

**The *Rize* of Krump in Canadian Dance**

Deanne Kearney

York University  
Department of Dance  
School of Arts, Media, Performance and Design

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Supervisor: Dr. Danielle Robinson

## Dedication

This is dedicated to my best friend, partner-in-crime and the best coffee shop work buddy, Jacqueline Melindy.

## Abstract

This major research paper follows a three-month ethnographic study of Canada's krump dance communities in Montreal, Toronto, and Calgary. Krump is an aggressive hip-hop dance style, created in South Central, Los Angeles in the early 2000s. I trace the growth of krump across Canada following the release of the documentary film *Rize* (2005). I argue Canadian krumpers are currently trying to build a national identity, distinct from the United States, in order to gain respect from the international krump community. Despite this shared overall goal, each Canadian community differs greatly, owing to their diverging histories and interpretations of krump culture as conceptualized by co-creator Ceasare "Tight Eyez" Willis. I show the impact of social media on the growth of krump worldwide. I build these arguments by drawing upon Paul Gilroy's understanding of diaspora, Benedict Anderson's theorization of community, and J.L. Granatstein's conceptualization of Canadian national identity.

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## **The *Rize* of Krump in Canadian Dance**

“*Rize* is what peaked my interest in it, and I always pretended like I could do it. I dreamed of doing it. You know, like when a kid balls up a sock and pretends to be Michael Jordan and shoots it into a laundry basket? That was me.” (Albano)

Released in June of 2005, the documentary film *Rize* shows the famously dangerous South Central<sup>1</sup> neighbourhood of Los Angeles recuperating after the violent race riots of 1992. Instigated by the acquittal of police officers in the case of Rodney King,<sup>2</sup> the riots raised concerns about police treatment of minorities in the United States. Following the youth within the South Central region, the documentary reveals a newly created means of expression, krump, within the turmoil of the city. This raw and dynamic dance style descends from an earlier South Central dance style called clowning. Krump encompasses an energetic movement basis in chest pops, stomps, arm swings and jabs. Although considered a part of the hip-hop community, the dance greatly differs from other hip-hop dance styles based on its aggressive aesthetic. With the release of *Rize* in 2005, krump transformed into a North American dance phenomenon. Thirteen years later, it is practiced worldwide with a solidified technique retaining its powerful movement aesthetic.

*Rize* helped inspire an entire generation of dancers across Canada to begin creating krump communities in different provinces and cities. Marcus Paris “OG” Johnson, a

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<sup>1</sup> South Central, Los Angeles was renamed after the riots and is now referred to as South, Los Angeles. The name was changed in 2003, in an effort to erase the negative images associated with the region of South Central.

<sup>2</sup> Rodney King was at the centre of an international story in March 1991, after footage was released of a brutal beating he received from Los Angeles police officers following a high speed chase. The beating was video recorded and released to the public. The police officers were charged with assault of a deadly weapon and the use of excessive force, yet were acquitted of all charges at the hearing. Within hours of the acquittal, the community began to riot, now known as the 1992 Los Angeles Riots.

veteran of Toronto's krump community, described an instant attachment to the dance style upon seeing an advertisement for *Rize* on television:

The first time I saw krump was on BET.<sup>3</sup> I was watching BET, and the *Rize* commercial came on... So I found the website... and I researched the hell out of the website. They had these clips - they had four clowning clips and four krumping clips and from those clips, I was able to learn krump until I found the movie on bootleg. (Johnson)

His story is not unusual as many Canadian krumpers today also conveyed a "love at first sight" story in relation to *Rize*. The diasporic krump communities in Canada that *Rize* inspired are not the same as the ones in the United States. Their distinct history, values, and priorities build an interesting case study for the nature of diaspora, imagined communities, and the formation of Canadian national identity.

This research project adopts a primarily ethnographic approach. During the summer of 2017, I travelled across the country to conduct participant-observation fieldwork within Canada's krump dance communities. I focused on the three main hubs for krump in Canada: Toronto, Calgary, and Montreal. I spent a month in each city, where I conducted twenty-two interviews with Canadian krump practitioners, attended eighteen krump sessions,<sup>4</sup> and two battles. I participated in five private krump classes and attended two workshops. I took fieldwork notes and recorded audio, video and images when permitted by practitioners.

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<sup>3</sup> BET is an acronym for Black Entertainment Television. BET is an American television channel which prominently targets African-American audiences.

<sup>4</sup> A krump session is equivalent to that of a dance freestyle circle, where participants stand in a circle and dancers one-by-one enter the space to freestyle krump movement. Generally the atmosphere is more friendly than that of dance battles which have an added aspect of competition.

Sociologist Jooyoung Lee's urban ethnography project *Blowin' Up: Rap Dreams in South Central* (2016) influenced my ethnographic approach. Lee examines aspiring rappers and b-boys in Los Angeles' South Central region as they try to become professionals in the industry. The stories and goals of participants in *Blowin' Up* are similar to those of the participants of this project. Lee focuses on the new generation of rappers, hoping to make it in an already huge industry. Lee investigates the identities that they must create to distinguish themselves from other rappers in order to 'make it'. I further Lee's work by studying a new generation of artists in the process of identity creation through an international lens.

With a stronger focus on dance and movement than Jooyoung Lee, Deidre Sklar's "Five Premises for a Culturally Sensitive Approach to Dance" (1991) are the guiding principles of my ethnography. Sklar argues that movement knowledge translates into cultural knowledge and an immediate corporeal experience. Sklar states that dance ethnographers have the task of perceiving dance in the contextual web of social relationships, environment, religion, aesthetics, politics, economics and history, which I aim to do within this project.

I have focused my fieldwork on the three major krump communities of Canada. Other cities that have growing krump communities are Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg and Ottawa. Although I have met krumpers from these locations, their communities are relatively new and have yet to develop regular sessions, battles or events. Notably, these communities are descendants of the three main locations in my research. Vancouver's scene is a good illustration of this fact. The leader of the Vancouver community is a member of Calgary's *Empirical Freedom* crew, where he lived before moving to Vancouver. His Calgary family supports his creation of the Vancouver krump scene. In the future, I hope to study these growing communities once they become more established.

My involvement with the Toronto hip-hop dance community began in September of 2012. At that time, I began training as a b-girl<sup>5</sup> and was introduced to the world of hip-hop dance, as well as to the other participants involved in the culture. After watching a live krump battle, I was drawn to that community and started working at an adult open dance studio that offered krump classes. The support of the participants in Toronto's krump community has been overwhelming for me. I have been given access to the community for a variety of writing and creative projects. Participants in the community express their belief in the importance of studying krump as they are unhappy with the current portrayal of krump in the media. Through my connections with the Toronto krump community, I was connected with the other two major communities of Montreal and Calgary. I am aware of my insider-outsider status in this field. I am a white female, and therefore not the typical participant of krump, most commonly a black male, throughout its short history. However, I am a dancer and participant in hip-hop breaking culture which is closely related to krump dance culture. A comparison of these styles will be discussed in a later section. My access to these communities varies by city, which will be discussed later in each city's separate sections.

In this major research paper, I trace the growth of krump across Canada following the release of the documentary film *Rize* (2005). I focus on the continuing effort by these communities to be recognized by the growing international krump community. I argue that Canadian krumpers are currently trying to build a national identity, distinct from that of the United States, in order to gain respect from the international krump community. Despite this shared overall goal, each Canadian community differs greatly, owing to their diverging histories and interpretations of krump culture as conceptualized by co-creator Ceasare "Tight Eyez" Willis. Due to its proximity to the United States, the Canadian krump community is

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<sup>5</sup> A b-girl is a female participant in the hip-hop dance style of breaking, commonly referred to as break dancing.

often overlooked as it is either seen as a 'little brother' to a larger world power, or so similar in practice as to make it indistinctive from the United States. Through my fieldwork, Canadian krumpers have expressed that theirs is a distinctive culture from the United States and they desire to establish a separate respected identity in the international krump community.

