualifications. It is not so much the drug dealers, the lack of services – even the post office closed a year ago after repeated break-ins – the isolation of being hemmed in by motorways or the feeling of abandonment by the state

that irks Achab and her neighbours the most, but the “stigmatisation and discrimination” against people who live there.”.

The stark living conditions are comparable to the New York projects where hip-hop was born. The overall feeling of being abandoned by the state is also similar, the low job prospects and the daily oppression felt in the banlieues feeding into the ‘us vs. them’ mentality.

The arrival of Francophone rap:

During the 1980s those inspired by hip-hop would recreate the sounds using the musical styles of American rappers. Some would rap in French, and some would adopt the African-American slang that they heard via films, TV programmes and the music itself. It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that this started to change, and French rappers began to realise that:

“they could not continue to simply transfer styles from New York or Los Angeles, whose realities and underlying assumptions did not apply to their own situation...to be sure, some continued to imitate their US counterparts, while others developed either French versions of US models or even invented original French popular ideologies.” (Prevos 2001).

It was the arrival of Francophone rap. Artists soon began to emerge with a real message, not too dissimilar to that of American rap, but localised, tackling social issues that were happening to them and the people around them. They rapped in the French language and used traditions of spoken music in the

West African griots and North African muezzins, mixed with the traditional hip-hop sound. Some of the key rappers to come out of this were MC Solaar, IAM, Assassin and NTM. Francophone rap received a huge boost in the early 1990s by a decision from the French Ministry of Culture, which passed a law insisting that French-language stations play a minimum of 40 per cent of French-language music. This enabled the rappers to reach a mainstream audience, as French musicians from genres such as rock, metal and electronica tended to still sing in English. This showed in the record sales of French hip-hop musicians, MC Solaar's second studio album 'Prose Combat', released in 1994, sold over 400, 000 copies in its first week, with IAM's album 'Ombre Est Lumiere' (1993) and hit single 'Je Danse Le Mia' doing just as well. French hip-hop had grown *"into a self-sufficient culture, one in which American attitudes are now deemed inappropriate and far removed from French realities."* (Gruntizky 1998).

One of the other key elements in the growth of French hip-hop was the release of the film 'La Haine' in 1995. It told the story of three young kids from Parisian projects whom, in response to the riots, are constantly fighting with the cops. It was one of the first films to document the life of citizens living in the banlieues, and opened many people's minds. Its soundtrack, which featured songs from NTM and Assassin, gave younger kids in the projects something to identify with. The film came at a time when France was in turmoil. A series of mysterious shootings and bombings shook the country, and the then Prime Minister Alain Juppe's austerity measures effectively paralysed the whole state. As Hussey (2015) says:

“in 1995 La Haine seemed to describe exactly what was wrong with France. In one of its blackest years, it seemed both to capture the mood of the country and turn it into great art.”

It crashed landed into the public consciousness and gave the audience an idea of the living conditions of people in the banlieues, introducing them to the music that was being created out of these projects, and made youths in the banlieues aware of hip-hop, inspiring many to make it themselves.

MC Solaar and IAM:

Two of the main artists to come out of French hip-hop were MC Solaar and the group IAM. The two were completely different in styles and lyrical content, showing how diverse the hip-hop scene in France had become.

Solaar became known for his very sophisticated rhymes, combining:

“the ‘edutainment’ elements of West Coast rappers Boogies Down Productions with an ‘art into pop’ intellectualism in dealing with subjects like racism, war, AIDS, and police harassment along with less political subjects like the fashion industry, Westerns (in a pastiche of Serge Gainsburg’s ‘Bonnie and Clyde’), philosophy and human relations.” (Mitchell 1996).

His tracks were free of expletives sexism and racism, and his electric use of the French language was even invoked by right-wing Minister of Culture Jacques Toubon, as a model for his campaign calling for a restricted and protected use of the French language, free of the corruptions of slang and

Anglicism's. The choice to write his songs in this way was a conscious one, stating:

"I wanted to correct all the clichés about rap...people used to think we were just robbing, stealing, selling drugs...the image was coming from the US. So the first album was in well-written French. No slang, good subjects and sometimes just poetry." (1994).

