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Networking Global Hip Hop Knowledges: The CIPHER Method

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Abstract. CIPHER: Hip Hop Interpellation is a global hip hop knowledge mapping project using ethnographic, digital, and arts practice research methods to better understand the emergences and flows of the culture's deeply local yet immanently global intertextualities. In this collaborative article, we network and develop ideas from six of CIPHER's global hip hop researchers, elaborating the project in method as well as theory. In so doing, we model our community-engaged CIPHER method of tracking thematic, conceptual, and archetypal relationships, presenting preliminary findings in four interrelated case studies: examples of hip hop knowledge transfer that evidence hip hop's generative glocal dialogue.

"Gems" of Hip Hop Knowledge

J. Griffith Rollefson

In August 2019, the CIPHER team at University College Cork, National University of Ireland, began laying the groundwork for a first-of-its-kind global networking and mapping of hip hop knowledge flows. With funding from the European Union, the team of researchers developed a method synergizing community-engaged scholarship with crowdsourcing and digital humanities methods (Rollefson 2018a; Spady 2013). By conducting ethnographic research in collaboration with artists, hip hop communities, nongovernmental organizations

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(NGOs), and other stakeholders around the planet, the team identifies and examines local "gems"—our shorthand for the smallest units of hip hop knowledge—in nuanced ethnographic and contextual detail and then networks these gems via thematic and archetypal interrelations. This CIPHER method suggests that it is the shared but ever-changing knowledge base of these diverse but conceptually interrelated gems that connects and animates the diverse communities that comprise the Global Hip Hop Nation (Alim 2006).[1]

In this article, we model this gem-centered methodology and the research team's community-engaged scholarly praxis, presenting preliminary findings in four interrelated case studies: examples of hip hop knowledge flows that evidence a glocal dialogue between New York and Ireland, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Togo, Narrm/Melbourne, Egypt, the United Kingdom, Oakland, Puerto Rico, and beyond. Through these examples, we demonstrate how the CIPHER method of tracking thematic, conceptual, and archetypal relationships between far-flung communities might help us better understand hip hop's glocalization. We conclude that the performative gems that emerge in these studies are key in understanding hip hop's broad and open-source appeal. Further, we argue that these gems of knowledge perform ideas that urgently need to be amplified, actively listened to, and heeded—be they figurations of ancient cosmologies ("yin/yang"), traditional epistemes ("third eye"), anticolonial slogans ("Fuck Captain Cook"), or empowering digital memes ("#MoSalah").

The CIPHER methodology is encoded in the title of the project. As Cheryl Keyes details in the first ethnomusicological monograph on hip hop, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, a "cipher" (also "cypher" or "cipha") is defined as the feedback circle formed whenever "three or more people gather" to perform, challenge, and empower each other (2002:124). A cipher can happen across any of hip hop's traditional four elements: between DJs or beatmakers at a beat battle, MCs in a freestyle cipher, B-Girls and Boys at a breaking event, or aerosol artists at a graffiti jam. Indeed, a cipher can also be cultivated in a hip hop classroom, where students are asked to "do the knowledge" and build on the well-developed discourse around hip hop's "fifth element": knowledge (Williams, Nitzsche, and Chetty, forthcoming). As such, the cipher is the basic unit of hip hop community. Yet, there is another key definition of "cipher" in hip hop—it is also the coded knowledge created by hip hop communities (Alim 2006). The cipher is thus the basic unit of hip hop community and the basic unit of hip hop knowledge. It is both the physical site of hip hop community and the conceptual terrain of hip hop knowledge production. As the critically acclaimed rapper Mos Def (Yasiin Bey) put it: "*We are* hip hop. Me, you, everybody. *We are* hip hop. So hip hop is going where *we* going" (1999) (emphasis in original).

This article elaborates the methodological approach that allows the research team of regional hip hop specialists to approach the central question: why has

this highly localized and iconically authenticizing African American music translated so widely to far-flung communities and contexts around the globe?[2] Riffing on Tony Mitchell's landmark collection, *Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop Outside the USA* (2001), James Spady, Samy Alim, and Samir Meghelli approach the question thus in their decidedly "emic" tome, *Tha Global Cipha: Hip Hop Culture and Consciousness* (2006):

> Hip Hop is always both local and global, yet it gains particular relevance to the lives of youth worldwide in the process of becoming local, i.e., it is through Hip Hop's localization that we can begin to see the limitless, yet local, horizons of significance for these diverse youth communities of practice. Localization forces us to contend with the "on-the-ground" realities, the specific ethnographic contexts, and the socio-political arrangement of the relations between language use, identities, and power. (Spady, Alim, and Meghelli 2006:9)

Building on the work of landmark interviews and essays in the Mitchell (2001); Spady, Alim, and Meghelli (2006); and Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook (2009) global hip hop collections, CIPHER picks up this methodological focus on localization and artist engagement—what Spady calls "hiphopography"—and further develops its theory. Indeed, on the theory side, CIPHER posits the "hip hop interpellation thesis" that "hip hop spreads not as a copy of a Black American original, but, through its performance of knowledge, emerges as an always already constituent part of local knowledge and practice" as people around the world are "hailed" into hip hop consciousness (Rollefson 2021:225).

To explain how this hailing happens, CIPHER remixes Louis Althusser's ([1971] 2014) theory of "interpellation" (calling into subjectivity) to imagine how hip hop's global call and response captures the imaginations of local subjects around the world and brings them into a global hip hop consciousness. While Althusser developed this idea in the tradition of white, European critical theory to describe the ideological "hails" of repressive state regimes, as Warrick Moses details below in his section "Diff'rent Tropes for Diff'rent Folks," CIPHER flips the script on this European "high theory" remixing it with Frantz Fanon's psychoanalytic and practice-based theories of subjectivization, racialization, and consciousness raising—in a word, Fanon's "sociogeny"—to examine the ways that music and media can "call" our attention and resonate with us in liberating ways (Fanon [1952] 1986:4–5; Sylvia Wynter in Scott 2000, 188–189). Indeed, despite Althusser's focus on authoritarian and unethical contexts we've found in interpellation theory a remarkably useful point of departure for analyzing what Luis-Manuel Garcia (2019) playfully terms the "ethical turn" in electronic dance music. That is, it theorizes how we become subjects by responding to musical calls and turning toward them.

While other scholars such as Garcia and hip hop, media, and racialization scholar Adam Haupt have repurposed interpellation theory as a theoretical lens

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with which to think about the ideological processes of any culture (be it white and authoritarian/hegemonic or Black and democratic/counterhegemonic), it is worth noting that interpellation theory also serves a more pragmatic function in the CIPHER project. As a well-known concept developed by a white (French) European scholar, the figure is immediately legible (and valuable) to many Euro-American scholars and thus at the very core of what "theory" means in a European context. CIPHER's Althusserian/Fanonian interpellative theoretical assemblage of hip hop interpellation thus serves as a form of instrumentalized theory that Gayatri Spivak terms "Affirmative Sabotage" (2012:4)—in this case, a strategy for accessing funding for Black music research in Europe. In brief, Europe's professoriate—and by extension its flagship ERC research program—is still disproportionately administered by white European scholars. As such, Althusser's theory also functions as a pragmatic tool, as it remains exceedingly unlikely that one would secure a major European Union grant by only citing Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, Paul Gilroy, and other scholars of color—even for a project exploring Black music and culture. The subversive affirmation of this approach thus follows (to mash up Spivak, Audrey Lorde, and Spady): if you have the keys to the master's house, you can smuggle in your Bomb Squad tapes.

The spark for the "hip hop interpellation" thesis first hit me during an interview with the Turkish Berliner MC Chefket in 2007 when he explained: "Maybe they didn't know it, but they were speaking to me and my community too." As I describe in my book, *Flip the Script* (2017), this African American art form has indeed called out to countless young men and women around the world, finding deep resonance among diverse communities and creating shared cultural currency across borders and between cultures. Instead of a top-down globalization, this music resonates around the globe for the same reasons it resonated with Chefket—for hip hop ideology proposes that Knowledge of Self (KoS) is key to the universal that the local unlocks the global (Chang 2005, 258–259).[3] This is the paradox visualized in the CIPHER team's Sankofa Power logo, which is a riff on a favorite gem of hip hop knowledge: the Sankofa icon of the Akan people of West Africa (figure 1).

In Akan culture, the symbol signifies the power of self-knowledge, depicting a bird progressing to the future yet reaching back to its history—depicted as an egg—which holds the dual potential for both sustainability and rebirth. The Sankofa Power logo refigures the egg into the digital universal power symbol (1/0, on/off), uniting an ancient icon with a contemporary icon and signifying hip hop's glocalizing power.