This small study speaks to a broader conversation regarding how anti-americanism can shape the Canadian identity. Canadian historian, J. L. Granatstein, studies this idea in *Yankee Go Home? Canadians and Anti-Americanism* (1996). The overwhelming influence of American culture creates a tricky relationship for Canadian artists. Although Canadian krumpers respect the dancing and talent in the United States, they would like to distinguish Canadian krumping culture as having a more welcoming and supportive atmosphere than what is currently being presented online by American krumpers on social media platforms.

Being respected within the international community brings benefits not yet afforded to Canadian krumpers. Such as the ability to professionalize the dance form similar to other international hubs. International recognition for Canadians would promote further growth of the community as international visitors would be more likely to visit the country and bring their knowledge. Without distancing and distinguishing from the United States, the Canadian krump community cannot grow to foster further opportunities.

The establishment of a Canadian krump identity has been problematic. Although the cities of the Canadian krump diaspora share a physical practice, they do not necessarily share the same customary or traditional practices. The Canadian communities lack a collective communication system between hubs. Due to this lack of communication between cities, the krump communities differ greatly, and have different understandings of

what krump is and how it should be practiced. Each community has different goals, which are prioritized before the nationwide goal of international notoriety. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) informs my ideas of how Canadian krumpers are currently in the process of community formation. Through Anderson's model of aspects needed to build a concrete nation, I explore areas in which Canadian krumpers need to unify in order to create a national krump identity.

To the international krump community, Ceasare "Tight Eyez" Willis embodies the most "authentic" version of krump, as a co-creator of the style and a dancer through its whole history.<sup>6</sup> In this paper, I will argue that Willis' role for the international krump diaspora is unique as the krump community is now connected to the shared origin point of Willis, moreso than the location in which the dance was formed. Linking authenticity to Willis rather than the community of South Central has helped to build worldwide krump communities as it disputes the idea that krump is the property of a nation. Although South Central was integral to the creation of krump, it has lost its power based on the changing atmosphere and lack of prominent krump practitioners. Paul Gilroy's concepts of diaspora in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) help to inform this study of the diasporic connected and disconnected krump communities of Canada. I further Gilroy's theories by placing the origin point on a person rather than a location.

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<sup>6</sup> Willis states that he is the only dancer to have never stopped krumping from its inception in South Central. Co-creator Jo' Artis "Big Mijo" Ratti has taken time off from krumping to pursue other career options (CJSimmons88).

Krump, a form of hip-hop dance,<sup>7</sup> is a new, and thriving, dance style. Hip hop studies are growing field of inquiry in academia, with much written in the area of breaking and hip-hop music yet not much in krump. Currently writing on krump takes place in the writers' origin country, the United States. They do not study alternate national identities of krumpers or its worldwide appeal. Early writers include Christina Zanfagna's "The Multi-Ringed Cosmos of Krumping: Hip Hop Dance at the Intersections of Battle, Media and Spirit" (2008), which focuses on the competitive and spiritual dimension of krump. Zanfagna defines krump as a twenty-first-century incarnation of breaking with movement harkening back to the African American ring shout. "Krumpin' in North Hollywood: Public Moves in Private Spaces" by Robeson Taj Frazier and Jessica Koslow (2013) follows the 818<sup>8</sup> krump sessions in North Hollywood and lays out a history of krump while discussing how these sessions challenge multiple forms of oppression and inequality within hyper-regulated Los Angeles spaces. This research paper fills this gap as I research the diasporic spread of krump to Canada, the construction of a Canadian national krump identity, and its place in the international krump community.

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<sup>7</sup> Krump's association with hip-hop is debated within the community. In this essay, I refer to krump as a hip-hop style, relying on Imani Johnson's definition in her chapter "Hip-hop Dance" in the *Cambridge Companion to Hip Hop* (2015):

Hip-hop is not a single genre of dance, or even an accurate label for which it attempts to account. The term is more appropriately an umbrella that encompasses a range of genres, some that were born out of hip-hop, and a number that were adopted into the culture. "Hip-hop dance" thus refers to both adopted and invented genres, which overlap aesthetically, and are related to one another through hip-hop culture." (22)

<sup>8</sup> The 818 session is named after the area code in which it takes place in California.

## Krump's Origins

In this section, I trace the conception and growth of krump within the United States to provide the basis for my investigation of the complicated identity of Canadian krumpers. I am critically presenting the krump origin story as is now accepted by a majority of participants. My sources for this history are documentaries following krump, newspaper articles from the period, and public video interviews with the creators. I include key precursors to krump's creation, such as the dance form – clowning. Following a similar pattern of solidification of dance forms as presented by anthropologist Jane Desmond in *Meaning in Motion's* (1997) chapter, "Dance and Cultural Studies," I include movements that informed krump at its creation, yet are no longer practiced.

Krump was created in the early 2000s in South Central, Los Angeles (LaChappelle Rize). Documentaries through krump's history, especially during the early 2000s such as *Get Krump* (2001), *Shake City 101* (2003), *Krump 1.0* (2005), attribute many different practitioners as creators of the style; the only constant throughout all is Ceasare "Tight Eyez" Willis. The creation of the style is now attributed to both Willis and Jo' Artis "Big Mijo" Ratti. However, there are other practitioners who also claim the title, most prominently - Christopher "Lil C" Toler. Toler is known commonly as a judge on *So You Think You Can Dance*. There has been a long community feud about Toler's role in krump. He continues to state that he is a co-creator of the dance with Willis - at one point publicly stating that he was the *sole* creator. Toler is now referred to as a 'joke' within the worldwide krump dance community, as is evident in YouTube videos comments and social media posts. Krumpers point out his lack of skill and his interest in commodifying the dance. I have heard rumors

that cameras are not allowed within most Los Angeles sessions as Toler has been caught recording and stealing movement from krumpers of today.

In an early 2001 interview within the documentary *Get Krump*, Willis sits with some of krump's first participants including Toler. In the interview Willis states that the dance was created by everyone who was there in the beginning as they each contributed their characters to the style. Based on this interview, I understand how the title of "creator" has become a controversial topic. I agree that Toler, as well as others present, have had influence on the creation of the form. Through documentaries like *The Heart of Krump* (2002), created a year later, you see Willis' and Ratti's role in solidifying the dance by providing terms, definitions and a solid movement basis. I argue that this solidification of the form by Willis and Ratti is the beginning of krump, distinct from a freestyle close to clowning in its 2001 rendition. In the 2002 documentary, Willis and Ratti state others such as Toler continued clowning instead of focusing on krump, and this claim is echoed through multiple accounts by other respected krumpers on YouTube. Through this research, I agree with the community in labelling Willis and Ratti as co-creators, but also acknowledge Toler's contributions to the form.

Accepting Willis and Ratti as co-creators, I continue with the story of krump. Both Ratti and Willis started dancing through another local dance style, clowning, in which they performed hip-hop moves with their faces painted like circus clowns and entertained at children's parties and public events. The history of clowning is present in video documentaries and magazine articles and with little contradiction. An inside look clowning is well documented in the 2003 TV documentary *Clowns in the Hood*. Thomas "Tommy The Clown" Johnson, former drug dealer and ex-convict, was released from jail in the 1990s. After his release, Johnson was hired to perform as a clown at children's birthday parties.

Johnson's movement was a mix of hip-hop dance vocabulary but with greater expression and improvisation. Wearing a clown suit with face paint and a rainbow afro wig, Johnson was inspired to spread joy in the city after watching the race riots in 1992. Johnson saw many families, friends and the lives of the youth within his community destroyed (Trebay). Eventually, other youth began to join him for his performances at birthday parties and he would share his fee. He became a mentor to the dancers and youth within the community. Clown crews began to pop up in neighboring cities. In response, Johnson organized competitions for the different crews to compete against each other. Clowning was used as an alternative to street violence, giving youth a tool to express themselves with the support of a mentor. The dance created goals to aspire to outside of gang culture. Clowning continues today in South Central with Johnson and a small following.