This style of rapping brought him huge success; his first single 'Bouge De La' went to number one in the French music charts, and then his next single, a love song called 'Caroline', did exactly the same. It was no surprise then that his debut album 'Qui Sème le Vent Récolte le Tempo' sold over 500,000 copies, with his second album 'Prose Combat' doing even better, selling more than double that. He had cracked the mainstream, and put the spotlight on French hip-hop, not only to a national audience, but to a global one too.

This did not stop him from being criticised, with some sections of the hip-hop scene in France accusing Solaar of addressing an educated elite rather than the social, political and cultural concerns of La Goutte d'Or, the Paris suburb and immigrant African subculture he comes from. Solaar is no average rapper though; he studied linguistics at university and originally wanted to become an investigative journalist, before discovering rap with his friends as it swept across France. He has been compared to the famous poet Verlaine, invited on the festival jury at Cannes, and has been praised by numerous culture ministers. When asked about the content of his songs by the Guardians Phil Daoust (2004), he responded with:

"my songs are about everything. I try to break down barriers between communities. I try to make people think. I like to speak about love, of course, but I try not to be sexist. I can't play the macho man. And I'm pretty non-violent."

This was in contrast to the hip-hop group IAM, who were also very successful throughout the 1990s. The group address similar issues as MC Solaar, such as racism, unemployment, war, drugs, poverty and local identity, but do so in a much more aggressive and upfront manner. Comprised of one French national, two members of Spanish origin, and one each of Senegalese, Italian and Algerian origin, they epitomise the multicultural nature of Marseilles, which is where the group are from. As Mitchell (1996) explains:

"IAM characterise Marseilles as 'The Planet Mars', the title of the groups debut 1989 album, and emphasise its separation from the rest of France as a seaport with large numbers of immigrants from Spain, Greece, North Africa and Egypt. The group's raps are spiced with Italian, Spanish and Arabic slang."

One of IAM's central themes is Africa; in particular, the group draw heavily on allusions to ancient Egypt. They developed a unique rap style, mixing hip-hop beats and French lyrics, with Middle Eastern and Egyptian influences. This concept of using ancient Egyptian themes in their music was later coined 'Pharaohism' by writer Andre Prevos. Swedenburg (2001) says:

"the concept (of Pharaohism) underlines Arabic origins while bypassing negative representations of North African countries gripped by Islamic fundamentalism and economic uncertainties."

It enabled IAM to speak freely about their Arabic origins and Islamic beliefs, without the negative connotations from a social scene rife with racist and discriminatory ideologies. In this way, the use of 'Pharaohism' is used as a mystical and coded strategy for the injection of Arabic and Egyptian lyrics, ideas, and sentiments, which made the music more commercially viable where the group could actually be heard. Otherwise, if the music were any more outright in its references to Arabic origins, white French conservatives might identify it with Islamic Fundamentalism, a growing problem amongst North African communities living in France.

It proved to be successful; their single 'Je Danse Le Mia' went on to be an enormous hit in the French mainstream, they sold millions of records worldwide from albums such as 'De La Planete Mars', 'Ombre Est Lumiere' and 'L'ecole du micro d'argent' and inspired a generation of young French musicians to use wordplay to express their hopes and frustrations. With MC Solaar, they are considered the pioneers of French hip-hop.

Concluding thoughts:

Both of these artists show how diverse the French hip-hop scene had become, moving far away from the musical idioms of American hip-hop to create their own unique sound. In an interview with Dan Glaister in 1994, Solaar makes this clear:

“sometimes I’m proud to say I’m doing French music, French rap, because none of the tracks we do are imitations. We listen to West Coast, Acid Jazz, hip-hop, hard core...and we do something totally different. We have influences, but we know we are living in France.”