Surely, those Afrodiasporic postcolonial communities that built the foundations of this culture in postindustrial New York City and beyond are at the center of this story and continue to inform hip hop's global meanings and fuel its appeal. But as the glocal gems of our study indicate, hip hop's localization in diverse

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Figure 1. CIPHER's "Sankofa Power" logo (traditional symbol with update by Rollefson).

contexts around the world is also driven by a recognition of self in this iconic other. Something about the music, dance, and artistic expressions of those Black and Brown postcolonial communities in the South Bronx resonated far beyond the five boroughs and far beyond the early 1970s. As our findings indicate, the glocal ethos and ethics that Spady, Alim, and Meghelli (2006) describe encourage artists to find themselves and their cultures in and through hip hop—to find and fashion hip hop gems within the contours of on-the-ground local knowledges, forms, and performance practices. That is, by hip hop's own standards the most hip hop thing you can do is to dig where you stand. As we demonstrate in both form and content through a set of networked glocal case studies, if you dig deep enough, you'll find hip hop.

As principal investigator of the project, I've used this common Irish metaphor of excavation to elaborate the connection between CIPHER's theory of hip hop interpellation and hip hop's organic intellectual praxis of KoS in a pilot study centering on my immediate local context in Cork, Ireland (Rollefson 2021). This article scales up and diversifies that provisional work, building a global network of ideas from six global hip hop researchers: Warrick Moses, Jason Ng, Patrick Marks (aka Pataphysics), Steven Gamble, Ophelia McCabe (aka 0phelia), and myself. We are, by no coincidence, also hip hop "heads" and practitioners. Here, we elaborate the CIPHER project of networking hip hop knowledges in method as well as theory, explaining the CIPHER method, modeling our community-engaged scholarly praxis, and presenting some preliminary findings in four interrelated case studies: examples of hip hop knowledges that navigate a translocal dialogue back, forth, and in between New York and Ireland, Nigeria, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Togo, Narrm/Melbourne, Egypt, the United Kingdom, Oakland, Puerto Rico, and beyond, including across the circuits of virtual communities, where participants the world over congregate in digital spaces.

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While we believe that the gems that emerge in these studies hold wisdom that urgently needs to be amplified, heard, and heeded, it will be important first to recognize the attendant dangers. As our team has gotten deeper into the project, we've also found it increasingly necessary to assess the ethical dilemmas of (data) "mining" these "gems." As MC Rico Pabón put it in a 2013 roundtable with Jeff Chang, Rickey Vincent, and RapGenius.com cofounder Mahbod Moghadam, "Sure, today [this data/these gems] might be in the hands of folks that we know, that we can touch. [But] tomorrow someone else steps and says 'Yo, we wanna cop Rap Genius. We're gonna pay you this much money.' Of course, that's what folks are trying to do. And *then* who is in charge?" (Rollefson 2018b; H. Morgan 2020).[4] In the months following the roundtable, Pabón's vision would prove prophetic as this company built on the free labor of hip hop fans and their community-centered knowledge base was injected with venture capital funds, refocused, and relaunched as Genius.com—the rap focus proving too limiting for their "Annotate the world!" corporate motto (Carlson 2014). As Pabón rightly surmised, Rap Genius's corporate board and shareholders were ultimately "in charge," not those "folks that we know."

The language of data mining around collecting valuable (and often vulnerable) underground knowledges resonates profoundly with violent histories of colonial value extraction and present realities of neocolonial domination. As such, it has become increasingly necessary to reflect on the real asymmetries that this discourse betrays (and enacts) and take proactive measures to affirm the community ownership of these knowledges, the community centeredness of this project, and the knowledge-leveraging aims of the CIPHER project (Rodney 1972). We present methodological, conceptual, and logistical approaches to attend to these dangers along the way, but it will be important to state as central to the CIPHER project's mission an underlying belief that we have, in hip hop, a blueprint for creating a just and sustainable world and a confident attitude that will help us get there (Rose 1994:39). As one such logistical approach to achieve this mission, this article has been made open access, just as CIPHER's main publication initiative—the new journal *Global Hip Hop Studies*—will be fully open access for at least its first five years.

In the sections below, we provide models for ethical, responsible, recuperative, and restitutive research in which "hierarchical divisions between the 'researcher' and the 'researched' are purposely kept to a minimum, even as they are interrogated" (Spady and Kweli 2006, Alim and Hi-Tek 2006). These range from dialogic interviews and coauthorship models to digital community, autoethnographic, and arts practice research methods—all of which are modeled here, attempting to track global commonalities without eliding the local differences, contextual specificities, and self-theorizations voiced by our interlocutors. Indeed, James Spady's hiphopography model of "insistence on direct engagement

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with the 'culture creators'" as critics and scholars in their own right is a bedrock of the CIPHER method—as it takes forward hip hop research's mission "to reinvigorate cultural studies' commitment to the people and put into practice what cultural anthropology (and, by extension, ethnomusicology) espouses, that is, a nonhierarchical, anticolonial approach that humanizes its subject" (Alim, Ibrahim, Pennycook 2009:18; Williams and Singh 2023). By linking hiphopography's "on the ground" ethics of collaborative knowledge production with an innovative cultural studies approach that tracks the intertextual network of hip hop knowledge flows via these smallest units, the CIPHER method looks to better understand how culture works.

The CIPHER Method

Central to the CIPHER research design is an iterative process that moves between online and sustained on-the-ground ethnographic work with communities around the world. Since lockdowns related to the COVID-19 pandemic impacted our ability to travel internationally just as the project started in earnest, we began by relying on online communications and virtual ethnographic methods: everything from direct communication via Zoom and WhatsApp calls, emails, and texts to musical, video, and image analysis of recorded community and commercial artifacts. As in-person fieldwork has recommenced, these online methods provide the basis for extended trips to those communities with whom we've been working virtually. As part of those trips, we are not only following up by conducting interviews, attending performances, and working as participant observers but, as a central feature of the CIPHER method, we are conducting paid workshops, interview performances, and other arts practice methods with the help of local NGOs and cultural authorities to train local stakeholders to participate in analyzing and networking their own local gems of hip hop knowledge.

To this end, we encourage readers to visit CIPHER's public-facing website, globalcipher.org, our first point of contact in providing community members with spaces to "do the knowledge" where people can add and network local hip hop gems, collaborate and connect, create and circulate information, and grow the cipher (Wheeler 2018). With the technology serving the community—not the other way around—there will be opportunities to post stories, updates, new releases, data visualizations, and other forms of open knowledge sharing. We will create an ever-updating and iterative searchable knowledgebase, created and curated by users, with geographic and temporal data visualization tools.

By activating a global cipher of community researchers in this way, we aim to collect, connect, and leverage hip hop knowledge, rather than extracting and monetizing. We minimize extraction, instead reorienting research outcomes to serve practitioners and their communities. Following the hiphopographic

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principles outlined above, our collaborative, community-engaged, and practice-led approach considers practitioners as researchers in their own right. The CIPHER method proposes that by analyzing these smallest units of hip hop knowledge—these gems—we might be able to better understand global flows, the localizing realities, and thus the interpellative process that calls people into hip hop consciousness. For example, this approach helps us better understand how and why a cluster of gems around the traditional South Asian concept of the "third eye" (the ajna chakra) have taken hold in hip hop ways of knowing, where the appeal of this traditional and archetypal gesture to mind opening and consciousness raising is leveraged by artists in a myriad of contemporary hip hop contexts.

We can track how the idea enters hip hop discourse though Five Percent Nation metaphysics and emerges in localized guises across the globe and across the elements: from the lyrics of Rakim (New York, 1988) and iconography of the Hieroglyphics crew (Oakland, California, 1993) to the naming of 3ème Oeil [third eye] (Marseilles, France, 2002), the sonics and videos of Juice Aleem (Birmingham, England 2011), and in the ideas and album art of Pataphysics, the artist and coauthor of this article also known as Patrick Marks (Narrm/Melbourne, Australia, 2017).

As we will see, the CIPHER method helps us understand how hip hop reactivates and spreads precolonial and indigenous concepts around the world—from "each one teach one" and "yin and yang" to hip hop's guiding ideological principle "KoS." Further, the method helps us connect more recent revolutionary histories and contemporary decolonial struggles to one another—from gems referencing "the Black Star Line" (Brand Nubian, Mos Def and Talib Kweli, etc.) to "La Operación Cóndor" (Calle 13 2010, Orion XL, etc.), to #BlackLivesMatter



Figure 2. A selection of glocalized "third eye gems" in iconographic and naming practices.



Figure 3. Album art for *Tip of the Spear*, the 2017 album by Pataphysics, depicting a black panther with a "third eye" and other signifiers of indigeneity (spear, luminous script, temple).

(Joyner Lucas, Eminem, etc.). In this way, we can see how global conceptual archetypes emerge as local gems in local contexts, local languages, and local styles as part of local knowledges and local lifeways.

