Picture a young man, about seventeen years of age. His family originally hails from the agrarian heartlands of eastern Uttar Pradesh but moved to Delhi to find work in the early twenty-first century. They live in a diverse and dense urban village in South Delhi, a place where migrants reside.[1] At his age, he would normally be attending senior secondary school or college, or working as a driver, a construction worker, or in a shop in one of the many malls that have cropped up all over the city, like the other males in his immediate and extended family. Instead of attending school or working, he practices his b-boy moves in the park close to his house with other young men from different ethnic, caste, and national backgrounds. He walks around his neighborhood and the city "battle ready," striding with an arrogant confidence—almost as if a soundtrack that we cannot hear and he alone can affords him a different embodied relationship to the streets he frequents.[2]

He and his friends write graffiti on the cement walls of their neighborhood and in other parts of the city. They spend their time traveling across the city on the Delhi metro, doing spontaneous dance performances in malls, parks, and historic ruins across the city. They rap in Hindi and English to each other and, occasionally, to an audience, microphone in one hand, the other pointing outward toward the crowd. They take photos and make videos of these performances and their other acts of creation and post them on social media.

Some people who witness their creative performances (and social media circulations of them) are excited and enthusiastic as they come across a familiar representation of youthful urban life from elsewhere laminated onto the urban terrain of Delhi. For them, these young men's hip hop play offers the opportunity for a quick news story about globalization in the so-called slums of the city.[3] Their performances also provide a viable image for a marketing campaign to promote a global sneaker brand in India or a narrative of political valence that could support an ongoing activist project.

For others, it is strange, unsettling. An old man in a South Delhi urban village mutters, "*Kya fyda*? What is the value?" under his breath as he stands in front of a graffiti mural painted by this young man and his friends. A former government school teacher of his says, "What will he do in the future? How will he earn money? He is already disadvantaged and poor. What will he do with this singing and dancing?" His parents are uncertain that this will lead anywhere. "Dress normally," his mother says. "Stop wearing your pants so low. Why this music?"[4]

In his recent monograph, D. Asher Ghertner argues that Delhi has been remade through the elites' (the planners', developers', politicians', and entrepreneurs') aesthetic vision of the future that places Delhi in comparison to, say, Paris or Singapore.[5] He suggests that urban development projects in Delhi that began soon after economic liberalization policies in India were enacted in the 1990s and that picked up pace in 2006 after the Delhi Master Plan 2021 was drafted have been mobilized through an image of these idealized world-class cities rather than by surveys, synoptic maps, or demographic data.[6]

This hegemonic image of a future Delhi, he contends, valorizes familiar scenes of urban life elsewhere toward the goal of making Delhi, to quote the authors of the Delhi Master Plan 2021, "a prime mover and nerve centre of ideas and actions, the seat of national governance and a centre of business, culture, education and sports."[7] Ghertner contends that, as this top-down aesthetic regime becomes policy and practice and taken-for-granted doxa, it generates the city's spatial everyday, its subjects, and its futures. It makes, if we play with the old anthropological adage a bit, the familiar of a Delhi past strange and the strange of a Delhi future familiar.[8]

The diverse young men who populate the pages ahead also use imaginaries of an urban elsewhere to conceptualize and produce sonic, visual, and embodied representations of themselves, the city they live in, and the potential futures of both. However, the key resource they utilize to imagine a different city and self, steeped in the familiar images and sounds of an urban elsewhere, are found in hip hop. This book is about these young men—the

children of newcomers, ethnic or caste others, and laborers in the city—as they come of age on the margins of Delhi's economic and social transformation with the promise that through transnational media consumption *and* production, they can fashion themselves and the worlds they inhabit.

Throughout this book, I use the synthetic term *globally familiar* to describe and theorize how smart phones and social media platforms offer these young men the means to reimagine and remake self and city through hip hop practice. The globally familiar, broadly speaking, is the technological infrastructure that facilitates connection across place and time as well as the diversity of media these technologies can be made to conjure. These mediations offer those from "below" an opportunity to reimagine the city and themselves on different and productive terms.[9] Perhaps more importantly, the globally familiar is a feeling of connectedness made possible through media-enabled participation and practice and the affective economy and structure of aspiration this feeling produces.[10] It suggests that by cultivating the self through the consumption, production, and circulation of transnational popular culture, a different present and future, replete with unanticipated participation and opportunity, is possible.[11]

Since the 1990s, media consumption has become a key site to track the effects of what was somewhat faddishly (in both hopeful and pessimistic ways) called globalization—a term used to describe not only the economic but the social, cultural, and political changes that arrived in the post–Cold War era in national contexts, like India for instance, which were previously economically "protected."[12] As Arjun Appadurai argues (as does Stuart Hall, in a different moment and context), by listening to, reading, and watching the "popular," people are not simply interpellated as docile subjects.[13] Rather, the explosion of access to TV, films, music, and the news—whether produced elsewhere or "locally"—offers people a site by which to understand, engage, and even contest changes that the flow of capital, in its myriad forms, produces in a particular place as it reconstitutes livelihoods, lifestyles, and personhood.