D’Sousa (1994) adds to that, stating:

“Francophone rap is really different from Anglophone rap. The message is the same, because I think it’s possible to say everything in rap music today...but in France the reality is totally different. You have to go to school, then college, then university, because France is a country of culture, literature, poetry, writers, good food and fashion...France is a country with a big culture, and it’s important for people in France to recreate this culture in the lyrics. And that’s why Solaar, Soon EMC, IAM, we write, we choose our words, because it’s important for people to understand what we say. Its not just rap for raps, its rap for the message, rap for the writer, for the mind.”

It influenced a generation to create music, and developed a unique diaspora between migrants from Africa, Algeria and the Arabic world. It opened the general publics minds to life in the poorer areas of France, and allowed for the citizens of these areas to be better understood.

Throughout this chapter the growth and development of French hip-hop has been explained, detailing how hip-hop in France went from just a mere adoption of American hip-hop, to a clear unique adaptation, impacting social and political issues throughout France, and bringing diasporic immigrant communities together.

Chapter Three – Rap Italiano

Introduction:

Rap Italiano grew out of the many centri sociali (social centres) across the country. These self-managed social centres appeared all over Italy during the 1980s, as a result of the recession and resignation of the 1970s left-wing militant students and youth that were dissatisfied with authority. These young adults squatted abandoned buildings, renovated them, and turned them into underground drop-in centres, youth clubs, drug rehabilitation sites, recording studios, art galleries and cinemas. These refurbished buildings became semi-legal, unconventional, independently run activity centres. Examples include the Officina 99 in Naples, Forte Prenestine in Rome, Leocavallo in Milan, and the Macchia Nera in Pisa. The social centres were often located in the outer suburbs of larger cities and became a social hub for political activists and a retreat for disgruntled youths; as a result the centres became a breeding ground for Italian political music. At first it was rock and punk that dominated the sounds and the image of the social centres, but as hip-hop began to sweep across the nation during the mid to late 1980s, it soon turned to rapping, breaking, baggy pants, hats and graffiti laden walls. As Liperi (1993) explains, hip-hop took root because it:

“offered an immediate connection with the world of social opposition because it was the immediate, direct result of it. If rap in its crudest form can be considered as a means of making political speeches (comiziare) through music, this is one of the main reasons that it offered the most direct vehicle of expressing anger against corruption, organised crime and social upheaval.”

Italian posses:

The earliest Italian rap was for the most part a direct emulation of what was happening in America. Early experiments with the musical idioms from artists such as Raptus, Radical Stuff and Camelz Finezza Click did little to inspire the Italian public. It offered nothing to the political movement, nor the social stance associated with hip-hop, and therefore Italian rappers failed to connect with an audience. It was not until they made use of the Italian language, local dialects, and started to rap about issues closer to home, such as political corruption, the mafia, and the Northern League, that the genre really took off and became recognisably embedded in larger social struggles.

“Rap, as something immediate, democratic and cheap to produce, became a vehicle through which the decadence of the new elite could be labelled and challenged by the Italian people.” (Mackay 2015)

It quickly developed its own identity; with hip-hop posses forming up and down the country, predominantly out of the social centres. Posses such as Devastatin’ Posse, 99 Posse, Almamegretta, Nuovi Briganti, and Sud Sound System, gained substantial followings. Posse was a word used in American hip-hop to describe a group of artists; its literal definition is a group of men summoned by a sheriff to enforce the law. That was one of the only aspects of American hip-hop to stay; instead each posse developed their own individual style that removed them from the shadows of American hip-hop and the emulation that first took place. As Mitchell (2001) states, the posses:

“were part of a subcultural movement that discovered a new rhetoric of political militancy, using rap music to criticize a whole range of social and political ills they attributed to an increasingly visibly corrupt Christian Democrat government.”

One of the most unique aspects of the posses was their use of local dialects, and their incorporation of folkloric traditions into the hip-hop sound. For example, Almamegretta, whose name means migrant soul in Neapolitan dialect, used music traditions from their home in Naples. Drawing from a rich history of musical styles they infused string guitars, known as mandolins, and the theatrical elements of classical music that Naples is known for, with the hip-hop sound.