While hip hop's omnivorous adoptions and adaptations of global knowledge systems might easily run the risk of misappropriation, CIPHER's detailed attention to how the recontextualization of these codes is received back in their ostensible places of origin helps center the global dialogue that refigures the archetypal human concerns in these hip hop gems. As Elliott Powell suggests, citing Deborah Wong (2004) and Stuart Hall (1981) in his examination of "the entanglements of appropriation" in Black and South Asian collaborations and flows, this terrain is revealing "about the place of power, privilege, and belonging within such musical relationalities" (2020:10–12). For hip hop knowledge production is at home in its contradictions: at once immanently Afrological and deeply indebted to South and East Asian holistic epistemes, while simultaneously rooted in the Black American inner city and fluent in Japanese martial arts moves, Sicilian Cosa Nostra lingo, Brazilian capoeira codes, and Jamaican Rasta overstanding (Lewis 1996). As one oft-cited gem puts it: hip hop created "something from nothing," a formulation that highlights how hip hop was cobbled together from devalued bits of every corner of our mutually entangled, postcolonial world. Indeed, hip hop is, as Robin D. G. Kelley (1999), Ellie Hisama (2002), and Jeff Chang (2005) have put it, a "polyculture."

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Ultimately, the CIPHER method aims to leverage its findings in the service of more effective, connected, and sustainable cultural policy, arts education, media literacy initiatives, and decolonial pedagogies. A standout example of what this method can look like in practice is exemplified in the nationally televised documentary about CIPHER's community-engaged arts practice research project, UBUNTU: Local Is Global.[5] In collaboration with young people and youth mentors from local NGOs, the Cork Migrant Centre (CMC) and Kabin Studio,[6] the project generated new arts outputs—and new knowledges—by asking young rappers, slam poets, beatmakers, dancers, and artists to construct gems around the concept of "ubuntu"—a Zulu word for humanity, meaning literally "I am because we are." The decision to focus on this concept emerged from a youth-led discussion about how the global is lived in a local context and how that experience is akin to how we experience others from the perspective of self—that is, how the construction of the self is informed by our relationships with others.

This theme was selected in a brainstorm with CMC about a large city-center mural showing, side by side, the phrases: "Black Lives Matter" and "End Direct Provision," a reference to Ireland's dehumanizing asylum-seeker system. The contextualized recognition of these global and local valences of antiracism inspired youth mentor and choreographer Andrea Williams to introduce the concept of ubuntu to our discussion—a concept that many of the CMC's southern African youth knew in one form or another. And as MC Tiny, one of the ethnically Irish youth from Kabin Studios, explained in the documentary, the ubuntu concept had taken root in his understanding: "I feel like you've learned things from everyone, and they're basically stuck to ya, they're a part of ya, you know? They're with ya along the way, you know?"

The hour-long performance on our local university campus not only created stunning new pieces of art, new understandings, and new iterations of ubuntu-themed gems, but linked the lives of these young people of diverse African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian backgrounds with underresourced youth from Cork's North Side, advancing the national conversation on immigration, belonging, and the future of Ireland. As CMC Director Dr. Naomi Mascheti explained of the organization's work with youth in the Direct Provision asylum-seeker centers in Ireland:

> There is a stigma around living in Direct Provision centers. So in the same way as the CIPHER project, it's all well and good to have the research but when you are in these settings you are applying it and you are seeing what it means to these kids. It maps really well with their sense of identity, with looking at the strengths that they bring, because when they are in the Direct Provision center, we're only looking at the deficit, we are not looking at them as people with nothing to bring, but people to be supported. But in here they look at what they bring. And in terms of what

> they bring, there just kind of is this collective, where their own identity is kind of shared humanity.

This "shared humanity"—what Martin Luther King Jr. (1963) famously called "an inescapable network of mutuality"—at the heart of the UBUNTU project is at the heart of the CIPHER method's analysis of hip hop's recontextualized archetypes and translated gems.

In the four sections that follow, we further detail the variety of approaches and hiphopographic attitudes that we bring to bear. In the first section, Warrick Moses elaborates the CIPHER method and theory of "hip hop interpellation" by examining gems of "double consciousness" in Afrodiasporic Irish hip hop. In the second, Jason Ng and Patrick Marks (aka MC Pataphysics) engage methods of (auto)biography, (auto)ethnography, and collaborative storytelling in relation to so-called Australia's colonial past.[7] In the third section, Steven Gamble tracks lyrics referencing footballer Mo Salah to examine the relationship between hip hop knowledge flows and internet memes, while the fourth returns to Ireland and MC 0phelia's arts practice research into hip hop's healing power.

In the telling of these disparate but interconnected stories, we will find myriad gems of hip hop's always already localized knowledges. But make no mistake: we will also find gems in the telling—for collected here we attempt to show the CIPHER method's range as we extend the global geographic scope of hip hop studies. Indeed, as the old adage puts it, "sometimes it ain't what you say, but how you say it." Indeed, MC Solaar finessed that common wisdom some twenty years ago, spitting the gem "*le contexte est plus fort que le concept*" [the context is stronger than the concept] (2001). This attention to the emic synergy of theory and method, lyric and flow, is at the heart of the CIPHER project. "Yeah, yeah, now check the method" as we turn to a hiphopographic case study that is central to our aims and concerns (Large Professor 1993, Common Sense 1994).

Diff'rent Tropes for Diff'rent Folks: Knowledge(s) of Self in Irish Hip Hop

Warrick Moses

Together with DJing, MCing, breaking, and graffiti writing, KoS is widely considered the "fifth foundational element" (Alim 2009:272) of global hip hop praxis. Through hyperlocal lyrical and sonic referents, hip hop manifested in the Bronx in the 1970s, later imprinting on other regions of the United States and various parts of the world. In Ireland, for example, musicians identified with the way that US hip hop artists expressed ideas of ethno-racial self-determination and resistance to structural oppression. Today, Irish MCs embrace "epic references, Joycean wordplay and trad [Irish traditional instrumental music] soundscapes"

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to situate their work within the au/oral lineages and complex sociopolitical histories of their native country (Rollefson 2021:224). Thus, the "hip hop interpellation thesis" proposes that "rap music spreads in many ways, but when hip hop culture takes root in all its performative and ideological forms, it does so via local roots" (Rollefson 2021:225). While themes of working-class life and Celtic mythology, along with Irish-language lyrics and trad instrumentation imbue Irish hip hop with a national consciousness, this archetype is challenged by the recent contributions of immigrant populations to the Irish hip hop scene.

My personal correspondence with Max Zanga, the Black Irish MC of Nigerian descent, noted that "what makes Irish hip hop *Irish*" (emphasis in original) are nods to the River Liffey or street names in Dublin ("Even if you're not from Dublin!"). These "Irish hip hop knowledges" supplant more familiar US hip hop references to ghostridin' or Sixty-Fifth and Ingleside, which locate their artists in the Bay Area and Chicago, respectively. Zanga also admitted half-jokingly that were it not for the longstanding relationship with his white, Irish-born bandmate, he'd be "a lot Blacker." Despite addressing racialized prejudice and stereotyping in much of his work, the full expression of Zanga's experience was constrained by Irish hip hop's genre conventions and prevailing imaginations of Irishness. This is neither an indictment of the genre nor the accomplishments of native-born white practitioners. Instead, I consider alternative perspectives within Irish hip hop, KoS informed as much by genre-specific performativity and Irish mores as they are by racialized and diasporic viewpoints.

In this section, I present insights from an interview with Denise Chaila, a Limerick-based artist of Zambian heritage, and perform a close reading of her 2019 track "Duel Citizenship." As a child, Chaila assimilated to broader African diasporic popular culture through US television shows, being introduced to Lauryn Hill's music through *Sister Act II*, for example. Consequently, she assumed "the model of Blackness that Irish white people respected when they were talking to Black people" (Moses and Rollefson, personal interview, 2020). In terms of Chaila's career, this demonstrates the hip hop interpellative premise of recognition and creative expression springing forth from "roots that had been there all along." It also highlights the inherently racialized nature of her apperception, given hip hop music's status as a putatively African American cultural domain. Such recognition demands a closer look at Althusser's ([1971] 2014) foundational interpellation model, conceived as it was in a racialized European domain. At this precarious moment when there is a growing mainstream awareness of deep-seated structural asymmetries wherein Black lives under presumption of guilt are being ruthlessly surveilled and extinguished by police, the relationship between agents of the state and its Black constituents is of critical importance. African Americans and the Black diaspora are all too aware of the consequences of responding to and resisting the capricious "hail" of

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police. The killing of George Floyd and countless others by US law enforcement and the murder of Irish-Nigerian George Nkencho by Garda Armed Support in Ireland are chilling examples.

That's the Sound of da Police!

Althusser's ([1971] 2014) theory of "ideological interpellation" explains how capitalist systems of production and the exploitation of labor power are maintained. Ideology here refers to: (1) practices that reproduce one's own class position and (2) the competences necessary to reproduce established class hierarchies and conform to the rules of the state. Put another way, ideology describes the skills needed to maintain one's place in the world (the know-how), to ensure the continuity of class structure (the rules of the game), and thus to affirm state authority. By following these directives, the rules of the state become the will of the people. Ideology interpellates the individual as subject of the state, bringing them into the fold. But ideology ultimately is also constituted by the subject. This reciprocal relationship means—quoting Althusser's famed contention—that the subject is "always already" directed by state power, is "always already" conditioned to the reproduction of class positionality and societal obligation. The subject acknowledges their own consciousness and intention as intrinsically aligned with the interests of the state, as benefitting the state, and vice versa.

