

Foreword

Katja Kellerer, PhD student, Humboldt University of Berlin and Organising Team, Afrikan Hiphop Caravan

The Afrikan Hiphop Caravan is an annual project run by various Hip Hop activist networks spread across the African continent and the diaspora. Its vision is to build a strong and united Hip Hop movement – a cohesive network of African Hip Hop collectives, with strong ties to like-minded organisations worldwide, that define Hip Hop as a tool of cultural resistance and political emancipation. The African Hiphop Caravan took place for the first time from February to April 2013. In collaboration with numerous project partners, the key organising collectives of that year – Soundz of the South (South Africa), Uhuru Network (Zimbabwe) and Wasanii Mtaani (Kenya) – investigated, discussed and celebrated Hip Hop, street art and urban youth culture for a week in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Harare, Nairobi and Tunis, respectively.

This volume is comprised of selected papers that were presented by Hip Hop practitioners, activists and scholars at one, or more, of the four Hiphop Symposia that were organised during the project's first operational year: the Hiphop Symposium in Cape Town, which took place on February 13 at Community House; the second one, at the Goethe Institute in Johannesburg, which followed on February 20; the third one, in Harare, which was organized in collaboration with the Department for African Languages and Literatures at the University of Zimbabwe on February 27; and the fourth one, which concluded the series, on April 17 at the Goethe Institute in Nairobi.

The Hiphop Conferences, which are comprised of paper presentations, panels and roundtables, form, next to Hiphop Slams in working-class communities, the cornerstone of the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan. The need for creating a unique space for scholars and activists to discuss the manifold and diverse adaptations of Hip Hop culture on the African continent rests upon two interrelated realizations. While African Hip Hop is increasingly attracting the attention of scholars – as testified by recent publications such as *Native Tongues: An African Hiphop Reader* (2011) and *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World* (2012), academics rarely have the opportunity to openly dialogue with Hip Hop activists. This multi-tiered dialogue, however, is important for Hip Hop to stay relevant, reflected and engaged in community struggles.

Since its arrival in the 1980s, elements of Hip Hop culture, particularly rap, have been adopted and adapted in diverse forms. Despite the fact that Hip Hop has been used as a tool for mobilising toward social transformation and to contest authority, oppression and power, as, for instance, during the presidential elections in Senegal in the early 2000s, elements of the culture, particularly rap, have also been appropriated by the ruling elite (see, for instance, Kellerer this volume) and underwent commodification, or, in other words, were adopted into mainstream pop culture in many places. Thus, the key aim of the Conference is to create a platform for Hip Hop scholars, cultural activists, artists and community organisers to critically analyse current debates surrounding African Hip Hop, to deepen the understanding of Africa's urban youth cultures, and to share

strategies and experiences in mobilising young people for social justice and transformation.

The Hip Hop Symposia in 2013, which were entitled “The Afrikan Hip Hop Symposium: An Educational Exploration of Youth Culture,” allowed for a wide range of topics to be discussed, including the impact of Hip Hop on urban youth culture and identity formation, the connection, or transcultural flows, between African and global Hip Hop culture, and the dichotomy between “mainstream” and “underground” Hip Hop in Africa. In addition to addressing, and speaking to, specific aspects of this wide thematic areas, the selected papers in this volume, which all have been presented at one or more of the four Hip Hop Symposia, are reflective of the Conference’s inclusive format by varying in style and form. Three of the submissions are written by young, female scholars: Pauline Mateveke analyses the songs of Stunner, Zimbabwe’s “king of bling,” Lauren Kent offers a case study of a breakdance crew based in Grahamstown, South Africa, while Katja Kellerer explores the mainstream/underground split in Zimbabwe’s Hip Hop scene. Thus, their articles – the latter two being shortened versions of a B.A. and a M.A. thesis, respectively – are scholarly excursions into the terrain of Hip Hop culture. The remaining four articles are written by Hip Hop activists, each of which reflects a different style and form. Biko Mutsaurwa outlines the mission and vision of the Afrikan Hip Hop Caravan. Mic Crenshaw, on the other side, shares his personal experiences and reflections of participating in the project’s event in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Harare and of travelling with the comrades. Shingirayi Sabeta, aka Mau Mau, who counts as one of the pioneers of Zimbabwean Hip Hop, offers an insider’s view of the beginnings and state of the urban youth culture in his home country, while Buddha Blaze’s comments capture his understanding of and involvement in Nairobi’s Hip Hop scene.