The use of local dialects by the posses was something of a cultural vanguard, with only 23 per cent of Italians continuing to speak regional dialects at the time, according to a survey by a RAI International program Italian News in 1997. Hip-hop revived the use of dialects in Italian music and put light on local oral traditions, such as ottava rima, a rhyming stanza consisting of three alternate rhymes and one double rhyme. As Povoledo (2000) states:

“ottava rima is a highly polished and structured form that, in its present version, sounds more like a modulated singsong than a rap. But the idea that a tradition with roots in medieval Tuscany relates to a genre rooted in modern New York throws into relief an essential element of Italian rap: as a re-examination of local oral traditions, it has revived the use of dialects in music. Indeed, Italy's vibrant hip-hop scene is less a confirmation of the supremacy of American exports than proof of the popularity of home-grown offerings.”

Fight da Faida:

Italian hip-hop's seminal moment was the release of the track 'Fight da Faida' in 1991 by Frankie Hi-NRG. His anti-government anthem was a massive hit and propelled Italian rap into the mainstream light. The lyrics are stark and pull few punches: the Italian people are described as 'cannon fodder' caught in a war between 'the mafia and camorra / Sodom and Gomorrah'. The main power of the track is its emphasis on institutional infection – 'today Vito Corleone is much closer, he's sitting in Parliament'. Its backing track was heavily indebted to the Beastie Boys and Cypress Hill, and it became the voice of a generation of Italians fed up with corrupt government officials, and a country ruled by the mafia. The chorus 'Fight da Faida', which roughly translates as fight the corruption or fight the feud (with corruption, injustice, criminality and for the victims of such acts as an anthem to stand back up), was heard up and down the country, from clubs in Milan, to social centres in Palermo. However, the track was not received well within some parts of the Italian hip-hop scene, Sicilian posse Nuovi Briganti accused Frankie Hi-NRG of betraying the independent, alternative principles of Italian rap:

"the impression is that he attempts to exploit the phenomenon, and talks about the mafia without really knowing the situation. A radio hit like Fight da Faida runs the risk of giving the mass general public, who are a long way from the underground, an image of hip hop that has very little to do with antagonism." (Cited by Mitchell 1996).

Isola Posse artist Speaker Dee Mo' saying that Frankie Hi-NRG is not "a protagonist of the Italian hip hop scene, he's part of the dance scene; the basis of his disco music is dance, which means he's got nothing to do with us." (Cited by Mitchell 1996). Frankie Hi-NRG defended his track when interviewed in 1992, saying:

"what counts in rap is content and message, not rivalry and jealousy. I don't believe that someone who has something to say can necessarily only go to a social centre or a squat. There's no such thing as a privileged audience, at least as I'm concerned, and I think rap has a duty to get across to who go to discos, people who until now never thought it was possible to dance to a text like Fight da Faida. The important thing about being part of the scene is sharing the essential co-ordinates that make hip-hop into a philosophy of life. I want to make use of all the doors and windows that are available to me, as long as my total autonomy is guaranteed. In a nutshell, I see rap as a rhythmically sung newspaper, and I appreciate all the poses who have authentic motivations, from Nuovi Briganti in Messina to the Devasatin' Posse in Turin."

This argument between Italian rappers about what is credible, and what is not, shows how the hip-hop scene in Italy had progressed, from an:

"initial phase of imitating outside models into an acculturation of rap, which created its own distinctive and diverse musical culture with its own boasts, taunts, tensions and ideological conflicts." (Mitchell 1996).

Jovanotti:

One of the most successful artists to come out of the Italian hip-hop scene was Jovanotti. Whereas the posses adopted a more militant style of rap, Jovanotti specialised in poetry, and a much softer sound. He managed to:

“introduce the consciousness of an American music subculture to the country’s masses and open up a new musical space which would see the birth of many MCs in years to come.” (Khan 2016).