Interpellation—being called/heeding that call—is exemplified when "the most commonplace everyday police [officer]" cries out into the street: "Hey, you there!" Responding to this address, the detached individual "becomes a *subject*":

> Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was "really" addressed to him, and that "it was really him who was hailed" (and not someone else). . . . [T]he one hailed always recognizes that it is really him who is hailed. And yet it is a strange phenomenon, and one which cannot be explained solely by "guilty feelings," despite the large numbers who have something on their consciences. (Althusser [1971] 2014:86)

The police officer's motivation for calling out in the first place is not given; neither are any racial categories: Is the policeman white? Is the respondent Black? Yet, the individual submits not solely through any sense of "guilty feelings" but responds willingly, accepting subjection because of his role in the "reproduction of the relations of production and of the relations deriving from them" (Althusser [1971] 2014:183).

The adaptation of Althusser's hypothetical and theatrical scene to hip hop interpellation posits that the sociohistorical and political conditions for hip hop cultural production are always already present in non-US spheres, that performative genre tropes are reproduced, thus evincing deeply local perspectives. That

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is, CIPHER's theory takes seriously the widely reported affinities and solidarities of global hip hop artists like the Indigenous Australian MC Wire's claim that hip hop "always has been" part of his culture (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009:26). Likening hip hop's function—its ability to extend a call and receive a knowing response—to that of the police officer in Althusser's discussion, however, necessarily recalls for Black communities contemporaneous experiences of being signaled, critically evaluated, and determined "out of place"—interpellative subjections into difference theorized by Du Bois and Fanon. Quite simply, artists like Denise Chaila are interpellated much differently than normative white members of the Irish hip hop scene (Advanced Chemistry 1992).

In "Duel Citizenship" (2019), Denise Chaila grapples with ideas of national identity, employing numerous references to her originary Zambian and adoptive Irish heritages. The homophone "duel/dual" evokes the wordplay of KRS-One's anthemic 1993 single "Sound of da Police!" (2015) where the African American MC contemplates the repressive function of "plantation overseers" and that of their modern-day counterparts, "police officers." This move underscores historical connections between policing institutions in the United States and "slave patrols" tasked with suppressing revolts among enslaved people and apprehending those attempting to escape from bondage. KRS-One instructs listeners to chant the word "overseer . . . like a sample": varying the inflection of each syllable the MC demonstrates a sonic (and ideological) transformation from "oh-*ver*-seer" to "off-*fi*-cer."

The ambivalence of Chaila's (2019) "duel/dual" compound elicits Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness":

> [the] sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of Measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness . . . two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; *two warring ideals* in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. ([1903] 1969:10–11; emphasis added)

Chaila's (2019) internal "two-ness," how she is externally perceived and the struggle to maintain varied aspects of her identity, is summed up with the lyric:

> I learned how to be Irish,
> Knowing some people would always think,
> That I was beyond the pale.
> I learned how to be Zambian with too little Bemba,
> To prove I haven't lost my way.

The expression "beyond the pale" plays with an Irish idiom (meaning outside of the Dublin area) and posits "Irishness" as an exclusively white ethno-racial category, while Chaila's retention of the Bemba language asserts her enduring connection to Zambia.

Throughout this piece, Chaila exploits the association of Indigenous language as a trenchant signifier of national identity, confirming her dual affiliation with Ireland and Zambia via an equal proficiency with Irish and Bemba. She explains:

> I started learning Irish out of spite, not out of love. . . . I would travel and white American tourists would find me in pubs, and they would tryta erase my Irishness. It's this weird pissing contest back and forth. . . . "No, I'm more Irish than you, I'm white!" Which is what it always boiled down to, you know? And so, I started to look for these accoutrements of culture to hold on to. Things that I could do, or be, or behave in ways that wouldn't just be like: "Gosh, how is *that* Irish . . . ?" It was as if I'd forgotten . . . that I'd spent the majority of my life being raised by a particular country and . . . that doesn't go away quickly. And so, when I started to . . . really write music, I was like: "OK, what version of Blackness do I wanna inhabit?" (Moses and Rollefson, personal interview, 2020)

In the second half of the track, Chaila (2019) emphatically describes her own "version of Blackness": "I have spent my whole life learning that I must make myself / Take my belonging; it will not just be handed to you." She evokes the iconography of both countries' flags, reconciling "green, and white, and golden eagles against streaks of orange and black," to show how their histories are intertwined. The MC assures detractors: "I could tell you about [the national anthems] 'Amhrán na bhFiann' and 'Lumbanyeni Zambia.' I could show you the spirit of [the cities:] Lucan, Limerick, and Lusaka. I could translate all of my Lenje [Zambian dialect] stories, so that we could sing them *as Gaelige* [in Irish]."

Chaila opens and closes "Duel Citizenship" (2019) with the same question—"Where are you from . . . *originally*?"—one that hints at Fanon's ([1952] 1986) anecdote of Blackness being fixed and scrutinized by the gaze of the white Other. In "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," Fanon cites the experience of a white child pointing out and exclaiming to his mother in astonishment: "Look! A Negro!" (91). This interjection not only marks Fanon as negatively stereotyped, as something to be feared, but also instills a sense of inferiority in relation to whiteness. This interpellative moment is Fanon's "sociogeny" of Blackness—the social genesis or subjectivization caused by the child's othering hail. "I was responsible not only for my body, but also for my race, and ancestors. I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my Blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism" (92). Fanon describes his exclusion from full participation in the world— "the White world, the only decent one"—as a colonized subject. Exemplifying Althusser's necessary psychic conditions for overthrowing state power, Fanon remarks: "I *hailed* the world and the world amputated my enthusiasm. I was expected to stay in line and make myself scarce" (94; emphasis added). While there is no record of Althusser

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engaging with Fanon's 1952 anticolonial text, we should, in any case, note that Fanon's hail was published almost two decades before Althusser's influential work.

The question "Where are you from . . . originally?" immediately posits Denise Chaila as an outsider. As with Fanon's story, this is an assumption premised entirely on race. In "Duel Citizenship" (2019), Chaila details the richness of her experience and the profound KoS that she embodies, presenting her own narrative to become "both the [Bemba] story, *akashimi*, and the one telling it, *seanachaí* [the Irish bard]." By the song's conclusion, Chaila has inverted the gaze of critics and reversed their challenge, inquiring of them instead: "Do you even know your *own* history?"

Apropos of Chaila's pointed question, we here turn to Narrm (Melbourne) to further develop the anticolonial thread.

"Fuck Captain Cook": Anticolonial Knowledge of Self and Society from Narrm

Jason Ng and Patrick Marks (aka Pataphysics)

Thinking critically about the smallest units of transferable hip hop knowledge, the CIPHER method's gem idea offers a way to consider how artists express local perspectives that are intertwined with cultural histories, traditions, and experiences from across the globe. This rich history of transcultural uptake in hip hop culture, art, and discourse illustrates the conceptual significance knowledge holds for artists and community members as a means to explore the world around them and their position within it (Chang 2005). Translocated from the Afrodiasporic origins of hip hop in the South Bronx, hip hop knowledge offers fertile ground for self-reflexive critiques of sociality and cultural polity in so-called Australia. This collaborative and coauthored section offers insight into this phenomenon by detailing the art and experiences of local Narrm (Melbourne) artist Pataphysics, who is an independent producer, MC, and arts educator.[8] His work draws on diverse influences from across the globe that culminate in detailed reflections on systems of neocolonial authoritarian control in so-called Australia in gems of anticolonial counterhistory.

Given that collaboration is central to the CIPHER method, we take artist-led collaboration as a critical methodological consideration for our research practice. By collectivizing and, at times, distinguishing our authorial voices as both researchers and artists, we challenge hierarchical distinctions typical in traditional anthropological ethnographic inquiry that position researchers as extractive agents rather than cultural community members and collaborators. This

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type of hiphopography and collaboration powers artist agency in scholarship by understanding practitioners as "critical interpreters of their own culture" and experience (Alim 2006:11). For the CIPHER team, this orientation is a means to understand stakeholder positionalities in relation to the dynamics of insider/outsider (emic/etic) distinctions and to help navigate challenges of accounting for ontological and epistemological biases with self-reflexivity (Qin 2016). Our research invites critical reflection from the field and positions artist testimony and creative work as contributions to scholarship rather than heuristic tools for analysis. This approach offers access to critical nuances often inaccessible to outside researchers and provides a path to further emic representation. What's more, it offers a way to reimagine the oppositional relationship between emic and etic perspectives and create an ethnography more in tune with postcolonial contradictions, simultaneities, and asymmetries and hip hop's own reality as an "always both local and global" culture (Spady, Alim, and Meghelli 2006:9).