Willis and Ratti, both part of Johnson's crew, grew older and found their styles too rugged and raw to continue clowning. Their movement became more aggressive and expressive of the community that they were growing up within (Nassim). Clowners started to transition their skills to a new style they called 'krump'. The dance style encompasses highly aggressive, energetic and fast-paced movements, with its foundation of chest pops, jabs, arm swings and stomps (Nassim). The dancers imported movements from the clown style, like the sexually explicit local dance called 'the stripper dance.'<sup>9</sup> Movements of these dances were combined for krump towards achieving greater body control, a forceful and aggressive aesthetic, and a greater ability to express personal emotions and narratives. Facial expressions are a large part of the krump and clowning aesthetic as they add a range of expressions and

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<sup>9</sup> The *stripper dance* in South Central, Los Angeles in the 2000s would be recognized today as a dance movement called twerking. In *Rize*, it is described as popping and gyrating from your pelvis. They state that the movement is not always seen as sexual. The stripper dance is no longer seen in krump today.

emotions to amplify and compliment the movement. Facial expressions can range from silent screams, enticing smirks to raging scowls.

The beginning of krump as it strays from clowning is documented in *Rize*. The main attraction of the film is a battle between the remaining clowns and the new krumpers. *Rize* is key to the growth of krump globally as it created a look into a culture that was solely based in South Central, Los Angeles and gave it a worldwide audience. Many krumpers started to dance after watching the film. The stories of the participants spoke to their personal experiences and they connected with the spirit of the style. Within multiple personal interviews, participants stated that after seeing a commercial on the BET Network, they instantly knew the dance style was of interest to them.

Although the basic movement vocabulary in *Rize* is outdated, the community extols the film for its contribution to building the worldwide community. The dancing presented in *Rize* is not what krump looks like today as it has gone through a solidification process similar to what has been described by anthropologist Jane Desmond (1997). She states that in most cases, dance forms that originate in a lower class or non-dominant group become refined and desexualized to gain upward mobility. Improvisation forms are codified to be easily transmitted across racial lines and commodified by dance teachers. Interest in krump after the release of *Rize* created new paid roles of teachers, and therefore a codified movement basis was established by Willis and Ratti to be taught internationally. The ‘stripper dance’ was removed in the process of solidification. Willis and Ratti made many ‘how to’ and ‘101’ krump DVDs that taught the style, which were passed around the country and eventually gained exposure internationally.

## **The Canadian Krump Diaspora**

Canadian krump was launched by *Rize* and held together by a common reverence for the co-creator, Ceasare “Tight Eyez” Willis, as well as a shared desire to be respected globally. Despite these commonalities, there is a profound lack of unity within Canada’s krump community, owing to the disparate interpretations of krump’s origins and measures of “authenticity”. As a result, I found drastic differences in how each community trains, performs, battles, communicates and organizes. Many of these differences relate to the economics and customs within each city. Through investigating how communities establish their identities and practices across space, time and culture, it enables us to see diasporic community formation. It is important to study each city and its differences to be able to discern further steps in creating a national level identity for Canadian krumpers. In this section, I explore each community through six points of comparison: generational status, leadership, membership, values, orientation and group boundaries. I base these comparisons on my month-long fieldwork within each community and the numerous interviews completed with various practitioners. Figure 1, on page 27, encompasses a chart of all community comparisons.

### ***Montreal***

The first city to have a krump presence in Canada was Montreal, Quebec. Otis “Pez” Hopson is attributed as the first Canadian krumper. Hopson defies the usual *Rize* ‘love at first sight’ storyline as he started to krump before the documentary debuted in 2003. After hearing about krump from friends on the West Coast, he managed to get a copy of one of the first bootleg DVDs on krump, *Krump 1.0* (2003). Although he did not have many resources

outside the DVD, he began trying to mimic the style. When *Rize* was released in select Canadian theatres in 2005, a few dancers in Montreal saw the film and wanted to learn its foundations. Remembering Hopson krumping at various dance events, a small group of dancers contacted him to ask if he could teach what he knew. Valerie “Taminator” Chartier and Vlad “Sevenstarr” Laurore were the first members of Hopson’s crew, *Berserk Squad*. These second generation dancers, Chartier and Laurore, now lead the large krump movement in Montreal. Although Hopson no longer krumps, he is respected by the community for his contributions to the scene.

Montreal has endured significant changes over time based on the arrival and departures of key community members. The city maintained a low profile in krump from its creation of the *Berserk Squad* to the early 2000s with minimal participants. The current leaders of the community were more initially involved with careers in physical fitness but switched their focus in the early 2010s for the arrival of an essential member of the Montreal krump community is Kevin “Jr Maddripp” Gohou. I was unable to meet him during my month-long stay in Montreal, as he was in his birthplace of France. He now resides in Montreal but often goes home to France for long periods of time. His presence helped to push the Montreal krump community to its current state. Gohou is a respected krumper, a member of krump crews in France and has been named as a member in one of Ceasare “Tight Eyez” Willis’ fams<sup>10</sup>. His work in Montreal helped to elevate the movement as he began training dancers upon his arrival. This change over time is significant, as the Montreal krump community has varied over time with participants coming in and out of the scene.

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<sup>10</sup> A krump ‘fam’ is a krump family with a leader that is referred to as a ‘big homie’ with his students who are referred to as ‘little homies’. It is the big homie’s job to mentor and teach the little homie about krump history and technique. This is different from a krump crew where all dancers are regarded as on the same level as all participants. Fams have dancers of all levels present.

Montreal currently has the most extensive community of krumpers and is the most diverse in its membership regarding race, gender, age, and skill. The two main leaders of the Montreal krump community - a white female and black male - exemplify the diversity of Montreal's krump community. Montreal has a booming arts and dance culture. Many Montreal schools offer dance classes as part of the curriculum, where krumpers teach students of all ages. This relates to the unique professionalization of krumpers within Montreal, as there are many 'professional krumpers' based on paid teaching opportunities. Krump classes within schools also create a diverse membership to the Montreal krump community as the dance form is open to all students regardless of race, gender, age or social status, some of which continue outside of school.

An organization created by the community in 2015 — The Montreal Krump Alliance (MKA), is significant in the current success of Montreal. The *Montreal Krump Alliance* is the main organization within the city with the mission to spread and promote the krump movement across Quebec. The alliance aims to make the dance more accessible and visible by establishing structures and resources to benefit Quebec's dancers and krumpers (Montreal Krump Alliance). The alliance also aims to create awareness of the physical and social benefits of krump for youth. MKA maintains daily classes, programs, sessions and annual events. The availability of krump in Montreal on a daily basis is uncommon in other Canadian krump communities. The daily training opportunities create an atmosphere that makes krump a part of the participants' everyday lives and identity. *Gutta Zone* and *The Clash* are both yearly events thrown by the MKA and are currently Canada's largest annual krump events. Krumpers travel from all over the world to attend, and well-respected krumpers are invited to judge and teach workshops.

Montreal's krump community heavily values training foundations and creativity, yet dancers are also encouraged to work on their physical fitness. Montreal is the only community in which I have witnessed this practice. The structure of Montreal sessions differs from other krump communities. The main three-hour weekly session that I was able to attend takes place in a small dance space without mirrors in downtown Montreal. The session costs five dollars<sup>11</sup> to attend; however, most dancers have memberships to the studio and participate in multiple open dance sessions during the week of other styles. At the krump session, dancers start by working independently, warming up or working on physical fitness. Dancers are given feedback by the leaders at the session while working alone. The leader or leaders present at the session then call everyone together and ask who would like to battle that day.<sup>12</sup> Dancers are paired up. A group dance session takes place before the battles begin.

The dancers use the full three-hours of the session time. When I was first invited to the session and realized it was three hours long, I assumed that they would not dance the entire time as the longest krump sessions I had been to before had lasted around two hours. During my interview with a community leader, Vlad "Sevenstarr" Laureore, I stated this observation. He replied by emphasizing how hard the community works and how many days and hours a week Montreal krumpers train. The best example of Montreal's hard work is the additional practices called 'pack outs' Pack outs are an event in which a krumper who thinks that they are not working hard enough calls a session where they have to battle each dancer in attendance. The event is meant to drive and push the dancer to exhaustion, to motivate themselves to work harder. Pack-outs are common in Montreal, unlike Toronto and Calgary.

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<sup>11</sup> A majority of krump sessions across Canada do not have entrance fees.

<sup>12</sup> Sessions in Calgary and Toronto generally do not host battles except for special occasions.