I pick up this idea in the contemporary, digital moment when a clear distinction between media consumption and production of media forms has collapsed.[14] The availability of inexpensive smart phones that allow for the possibility to access and repost (and remix) existing media and creatively capture our everyday experiences profoundly shapes how we come to know ourselves in the world. In this moment, media is not simply something to consume and imagine with but a way to actively create oneself and the world anew and communicate these understandings to others.[15] As Donna

Haraway presciently argued almost three decades ago, "communications technologies . . . are the crucial tool recrafting our bodies."[16] In the present moment, digital communication technologies hold the potential to remake bodies *and* places precisely because of the speed of continuous and recursive connectivity and comparison they facilitate.

I deploy the globally familiar in this book to specifically engage with "digital hip hop" as a site of gendered becoming and spatial transformation in Delhi. The globally familiar, in the close ethnographic reading that follows, is Black American masculinity as it is digitally broadcast, received, and retrofitted for rebroadcast through hip hop's sonic, visual, and kinesthetic sensibilities. I draw from a range of research that has engaged with hip hop as a global phenomenon and that recognizes the reach of American Blackness beyond African diasporic circuits to explore how digital hip hop becomes the key *global familiar* by which the young men I met in Delhi's hip hop scene come to understand and creatively mobilize their perceived and experienced gendered (classed, and racialized) difference in ways that produce new relations in and with the city they call home.[17] To focus on digital media circulations as a site of gendered becoming in Delhi is, as Joshua Neves and Bhaskar Sarkar argue, to move away from "normative imaginations of global technoculture" that center Europe and North America.[18] To engage with hip hop in urban India is to recognize the reach of African diasporic arts as they are amplified through digital means to produce unanticipated subjects and places.

In the last decade, feminist hip hop scholars working in the United States have paid close attention to how hip hop envisions, articulates, and shapes normative and deeply problematic ideas about gender and sexuality as well as offers opportunities to interrupt them.[19] However, while there has been plenty of research on hip hop's "global linguistic flows," there has been little work on how hip hop's aesthetics, in its global travels, have shaped gendered subjectivities elsewhere.[20]

As importantly, there have been few close engagements with contemporary embodiments of working-class masculinity in the complex social worlds of postliberalization urban India. As Sareeta Amrute argues, contemporary scholarship on India has tended to focus on either the so-called urban middle class or on the rural caste, religious, ethnic, and tribal subject.[21] The urban and peri-urban poor and working class, as a result, tend to get subsumed into one analytical project or the other or are left out altogether. With regard to the study of masculinity, this tendency has resulted in two strands of scholarship. The first strand has engaged with colonialism's impact on the male gendered body, with an analytical focus on caste Hindu male sexuality, bodily

cultivation, semen conservation, religious-nationalist identity formation, and consequent sectarian violence.[22] The settings for these engagements, with some notable exceptions, have been either in the village or in one of India's many second-tier cities or large towns.

The second strand has delved into "middle-class" masculinities and sexualities in the postliberalization period, touching upon the impact of consumerism, national and regional mass media, and a newfound sense of publicness.[23] The settings for these studies have included cities but have, with few exceptions, failed to differentiate male subjects based on their laboring opportunities, racialized positions, or spatialized conditions.[24] In other words, there has not been a close engagement with how in-migration and expropriative development have impacted how the male children of workers, as they come of age in urban spaces of transformation, imagine and perform themselves as men.[25]

In the pages ahead, I foreground how transnational media circulation influences the aspirations and everyday gendered performances of a diverse group of young working-class men growing up in urban India as well as think through the ways in which media *production* becomes a site of transformation and opportunity. In particular, I push for an attention to the ways the miniaturized screen—as it brings notions of personhood and place from elsewhere into immediate and productive conversation with the here and now—provides a diverse cross section of working-class men in Delhi the opportunity to self-fashion themselves *as* men in the context of the city they call home.[26]

I engage with masculinity in my participants' social (media) play, physical embodiments, conceptual understandings of gender, aspirations for the future, and their opportunities for work. In each case, I look at the ways in which their social performances and gendered aspirations are influenced as much by the context they live in as by the media content they consume and emulate in their online productions and everyday hip hop embodiments. By situating my account among a diverse group of working-class young men living in the city, I push against readings of masculinity as regional (South Asian) or national (Indian). Rather, I focus on the fluid and complex assemblages of gender in relation to class, caste, race, and ethnicity within the context of Delhi but linked to transnational circuits of becoming.[27]

By engaging with Delhi as a spatial field of transformation made optical, audible, and visceral not only in the ethnographic *cut* I inhabited with these young men who generously included me in their cipha but also in their audiovisual productions, I offer an alternative narrative to the ways in which

urban place-making is often discussed in South Asia—as a project that is ruled by experts and ratified by the desires of the so-called middle class.[28] Brian Larkin poetically argues that "the quotidian landscapes of life—posters on the walls, shop signs, dancing girls, bestsellers, panoramas, the shape, style, and circulation of city buses—are all surface representations of the fantasy energy by which the collective perceives the social order."[29] In the pages ahead, I show how digital hip hop offered these young men the opportunity to claim and reimagine the spaces of their city—the parks, the malls, the historical ruins, the cement walls surrounding the streets of the slums and urban villages where they reside—in ways that productively disrupted normative understandings of twenty-first-century Delhi's social order.[30]