The following transcripts are from dialogic sessions between myself (Jason) and Pataphysics based around the gems of hip hop knowledge that have influenced him and that he celebrates in his own practice.[9] Hip hop knowledge in this locally derived practice appears with direct reference to the Black consciousness of Public Enemy.

> The one influence that sticks out very early that I have a visual memory of is Public Enemy—"Don't Believe the Hype" and "Fight the Power." That early political hip hop had a huge influence on my life and the way in which I saw stuff. Especially the aspect of race, and then my experience here (Australia) in terms of Black and Brown representation in such a powerful, cool force, when there wasn't those images anywhere else. There weren't images of cool, young Black and Brown people doing dope shit—that didn't exist on Australian TV. So to see that was very inspiring.
>
> I do think music sets off things in your brain. People may listen to Public Enemy and have their own critiques about flow, or beats, or how it sounds today. But early on that was a beacon of light in an industry that wasn't representative of sharp critiques and consciousness. That was new music, this was dangerous music. I remember people being scared of Public Enemy and of rappers discussing these ideas and concepts.
>
> One of the concepts that I always thought was fresh was KoS, and that comes from the Five Percent Nation of Islam that was around in the '90s. Rather to say a consciousness, it was a level of introspection, and understanding, and knowledge, and wanting to learn. And back then it was cool to be smart, it was fresh. That was what I always really liked, that desire for knowledge in hip hop. It was all the things I associated with cool, and still associate with cool. It almost would be like, that consciousness, not just of social awareness and self-awareness, but also a critique, and then being able to voice that articulately over beats. That's literally what they [Public Enemy] were doing and that's what I was doing at that time [the early 2000s]—voicing the critique that I had of my social situation and of history.

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Notably, these brushes with Public Enemy confirm Tricia Rose's (1991:276) suggestion that "the advent of Public Enemy marked the observance of rap as a political cultural form"—here on a global scale. The same political reflexivity identified in Public Enemy's work is also embodied and practiced by Pataphysics, illustrating the self-reflexive praxis of the interpellation thesis. In Pataphysics's case, the Melbourne-Narrm colonial dialectic preconditions the context in which hip hop is reproduced. Pataphysics offers a neocolonial critique that resonates with, but is distinguished from, African American cultural experiences as expressed by groups like Public Enemy. This South Pacific distinction appears in the critique of contemporary Anglo-Celtic supremacy sustained by systems of governance, policing, and media since first contact with British colonial imperialism, through the self-reflexive counterhistories of people of color, asylum seekers, and First Nation peoples in Australia. Pataphysics's example illustrates how localized hip hop knowledge is deployed to critique the "domain in which people search to create meaning about their everyday lives [that] is subject to politicization and struggle" (Angus and Jhally 1989:2).

Pataphysics's songs "Asylum Is a Crime" (2013), "First Casualty" (2017b), "Frames" (2017c), and "Cycle of Oppression" (2017a) offer sharp critiques of local-global cultural politics and alert audiences to their own subjection by ideological state forces. These works pose a challenge to audiences to think critically and to question the ontological and epistemological biases that are reproduced through powerful ideological structures. For example, researchers have scrutinized the increased concentration of media ownership in Australia—29 percent owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp (Papandrea and Tiffen 2016)—and the failures of cultural representation throughout recent history (Hage 1999; Soutphommasane 2015). These realities undergird what Ghassan Hage (1999) has called a fantasy of white supremacy in Australian multicultural society, which supplants authentic multicultural representation. Such misalignments are born from the desire for a white nation evident in political reproductions of this imagination—as exemplified by the White Australia Policy (1901–1949) and Hansonism in the 1990s.[10] Pataphysics offers a critique of state and media representations, voicing neocolonial tensions felt by people of color. On "First Casualty," (2017b) he explains:

> The leaders had them fooled
> It started in the schools
> Preventing revolutionaries was the golden rule
> No need to control with that fear and violence,
> Cripple with apathy, hear the silence,
> Power will always take, subsidized by the state
> Oversaturation of information, but what is fake?

Such an approach alerts the audience's attention to alternative discourses, which Pataphysics explains:

> Local critiques were foreign in the mainstream. There were, of course, activists working on this all their lives. But in terms of our consciousness, and our generation, that really wasn't there. I could count on my hand the amount of people I could have these conversations with.
>
> There's a bunch of stuff that I used to write in the early 2000s which were debates that weren't happening in popular consciousness—I remember at the time I was voicing these there weren't many people voicing them in hip hop. Some of the stuff would make me so angry and enraged. I remember a song I wrote in 2005–2006 was called "Fuck Captain Cook," talking about our national identity which I think for a while I felt was never questioned.
>
> It came from me trying to understand race and critical race theory in this country and how it applies to people like me. And when I would go back and dig. The forces, systems, and structures that affect me and my family started at first contact [with British imperialism]. So if it's going to be better for me and people like me, who are migrants, we need to go way back and start healing that. Those systems still affect people today.

The song "Fuck Captain Cook" (2007) comprises a collection of local gems of anticolonial knowledge and history that presents a robust counterhistory to the hegemonic imperialist narrative. On the track, Pataphysics confronts an assortment of systemic neocolonial issues that are widely felt today and connected to first contact. The song references the Australian national anthem, "Advance Australia Fair" (McCormick et al. n.d.), which has been critiqued as celebrating "the white man's burden, as it applied to this particular far-flung reach of the empire" (Kelen 2002). Pataphysics creatively dismantles this white Australian memory by re-presenting the countermemories of the oppressed, dispossessed, displaced, and marginalized. Where the historical "Advance Australia Fair" (McCormick et al. n.d.) offers: "Our land abounds in nature's gifts, of beauty rich and rare," Pataphysics (2007) corrects: "Our land abounds in nature's gifts, overriding native title, log and mine till nothing left." Where "Advance Australia Fair" (McCormick 1915) concludes: "In history's page, let every stage, advance Australia fair," "Fuck Captain Cook" (Pataphysics 2007) corrects: "In history's page, let every stage, write about the war and genocide that was illegally waged."

These hip hop gems of anticolonial revision are connected through a political consciousness and critique of colonial history that is emblematic of hip hop's counterhistorical practice. For example, the title of Pataphysics's 2017 track "Lest We Forget" is a gem of historical memory that flips the script on the repeated mantra of "Recessional," the poem of imperialist dominion written for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 by Rudyard Kipling. Notably, the line by the colonial poet who also wrote "The White Man's Burden" (1899) is also

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recontextualized as an anticolonial gem in the chorus to the track "December 11th" by the Irish crew The Good Vibe Society (Rollefson 2017:239–240).

It is no surprise that conceptual similarities are temporally and interculturally reprised between Pataphysics's early influences from the United States and his own practice. Take, for example, the treatment of education as a Western rationalist ideological structure that rejects alternative ontological histories, truths, and ways of knowing. Where Public Enemy's 1988 "Prophets of Rage" implores us to "attack lies in the books that you're readin, it's knowledge of yourself that you're needin," Pataphysics's 2007 "Fuck Captain Cook" suggests: "Fuck Captain Cook and the white history books, talking about how they discovered rather than stole and took." Althusser ([1971] 2014) positioned education and literary texts as ideological state apparatuses that unconsciously hail, interpellate, and consensualize individuals as subjects to a false consciousness. In these hip hop hails, the calls to consciousness are predicated on alternative ways of knowing, offering a type of antithetical self-reflexive awareness of this very subjection—an antidote to the poison of colonial false consciousness.

The notion of "Combat Literature" put forward by Fanon (1963) similarly frames literary expression as liberatory and able to propagate conscious resistance and change to colonial systems. Through a quest of self-knowledge that overcomes colonial "malaise" and "self-loathing," a combat writer becomes "a galvanizer of the people" (159). While critical, "Fuck Captain Cook" (Pataphysics 2007) ultimately offers an opportunity to think more broadly of the historical contexts that shape contemporary society. It is, at its core, a song designed to challenge and inspire, rather than simply and fatalistically remind audiences of the systemic injustices made possible by colonialism. This condensed expression of anticolonial counterhistory challenges the structural reproduction of colonial consciousness and offers a remedy to the tensions created by nationalism in the past, present, and potential futures. As Pataphysics put it, "If music and art affect people, and people affect society and culture, and society and culture affect the world, it can change our trajectory as a species." Here, we turn to the world-changing effects that digital communications technologies have had on storytelling.

Gems, Memes, and Mo Salah

Steven Gamble

Thus far, this article has established that a focus on how hip hop culture spreads can help us to understand the circulation of knowledge across time, space, and place. Griff Rollefson uses the term "gems" to refer to concise chunks of easily communicable hip hop knowledge that draw on local knowledge to articulate

widely understood ideas. We have seen examples of this in Denise Chaila's strategic figure of "Duel Citizenship" and the use of "third eye" to connote social consciousness on Pataphysics's album cover (figure 3) and elsewhere (figure 2). In her foundational work on rap music, Tricia Rose (1994:3) wrote about hip hop involving "stories with catchy and memorable phrases and beats that lend themselves to black sound bite packaging, storing critical fragments in fast-paced electrified rhythms." "Black sound bite packaging" serves a similar role to "gems," but its emphasis on sound does not capture the entire cultural genealogy of breaking, graffiti, and other nonmusical cultural practices of hip hop.