Montreal's community is internationally-orientated, as travelling to other krump events or training programs in the USA or Europe is also a common occurrence for Montreal krumpers, unlike the rest of the Canadian krump communities. In personal interviews with community members and leaders, I was told that Montreal's long-term goal is to make the city an international hub for krump, and the community wishes to open a local dance studio dedicated solely to krump and krump related classes. Montreal would like for international krumpers to make trips to the city solely for krump, as they currently do all over the world. During my month in Montreal, many dancers came in and out of the city based on training programs and trips to the USA or Europe. Krumpers were also making plans to attend *European Buck Session* (EBS), the world's largest krump event. Chartier has been a contender in the female category of EBS and placed in the top sixteen in the female division. There are multiple divisions in the competition, including male, female, crew and youth.

Chartier is the most internationally recognized Canadian krumper, having recently been accepted into the fam<sup>13</sup> of the creator Cesare "Tight Eyez" Willis. This achievement has helped to create international recognition. She was named FCD World Krump, an online krump organization, as the female krumper of the year in 2017. She is celebrated throughout all Canadian krump communities for her work in creating space for female krumpers. Chartier is currently teaching a program titled *LeadHers* which provides classes by women for women to help increase female empowerment through krump. Krump is a male-dominated dance form within most cities. Montreal maintains a balance of both genders and respect amongst sexes while boasting Canada's only all-female krump crew *Buck Swans*, led by Chartier.

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<sup>13</sup> The traditional way to join a fam within krump is to be asked by the leader of the fam, and then battle the members of the fam or the leader. The dancer does not have to win the battle but has to show the leader their skill and hunger to be in the fam. The dancer is then given a title within the fam.

Although the Montreal krump community was open to my research and invited me to sessions and events in the city, the overall sentiment felt like the community seemed closed to outsiders who are not serious about training in the form. The community is more focused on creating virtuosic dancers rather than creating a family-like community outside of the dancing. This reluctance to engage outsiders could relate to Montreal's precarious positioning within Canada and the world. The language barrier could also have been a barrier as many Montreal dancers' first language is French, therefore making it hard to communicate with outsiders. Being from Toronto, a major source of competition for Montreal may have affected my access to the community. I noticed this challenge once before, as I was given limited access when I had contacted members of the krump community in Montreal for a previous writing project. I believe I was given increased access through this project because of my connections with the Toronto and Calgary krump communities.

### ***Toronto***

In the spring of 2006, one of the first krump battles in Toronto took place between two young boys — B.J. Albano and Daniel Dewa in a parking lot within the district of Scarborough. They were friends, yet based on what little they knew of krump, they understood that in that culture, when you meet another krumper, you battle. Following the battle, they decided to train and learn krump together. Albano was first exposed to krump through the documentary *Rize* when a commercial for the film popped up on BET. He is currently thought to be one of the leaders of the krump community in Toronto; however, some members debate this. The second leader of krump in Toronto is Amadeus “Primal”

Marquez, controversial for his lifestyle choices<sup>14</sup> and opinions. These leaders are from two different generations, and the divide in leadership can be explained through a summary of changes to the community over time. B.J. Albano is regarded as Toronto's krump historian. Throughout a three hour interview, Albano gave a timeline of Toronto krump and its major events. He consistently checked his accounts and dates with youtube video confirmation. My subsequent Toronto interviews also verified the stories and timelines he provided.

The Toronto krump community started with approximately fifty krumpers training in different small fams, unaware of the other krump fams training across the city. As the dancers began to learn of other fams in their vicinity, battles began to take place in order to establish a hierarchy of who-is-who in Toronto krump. The most famous battle took place at York University in early 2007, where current long-standing and well-respected Toronto krumpers, many in opposing krump fams, met for the first time.

*Northbuck*, a krump crew established in 2009, was created to bring together all of the best krumpers within the city into one super crew. The crew began to perform across Toronto and the GTA. They still today hold weekly open sessions, such as the *Dungeon Session*. The *Dungeon Session* is Canada's longest running session. It has taken place in the apartment of Marquez every Tuesday for the past nine years. In 2009, *Northbuck* named themselves the premier<sup>15</sup> krump crew of Canada after traveling to Montreal and beating the krumpers within the city. Albano opened up a YouTube account called *Canada Krump* in 2009; he began to post videos and take hold of the krump movement in Canada. Canadian krumpers knew that

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<sup>14</sup> Marquez is a large personality in the community, who openly expresses controversial opinions on a variety of topics including race and gender. He is open about his criminal past and troubled childhood in which he experienced homelessness. He credits his love for krump for bringing him out of those hard times.

<sup>15</sup>*Northbuck* uses the term 'premier' to refer to themselves as 'the best,' rather than 'first,' as they are aware that the crew in Montreal was founded before them.

in order to gain knowledge and respect from the American community was to post video footage of there dancing and be recognized by an American. The American krumper would in turn ask you to be there 'little homie' and would send send music and other knowledge only available in the United States at the time

In 2010, Albano was contacted by leaders in the American krump movement to pair up in a global krump movement titled *Impact*. He was paid to fly to Los Angeles to participate in local battles and learn how the community worked in order to bring back and spread his knowledge in Toronto. However, Albano caught both communities off guard at the height of their growth, as he announced that he was leaving krump to pursue his religion. Albano left Marquez in charge of *Northbuck* crew and its surrounding community. The krump community in Toronto experienced a large rift following this change of leadership, with many members upset with Albano who they considered as a brother figure before his abrupt departure. Marquez took over leadership of the krump community and continued to organize events and book performances. Under the leadership of Marquez, *Northbuck* openly rejected religion in the krump community which stopped other krump groups such as *Durham Underground Buckness* from participating in the culture.

Today, the krump community in Toronto — at one time very large and strong — has fewer events and classes around the city. Facing significant internal issues, Toronto krump lacks a leader who takes initiative and is respected by the community. Albano returned to krump in early 2012, and has tried various projects to bring participants together, but he lacks the support of the older krump community as they now hold a lack of trust in him. Albano is continuing his work through a studio in Scarborough where he teaches krump to children. Marquez is widely respected for his skill, but based on negative feedback from his peers, he

has expressed a lack of interest in being a leader in the community. In a personal interview, Marquez stated his wish to concentrate on his krump fam and shift away from the responsibilities of planning the majority of Toronto's events, encouraging others to step up and host their own.

Toronto's krump community is similar to the American community in that the identity of 'krumper' is extremely significant to the dancers. Most dancers in Toronto are older<sup>16</sup> black males with stories of hardship from their youth. Since many come from backgrounds and upbringings similar to that which is depicted in *Rize*, they find this sense of community an essential draw for getting involved with krump. With the core membership in Toronto having known each other for over ten years, it is an intimidating culture to join. Even though the practitioners express being open to new dancers, the community feels like it is less accepting of outsiders without personal stories similar to their own. Even public dance events, such as at the Art Gallery of Ontario, open with krumpers telling their stories of homelessness, jail time, drug use before turning to krump, which I have not seen in Calgary or Montreal.

There are very few women within Toronto's krump scene. Some male participants, such as Marquez, express that they do not like to battle females because they find themselves to be too aggressive.<sup>17</sup> A common sentiment amongst Toronto krumpers is that they respect female krumpers, but prefer not to battle them. This feeling differs from both Montreal and

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<sup>16</sup> I use 'older' here to refer to dancers in their thirties, similar in age to the co-creators of the style. Dancers would have picked up the style when it emerged in their teenage years, since it appealed to that age group, and continued into adulthood.

<sup>17</sup> Male dancers do not feel that krump is too aggressive for females to participate in, but that their battle style is too dark and aggressive to present to a female. In 2012 and 2013, Marquez created an all female krump workshop series in Toronto to encourage more females joining the dance form.

Calgary's scenes as they believe that krump should be open to all dancers, including women, and find no difference in battling between men and women.

Toronto's raw talent in krump is undeniable. Since practitioners come from rough upbringings, the emotionally driven dance performed at sessions and battles is akin to that which is seen in the film *Rize*. I have witnessed emotional outbursts in Toronto sessions unlike that of other cities. I have witnessed dancers cry or yell within dance sessions through emotions of anger or pain. In November of 2016, a prominent krumper in the Toronto community - Andre "Menace" Christie – passed away. The whole community came together through multiple sessions to dance and grieve. Dancers were crying, hugging and talking about mental health issues, from which Christie suffered, and how they were always there for anyone in the community to talk if needed.