In their renderings and inhabitations, contemporary Delhi was reimagined as global or world class not because of the new roads to accommodate the surge in privately owned automobiles; the new glass, steel, and concrete private housing developments; the shiny international airport; or the countless shopping malls and private hospitals that have come to dominate the city's built environs.[31] Rather, the young men I met in the city utilized hip hop to reimagine their city as global because of its slums, its graffiti murals across the city's expanses, and its regular hip hop events. Their hip hop–inspired self-fashioning projects in the city, in this sense, not only indexed their gendered becoming but was constitutive of *Delhi as a place*.[32]

Consider that much of the scholarship on twenty-first-century Delhi has focused on either a top-down reimagining of the city or on the urban poor and their plight as a result of slum clearances and the like.[33] In each case, Delhi's urban poor and working class are depicted as homogenous and either passive recipients or, at best, as examples of anachronistic resistance to an urban Indian present and future that, ultimately, does not include them in its imaginaries. This book provides a different entry point to engaging with Delhi than those offered by scholars, literary writers, or the mainstream media, who portray the city in terms of clear demarcation and division where the cosmopolitan elite have access to the global—literally and metaphorically—while the masses do not.[34] What emerged—in the images, videos, and social media narrations of the diverse young male hip hop dancers, MCs, and graffiti writers' everyday border crossings and relational entanglements in the city coupled with my ethnographic deep dive into the contexts of their production—was a picture of Delhi that did not seem so clearly divided on some counts but was deeply unequal (and segregated) in others.

This doubling, where the young men I got to know deployed hip hop to spatialize Delhi as a site of productive mobility and recalcitrant inequality, at once

challenged and reinforced the logics of a top-down aesthetic vision of Delhi as a world-class city. In this sense, the pages that follow will not offer a simple tale of celebratory subaltern resistance against the dominant aesthetic that has in the last twenty years transformed many of India's urban spaces into what media theorist Ravi Sundaram has argued are "middle class utopias."[35] Rather, the story that unfolds centers on how these young men negotiated the changing economic, social, and spatial conditions around them through hip hop–influenced modes of consumption and performances of distinction that did not, for instance, critique their economically and socially privileged peers but were meant to productively grab their attention even if that sometimes meant calling into question the structural forces that produced their shared reality.

Nor does this book offer a dismal narrative of digital subjectification, global consumerist interpellation, and capitalist dispossession: the kind of ethnographic account that Sherry Ortner has described as "dark anthropology" and that Jodi Dean argues exemplifies the (digital) communicative turn in capitalism.[36] The mere fact that these young men have taken up the hopeful, creative, and vitally embodied and spatialized practices of hip hop, with its political history of representing racial capitalism and its effects, would make that impossible.[37] Rather, I endeavor to explore and unwind the stories of how my participants' digital hip hop practice in Delhi reflects the complicated relationship between their desire to participate in global capital's reworking of the city and the opportunities and exclusions they encounter *as* marginal male subjects otherwise in the shadows of globalization's transformation of the city and the country.

If the anxieties their elders and parents have about their hip hop practice reflect the limits linked to these young men's economic and social futures in the city (*Kya fyda*? What is the value?), my participants' insistence on pursuing hip hop art forms and developing digitally enabled transnational communities of practice reveals the ways they imagine the transformative potential of digital technology and hip hop to create new possibilities for life otherwise. Taken in this spirit, my analysis of masculinity, urban space, and digital hip hop in Delhi offers something akin to what Lila Abu-Lughod describes as a "diagnostic of power."[38] This diagnostic concerns itself, in large part, with the ways in which the young men who let me into their lives positioned themselves (and were positioned) as gendered subjects in the fast-changing urban terrains of the city more than two decades since economic liberalization changed the country and its cities irrevocably.

In this sense, this book—with its focus on transnational (digital) media, hip hop praxis, masculine becoming, and urban change in India's capital

city—offers the latest "digital take" on a body of literature concerned with how economic liberalization in India in the 1990s and the consumptive flows it has since let loose have transformed public space, understandings of gender, and aspiration for young people.[39] Anthropological work that has focused on the liminal category of youth in the postliberalization era has carefully engaged with the ways in which access to global circulations has ushered in tastes, desires, aspirations, and political sensibilities that anxiously reconstitute gender roles, reimagine public space, and, in some instances, fatally mark aspiration as future death.[40] These accounts have offered opportunities to critically reflect on how young people living in India, as they reimagine and reposition themselves through sartorial choice, consumptive habits, and articulations of their hopes and dreams, at once transgress and reinforce class, religious, caste, and gendered difference in the lifeworlds they inhabit. Some of this rich corpus of scholarship on youth in postliberalization India has highlighted mass mediation as a key element in the reformulation of gendered subjectivities, social practices, and spatial relations.