In many contexts—for instance, in Chaila's work—it is helpful to think about performative "tropes," which Imani Perry theorized in relation to intertextuality. Drawing on Sam Floyd's (1995) work, she described call and response, for example, as a particular trope underlying the evolution and proliferation of rap music (Perry 2004:33–38). In my work as a researcher of music and the internet, the corresponding vernacular term would surely be "meme" (Denisova 2019). Though an internet meme might seem more frivolous than how hip hop spreads and shapes knowledge, both are cultural ideas repeated, with variation (sometimes problematically so), in increasingly distant contexts. This comparison is worth further consideration given the role that hip hop itself plays across the social web (Gamble and Campos Valverde 2021, Vallaste 2017).

With a striking presence on audio- and video-streaming platforms, hip hop is now situated at the forefront of popular music culture on the internet.[11] Sounds, images, words, dance videos—all elements of hip hop expression—proliferate over online platforms. Snippets of hip hop's cultural currency permeate the web, particularly viral discursive articulations such as the meme template drawn from Drake's "Hotline Bling" video and game platform Fortnite's theft of Black social dance moves (figure 4).

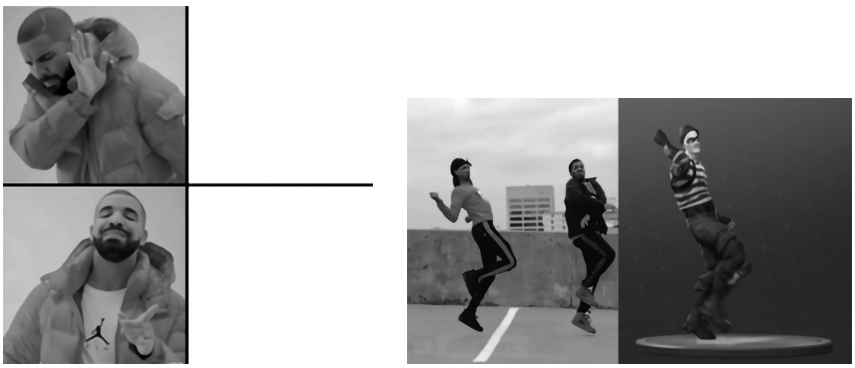


Figure 4 and b. Examples of viral digital culture originating in hip hop.

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Hip hop memes demonstrate the hip hop interpellation thesis with precision, but from a top-down perspective: the transculturally expressive potential of hip hop makes cultural sound bites, tropes, and gems accessible and appealing to adapt, remix, and share. Internet users borrow chunks of hip hop expression and spread them to new contexts to articulate localized knowledge and specific discourse. This perspective on how hip hop travels and localizes exemplifies Henry Jenkins et al.'s (2013) ideas about "spreadable media." However, it also prompts questions regarding the digital appropriation of Black expressive culture, from Blackfishing (Cherid 2021) to racialized reaction GIFs (Sobande 2021). The commercialization of Genius.com—as detailed earlier in this article—serves as a particularly stark reminder of the power of the digital economy to exploit, market, and monetize crowdsourced knowledges. However, its status as a major site for contemporary hip hop discourse and one of the most popular five hundred websites globally makes it difficult to ignore. As a vast audience accesses hip hop through viral media, memes, and websites like Genius.com, the CIPHER method considers the intersections between expressions of hip hop and the social web. Here, I analyze the spread and variation of one hip hop meme—lyrics referencing Mo Salah—to exemplify how hip hop circulates between cultures via the internet.

In 2017, the footballer Mohamed "Mo" Salah joined Liverpool, one of the most successful and popular teams in the English Football League. Already well-known in English football after an earlier stint at Chelsea, he quickly became an important fixture in the team's lineup and went on to win several awards for his performance in his debut season. Hip hop artists immediately took note of his rising profile. In the UK drill track "Know Better" (2018), which first brought Headie One to the attention of the mainstream UK media, the rapper drops the bar "excellent finish: Mo Salah." Here, Salah is referenced as a generic symbol of competence, his "finish" (ability to score goals) recontextualized as a comparison to boast about Headie One's own inevitable success. A few months later, the Nigerian artist Ycee (2019) played on the US trope of "balling" to claim style and skill—"I ball like Mo Salah"—in a track also named after the footballer. The global spread of the Mo Salah reference then took on increasingly local specificities. In the line "pressure on my shoulders like Mo Salah in the final," London artist Yungen (2019) referenced the high-profile Champions League Final between Liverpool and Real Madrid, where Salah—by this point a standout star in European football—had to stop playing due to a shoulder injury. In "First of the Second," Yungen takes a heroic stance, placing himself on the same stage as Salah but managing to overcome the pressure and complete the couplet with "failure is my only rival."

At this point, Salah began appearing in non-Anglophone hip hop. German rapper Miami Yacine used Salah as a point of North African pride to rep his own

Moroccan heritage in "Hayabusa" (2019). Just a few weeks later, Salah appeared in "PT:1" (2020) by Sweden's Yasin as a metaphor for the top-dog spot. Yasin raps, "*om det här är premier league, jag är Mo Salah*," which translates roughly to "if this was the Premier League, I'd be Mo Salah."[12] The meme spread further afield to Malawi, where Salah gained a reference in "Mwana Uyu (ft. Suffix)" (2019) by Kelvin Sings, and France, name-dropped by rapper PLK in "Billet d'20" (2020). Berlin's Samra offered a German iteration of "balling like Mo Salah" in his track "Rohdiamant II" (2020), while Riz Ahmed relocalized Mo Salah in "Mogambo" (2018) on his critically acclaimed post-Brexit album *The Long Goodbye*, an extended metaphor conceived of as a breakup between the Muslim rapper and his abusive former lover Britannia (the British Empire). Soon after, Mo Salah's name crossed the Atlantic and completed the super-brief couplet, "Now I'm rocking Prada / Get it in: Mo Salah," in Cochise's "Lost It" (2020).[13]

Lyrical references to Mo Salah capture more than just a convenient rhyme for Prada. His reputation as one of the most prominent and successful Egyptian sportsmen worldwide offers clear ground for affordances of Black, African, and Muslim pride, especially given how often name-drops appear as similes. Indeed, artists across the globe compare themselves to Mo Salah—balling like him, feeling like him, being the Mo Salah of their own domain—in various contexts. Of course, we have seen much the same for various sports stars throughout the history of hip hop (McLeod 2011:153): Mike Tyson, Michael Jordan, David Beckham, LeBron James, and Serena Williams, among others. What differs here is the speed at which this hip hop referentiality crosses the globe. The internet accelerates the process of hip hop interpellation, as lyrics now circulate and morph at a surprising pace.

Is there something reductive about approaching the spread of hip hop knowledge in the same way as memes? As memes are usually thought of as trivial, temporary, throwaway pieces of internet humor, applying the term would seem to minimize the significance of Mo Salah's appearance in hip hop lyrics. But this underestimates the importance of memes, which resemble a unit of analysis meant to address "significant means of information, interaction and political deliberation" (Denisova 2019:2). Like expressions of hip hop, they are rich and densely packed symbolic stores of knowledge with viral appeal to audiences in a range of contexts. The meme-fueled rise of the alt-right demonstrates that they should be taken seriously (Lamerichs et al. 2018) and points to problems associated with the easy shareability of such cultural artifacts.

The celebratory memefication of Mo Salah, for example, also carries some cultural specificities that are exclusory: all of the examples procured here come from male voices, reflecting a long-critiqued masculinist emphasis in hip hop (J. Morgan 1999; Gaunt 2006). Furthermore, it could be argued that Mo Salah's popularity reproduces "good immigrant" discourse in British society (Shukla

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2016), as the footballer's name can be easily transferred into damaging contexts. Certainly, this is seen in Liverpool fans' football chants ("If he scores another few, then I'll be Muslim too"), an intertextual borrowing of Mo Salah outside the domain of hip hop. As we stressed in the article's introduction, we need to be mindful of the risks associated with the easy and open transfer of often vulnerable cultural knowledges, exacerbated by internet connectivity. Attending to the online mediations of hip hop helps to develop a more detailed account of how hip hop knowledge spreads. Let us learn from Mo Salah's example and strike with precision in our efforts to better detail and understand hip hop's global dialogue. Our final hiphopographic case study passes the mic to hip hop artist Ophelia McCabe (aka 0phelia) and returns to Ireland, as we turn to hip hop's healing power, look to rebalance, and bring it all home.