Toronto krumpers, similar to all Toronto hip-hop dance forms, also value creativity and creating new movements and characters to portray. My interviews with Toronto krumpers were different those from other Canadian krump communities since they talked more about their character creations and the unique creative outlet that they gain through krumping. During one session, I was taken aback by the storytelling apparent in one of Amadeus Marquez's rounds. I have talked to Marquez many times before about his use of characters, so I immediately went up to him and asked him who or what he was portraying. He was sitting down, recovering from his round, breathing heavily between sentences:

Did you ever see Game of Thrones? There is a part where, there is a guy with no face... It's basically just like an entire underground sanctuary with all these faces of all these people. So I have all these different masks that I was kind of playing with. And then I started to piece them together. (Marquez)

Popular culture characters, like those in *Game of Thrones*, have played an important role throughout Toronto's krump history. Some krumpers or fams are named after popular television shows or video game characters.

Albano's goal for the city is to begin to monetize the long-term krumpers' accomplishments through opportunities for teaching and performing. Albano feels that Toronto krumpers are not being appreciated for their talents and their many years of training. They have not yet monetized teaching or performance in the same way that Montreal has managed to capitalize on their markets. He believes that this is likely based on a lack of proper organization. Although this was Marquez's goal as he pursued a professional career as a krumper in Toronto, he has retired this goal in pursuit of other work outside of dance based on its difficulty.

Toronto krumpers generally do not travel anywhere for krump unless they are invited to teach or judge a battle which currently is rare. At the same time, the community is open to outsiders doing research. Toronto krumpers were very open to my research, offering to help in anyway possible and thanking me for my work on numerous occasions. This attitude could be due to my numerous previous projects within the community<sup>18</sup>, some of which include job creation through producing shows for which I hire krumpers to perform. However, I believe they would be just as open to any researcher as I have witnessed support for these types of projects over the past few years. I have seen this widespread acceptance offered to researchers ranging from high school students to writers for the *New York Times*.

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<sup>18</sup> In 2015 and 2016, I created a production company titled BreakinGround with which I produced urban dance shows. Krump pieces were the highlight of both shows, with Marquez as the choreographer and emcee. I also created dance choreography pieces with krumpers in 2016 for emerging choreographer performances. I wrote a blog, where I interviewed krumpers, called WordUpTO in 2014, and published an article in *Dance International* magazine on krump in which I interviewed various Toronto krumpers (Kearney 2015).

For many years there has been a rivalry between Montreal and Toronto krumpers. Dancers from each city face off and represent their communities whenever an opportunity is present. Through my interviews with Toronto krumpers, the consensus was that for many years Toronto took the lead in these battles. I suspect this to be true based on the history of the two cities and archival video documentation. A recent battle in which Montreal and Toronto faced off took place in Toronto on November 26, 2017. This battle was the first in many years between the cities. After seeing the line up of who was to battle who, I expressed to Toronto leader, Amadeus “Primal” Marquez, that I believed Montreal was going to win the battle in a landslide. He assured me that I was wrong. I was unable to attend the battle because of prior engagements. Marquez called me the day after the battle to tell me that I was correct; Montreal had won every judged battle against Toronto.

### ***Calgary***

Calgary is the smallest and newest krump community; it emerged in the late 2000s. Calgary’s krump scene is lead by Oliver “Reignmaker” Reyes. *Empirical Freedom*, led by Reyes, is the main and only crew within Calgary encompassing all of the city’s krumpers. Calgary is run by its first generation krumper, Reyes, who is influenced by the first and second generation krumpers from other Canadian communities. Since the community is new, there have not been many changes over time to account for other than the growth they have experienced since its origin.

Reyes first saw krump through the film *Rize* in theatres in Calgary. As a trained studio dancer from British Columbia, he transitioned his skills into hip-hop dance styles after moving to Calgary for school in the late 2000s. He began krumping a few years after seeing

the film. Reyes has a movement and theatre company called *Movement with a Message*, which incorporates krump into its performances. Reyes is also an engineer with a family: a wife and two kids. Family is important to Reyes, which translates visibly to how the community runs.

Krump in Calgary mainly takes place on Thursdays at the *Decidedly Jazz Danceworks*. Studio space is given by the dance organization, and open krump classes are offered through various sessions of the studio's calendar. During the warmer months, krump sessions are taken outdoors to Calgary's Peace Bridge. The bridge is brightly lit and only for pedestrians. Krump sessions generally only take place once a week in Calgary, and are sometimes interrupted for conversation with friends instead of dancing. Calgary krumpers are starting to travel outside of their community. Some traveled to *European Buck Session (EBS)* in Europe in 2016 and are planning to attend again in 2017. The funds for the trip were raised through teaching krump weekly at *Decidedly Jazz Works*.

The overall feeling of krump in Calgary is family. Once in the fam, you are always in the fam - and this is made known by Reyes. Every member of *Empirical Freedom*, whether they continue krumping or not, are always welcomed and watched out for by Reyes. Within other Canadian cities, the expectation remains that to continue to be a part of a krump family means that you must actively krump. The fam is very inclusive, and my time in Calgary was undeniably the most welcome I have ever felt in a community.

Calgary's many female krumpers outnumber the males, yet not all are active. Ceniza "Fortress" Aviles is the leader of the female krump community in Calgary. Aviles is a second generation krumper. Through interviews with her, she expressed her disbelief that krump in other cities was not as accepting of females as it was in Calgary. When I mentioned that other

female krumpers had shared experiences in which men didn't want to battle them because they were women, or men expressed to be more upset when they lost in a battle to a woman, she instantly expressed her surprise:

Oh, wow, that's so bad... We are so lucky to have such strong men that are not intimidated by women. We are so blessed. There is Oliver, Albert, and Gracias, and when we are sessioning with them, they are not intimidated by women and they are also gentlemen. I love that women are celebrated here. (Aviles)

The membership of Calgary's krumpers is female-based but overall diverse in race and age and the dancers express a sincere openness to anyone who wants to try the form.

Calgary's future goals are to spread krump throughout the city through after-school programs and open the form up to anyone and everyone. They aim to create a more diverse identity for what a krumper can be.

Although krump started with at-risk youth, it doesn't have to stay like that. I see that it is for everyone. Everyone can benefit from that dance. I want to open it up and make it more accessible for all kids, for everyone. (Reyes)

Calgary is also working toward helping grow the new Vancouver krump community, started by a crew member who moved to the city. The main members of the *Empirical Freedom* crew throw a yearly krump event called *Fifty Hype*, and they are currently organizing and raising funds for a Vancouver edition. Calgary's scene is nationally facing as it is more interested in what other Canadian krump communities are doing than the international community.

Calgary is an interesting city for a krump community to exist within. Krumpers express the lack of support for the dance style, specifically by the hip-hop dance community.

In an interview with Albert “Grr-illa” Myles Mejia, I asked what the relationship within the city is with other hip hop styles

Its awful. We have respect for them but they don't have respect for us. They don't want to open their mind to it. I had a judge come up to me and say that no one is feeling krump. I've called out judges at mutiple events. They don't even play krump music. (Mejia)

Although this is echoed in Toronto and Montreal to a slight degree, Calgary continuously fights to be accepted, understood and welcomed into dance events. During the time I was in Calgary, the famous Calgary Stampede was taking place. Country music and rural culture is typically celebrated in the city; hip-hop is generally in the minority.

Calgary is one of Canada's wealthiest cities, and dancers express the pressure to be successful in its large business sector. Therefore the dancers view krump as an addition to their life and identity, not as an overwhelming facet. Since dance as a career in Calgary is not common, all krump dancers have outside jobs, hobbies and other dance forms that they also focus their attention on.