For instance, Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella's account of young men in small-town Kerala going to the cinema and Sarah Dickey's theorization of film-star fan clubs in a second-tier city in Tamil Nadu provide a way to think about how national and regional cinema shapes everyday life for young men in India. In their accounts, what emerges are the kinds of gendered relations, political sensibilities, and spatial inhabitations produced through the act of watching together in an era marked by a consciousness of elsewhere and otherwise.[41]

I also think of Devan, the young low-caste college student based in small-town Kerala who appears in Ritty Lukose's work on youth transformations in postliberalization India. In Lukose's account, Devan, in part by watching the Tamil film *Kaaladan* (Loverboy), began to shop for and dress in what Lukose describes as a Ragga-inspired style (baggy pants, loose shirts, sneakers, and a ponytail) in an effort to be "*chethu*," cool or sharp in Malayali. Global Blackness, mediated through Tamil cinema, offered a different gendered and racialized possibility for Devan and, in turn, produced different social practices and aspirations for him and his peers.

In more recent ethnographic work, there has been a focus on reality television shows like *Indian Idol* and the ways in which youthful aspirations for national fame are sparked and cultivated by the promise and possibility of televisual appearance.[42] Simply watching the show—modeled after an American show by a similar name—sparks the desire in young people to fashion themselves as musical performers, even if the possibility to access

the requisite training to become one is limited based on gender, class, and caste and the particular aesthetics of the show favor the reproduction of a dominant aesthetic.

These ethnographies of youthful media practice have not (and, in some cases, could not have, given their timing) paid close attention to the ways in which transnational, networked media connectivity has become a taken-for-granted horizon of possibility that shapes desire, personhood, relationships to space, and dreams for the future.[43] As with previous shifts in media infrastructure in India—for instance, the cassette tape boom in the 1980s or the advent of satellite television in the 1990s that caused the proliferation of a broad variety of local, regional, and globally circulating media forms—the post-2008 digital explosion has opened up the possibility for new modes of consumption, communication, and production.[44]

For instance, as of 2019, India has the largest number of regular Facebook users in the world (approximately 269 million people).[45] These users are concentrated in India's urban centers, particularly first-tier cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru where there has been a rapid creation of digital infrastructure in the last decade, especially after 2008, when 3G and 4G spectrums were auctioned by the government to private interests that rapidly expanded internet connectivity.[46]

The globally familiar takes up this new spatialized media ecology and the concomitant social practices, acts of self-fashioning, and unbridled aspiration it motivates among India's diverse youth—an under-twenty-five-year-old demographic that comprises more than half the nation's population.[47] The globally familiar pushes us to think what happens when the silver screen is miniaturized, when media of all sorts can be evoked with a swipe or a click of the button, and when collective viewing practices consist of a group of young people (in the case of this book, young men) gathered around one small blue-lit screen in public space.

In the current moment, quite literally, the global can fit in one's pocket to be summoned in an instant. This emergent digital infrastructure has provided young people across various social divides in urban India with, among other things, access to popular cultural content from around the world: global news (fake and otherwise), English Premier League football, K-pop, Naija pop, Japanese manga, and, of course, hip hop, all of which supplement their previous diet of the popular produced by national and regional mass media industries as well as web-based media directed at "Indian" youth.[48]

The globally familiar, in this sense, demands a recognition that in the age of social media, the popular, in its various media manifestations, is more

diversified than ever before. Amateur YouTube videos shot by youth living in cities around the world are just as likely to be accessed as corporate-produced media depictions, and the ways young people in India gain access to what they consume is increasingly a function of the online and offline web of relationships they find themselves enmeshed in.[49] These media forms, taken as a whole, are constitutive of how young people in urban India make sense of who they are and where (and when) they live. In this sense, the globally familiar suggests that transnational circulations of media content open up a site by which to understand how places and subjects are produced that are neither global nor local but in excess of both.[50]

Why Hip Hop?

"Why hip hop?" was a question I asked b-boys, graffiti writers, and MCs quite frequently early on in my stay in the city. The response I got was an affectively charged one: hip hop is freedom; hip hop is life. Hip hop, as these young men described, allowed them to create a feeling of connection and belonging through stylistic play and embodied practice that exceeded their conditions of possibility as the children of laborers, refugees, and caste Others.[51] For these young men, digital connectivity offered access to youth cultural worlds beyond what they deemed "Indian" popular culture, which they argued they felt no connection to because they were outside the dominant narrative these popular representations portrayed. In their accounts, they imagined regional and national cinema and TV as local, even though they too were in global circulation within and beyond diasporic circuits.[52]

