

““United Ghettos of America”: The Aesthetics of Multicultural Exchange and Bricolage in New York City and the Case of the Jamaican Influence on Hip-Hop (1987-1995)”

Much has been said about the cultural importance of New York, sometimes referred to as the ‘capital city of the world’ in modernity, with many scholars, cultural commentators and artists highlighting the importance of this global metropolis as a centre of immigration and multiculturalism. Somewhat contradictory in this regard, then, is the seeming academic (and otherwise) insistence that music and ethnic categories emerging from the city be so segregated and demarcated in terms of their theoretical categorization.

From the first phase of my extended semi-structured fieldwork interviews spanning two and a half months at the end of 2019 with New York reggae and hip-hop practitioners, my findings suggest that the dense, diverse multiculturalism *par excellence* of New York facilitated a sort of urban, multicultural *bricolage* (Levi Strauss, 1962), which connected music genres and their wider cultures right across this great metropole. Whether funk, salsa, hip-hop, reggae and later house, from the point of view of my interviewees these musical influences were in many ways merely flavours of the artists’ palette. Furthermore, this invites us to reflect on the utility of, for example musical and ethnic categorisations, and the sometimes rigid demarcation of these in academic discourse, which I did not find to be a feature of my respondents language and experience.

I seek to outline a period in New York music history, from 1987 to 1995, which saw not only an explosion of New York reggae in the US capital, but also saw an intensification of dialogue between Jamaican-born – but very much *New York* dancehall – and hip-hop, and the eventual birth in the early 90’s of a new sub-genre, so-called *raggamuffin hip-hop*. I argue that regardless of the categories that may have previously been applied to these phenomena, such interactions were an extension of a fabric, an aesthetic and a method of two decades of urban multicultural bricolage in many ways embodied (though not isolated to) through the emergence of hip-hop.