	<b>Montreal</b>	<b>Toronto</b>	<b>Calgary</b>
<b>Generational Status</b>	Run by second generation krumpers	Run by a first generation and a second generation krumper	Run by a first generation krumper
<b>Change over Time</b>	Growing	Shrinking	Slowly growing
<b>Current Size</b>	Large (30)	Medium (15-20)	Small (10)
<b>Main Leaders</b>	Valerie “Taminator” Chartier and Vlad “Sevenstarr” Lauore (Woman and Man)	B.J. “Pusha” Albano and Amadeus “Primal” Marquez (Two Men)	Oliver “Reignmaker” Reyes. (Man)
<b>Relationship between Them</b>	Collaborative	In Conflict	N/A
<b>Backed by</b>	Montreal Krump Alliance	Northbuck Crew and Simply Swagg Dance Studio	Empirical Freedom Crew
<b>Membership</b>	Diverse in race, gender and age	Primarily Afro-Canadian men	Diverse in race and age, but mainly women
<b>Number of New Participants</b>	Many (30 *including students and youth)	Few (5)	Few (5)
<b>Primary Value</b>	Dancers’ strength and virtuosity shown in battles	Individual Creativity and expression	Accessibility and inclusion
<b>Goal</b>	Creating an international krump hub in Montreal	Monetary gains for high ranking dancers	Helping the Canadian krump community to grow and unify
<b>Orientation</b>	International	Local	National
<b>Group Boundaries</b>	Closed to researchers Open to new dancers	Open to researchers Closed to new dancers	Open to researchers Open to new dancers

**Figure 1: Chart of Community Comparisons**

### **The Canadian Krump Perspective**

This section explores how Canadian krump communities come together through a shared rejection of the politics embedded within American krump culture. Much of the politics and communication between American krumpers is present on social media —

including YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. Canada's interpretation of the American krump community is created through public online interactions between American krumpers.

Through investigating these platforms, I show the different representations of Americans and Canadians online, as well as how these online representations are changing as social media evolves. This section connects the idea of the Canadian identity as a shared sentiment of anti-Americanism as expressed by a Canadian journalist Robert Fulford and historian J. L. Granatstein by ways of social media.

The politics of the American scene were first revealed to me in 2012 by krumpers in Toronto that expressed the difference between the American Facebook page "Krump" and the "Canada Krump" Facebook page. Americans were regarded by Canadians to use social media outlets to share their negative opinions on other krumpers, communities, or to 'call out' other participants more so than Canadian krumpers. At this time, the main outlet for krumpers to communicate was through text on Facebook pages.

A post by Toronto leader Marquez on October 24, 2012, reveals his feeling for American krumpers' online interactions. He forcefully tells American krumpers to 'grow up,' as he says he sees a large amount of drama play out between Americans online every day.

Dear American Krump movement... grow up. Seriously though. So much drama and so much beef over the reasons why people krump. Its simple... watch this, if you don't like how someone is dancing or why they dance, don't talk to them, don't speak about them, don't even think about them. If they aren't "in your lane" or your too "overbuck" for them, why are you wasting your time speaking about them? I see posts EVERYDAY of some new beef in the American krump movement. Makes me sad... (Marquez)

He ends the long post by asking for people to see the positivity in his call out, because he wishes people would stop the judgment of other krumpers, as it slows down the growth of the whole movement.

In 2018, when I access these Facebook pages, I see that they are used for marketing krump events, videos, and music. Now, they are used less for opinions of other krumpers and communities. As social media forms continues to grow, rants about the krump community that previously took place through text on Facebook, such as Marquez's referenced above, have shifted to being spoken in live stream videos on Facebook or Instagram.

An illustration of krump online presence in the United States can be seen through Marquisa "Miss Prissy" Gardner. Gardner is an American female krumper who is attributed as the Queen of krump. Gardner contributed to krump's creation in South Central, Los Angeles and also was a part of Johnson's clowning crew. While I was in Calgary with the krump community, Gardner live-streamed her opinions on the Montreal krumper, Valerie "Taminator" Chartier (July 13 2017). Chartier had been invited to teach krump workshops at the New York *Ladies of Hip-Hop Festival*. Gardner was dismissive of Chartier being invited to the festival to represent females in krump, saying she did not know who she was; Gardner also referred to Chartier's white skin as being a reason that she should not have been asked. Chartier, herself, did not respond to Gardner's opinionated video, yet krumpers across Canada expressed their disagreement with this call-out. Some remarked that Gardner must not have been paying attention to what was happening in krump if she did not know who Chartier was and why she should be invited to the festival. In a personal interview with Toronto leader, Albano, he told a story of Gardner's visit to Toronto to judge a krump battle in the late 2000s. While judging a battle, she told the dancers that they were 'buck,'<sup>19</sup> but asked where the black dancers were, as most on stage were of Asian descent. Gardner openly makes videos saying that she believes krump should only be taught by black people. There

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<sup>19</sup> Buck is a positive term in krump to say 'authentic', unique or talented.

are many Americans that share this and other controversial opinions through which Canadians bond in disagreement.

Through experiences similar to that of Gardner's online public opinions, come a united Canadian community expressing a version of anti-American identity. The Canadian krump community provides some insight into the broader question of Canadian identity created in opposition to the United States. As echoed in many aspects of Canadian life, Canadian krumpers exhibit similar hypocrisy of borrowing American-created culture while holding disdain for the country's dominance in it. This tricky relationship between countries is expressed by Canadian historian J. L. Granatstein in *Yankee Go Home? Canadians and Anti-Americanism* (1996). Granatstein jokes that anti-Americanism is Canada's state religion and the bedrock of the Canadian nationalism. Although Canadian krumpers would not describe themselves as anti-American, and I do not find this to be the correct term for their identity, Canadian krumpers usually describe themselves in opposition to the American krump persona; therefore, it is helpful to study Granatstein's ideas of anti-americanism.

The delicate relationship between the countries is also a career-long focus of Canadian journalist Robert Fulford. Fulford specifically refers to the art world's hypocrisy in which anti-American sentiment is discarded when the opportunity to work with talented Americans is present (2001, 2004, 2005). Canadian artists also hold up success and approval of American practitioners in the arts as an emblem of Canadian excellence. Similar to other art forms, Canadian krumpers seek approval from admired American dancers. However, this comes from a need for exchange of knowledge, rather than a hypocrisy as described by Fulford. From krump's beginnings in the early 2000s, the only way to attain krump knowledge and krump music were online through American krumpers. In a personal

interview with Toronto leader, Albano, he states that the goal of krumpers within the city in the late 2000s was to be recognized on YouTube by an American krumper. Once you were recognized by an American krumper, they could ask you to be their 'little homie' and could send music and other knowledge only available in the United States at the time.

In krump parlance, a little homie is anyone in the big homie's fam. This relationship is important within krump, and its changes through time reflect key differences between the American and Canadian communities. The big homie role is described by both communities as being a mentor to little homies: contributing to their knowledge of krump and training them. Some Canadians are frustrated and feel that Americans have lost sight of this meaningful relationship. They believe that some American krumpers have changed the relationship to become more about filling spots of the fam with skilled dancers to be shown off, rather than training dancers to improve. Nyasha Nyamaka is a female krumper from Calgary who attended an international battle, *European Buck Session* (EBS), and witnessed this change in meaning firsthand. Nyamaka stated in a personal interview that she "was really disheartened of what I was seeing in the culture compared to what I thought it was". While at EBS, she was approached by many American dancers to become a part of their fams, which she realized that she was being invited to be the token talented female of the group rather than partake in a serious mentor relationship. She then took a break from krumping since she did not like the politics involved in the scene. Through my time in the Canadian krump communities, I have found that Canadians take the big homie or mentorship role very seriously. Canadian krumpers have intervened in situations where they believe that someone is not ready to be a 'big homie,' and will disband newly created fams if they believe they are improperly handled.

Unlike the American krump community, Canadian krumpers are very supportive of other Canadian krumpers with few exceptions. These exceptions mostly come out of Toronto regarding female acceptance by the older male generation and of competition between a very small number of Montreal and Toronto dancers. Canadian krumpers come together from all different locations at global krump events such as *European Buck Session* to dance together and support each other. Canadian Facebook groups and written interactions show love between dancers. Krumpers share videos of neighboring cities' dancers to state how proud they are of their growth, their work or to call them family. Call outs by Canadian krumpers are generally playful. Canadians are aware of this distinguishing factor from the United States and are proud of its part in their national krump identity. A call out during my time in Montreal on the facebook group states: "I miss you guys ! Cant wait to see all of you!!!! By the way I'm calling out my brodie Sunny when I step foot in montreal, let's do it !!" by leader Kevin "Jr Maddripp" Gohou. With a response of "Lets do it bro. Can't wait to see you." by a younger member of the community (August 11, 2017).

