FOR THE CULTURE

This Exists. This Matters. This Is Ours.

Today, “for the culture” is spoken every day in comments, captions, conversations, podcasts and online communities. The phrase feels familiar, almost self-evident. Yet behind that apparent simplicity lies a history. A way of saying: this exists, this matters, this is ours.

The phrase has deep roots in African American culture, and more specifically in the communities that developed hip-hop as a cultural and political response to exclusion. Originally, “for the culture” functioned as a powerful statement of collective identity, authenticity and solidarity.

Today, the term has taken on a broader and more fluid meaning. Through social media, from TikTok videos centred on Antwerp-Moroccan celebration culture to posts about Korean streetwear, and through music, fashion, artistic practices, collectives and communities, “for the culture” is constantly being reinterpreted and reinvented. The phrase now circulates far beyond its original context, each time taking on a different meaning, a different community and a different claim to visibility.

But what happens when an expression rooted in a specific history of exclusion and resistance becomes increasingly widespread? What remains and what changes along the way? Does the phrase lose something of its original meaning, or does its circulation reveal how different communities recognise similar questions around representation, ownership and visibility?

To understand these questions, it is important to return to the context in which the phrase emerged.

Hip-hop was not a genre. It was an infrastructure.

Emerging in the South Bronx during the 1970s, within communities shaped by urban policy, economic exclusion and racism, hip-hop developed its own systems of production, distribution and recognition. In this context, “for the culture” was not a slogan but a way of naming actions carried out in service of the community. It referred to a shared responsibility: not only to create culture, but also to protect it, preserve it and pass it on. People acted not only for themselves, but in service of something larger than the individual.

Tricia Rose (1994) describes hip-hop as a cultural and political system that responded to marginalisation not by asking for a seat at the table, but by building its own table. That attitude continues to resonate today, far beyond the phrase’s original context. In cities such as Antwerp, Brussels, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, similar dynamics remain visible. Young diasporic communities use culture not only as a form of expression, but also as a way of claiming space, recognition and agency.

When culture becomes a space where communities make themselves visible, questions of identity inevitably emerge. Stuart Hall (1990) argues that identity is never fixed, but constantly shaped and reshaped through cultural practices. From this perspective, “for the culture” can be understood as more than a description. By using the phrase, people position themselves within a community and express a sense of belonging.

That sense of belonging is not without meaning. It often emerges from shared experiences of underrepresentation, exclusion or the feeling of not being fully reflected in dominant cultural narratives. Shared identity becomes a way of finding recognition, exchanging experiences and creating collective space.

With the rise of social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, the phrase has taken on a new dynamic. Social media accelerates the circulation of language and culture, but it also disconnects expressions from their original contexts. As a phrase moves across communities and platforms, its history does not always travel with it.

As a result, “for the culture” acquires new meanings that are not always directly connected to the context from which it emerged. A ritual becomes content. A cultural practice becomes a trend.

This is not simply a matter of platforms or algorithms. It also raises broader questions about cultural circulation and ownership. Who gets to define what a cultural practice means? Who gets to use it? And what changes when meanings move between different communities and contexts?

At the same time, “for the culture” is not only visible online. Today, we see artists, collectives and communities increasingly creating their own exhibitions, events, archives, platforms and spaces for gathering. In Antwerp and Brussels, this can be seen in initiatives and collectives such as AL.ARTE, BHM, BAYA Collective, XRAY.community, Nana Benz, BreakFreeBabes and tashattot.collective, among many others.

These initiatives are not only created to present work. They also create space for stories, images and experiences that may be less visible elsewhere. Often, they emerge outside traditional institutional structures and from a strong need for representation, ownership and collective space.

In these contexts, “for the culture” functions not only as a slogan, but also as a shared attitude and way of organising. It is about producing culture through community, mutual support and shared experience.

This development raises important questions. Why do so many young (diasporic) communities recognise themselves in the phrase “for the culture” today? And what social mechanisms lie beneath that recognition?

Part of the answer seems connected to questions of representation, cultural recognition and ownership. Although contexts differ, many communities today experience the need to create their own spaces, networks and forms of visibility. Just as hip-hop emerged from the need to

build independent cultural infrastructures, we now see artists, collectives and communities searching for new ways to share and pass on stories, rituals and knowledge on their own terms.

In this sense, “for the culture” refers not only to what is created, but also to how it is created. The phrase can be understood as an attitude that shapes how a space is organised, who is invited, how decisions are made and who holds ownership over what is produced.

We see this reflected in independent collectives, self-organised events, archive projects, community platforms and art spaces such as MINO that consciously operate outside institutional logics. Not necessarily as alternatives to existing institutions, but as places where new forms of cultural production, encounter and knowledge-sharing can emerge.

What is being built in these spaces are cultural ecosystems: infrastructures in which communities do not simply consume culture, but also produce it, preserve it and pass it on.

In Antwerp, these dynamics are far from abstract. The city is home to a rich and growing network of independent initiatives, collectives and creative spaces that are driven by similar questions around representation, ownership and community-building. On Minderbroedersrui, in Borgerhout, Berchem and beyond, artists, young people and communities are developing their own ways of organising, presenting, archiving and sharing knowledge. Not as a reaction to the city, but as an integral part of it.

Perhaps this helps explain why “for the culture” continues to resonate so strongly today. The phrase reveals not only how language and culture constantly evolve, but also how different communities recognise themselves in similar dynamics of visibility, exclusion, representation and collective organisation.

What began as a powerful expression within a specific cultural and historical context now circulates globally among communities that are each searching, in their own way, for space, recognition, belonging and cultural ownership.

That is precisely where the relevance of “for the culture” lies today. Not as a fixed concept, but as an invitation to think about how culture is created, shared and given meaning within communities.

FOR THE CULTURE does not begin with the ambition of providing a single answer. Instead, it seeks to create space for these questions to be explored. Through art, conversations, film, music, public interventions and collective gatherings, the project invites artists, neighbours, young people and visitors to reflect together on how culture is created, shared and given meaning today.

Not as something fixed, but as a living practice that is continuously being made, questioned and passed on.

Text: Malikka Bouaissa & Team MINO
English translation of the original Dutch text.