Like most Italian hip-hop artists, Jovanotti’s early music took direct inspiration from American hip-hop. His first album ‘Jovanotti for President’ (1988) could easily be mistaken for a Beastie Boys record, which was badly translated into Italian, with a mix of English. The record featured cut up samples from American artists like James Brown, political speeches from Martin Luther King, and even a brief shout out from Afrika Bambaataa. His career is comparable to that of Italian hip-hop as a whole, and like Italian hip-hop he changed from emulating American styles and traits, to adapting them. He found his own voice within hip-hop and offered something different to what the posses up and down the country were creating. His smooth poetic style of rapping connected with a wider audience, still lyrically tackling social ills and making political statements, but doing so in a less in-your-face and aggressive manor. The breakthrough Lorenzo album series throughout the 1990s cemented Jovanotti into the mainstream gaze, Lorenzo 1994, 1997 and 1999 all reached number one in the Italian music charts, and sold over 500,000

copies each. He put the spotlight on Italian hip-hop, as artists such as Articolo 31 from Milan, and Fabri Fibra from Marche, followed in his footsteps to mainstream success. As Mitchell (2001) states:

“the relatively smooth progress of Italian rap music from the centri sociali to the pop charts has resulted in an almost complete indigenization of rap in Italy, along with its appropriation as a subgenre of Italian musica leggera.”

Concluding thoughts:

Italian hip-hop had developed into a powerful medium, influencing social and political issues it opened peoples eyes to local social problems, such as homelessness, unemployment and police repression, and attacked targets such as political corruption, the mafia, and the Northern League. The musicians involved created a unique offshoot of American hip-hop, not just lyrically, but musically as well. As Mitchell (1996) explains:

“the use of regional dialects and instrumentation serves as a cultural repository for tribalized local cultural forms, and gives Italian rap a folkloric dimension which distinguishes it from rap music in many other Western countries.”

Italian rap had a huge impact on society, and it is seen as one of the main catalysts in the upsurge of political demonstrations against the Christian Democrat government in the early 1990s, and then the Berlusconi government of 1994. The diversity of Italian rap is explained throughout this

chapter, from the militant style of posses such as 99 Posse and Possessione, to the poetic style of artists like Jovanotti and Articolo 31, it had grown and matured, capable:

“of being not just a manifestation of anger and anxiety, but a rich and complex musical proposition, at once totally modern and linked to the real roots of Italian popular music. It is music that is international by vocation but Italian in spirit, with lyrics that often succeed in describing reality in a creative way” (Assante 1997).

Chapter Four – German Hip-Hop

Introduction:

Hip-hop arrived in Germany amidst political and social unrest. The country was still feeling the effects of the Second World War, and was split into two separate states, the Federal Republic of Germany in the west, controlled by American, French and British forces, and the German Democratic Republic in the east, under the reign of the Soviet Union. Despite this, and on going political uncertainty, each state developed a strong hip-hop scene, with the films *Wild Style* (1982) and Harry Belafonte's *Beat Street* (1984) being crucial vectors in the communication of the styles and characteristics of hip-hop to communities of each state. The vast numbers of American soldiers stationed in West Germany also had a huge influence in developing the hip-hop scene. It is even said that the first rapper to ever rap in German was an American soldier by the name of Tigon.

From here there were a few novelty hits like 'Rappers Duetsch' by the group G.L.S United, (a cover of the popular track 'Rappers Delight' by American group Sugarhill Gang), and attempts from folk pop stars, sportsman and celebrities to rap, but as Schacht (2015) states, it was *"the epitome of awkwardness. It embodied the flatness of post-war German humour and everything that was uncool about fastidious German pop culture."* This is one of the reasons why it was the visual element of breakdancing that caught on

the most, with scenes developing in Cologne, Dortmund, West and East Berlin, Heidelberg and Dresden. As Elflein (1998) explains:

“in the beginning most of the activities focus around breakdance and in doing so some youth achieve to become professional dancers and develop an economic perspective out of dancing. With time graffiti and rap enjoy greater popularity among other things because many interested youth aren't able to reach the immense athletics and body control necessary for breakdancing.”