Healing in the Cipher: Trauma, KoS, and Rebalancing the Feminine

Ophelia McCabe (aka 0phelia)

For me as an artist, hip hop is a force of positive change, a means of overcoming the greatest adversity. In this section, I focus on my own artistic work, examining how hip hop's yin and yang balance between being and doing have helped me to channel my emotions, process trauma, and reconnect with myself. Importantly, my concern here is not solely focused on women and girls but on feminine expression, that which is complement to the masculine: two halves of a whole, essential for a balanced representation of life—fluctuating, compromising, permeable, reaching out to one another, being together (Gaunt 2006:1–12). It is this balance and support that I theorize as healing in the cipher.

Early in life I learned to distrust groupthink and the cultish ways of insular communities, a pivot that enabled my commitment to myself. Nonetheless, I was silenced by traumatic experiences that kept me from expressing my emotions. I thus began to pursue artistic forms of expression, starting on my journey into my authenticity or KoS through writing. I have been moved by rhythm for as long as I can remember and writing rhymes has always simplified and clarified things for me. My expression took form when I was introduced to hip hop in the 1980s. Yet, paradoxically and in parallel, I engaged in secret compulsive behaviors as a means of escape. These contradictory realities moved in opposite directions with steady momentum until I was completely disconnected and alone later in life—isolated from others, gravely ill, and separated from my true self.

In his 2020 track, "Drift Away," the Oakland-based Borikén (Puerto Rican) MC Rico Pabón depicts his own traumatic experiences, putting to verse the terrifying reality of his upbringing in the couplet: "I can trace my steps to when

I used to wait for death / So many nights I'd lay awake halfway afraid to take a breath." At the end of the track, Rico's message is elaborated and underscored with the voice of trauma specialist Dr. Gabor Maté. The Maté sample concludes the track: "The essence of trauma, which is underneath all human dysfunction—addiction, affliction, disease, confusion—is separation from the self. Having lost it early in life, how do we regenerate or recover that connection?" That is the question that has fueled my journey through life, and hip hop has provided the conscious framework for me to pursue and perform KoS in a healthy way. It is a method to express my findings while designing the reality I wish to build.

I came up live in the cipher, in jams, and at open mics, creating a diverse and colorful experience through hip hop, and I have remained independent and underground to this day. One gem that grew out of performing knowledge in the cipher is a lyric in which I name a major source of trauma. By naming it in hip hop performance, I spit that poison out. The lyric, from my 2010 track "Save Our Souls," begins with the lyric: "Baptised by a paedophile." This lyric personalizes the systematic sexual violence perpetrated by members of the clergy across Ireland. Growing up, when I most needed guidance, I found the so-called solace offered by sermons in the Roman Catholic Church to be disingenuous and exclusionary. I had spent my childhood backstage in theaters across Ireland, observing my father's acting, immersed in show business. In comparison, I would then scrutinize the act of the Catholic father who—unlike my biological father—did not convince me for a second. I officially defected from the Roman Catholic Church in 2010 following the release of yet another toothless government investigation into clerical child sexual abuse and church-state sponsored oppression in Ireland (Hogan 2019, E. Kelly 1997). I had a personal need to address the institutional abuse and the effect it had on the people native to the island. On "Save Our Souls" (2010), I use the discomforting paradox captured by this gem to interrogate the misplaced trust and violated vulnerabilities around this national shame, continuing:

> . . . considered suicide
> With no recourse for to reconcile
> Individual rights and well being undermined
> The Institution has been devised to demoralize
> Faith needs nourishment, not coins in baskets
> For monsters, behind material in-vestments
> Testament to the detriment of confessions
> Citing self-professed God complexes

Of course, this national trauma was preceded and preconditioned by the colonial trauma that came before it. Men, women, and children were brutalized before and after British withdrawal from Ireland. Indeed, on this island, one tyrannical purist regime simply replaced another. After British colonialism

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systematically decimated the native language, the new theocratic regime got on with the business of cleansing the ordinary people of *Éire* of their native ways.[14] "The shameful solution"—the architecture of containment in the form of penal institutions of many kinds—was endorsed by Archbishop John Charles McQuaid and the prominent politician Éamon de Valera in the wake of Irish independence (Al Jazeera 2020). As activist, solicitor, and former advisor to the Tuam survivor network Kevin Higgins explained, their "wish to portray this island as a shining light of Catholicism" led to a dangerous imbalance, as "the position of the Catholic church as the arbiter of all that was ethical, correct and moral in Irish society became beyond challenge" (Al Jazeera 2020).

For seven decades after independence in the early 1920s, children were charged and sentenced for being orphaned, destitute, or vagrant, and women were incarcerated or vanished for reasons like being pregnant (the child being the evidence of the female's crime) (Brennan:2014). Men were also randomly yet systematically removed from society for mental illness and various failures to comply with the theocratic regime. With 20,063 people in public mental health hospitals, Ireland was dubbed "the largest open-air lunatic asylum in the world" by George Bernard Shaw in 1956 (B. Kelly 2019; Boland 2022, O'Brien 2014). These fine houses and buildings had ample space and resources to grow food, yet the so-called forgotten boys and fallen girls were starved and neglected to death. At this point, many Irish communities were spiritually bankrupt. The people of *Éire* could no longer muster the belief or force needed to reclaim the island like that which had been attempted at the failed Easter Rising of 1916. Our native language—which holds so many of our distinct truths—as well as poetry and wisdom was falling apart because of scandalous methods of education including savage clerical corporal punishment, which was common in Irish schools until the 1980s.

So much has changed in Ireland since this time, but generational oppression produces compound scar tissue that can inevitably hide the source of the original wound. In Ireland, we have residual tendencies to self-deprecate, be compliant, and to withdraw because we may yet be regurgitating the toxins fed to us about ourselves. While one must first name the source of trauma—name and spit out the poison—to progress on a healing quest for KoS, one must also work proactively at reconnecting and regenerating. I began to follow the voice inside and express my voice through hip hop, and the community embraced me as long as I kept coming correct. I was hired after a club gig to facilitate young people with complex emotional issues to give voice through hip hop and have subsequently spent the past fifteen years working with the youth. They accepted me because I was like them. Hip hop fed us messages of fun, struggle, resistance, rebelliousness, visibility, and openness through intelligent, witty, and articulate wordplay.

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I have always been attracted to what I perceive as having soulful, connected, and truth-seeking qualities. Erykah Badu's track "Appletree" (1997) is one such example of these qualities in hip hop. Badu makes it clear that she is self-satisfied and sustained. A powerful yet calm feminine strength radiates from her lyrics:

> I don't walk around trying to be what I'm not
> I don't waste my time trying to get what you got
> I work at pleasin' me, cause I can't please you,
> and that's why I do what I do

Doubling down on the arboreal metaphor of the title "Appletree," she concludes the chorus, "My soul flies free like a willow tree." Indeed, her use of the symbolic gem of the apple tree flips the script of shame that the Christian church uses to sustain its patriarchal narratives. For Erykah, the apple tree is an open source of knowledge, not a serpentine test or a source of forbidden fruit (Eve 1993).

I often use natural spaces to enable my being, my silent conversation within. My 2008 verse "Eagníocht An Chrann" ("The Enlightenment of the Tree") explores my Irishness and femininity in my native tongue. Like Erykah, I turn to the tree as a source of serenity and end the piece by encouraging the listener to do the same, spitting the lyrics, "*Oscail do chluasa beidh an freagra ann, nó cuir do ceisteanna ar eagniocht and chrann*" (Open your ears and the answer will be there, or put your questions to the wisdom of the tree). To me, the deep knowing displayed by gigantic native trees is moving in stillness: indeed, being. The energy field under the canopy diffuses my emotional intensity and can transmit serenity to those who are sensitive enough to experience it. Thus, it's no surprise to learn that "in early Irish mythology and legend, the feminine is quite dominant in the otherworld as well as on earth. . . . Goddesses symbolized the land. The same Irish goddess could be a young woman or a hag, a mother or a virgin, a warrior or a seductive temptress, depending on the occasion ("The Feminine in Early Irish Myth and Legend" 2004). These folklore goddesses could cultivate the earth, plant, nurture, and grow apple trees so as to eat the plentiful fruit produced. Despite centuries of cultural and linguistic oppression under British colonial rule and decades of theocratic suppression of traditional lifeways, it is the storytelling aspect of Irishness that survived all forms of oppression on this island.

Hip hop is my original guru, the elements my map, KoS my supreme objective. In my opinion, no legal system of justice can offer healing but togetherness can: "just us" moving in the cipher (Gang Starr 1998). In my arts practice research with the CIPHER project, I am developing emic methodologies based on hip hop modes of knowledge transfer in the cipher—the feedback circle formed whenever three or more MCs gather to perform, challenge, energize, and "feed off of one another" (Keyes 2002:124). This work manifests in the form

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of thematically organized collaborative tracks and live MC ciphers in Ireland, Europe, and North America: freestyle ciphers that explore hip hop knowledges and engender hip hop ways of knowing. My methodology is designed to both do and be hip hop to inform my autoethnographic research into how hip hop localizes itself globally, but principally these methods are designed to expand the cipher. Some of the themes explored are chosen in advance and prompted by established hip hop gems, but we also let whatever has to emerge come to the surface so that we, as a group, can journey symbiotically and develop our healing energy. As we establish trust, which is the basis for healing—unifying the tribe, so to speak—we, in turn, harness and expand the resonant field that holds us.