"Bollywood films. I hate them. They are horrible," said Jay, in a mixture of Hindi and English. Jay was eighteen years old when I first met him in 2012. A talented MC and b-boy, he moved with his father from Garhwal district in the mountains of North India to South Delhi in 2003 but claimed Nepal as home. "*Ghazals*? Filmy music? That is not for me. That is for Indians. *Aam aadmi*.[53] Ordinary man. *Main alag aadmi hoon*. I am a different man." For Jay and his peers, their positions as *alag aadmi* could only be articulated and aestheticized through hip hop. Their reclamation of *alag* (difference) through hip hop transformed their outsider positionality in Delhi into a globally familiar one—where a creative embodiment of spatialized, gendered, and racialized difference becomes a resource and strategy for realizing social and economic mobility. As such, hip hop fulfilled itself in Delhi as it has throughout its forty-year history since its inception in Black and Latinx neighborhoods of urban America: as a technology of creative bricolage that opens up

opportunities to self-fashion as a response to processes of disenfranchisement, and to generate new social and economic possibilities as a result.[54]

In this sense, practicing hip hop in Delhi reveals what Achille Mbembe describes as the "manifest dualism" of Blackness as it circulates across the world. Mbembe argues that "Blackness was invented to signify exclusion, brutalization, and degradation, to point to a limit constantly conjured and abhorred." And yet, he argues, Blackness, in its travels across the world as art and merchandise, also "becomes the symbol of a conscious desire for life, a force springing forth, buoyant and plastic, fully engaged in the act of creation and capable of living in the midst of several times and several histories at once."[55]

The dual nature of Blackness—its capacity to generate vitality, relationships, and economic value while indexing or becoming synonymous with violent exclusion—has been foundational to hip hop's aesthetic and its success globally and was on display in Delhi. Through hip hop, the young men I got to know in Delhi were able to first imitate and then embody the circulating image of Black masculinity clothed in hip hop's bravado and rebellion to make sense of themselves, individually and collectively, as marginalized subjects in the capital city of India.[56] Blackness vis-à-vis hip hop became a political category of possibility and inclusion for these diverse young men, an incipient possibility for solidarity and friendship across ethnic, religious, caste, and racialized difference.

Yet hip hop's practices, styles, and embodied ways of being, especially when coupled with the potential for social media circulation, also offered them the means to frame their unequal experience as a global hustle: a way to get by, even succeed, in a city striving to become world class precisely because of hip hop's capacity to signify subversion and sovereignty in its public affect and its embodied experience as socially and economically valuable. Which is to say, digitally enabled hip hop offered these young men a means to self-fashion themselves as unique, creative, even entrepreneurial individuals who could participate in urban India's aspirations for world-class status.[57]

By remaking themselves and the city, even if uncomfortably and unevenly, to fit the narrative capital has produced about a world-class Delhi through their claims to Black masculinity, (some of) these young men made friends they would otherwise have never met, found unanticipated work, explored the breadth of the city, and (in some cases) were even able to participate in activist-driven initiatives in ways that would have otherwise been foreclosed to them. Yet despite the opportunities that arose for some, the potential for fracture and dislocation lurked in the background, linked to a postponement

of a prescribed reproductive future of marriage, children, and a steady pay-check (likely from a casual service labor job, which is all they would be able to obtain given their social backgrounds, access to education, and so on).

These potential and delayed futures evoked a specter of normative masculinity in Delhi's migrant and working-class neighborhoods that the young men explicitly pushed against through hip hop praxis, even as some of them had to succumb to living a dual life of being a wage laborer and a hip hop artist to help their family pay the bills. The promise of fame and fortune also created competition, disagreement, and hostility between Delhi's aspiring young hip hop artists in ways that fractured solidarity as it became evident, over the course of the several years that I have known these young men, that only some would succeed financially as digital hip hop artists—in part because their claims to an authentic "Indian" hip hop urbanity stuck better than others.

The globally familiar, as it manifests American Black masculinity in Delhi, is thus an ambivalent optimism (rather than a cruel one).[58] Why? Because it offers a hip hop otherwise that is always already saturated in racialized capitalist realism of the Atlantic world.[59] It feeds aspiration by providing the resources for the self-cultivation of an affectively charged and globally manifest gendered and racialized subjectivity that promises a different (economic and social) future. It delivers on its promise in the moment when vital embodied practice and the thrill of digital documentation offer a way out of the everyday and a chance to connect with unanticipated others. Yet over time, it only partially, at best, lives up to the expectation it generates, even if social media promises something more.

Throughout the book, I think through and theorize hip hop practice for social media circulation within and beyond one's existing networks as a key aspect of the globally familiar. The relationship between media consumption and production in the digital age is recursive.[60] What one consumes shapes what one produces and vice versa. The do-it-yourself (DIY) media content one produces beckons, cajoles, invites, and, invariably, offers the potential for new relations as it travels through the digital circuitry of social media: #dmforcollab.[61] The content that gets ratified on social media through "likes" intensifies the circulation and production of particular gendered, classed, and racialized subjectivities laminated onto space and place. One never knows how far what one makes will travel. One's affectively charged audiovisual self-productions on platforms such as Instagram, as Alice Marwick teasingly and tantalizingly writes, might even create "instafame."[62]