As the German media's infatuation with American hip-hop faded, so did the interest of many youths, who decided to turn to other themes and styles. This resulted in German hip-hop remaining underground, with only the hard core of mostly male activists remaining. During this time German hip-hop artists started to release their own music. West Berlin crew Rock Da Most had the most significant release with their record 'Use the Posse' (1988). The album relied heavily on the American hip-hop sound and the artists still rapped in English, but it was a marked improvement from the style of rap first released by the likes G.L.S United and co.

Krauts with Attitude:

It was not until the fall of the Berlin wall and the unification of Germany in 1989 that hip-hop really began to develop its own sound and grow in popularity. As Elflein (1998) states:

“the fall of the Berlin wall refreshed German nationalism, which opens a space for the commercialisation of a new national coded youth culture. In March 1990 an article appears in the perhaps most important German-speaking music monthly Spex, which on the front-page is loudly called Krauts with Attitude.”

The title of the article derives from the controversial American rap group Niggaz With Attitude (N.W.A.), with the phrase ‘Krauts with Attitude’ being used for the title of a compilation album of German hip-hop artists in 1991. The album featured over 15 different acts from various parts of Germany, some continuing to rap in English, and others in German. The use of the term Kraut was seen as a backlash towards the American and English attitude towards Germany¹, with the album supporting an underlying nationalism, in the liner notes it says, *“now is the time to oppose somehow the self confidence of the English and the American.”* The album cover was designed in the colour of the national flag (black, red and gold), and its antagonistic lyrics towards authority showed a kind of national pride that had not been seen since the end of the Second World War. As Mark Pennay (2001) states, *“this was rap with a real political message, not a pale imitation.”* In Dietmar Elflein’s (1998) view, the Krauts with Attitudes production initiated a transformation of rap, into Deutscher hip-hop and Deutscher Sprechgesang (German speech-song), which *“grafted an adopted music style onto a national identity.”*

¹ Kraut is a derogative term, which was specifically used to describe a German soldier by the Americans and English. Its use in popular music came about when journalists at the English magazine Melody Maker described a form of experimental rock coming out of Germany in the 1970s as Krautrock.

One of the most controversial elements about the album was its exclusion of immigrant hip-hop artists, in particular Turkish rappers. The album was seen as a nationalistic movement, and it caused the German hip-hop scene to diverge into two distinct genres, Deutscher hip-hop and Oriental hip-hop.

Deutscher hip-hop vs. Oriental hip-hop:

Deutscher hip-hop was essentially anything that was non-Turkish hip-hop, it was a term coined by the media and rarely used by the artists in the scene themselves. This was because German hip-hop had developed into a genre with many different participants, all with varying ideologies and lyrical content.

As Pennay (2001) says:

“on the one hand, there are the old-school hardcore heirs and peers of Advanced Chemistry, who are able to trace their roots back to those marginalized enthusiasts who took the ‘fashion’ waves of the 1980s to heart. On the other can be found the more commercial and accessible perpetrators of the ‘lovers rap’ trend begun by Die Fantastischen Vier, who rap about personnel relationships, with little or no recognition of a wider hip-hop culture.”

The reason why the two terms became popular, mostly amongst journalists, was because of the marked difference between the two. It was true that Deutscher hip-hop had moved on from rapping in English to German, and had its own variables, from the nationalist style of artists heard on the album *Krauts with Attitude*, to the conscious rap of *Advanced Chemistry*, but the sound remained indebted to that of American idioms. Oriental hip-hop on the other hand rejected African-American samples and the German language, in

favour of samples drawn from Turkish arabesk and pop, and the language of their homeland. This was not only a backlash against the exclusion of Turkish rappers on the album *Krauts with Attitude*, which represented a nationalistic viewpoint shared amongst many in the new unified Germany, but to the on going discrimination and racism they were receiving for being of Turkish nationality. The use of arabesk and popular Turkish music intertwined with the hip-hop sound, as Pennay (2001) describes:

“expresses a nostalgia and cultural pessimism that dovetails perfectly with Hip Hop’s invention of community through stories of displacement and loss. The central musical innovation in ‘Oriental Hip Hop’ – the rejection of African-American samples in favour of samples drawn from Turkish Arabesk and pop – is emblematic of the blending of diasporic Black culture and diasporic Turkish culture.”