With these changes in social media platforms, new windows of communication between communities and krump veterans have begun to emerge. Recently, co-creator Ceasare "Tight Eyez" Willis has been speaking openly on live streams about different issues in the overall krump community. His ability to live stream has changed how the krumpers of the world can now interact with him. In the past, dancers from far regions were only able to hear him speak when others recorded him talking at various workshops where he was teaching, or in small doses when he would speak between the rounds of a recorded battle or session. During my initial interest in krump in the early 2010s, I would search for hours for interviews or any workshop talks of Willis', which were generally of low quality and hard to understand. Past live streams by Willis address his opinions on why krump is not a part of

hip-hop, the problematic battle he participated in with a b-boy, the difference between OGs and Veterans in the krump community and the need for the community to professionally record and publish what is happening within their krump communities.

With this new global communication being generated, and more opportunities to hear the co-creator of the form speak, the international and Canadian krump community only stand to grow. With a central problem in the past being divergent interpretations of Willis's teachings through a chain of communication, the Canadian communities can all benefit from first-hand contact with Willis. The evolving social media platforms also create opportunity for stronger communication methods between Canadian cities. Toronto has begun to livestream some of their krump sessions and hopefully more cities in Canada and internationally follow suit. Further impacts of social media will be discussed in the following section.

### **Nationalism and Diaspora**

In this section, I will argue that Canadian krumpers aim to establish a cohesive Canadian krump community. Yet, they are currently prevented from doing so because they are not equally prioritizing and implementing their shared goals of international recognition and search for 'authenticity' in a coordinated manner. Here I will draw on Benedict Anderson's model for 'Imagined Community' formation, as well as Paul Gilroy's theorizations of diaspora, based on African diasporic community development in an international context. Canadian krumpers want a national community, for reasons that will be discussed in the following section.

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) speaks to how Canadian krumpers are imagining and creating the identity of Canadian krump. *Imagined Communities* follows Anderson's concept that a 'nation' is a social construct. Anderson states that the sense of community in a nation exists in the imagination of its members. A nation consists of a self-perceived commonality, even though the members never know, hear or speak to all included in the nation. This imagining by participants is the first step in building a concrete nation. Anderson describes the different factors that create a sense of community: geography, cultural exhibitions, languages and goals.

I see the overall Canadian krump community as an *almost* imagined community, even though they have attained the factors presented by Anderson. Geography is a large part of the Canadian krump community commonality, as the identity of 'Canadian krumper' is projected to dancers within the borders of Canada. Cultural exhibitions are common within krump as presented through dance mediums of battles and sessions. At cultural exhibitions worldwide, krumpers support other dancers from their region in the same respect as seen in sporting events. Canadian krumpers share a common language of terms that are only understood within the community; these terms refer to specific movements, characters, compliments, and events. Canadian krumpers have a common goal of international recognition while also having competing local goals, which complicate the goal factor of the imagined community.

Although Canada's krumpers meet Anderson's criteria for imagined community, the missing link of communication between members or leaders has created an *almost* imagined community. Although all three krump communities of my case studies share a current goal of international recognition, they are currently not prioritizing the goal at the same level or

pursuing it in the same way. This is due to the lack of communication amongst communities. Each community has a different understanding of ‘authenticity’ in krump practices. These different understandings affect each communities’ ideas of how to pursue the overall goal of international recognition. Montreal’s community focuses on travel to build the goal of international recognition. Toronto focuses on online video and bringing dancers to the city for the same goal. Calgary focuses on creating a strong united front of Canadian krumpers, while helps other small communities to thrive.

The communities also have local, competing goals which are prioritized differently by each individual group. Montreal’s local goal is to build a krump school within the city. Toronto’s local goal is to create monetary outlets for krumpers through performance and teaching. Calgary’s local goal is to help the Vancouver scene to grow and thrive. As communities focus on their local goals, I find that miscommunication grows between leaders of the communities. Although these contrasting goals are somewhat known to the krump leaders in diverging cities, they are not explicitly dealt with, I believe, because they do not see how different they are from one another. In an interview with Calgary leader, Reyes, I told him about Albano’s work in Toronto to create paid positions for Toronto dancers. Reyes responded that he would talk to Albano about it. He said that he knew it was happening but not to the extent that it was.

With the unique opportunity of spending time in each community, I was able to share with the leaders the differences in their communities that I had observed, opening a new dialogue and opportunity for discourse between them. I did not realize until after my fieldwork how unique my situation was in witnessing the workings of each community; this had not yet been done by any other Canadian krumpers for periods extending for more than a

couple of days. Current leaders in contact with each other are Vlad “Sevenstarr” Laurore (Montreal), Oliver “Reignmaker” Reyes (Calgary), and BJ “Push” Albano (Toronto). These three have expressed a brotherhood between them. Reye talked a lot of the brotherhood between the three. He showed me a group chat where they talked about the future goals for Canada and had documents with notes from meetings that they have had to talk about krump in all of Canada. The relationship between them can be complicated because other leaders within the communities might then be left out. Toronto leader Marquez has expressed how it would not make sense for him to not be a part of the conversations about krump in Canada as Albano is not respected within the city.

Anderson’s concept of the imagined community predates the explosion of social media and the impact that it can have on the building of a imagined nation. A glance at the online communication between Canadian dance communities demonstrate a significant number of interactions between dancers ‘liking’ videos posted by others; however, this exists only in the cyber world. During my interviews, I was surprised at the number of krumpers in various locations who knew the names of other cities’ krumpers, were connected on social media and had seen video footage of them dancing, yet had never had a conversation with the dancer. When I asked dancers who they would recommend I talk to for my research in neighboring cities, only leaders were able to give names or connections, not the dance community members. This fits with Anderson’s model in which participants in an imagined community are not in direct communication. Yet this is this lack of communication within the Canadian krump communities that has been the downfall in its attempt to create national unity.

This *almost* imagined community speaks to the different interpretations of krump in the Canadian diaspora. My use of the term diaspora is informed by the work of Paul Gilroy. Early interpretations of diaspora state that individuals within the diaspora maintain a strong and shared collective identity centered on their point of origin (Gilroy). The members are able to trace the history of their ancestors back to this location. Therefore the point of origin is established as a homeland, a place of belonging to which return is possible. Gilroy challenges this concept by formulating the diaspora as a transnational cultural construction with no origin point (Gilroy). Gilroy's concept of diaspora central to the formation of the African diaspora, as based on the work of Stuart Hall, focuses on the 'routes' taken rather than the 'roots' firmly situated in a location of origin. Routes refers to the travel of participants of the diaspora and their current locations rather than the roots in location of which they began. Gilroy's examples within *The Black Atlantic* (1993) dispute the claims that black culture is the property of a single nation.

Gilroy's interpretation of diaspora can act as a model for the Canadian krump community in multiple ways. Although krump is associated with and still takes place within the origin point of South, Los Angeles, it is not regarded by krumpers in the United States or internationally as a location to visit, or a home place to return. Although you can return to a point of origin, the changes over time to that location can lead to an entirely different environment, unrelated to the reasons for wanting to return. South Central has transformed drastically since its troubles within the 1990s and early 2000s. I argue that Canada's krump diaspora is unusual in that its individual communities are connected to the origin point of a person, the co-creator of the dance, Ceasare "Tight Eyez" Willis, more so than its geographical origin point of South, Los Angeles and to the other Canadian cities. I am furthering Gilroy's claims of the possibility that a diaspora does not have to have a location

as an origin point by giving this role to Willis. The overwhelming connection to the creator of the dance provides krumpers internationally with the most 'authentic' version of krump, as they see it through a singular person. Dancers in all communities hang on every word and movement of Willis and try to incorporate his interpretation of it within their community. Each Canadian community follows Willis and his teachings online and through hearsay from other high ranking krumpers. With conflicting interpretations that can be made about Willis and his teachings - each community differs. Each community is connected with the creator of the style more so than they are with the other communities and they each see their interpretation as closest to that of how Willis would want the community run. Therefore the legitimacy of krump is carried on the shoulders of Willis, a person and not a location. This change could speak to new understandings of diaspora created and influenced by social media.