As Kathleen Stewart explains, affects do not work through explicit meaning but rather "in the way they pick up densities and texture as they move through

bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings of all kinds."[63] The globally familiar, in this sense, asks us to pay attention to the ways in which digital content channels and organizes affect through circulation as well as during the behind-the-scenes work that needs to be done to produce the audiovisual artifacts in the first place. It also asks us to pay attention to the sign-concepts that travel in the media that are consumed and reproduced as citation in everyday interaction and in subsequent social media representations.[64]

In the chapters ahead, I explore the ways in which aspiring b-boys, rappers, graffiti artists, and DJs in Delhi's margins evoked and deployed gendered, spatial, racialized, classed, and kin concepts linked to their hip hop media consumption but also animated in other transnational popular discourses—friend, swag, racist, nigga, nation, race, slum, and bro, to name a few—and the ways in which these concepts both disrupted previous and generated new understandings and embodiments of masculinity, reimagined the city's spatial coordinates, and indexed their aspirations as well as the uneven social and economic opportunities available to them.

The globally familiar, when theorized as a tracking of mediatized moving concepts as they shape life in a particular place and time, animates what Michael Lampert argues is the role of contemporary "global" anthropology as it "prides itself on critically pluralizing concepts that purport to be the same across contexts . . . to work as connoisseurs of the 'not quite' rather than peddlers of the strange."[65] To engage with the hip hop–inflected concepts these young men use to understand, theorize, and aestheticize their situated subject formation is to recognize that media consumption generates new ways of seeing, hearing, understanding, and articulating difference as well as opportunities for producing place.[66] It also pushes us to recognize how moving concepts, held together and intensified in hip hop's aesthetics, produce social, economic, and political value for the young men who remade themselves in and through them.

Indeed, if I could go back in time and respond to the old man who looked at the graffiti mural and wondered aloud about the value of such an endeavor, I would tell him that the mural, when made into an image that can travel with a caption that might read *Delhi swag*, opens up worlds of deferred possibility and potential capital.[67] If he gave me the time, I would explain that hip hop's technologies of practice, as they have been picked up across the globe, have always been about productive appropriation of concepts, materials, and technologies to, as James G. Spady argues, "loop link," or "reenact, enact, and update the aesthetic, political, and social impact of Black cultural movements in new and very different contexts."[68]

The globally familiar asks us to consider how the "loop links" of hip hop practice, as it is intensified through digital media production and circulation, generates vitality in a specific place and time and with particular young people: in Delhi in the second decade of the twenty-first century among young men who are otherwise imagined to be on the margins of change. Moreover, it pushes us to consider how hip hop's aesthetic of flow and rupture, as Arthur Jafa describes its practices of omnivorous bricolage, when made digital, amplifies offline practice of b-boying, rapping, or painting through an online representation *of* practice (a practice of practices, as it were).[69]

In so doing, the globally familiar suggests that hip hop's aesthetic of assemblage and improvisation is now eminently digital in the ways it is consumed, practiced, and produced. One could argue that videography and photography and perhaps even social media literacy are integral skills (maybe even hip hop elements in their own right) for an aspiring twenty-first-century hip hop artist.[70] As such, the globally familiar pushes us to consider the ways in which hip hop brings its musical, lyrical, visual, and kinesthetic modalities together into multimodal relations in ways that push against scholarly reductions of hip hop that pose its traveling traditions as solely musical and linguistic. As Delhi b-boy Sudhir once said to me: "It's not enough to learn a b-boy move from YouTube. One has to learn how to shoot it properly. Lots of cuts. Then, what music to put on? *Yeh bhi zaroori hai*. That is important too."

Sudhir's recognition that shooting and editing are important (too) marks the ways in which the young men in Delhi's hip hop scene imagined how their experimentations with hip hop, what Jeff Chang calls "the most far-reaching arts movements of the past three decades," created opportunities for social, economic, and political participation in ways that recursively shaped how these young men came to see and produce themselves and the city they call home.[71] Their interest in generating social and economic capital through their hip hop self-making projects opened the door for me to enter into their worlds as a collaborator and, with them, to imagine and theorize a digitally enabled shared anthropology.

An Ethnography of the Globally Familiar

It was February 2013. I waited with Jaspal Singh for Soni at the mouth of a South Delhi metro station. Singh is a sociolinguist from Germany with roots in Punjab, and Soni was, at the time, a nineteen-year-old Sikh b-boy and aspiring rapper from an economically depressed postpartition Punjabi enclave in West Delhi. As we waited, I found a sliver of shade on the edge of a

parapet so Singh and I could sit and talk a bit before Soni arrived. Singh had connected with Soni at a hip hop concert featuring Snoop Lion (now, once again, Snoop Dogg) and various local hip hop acts a few weeks prior. Singh had asked him to come to South Delhi for an interview and a conversation about music production and generously invited me along for the meeting.

Singh and I had recently met after we found out we were both doing research projects on the emergent hip hop scene in Delhi. Singh had stumbled upon a conference abstract I had written about clandestine and improvisational hip hop dance sessions in South Delhi malls the year prior and contacted me to tell me he was going to be in Delhi in 2013 doing fieldwork.[72] Once we figured out we both would be in Delhi at the same time, we planned to connect. Soon after I arrived in Delhi in January 2013, we met over a reassuring meal of *dal chawal* (rice and lentils) and committed to supporting each other in our fieldwork endeavors.