Sampa the Great offers one such take on the gem of healing in the cipher—her understanding of healing herself and her femininity—in her 2018 track "Energy":

> Feminine energy never shame again
> Reign, tamed, brain, praying
> Intuition, ambition running through my veins
> Pour up the love, let the healing begin

As Sampa so elegantly and forcefully reminds us, another valence of hip hop's much-lauded African inheritance of the *griot* (the West African bard)—like the *seanachaí* (the Irish bard and storyteller)—is the shaman, the healer (Osumare 2007).

Conclusions: Listening for Hidden Gems, Heeding the Call

J. Griffith Rollefson

Through the methods outlined and modeled here, CIPHER looks to develop an ever more nuanced understanding of how and why hip hop has called out to—and elicited such forceful and elegant responses from—diverse communities around the world. How are gems of hip hop knowledge—like the griot and the seanachaí—heard and understood in widely divergent cultural, musical, and linguistic contexts around the world? And further, how are these gems localized, translated, reterritorialized, reimagined, refigured, resonified, and performed by hip hop's interpellated subjects? As we've just seen, CIPHER aims to listen closely and follow the gems to find out.

By better understanding the dynamic interrelationships between the distinct-but-same archetypal knowledges that emerge as local gems in diverse contexts, it is our intention to better understand knowledge flows across the Global Hip Hop Nation. Furthermore, we intend to use these understandings to better leverage these traditional, community-centered, revolutionary, and decolonial

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knowledges in partnership with local stakeholders the world over. Indeed, it is in the transcultural dynamics of this call and response that CIPHER sees the possibility for real translocal dialogue that might provide a blueprint for moving beyond present-day hegemonic communication models that are beholden to top-down neocolonial regimes of globalization—and are not really dialogues at all. Indeed, the CIPHER method suggests that decoding hip hop knowledge often requires us to do real work at understanding. That is, many of these gems—especially the underground and profoundly emic ones—require a more active mode of listening and discernment. As such, our team of community-engaged researchers must build trust, do the work, and then heed the call of these community-centered knowledges. As MC Geologic from the Seattle duo, Blue Scholars, once put it, "I might show you the door, or open the door, but you gotta walk through it yourself" (Rollefson 2017:36).

For this reason, CIPHER builds upon hiphopographic methods of researched centered on community engagement and culture creators, embedding these emic feedback loops at every step and in every structure. In this way, organizing principles, knowledge structures, and pedagogies of hip hop are built into the form as well as the content of the project. Of course, as Warrick Moses details in this essay, there are also consequential complexities in interfacing with and networking hip hop's "diff'rent" emics—collisions and layers that create disparate contexts and perspectives in need of reconciliation and reparation. Yet, even here, hip hop's polycultural ethos offers models of hybridity, multiplicity, fugitivity, and code switching. For just as Denise Chaila suggests that some of us are forced to code switch to survive, hip hop's praxis also suggests that we all have alter egos—its Afrodiasporic genesis offers us a glimpse into that reality. As Tricia Rose suggested at the dawn of hip hop studies, this cultural praxis offers us a "a blueprint for social resistance and affirmation" through which we can "create sustaining narratives, accumulate them, layer, embellish, and transform them" (1994:39).

CIPHER's theory of hip hop interpellation is about heeding that blueprint—about listening closely, doing the work of discernment, and hearing yourself in hip hop's call. Just as Samy Alim's suggestion that "hiphopography seeks to reinvigorate cultural studies' commitment to the people" (Alim, Ibrahim, Pennycook 2009:18) so too does the CIPHER method ask that we evolve our close reading techniques to take seriously the musical sound, bodily performance, and visual arts as the preferred forms of performative scholarship—modes of communication that far predated the West's writing-based knowledge trade. Indeed, hip hop's recognition that the West African griots were the culture bearers and knowledge transmitters for many thousands of years before the emergence of Western logocentrism (and its depthless written objectivism) should also serve as a reminder: every culture and tradition on the planet once had its own

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vibrant, evocative, and performative au/oral storytelling traditions (Weheliye 2005:30–36). From the Mandinka *Epic of Sundiata*, to the Chinese *Shuōchàng King Gesar*, to the Irish *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, to the Greek *Iliad*, people around the world know local knowledge when they hear it. And when they hear it, it often rhymes.

The CIPHER method and its hip hop interpellation thesis suggests that hip hop knowledge transfer happens via close listening—via hearing, seeing, and heeding in our communities. This type of knowledge transfer is not mainly about reading words or passively hearing music, but about actively listening to, moving with, and heeding the hails of these performed gems—and doing the empathetic work of finding ourselves in them. This au/oral knowledge transfer, storytelling, in all its musical and danced contexts, is a central part of what Kyra Gaunt (following Cornel West) theorizes as "'kinetic orality'—the conjunction of orality and embodied language and meaning in Black musical discourse" (2006:62). This, we argue, is why those archetypal knowledges live on and relocalize through hip hop networks—ideas that used to be passed down au/orally, artistically, and performatively in music, lyric, and dance from one generation to another. In this understanding, knowledge moves not through the abstract universalisms of literate culture—of words on the page (or screen)—but through the personal experience of locally embodied practices and authentic utterances of gems that enliven knowledges; gems that call out to and interpellate listeners where they're at (Eric B and Rakim 1987).

Indeed, this is why music, art, and performance matters. This is why stories matter. This is why rhymes matter. As one of our contemporary culture bearers, the "quotable oracle," Rico Pabón (2020), puts it:

> Listen: the message is vital
> I'd like to welcome you here, glad that our paths crossed
> And if you've never heard me this a crash course
> First off, I'm convinced ain't no coincidences
> So if you listening,
> There's hidden gems for you within these sentences
> I hope you find 'em . . .

The track concludes: "Listen closely."

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of the "Hip Hop Nation" and its manifestation in and through language, see Alim (2006). For more on the CIPHER project, please see the community research website at https://globalcipher.org/ and the university website at https://www.ucc.ie/en/cipher/. Full details on the CIPHER project methods and theory is available at https://europeanhiphoporg.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/ercconsolidatorgrant-2018-rollefson-fullapp.pdf. The CIPHER: Hip Hop Interpellation project is funded by the European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Grant

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(CoG) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 819143).

2. For another globally informed approach to questions of hip hop's broad appeal, see Katz (2019:6–14).

3. In his landmark hip hop history, *Can't Stop Won't Stop* (2005), Jeff Chang traces the concept of KoS back to the Black Muslim beliefs of "the Nation of Gods and Earths, better known as the Five Percenters."

4. See also the video of the RapGenius.com Roundtable, archived as example 6 at https://europeanhiphop.org/jwpm/.

5. "Ubuntu: Local Is Global" was filmed for episode 6 of RTÉ *Change Makers*, directed by Ciaran O'Connor (New Decade 2022). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEV_IgorLaY&list=Plo8-GxQ7C67BOQFDHFLwQDglUZzyBOnMK&index=22&ab_channel=IrishUniversitiesAssociation

6. For more information about the Cork Migrant Centre, visit https://corkmigrantcentre.ie/. For more information about Kabin Studio, visit https://gmcbeats.com/thekabinstudio/. For more on African hip hop concepts and aesthetics see Osumare (2007), Appert (2018), and Clark (2018).

7. So-called Australia is used to denote the colonial imaginary that dislocates the history of the land (a land without a single Indigenous name), which belongs and has always belonged to the First Nation people.

8. *Narrm* is the Woi Wurrung term for Melbourne and is used by many to reclaim and acknowledge Melbourne as First Nation land.

9. Given the dialogic premise of this section and Pat's role as coauthor, it is worth noting that both the conversation and editing thereof have been shaped through a collaborative process wherein the binaries of interviewer/informant and scholar/artist are blurred. As such, the scholarly apparatus of this article necessarily refigures some traditional citational practice (no citation per se, nor "date of interview").

10. Established in 1901, the White Australian Policy was a discriminatory immigration policy that restricted the migration of non-Europeans to Australia. While the policy was dismantled over the twentieth century, similar ethnic nationalism and racist sentiments reemerged in politics in the 1990s in Hansonism, a right-wing populist political ideology of Pauline Hanson of the One Nation Party.

11. In 2018, industry body Nielsen Music reported that hip hop as a genre comprised a third of all on-demand streams.

12. My thanks to Susan Lindholm for confirming this translation.

13. A GIF showing the global movement of Mo Salah lyrics can be found at https://globalcipher.org/2021/11/15/mo-salah-lyrics/.

14. Éire is Gaelic for the island of Ireland and directly connected to the natural goddess Ériu.

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