The first rap song in this style was released in the same year as *Krauts with Attitude* by Nuremberg based hip-hop crew King Size Terror. The track entitled 'Bir Yabancinin Hayati', which translates as 'The Life of a Stranger', describes the marginalisation of a Turkish man living in Germany. Hip-hop grew in popularity amongst the diasporic Turkish communities because, as Brown (2006) states, hip-hop is:

“an art form that expresses a powerful spirit of resistance against oppression, especially the oppression of an ethnic minority by an ethnic majority, Hip Hop offers a ready-made model of underdog ethnic nationalism that is hugely appealing to groups who have to deal with being ‘strangers’ in a strange land.”

The most significant release in Oriental hip-hop was the album *Cartel*, in 1995. The album imposed a Turkish nationalism and pride that united the diasporic Turkish communities in Germany. It was seen as a direct response to the album *Krauts with Attitude* with its use of the colours of the Turkish flag on the album cover, with the 'c' in *Cartel* a manifestation of the crescent of Islam. Like *Krauts with Attitude* it was a compilation album, featuring various artists of Turkish decent. The compilation contained five tracks by Nuremberg artists Karakan, three songs from the Kiel group Da Crime Posse, three songs by Erci E from West Berlin, and a communal recording by all of the artists on the title track *Cartel*. The official press release makes the aims of the album clear:

“the new identity: Like in France or England ethnic minorities cry against discrimination with their own music. Hip hop as a language is therefore a logic choice...Cartel want to offer their own identity, because only who makes clear, where he is standing, gets calculable and taken seriously. Cartel is the musical lobby for thousands of kids of the second generation, who expresses what they think and what they feel...” (1995)

Both genres had developed into opposing pillars of the German hip-hop scene, which represented larger social tensions between the immigrant diasporic communities and the German nationals. Advanced Chemistry, who are a hip-hop group made up of German citizens of migrant backgrounds, looked to bridge the gap between the two, shedding light on the racial discrimination and political issues happening within Germany. They went on to become one of the pioneering groups to push the German hip-hop scene forward into a more conscious style, away from the nationalist stance of many

at the start of the 1990s. Their song 'Fremd im eigenen Land' (Foreign in my own Country) went on to inspire many other German hip-hop artists to speak out about social ills and political unrest during the mid to late 1990s.

Concluding thoughts:

German hip-hop is defined by its fragmented nature, from starting off as a direct emulation of American hip-hop it veered off into many different adaptations. From the nationalistic style heard from the artists on Krauts with Attitude and the creation of Oriental hip-hop from Turkish immigrants, to the clashing styles of conscious rap group Advanced Chemistry and the more mainstream Die Fantastischen Vier. It had developed into a scene with many ideological differences and styles, moving far away from American hip-hop into its own genre with critical discourses and arguments.

The rise of nationalism after the reunification of Germany in 1989 is something unique about the German hip-hop scene, and it is one of the reasons why it became so fragmented. It caused the diasporic Turkish community to create Oriental hip-hop, as a means to escape the marginalisation of everyday life and to hit back at the growing racial discrimination.

German hip-hop artists had found their own voice within the genre, creating unique musical diasporas that would impact on society and popular music in Germany for many years to come.

Conclusion

In the first chapter the arrival of hip-hop into Europe was explained by looking into the key theories of Globalisation and Americanisation, which are crucial in explaining how hip-hop first began to develop in France, Italy and Germany. The first chapter also gave a detailed background of the birth of hip-hop in New York, discussing the key elements of the culture and the circumstances to which it developed. Then giving an overview of how hip-hop entered into the European consciousness. From here each following chapter (2, 3 and 4) discussed the growth and development of hip-hop in France, Italy and then Germany, during the 1980s and 1990s. Discussing how each countries hip-hop scenes adapted hip-hop, and how the genre affected the society of each country – showing how hip-hop helped bring diasporic communities together in France, incited protests against governments in Italy, and divided a nation between nationalists and immigrants in Germany.