While we sat waiting for Soni and took the commuter bustle in, Singh told me that he was planning to set up a recording studio in his new apartment, where he could invite dancers in Delhi's emergent hip hop scene who were interested in expanding their hip hop repertoires to record their raps and learn to produce beats. Studio time in Delhi, he reasoned, as anywhere else in the world, is expensive. Moreover, there were not many professional recording studios available in Delhi for young people to experiment with their hip hop–inflected musical ideas, even if they had the money to spend.

The idea of a providing DIY studio space, he believed, would not only give him the opportunity to develop relationships with young aspiring musicians in the Delhi scene and to capture the kinds of stylized articulations of self and world that they made available in their lyrics; it would also allow him to offer something back in return for the access that they provided him into their worlds. As we leaned against the parapet, I told Singh about the music video I had filmed for a crew of rappers from South Delhi the previous summer (in 2012) when I made my first foray into the scene. I described how, until the moment that this group had needed me to shoot this video, I had a difficult time getting in touch with them or having them take my interest in them seriously (once they found out I was not a journalist or a contemporary or legendary hip hop practitioner from afar). The digital single-lens reflex (DSLR) camera I brought with me to Delhi, I explained, facilitated access. Much like his music studio, the camera promised the exciting possibility for what our interlocutors perceived as a paraprofessional opportunity for self-production and circulation. Singh, after a momentary pause, said, "You should keep making music videos with the rappers and dancers we meet in Delhi."

Throughout my days in Delhi, I engaged with the young men I met as their cameraman, as their producer, as their personal photographer, and, eventually, as their collaborator. In so doing, I marked myself as another kind of familiar the global makes possible—the twenty-first-century male, Indian American anthropologist who arrives (largely because of the media representations of hip hop I saw from afar) and stands just offstage to document events and performances as they unfold.

During the two years I lived in Delhi, I took up any and all opportunities to create audiovisual content in conversation and, in certain instances, in explicit collaboration with young men in the scene. Throughout this book, I touch upon these digitally enabled shared ethnographic moments as instantiations of a hip hop–infused ethnography, or "hiphopography." For H. Samy Alim, James G. Spady, and Samir Meghelli, hiphopography is a way of conducting research that takes seriously hip hop practitioners' efforts to theorize and represent themselves in the world to become someone new. As such, hiphopography is an approach to research that attempts to displace the power differentials between experts and participants in typical social science endeavors by harnessing hip hop's aesthetic and epistemic sensibilities toward dialogue and improvisation such that all participants are imagined as experts.[73] Our coproduced knowledge was composed of the images, sounds, and videos that we made and, as importantly, the discussions we had about framing, producing, or locating them. These collaborative media artifacts could at once become the site for my (future) analysis as it traveled in social media as well as the vehicle that reaffirmed existing relations (through "likes" on Facebook) or created new ones for them.

Making together, while mutually beneficial, also generated moments of discomfort, uncertainty, and, at times, disagreement. These moments of difficult conversation centered around how best to represent the city and a subaltern Delhi masculinity through the aesthetics of hip hop as well as how far I would be willing to go to share my resources. These challenging moments drew attention to how my presence, as an older male Indian American from New York whom they perceived as closer to an authentic Black masculinity than them, could and should influence the ways in which they imagined an emergent Delhi hip hop scene. Moreover, my presence pushed them to think through and articulate what they valued as they actively shaped themselves as men coming of age in a city, as I described in the preface, that was grappling with its mediatized reputation as a place hostile to women and full of dangerous, itinerant, and unemployed men.

In the chapters that follow, I think through these instances of shared making as sites of possibility and friction to reflexively engage with what it means to do media ethnography in the digital moment and what sorts of surprising insights emerge when making together becomes an activity that, ultimately, is just as much about the cultivation of value as it is about the energetic immediacy of coproduction.[74] In this sense, the pages that follow offer a way to think through and engage with what Amit Rai has recently described as an affective ethnography in and of the media—one that traces the feelings of excitement, anxiety, and hopefulness linked to improvisational making with others against the backdrop of neoliberal valorizations of entrepreneurship and self-cultivation.[75]

The first two chapters foreground masculinity, its embodiments, and its relationalities in and through digital hip hop. In chapter 1, I discuss the ways in which cultural producers in the scene mobilize the globally familiar to forge friendship and enact heteronormative romance across difference in Delhi. I focus on Jay, an upper-caste Hindu Nepali living in a *jhopadpatti* (informal housing colony) in South Delhi, and discuss a music video we worked on together, ostensibly for the parents of his unrequited love, a young Christian woman originally from Mizoram (a state in the Northeast of India) who lived on the other side of the city and whom he met in a hip hop jam months prior. I argue for an attention to the ways Jay imagines his creative production and play through hip hop as a means to make, maintain, and deepen friendships across ethnic and class difference as well as bridge the religious difference and familial disapproval that separates him from his love interest. In so doing, I theorize how the globally familiar becomes central to constituting intimate relationships and emotive masculinities in the context of the globally ubiquitous social media logic of friend and the fracturing discourse of "love jihad" currently circulating in India while also revealing Jay and his crew's spatialized understandings of gender in the city.