However, there are problems with authenticity hinging on a singular person, which were expressed in my interviews with different Canadian krumpers. Some noted the frustration of having to follow the word of one person even though the dance style has grown as large as it has. Others cite the complications of dancers worldwide trying to gain legitimacy through copying one individual, making a majority of the community dance the same rather than adding their own unique flavor. Being able to gain legitimacy in the international krump community through Willis, while also holding an individual krump style, seems to be the dream for many Canadian krumpers.

### **The International Krump Community**

In this section, I discuss the future professionalization of krump in Canada and the benefits that I, along with the other Canadians krumpers I spoke with, can imagine would take place if respected in the international krump community. I explain how Canadian krumpers are currently represented in the international scene. I show how the professionalization of krumpers resembles the history of the breaking community. With the key commonality between Canadian krumpers being a shared desire for international recognition, it is important to discuss the implications of this achievement.

An advantage to becoming a respected international krump community is it can fully professionalize communities of practice. I use the term professionalization to describe krump becoming one's main paid occupation, rather than a hobby or as additional income to another career. Currently krump professionalization in Canada, mostly taking place in Montreal, is through teaching opportunities. In Toronto and Calgary, krump teachers treat teaching opportunities as additional income while holding other work. However, this is not how krump professionalization works within the most respected countries and cities. International professional krumpers are paid to perform, battle, travel, judge and teach high-level workshops. This idea of professionalization is the goal for Canadian participants, instead of solely teaching in their communities.

The transition into a broader based professionalization is similar to the professionalization of breakers in the hip-hop community. Breaking is farther along in its history and is an established dance form with many international competitions, events and professional practitioners. Dancers can be sponsored by different clothing or athletic companies and are paid to compete, travel, judge and teach. Breaking began similarly to krump and is practiced comparably as a cultural form using different terms to describe similar

practices (cypher vs. session, crew vs. fam, etc). Breaking began in the mid-1970s in the Bronx, New York. The style began to spread through films such as *Breakin* (1984) and *Beat Street* (1984) and is now internationally practiced. Canada's national breaking community is heavily connected, unlike the krump community. Canadian breakers propelled themselves into the international scene with great skill in the eighties and nineties and today are connected through different organizations such as the *Universal Breaking League*. Canadian breakers are professionalized through performance more so than through teaching. The national communication between b-boys and b-girls is consistent online and through travel, making for a strong "imagined community."

There are promising signs that Canadian krump is beginning to be more connected to the international krump scene. Within the past couple of years, some Canadian dancers have started to gain recognition from the worldwide scene, as previously occurred in the breaking community. Canadians are rising in the ranks of international battles, and views of online footage are mirroring this increase of interest. These videos are resulting in more international krumpers beginning to recognize the talent in Canada. This accomplishment mainly falls on the shoulders of the Montreal krump leaders, specifically Valerie "Taminator" Chartier. Chartier has ranked high in some of the biggest worldwide krump events. In 2017, Chartier both joined the creator Willis' fam and was named female krumper of the year by *FCD World Krump*, an online krump organization. Toronto krump leader, Marquez, has been recognized by co-creator Jo' Artis "Mijo" Ratti and is in the process of becoming a part of his fam. Marquez has been spotted by Ratti and has talked about this honor, yet has not battled him for a position as of yet.

A small but growing number of international figures are beginning to openly recognize the Canadian scene and travel to our events. Larry "Ruin" Coombs, a high ranking

krumper from the United States, a multi-year winner of the *European Buck Session's* male competition and member of Willis's fam, states to Canadian krumpers his love for Canadian scene and the country. He has attended multiple events in both Montreal and Toronto. Both co-creators of krump have visited Canada on a couple of occasions when paid to attend events such as the large hip-hop dance festival *World of Dance. Simply Swagg Dance Studio* in Scarborough, referred to as the home of krump and opened by Northbuck member Paul "Kaze" Thurton, brought co-creator Jo'Artis "Mijo" Ratti to his year-end dance recital to perform alongside Northbuck crew in 2017. He also taught workshops at the studio. Ratti recently visited Montreal for the first time to teach workshops and has also made trips to Calgary, as his partner is originally from the city. Other high ranking krumpers from the United States and the United Kingdom have visited both Montreal and Toronto on a few occasions. Leaders from all communities are discussing how to get more high ranking krumpers to visit their cities to enhance the growth of their krumpers.

When I first began researching krump in 2012, *European Buck Session (EBS)*, the world's largest krump event, had yet to be attended by Canadian krumpers. Today, Canadian krumpers are attending together in small groups and competing in the battles representing Canada. The EBS logo is made up of twelve different world flags representing the countries in attendance at the battle. The flag does not currently contain the Canadian flag as pointed out by Canadian krumpers who raised this issue to organizers once they started to attend. The flags currently presented in the logo and advertisements for the event are the United States of America, Brazil, Philippines, France, United Kingdom, Russia, Switzerland, Japan, South Africa, Germany and Portugal. These countries currently have the largest and most respected krump communities in the world.

If Canada becomes an international hub for krump, like the countries on the EBS flag, Canadian krumpers would be considered for paid travel positions to krump events and performances. Canadian krumpers could receive recognition for their hard work and dedication to the craft. This could be a monumental step towards the professionalization of krump in Canada. Canadian krumpers are moving in the right direction to be recognized as an international contender through the hard work of Canadian krumpers such as Chartier. This progress is furthered through the increase of international visitors to the community such as Coombs. The professionalization of Canada's breaking community shows us the importance of communication and the need for Canada's krumpers to shift towards better coordination. Being able to professionalize Canadian krump would help immensely to grow the community to become an international player.

## **Conclusion**

Through my time traveling through the major Canadian krump communities, I found that Canadian krumpers do have a unique identity to contribute to the international krump community. The identity is different from the United States' and is based on the desire to create a supportive and open atmosphere in which krump is both accessible to all interested participants and still strong in skill and creativity. Each community has different strengths to contribute to this identity, and if brought to the table with unified communication, could amount to a professionalized national community and recognized international identity. However, my research has demonstrated that the Canadian krump communities are currently not united enough to take action towards these goals.

I believe that the lack of communication between groups could change in the near future because of the necessity of helping new communities grow and the changes to communication now possible through social media. The growth of the Canadian krump diaspora has already begun with smaller krump communities popping up all over the country as offshoots of the originating cities of Montreal, Toronto, and Calgary. These new communities are pushing the leaders of the originating cities to come together now more than ever to promote the growth of their communities and others. The leaders of each community are stressing the importance of being a role model to up and coming scenes.

The future of krump in Canada will also depend upon the next generation of dancers. With the focus on youth through studio work in Toronto and Montreal and after-school programs in Calgary, the next generation will benefit from the work of the leaders who created communities with little to no information other than the film *Rize*. With the evolution of social media and new ways of learning dance online, the Canadian community only stands to grow stronger. With this vast and available knowledge base in conjunction with the Canadian leaders advocating for a more supportive dance scene without the politics of the American community, the next generation will be able to learn krump in a knowledgeable and supportive atmosphere. With improved learning environments to train talented dancers will come a new professionalization of krumpers valuing performance over teaching. Although teaching is also a valued profession in krump, there are significantly less opportunities for performance, and therefore they are more highly regarded. Canadian dancers, once recognized as international players, will begin to be paid to perform, travel and judge. Although some Canadian krumpers are travelling currently, it is generally not for paid positions and expenses have to come out of personal income. These possibilities, however, depend on whether communities can work on both the goals of their specific locales, as well

as the national goal. Canada is solidifying its krump community and identity with some miscommunications and bumps in the road, which follows a similar trajectory to the krump origin story presented in *Rize*; however, based on the passion for this style that I witnessed throughout my fieldwork in the summer of 2017, I am confident in the future growth of the Canadian krump community. The rise of krump in Canada has only just begun.

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