The development of the hip-hop scenes in France, Italy and Germany all followed similar patterns. At first the initial output from artists within these countries was a direct emulation of the musical idioms and styles of American artists. In France this was at least, for the most part, done in their own language - 'Chacun Fait (C'Qui Lui Plait)' (1981) being one of the earliest hip-hop records to come out of France. In both Italy and Germany the emulations were done in English – Let's Get Dizzy by Radical Stuff in Italy and Rappers Duetsch by G.L.S United in Germany, are examples of this. In Italy it didn't take long before the artists started to use their own language and local

dialects, but in Germany it took almost a decade before rappers started to use their own native tongue.

From here each country developed unique offshoots of the original hip-hop sound. Each country used hip-hop in a similar fashion, as a tool to protest against political and social ills. These included racial discrimination (France), political corruption (Italy) and immigration (Germany). The hip-hop scenes in each one of the countries had multiple different factions; in France and Italy this was mostly between the underground rappers, of IAM (France) and the Italian posses like 99 Posse and Possessione, and the mainstream artists, of MC Solaar (France) and Jovanotti (Italy). This was also the case in Germany with the opposing hip-hop crews Advanced Chemistry and Die Fantastischen Vier, but the introduction of nationalist rap and Oriental hip-hop meant that the hip-hop scene in Germany was more divided than that in both France and Italy. In all of the countries hip-hop was most popular with the diasporic communities of immigrants. This was because hip-hop was the perfect tool to speak out against the oppression and racial discrimination that they faced. In France hip-hop brought together the diasporic communities of former colonies, such as Algeria, Morocco and Guinea, who were living in the segregated projects in the suburbs of big cities like Paris and Marseilles. In Germany the creation of Oriental hip-hop brought together the diasporic Turkish communities, who were facing increasing persecution with the rise of nationalism after the reunification of Germany. When looking closely at each countries hip-hop scene there are close comparisons between artists. IAM's (France) use of Middle Eastern sounds and Arabic references is extremely

similar to that of the Oriental hip-hop strand that came out of German hip-hop, and MC Solaar's (France) smooth poetic style of rapping is very similar to that of Italian rapper Jovanotti.

The big difference between each countries hip-hop scene is the use of the local language, or the language of their heritage. Each hip-hop scene wasn't trying to appeal to anyone but the people of that country, or the people of similar nationality. Hence the lyrical content strongly focused on local issues, with even the more mainstream acts like Die Fantastischen Vier recognising *"the need to draw upon their own environment in order to make the genre relevant and appealing"* Pennay (2001). In terms of incorporating local sounds and influences, both France and Germany relied more on cultural heritages rather than the musical influences of their adopted country, for example the influences of North African muezzins in France and Turkish arabesk in Germany. Italian hip-hop was different in that regard, and the use of local dialects at a time when they weren't commonly used was something of a cultural vanguard, for example the hip-hop posse Almamegretta's use of the Neapolitan dialect. Hip-hop also unearthed cultural linguistic traditions, such as the medieval Tuscan tradition of ottava rima - a rhyming stanza.

By the end of the 1990s hip-hop in France, Italy and Germany had developed into a self-sufficient culture, one that had an important role within society, influencing popular music and politics. All of these countries adapted the original hip-hop sound that came out of New York to meet their own political and social needs, creating unique offshoots of American hip-hop and

developing unique musical diasporas. This dissertation has given an in-depth analysis of how this developed during the 1980s and the 1990s, drawing from important theorists such as Andre Prevos, Tony Mitchell, Mark Pennay and Dietmar Elflein, and conducting research through numerous online articles, documentaries, and films.

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