In chapter 2, I discuss my travels with several b-boys and rappers as we sought out clothes, hats, sneakers, and other material signs in shopping malls, markets, and online spaces. I use our forays across the city to think through, as they remake their bodies in the visage of a normative hip hop masculinity, what sorts of relationships with urban space emerge through their search for the things they feel are essential to being and becoming hip hop. Along the way I theorize how *swag*—a globally circulating, gendered, and gendering popular term hip hop practitioners in Delhi deployed to understand the things they wanted (or, in some cases, rejected)—articulates with *fetish*, a term used to think through the magic of a thing's ability to congeal relations

as well as its power to alienate. In so doing, I put the globally familiar into conversation with recent theorizations of style, citationality, and consumption to argue for a transnational gendered and racialized understanding of style and stylistic choices in relationship to the changing urbanity of Delhi.

The next two chapters foreground what I call digital hip hop and the kinds of exciting yet conflicted work and networking opportunities it generates for the young men I got to know in Delhi. Chapter 3 dives headlong into the relationship between the youth culture industry and the DIY digital hip hop production of my participants. I discuss how the globally familiar articulates what has been called immaterial labor in the twenty-first century. Specifically, I trace the ways in which Jay and others in the scene participate in the various gendered and racialized laboring opportunities that arise as a result of their online and offline hip hop creativity in Delhi's (and India's) emergent youth culture industry. I argue for an attention to the ways in which the kinds of cooperative, aspirational, and often free labor that my participants offer as artists and media producers reveal how capitalism continues to unfold in ways that create novel arrangements of gendered labor and aspiration.

In chapter 4, I discuss how digital hip hop creates a complicated political economy of recognition between visiting international hip hop actors as they seek out "authentic" Indian hip hop and young people in the scene as they mobilize their (media-influenced) understandings of class, race, masculinity, and urban spatiality to get the attention of these actors. Utilizing the example of the Indo-German Hip Hop Project, a soft diplomacy initiative sponsored by the German consulate and the Goethe Institut in 2011–12, I discuss the frictions that emerge between differently situated international actors as they all sought the same "authentic" male hip hop subjects from the same 'hoods, and the opportunities that arose for those young men who were able to effectively channel and perform a globally familiar spatialized subaltern subjectivity.

The final two chapters foreground hip hop place-making and an emergent racialized spatiality in Delhi. Chapter 5 focuses on the ways in which Sudhir and his crew's globally familiar representation of their urban village as a global 'hood is utilized by artists and activists to make their case for an alternate development model situated in a new urbanism discourse that calls for the scaling down of urban space. I discuss the consequences of how this move to champion urban villages as potential models for a future Delhi coincides with processes of urban change that have remade several urban villages in South Delhi as centers for nightlife and boutique consumerism.

In chapter 6, I explore how the category of race is summoned and deployed by the young men in my study to describe their experiences of exclusion in the city and their relationship to the neighborhoods they live in. I focus at first on a Somali refugee in the city, as he and his crew recount the anti-Black racism they face in Delhi through their raps. I use their testimonial to think through how other young MCs and dancers from diverse backgrounds mobilize race to describe their experiences of discrimination. In this reckoning, the globally familiar draws attention to how digital media circulations of hip hop, as a discourse that directly engages with discrimination based on essentialized notions of difference across the globe, produce a shared vocabulary and aesthetic by which to articulate and embody a sense of common difference among the diverse practitioners in the Delhi hip hop scene. I also discuss how potential solidarities across difference made possible through hip hop are fractured when certain actors are excluded from a Delhi hip hop scene as it seeks to understand itself in an Indian imaginary.

I conclude with an epilogue that describes where some of the young men, whom I first met in 2011 and who populate the pages ahead, are in their lives as I write the final draft of this book. Much of the anthropological writing on youth assumes its ontogenetic timeframe to be liminal, a period of time where an exploration of life leads to a blurring of social norms as young people learn to labor and come to terms with their ascribed social positions.[76] What does a return to their lives regularly over the course of several years, a return at least in part made possible by social media, tell us about the present and future for these creative young men, about Delhi, and about the global itself?

I also argue for an attention to how anthropologists can be tracked and summoned as familiars through the digital, long after we have returned home from the so-called field. I pose some thoughts about the ethical and political conundrums that arise as a result of this constant state of connection even as I discuss the opportunities that open up for us to think differently about how ethnography might be done in the digital age. The globally familiar, in this (final) instance, requires us to pay attention to how our intellectual work, as it circulates online, blurs as it comes into contact with our social media personae when we become searchable in online worlds. As it grounds us in the same everyday practices as our interlocutors, the globally familiar ultimately asks us to recognize ourselves as equally steeped in the enchantment and precarity that the digital produces.