

# Book Reviews

Charry, Eric, ed. 2012. *HIP HOP AFRICA: NEW AFRICAN MUSIC IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 404 pp. \$25.16

*Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World*, edited by Eric Charry, is a set of twelve essays on rap and hip-hop on the African continent. Charry, a distinguished professor of music, contends, “American rap was the source for African rap” (p. 3). Consequently, he has assembled remarkable essays by experts who offer deep historical and cultural connections showing how Africans shape rap to fit their local circumstances.

Invariably, the volume offsets the attention that is unequally paid to the experiences of African hip-hop music from the continent. Toward that end, most of the essays focus on compelling stories of how “the genre has become one of the most relevant forms of expression for African youth” (p. 1). According to Charry, “African youth continually search for new ways to make rap relevant and unique, which often means digging through local culture, almost like American DJs will crate-dig; search through crates of obscure vinyl record albums for new sounds” which eventually helped the connection with African culture through rap (p. 18).

In varied ways, the essays collected here consider rap as “appropriating, integrating, and transforming a foreign art form into a locally meaningful genre . . . [providing] a rich laboratory in which to view [the] process of change” (p. 300). These essays—contributed from Ghana, South Africa, Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Kenya, and Tanzania—examine the conditions, motivations, and experiences that attended the birth of hip-hop in Africa.

The contents of the book, grouped into six parts, show that rap is not limited to American popular culture, but has exponents in Africa. The authors become conversant with young hip-hoppers in Africa, looking to the United States for legitimization of their own culture—perhaps an issue for urban elites more than rural Africans. This phenomenon underscores everyday popular culture. As a result, several of the essays demonstrate how a focus on African hip-hop expands the range of plausible responses embraced in contemporary music. The essays essentially argue that rap is a “recent tradition, originally associated with a specific place and culture but rooted in aesthetics that developed in the Americas” (p. 308).

Part one of the volume has two chapters. The first, “The Birth of Ghanaian Hip Life: Urban Style, Black Thought, Proverbial Speech,” contributed by Jesse Weaver Shipley, an anthropologist, discusses the “confluence of styles” (p. 30) that led to the birth of hip life in the late 1990s. It demonstrates

how the naturalization of this genre builds upon such important genres as “elite youth transformation of American hip hop,” “privatization of media,” and “state appropriation of youth taste” (p. 30). In combining such an eclectic mix of performance traditions into a locally significant form, it emphasizes that hip life intermingles African diasporic influence with the legacy of proverb-based Akan language performance genres and the rapid development of commercial electronic media in Accra. Subsequently, hip life is not characterized by a particular rhythm or lyrical flow, but by a creative style for mixing diverse African and diasporic performance practices and signs.

The second chapter in this part, “A Genre Coming of Age: Transformation, Difference, and Authenticity in the Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture of South Africa,” is contributed by Lee Watkins, an ethnomusicologist, who here unveils the authenticity of rap music, expressively mobilized and contested in various spheres and spaces. For example, Watkins examines South African hip-hop in the late 1990s in the light of such issues as “racism, marginalization, and musical creativity embedded in local and global frames” (p. 58). For a deeper and easier understanding, he discusses this chapter in sections, including “a description of the numerous hip hop scenes in South Africa, including Cape Town, Johannesburg, [and] Durban[,] and the seriously neglected music studies of the Eastern Cape such as Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth” (p. 58). The second and third sections explore the issues emerging in these locations, contextualizing hip-hop in South Africa more critically within a global performance culture, and finally analyzing the potential future of hip-hop in South Africa.

“Griots and Messengers” thematically forms part 2 of the book, which consists of three chapters that address rap music in Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, and Malawi. In it, Patricia Tang takes a critical look at the relationship between rap and griot traditions in West Africa in the contribution “The Rapper as Modern Griot: Reclaiming Ancient Traditions.” The chapter examines the hip-hop scene in Dakar, Senegal, and explores ways in which African musicians reinvent both African American and African cultures for their own purposes (p. 80). Focusing on the study of Positive Black Soul, the first African group to gain international success, the chapter reveals how Senegalese rap artists have seized upon and exploited Africanisms, particularly griotism, through symbolic, linguistic, and textual musical means.

In chapter four, “Promises of the Chameleon: Reggae Artist Tiken Jah Fakoly’s Intertextual Contestation of Power in Côte d’Ivoire,” Daniel B. Reed explores the intertextual artistry of the Ivorian reggae musician Tiken Jah Fakoly, especially the musician’s 2000 song, “Promesses de Cameleon” (“Promises of the Chameleon” in English) (p. 92). In analyzing the intertextual references, Reed highlights “the genre of reggae as his medium of communication, singing a key phrase in the song’s chorus in the Jula language, and above all the daring inclusion of a speech by General Robert Guéï, the leader of the military junta then governing Côte d’Ivoire” (p. 92). Reed argues that these sensitive ideological and identity-related implications of choices of text make this song a powerful expression of protest. Furthermore, he

notes that the song proved so effective and popular that Fakoly began receiving death threats from Côte d'Ivoire military rulers and was forced to flee the country (p. 92). Indeed, Fakoly's references lend themselves particularly well to an intertextual analysis, which can perhaps most effectively uncover a major aspect of his approach (p. 92).

The final chapter of part two is "Style, Message, and Meaning in Malawian Youth Rap and Ragga Performances" by John Fenn. In it, he claims, "Rap music from the United States and ragga [*sic*] from Jamaica feature prominently on the youth cultural landscape of Malawi." He again discusses 'how imported urban dance-oriented music with strong global connections to youth demographics . . . hold[s] cosmopolitan appeal for Malawian youth' (p. 109). As style comprises both physical and ideological elements, and Malawian youth mostly draw on several styles and messages as the contents of their music, Fenn investigates the interplay between style and message as found in rap and ragga [*sic*] musical performances from the urban environment of Blantyre, focusing on messages that young singers send in their lyrics and in the styles they create or embrace. Claiming that the "interplay between style and message" undergirds "musical sociality" among the youth in the city, Fenn emphasizes that the youth negotiate social, economic, and political structures in Blantyre through their everyday practices and musical performances (p. 109).

"Identity and Hybridity (Mali and Nigeria)" thematically forms part 3 of the book, which discusses the mixture, collision, and collusion between the West and Africa in connection with music. Here, Dorothea E. Schulz contributes chapter six, "Mapping Cosmopolitan Identities: Rap Music and Male Youth Culture in Mali." Schulz examines the pulsating word-rhythms of rap in Bamako, the capital city of Mali. She contends, "Rap's triumphant national career has been facilitated by the diversification of the media landscape in the wake of the multiparty democracy and concomitant civil liberties in 1991" (p. 129). The chapter "grasps the social significance and repercussions of rap in Mali, coupled with specific conventions, moral standards, and social institutions within which hip hop emerged in the United States" (p. 131). After 1990, hip-hop enjoyed spectacular success among male youth, yet it still faces situations of marginality in Mali, and Schulz discusses why and how it seems to offer a way to come to terms not only with their personal dilemmas, but also with their desire to imagine themselves as modern, cosmopolitan, and "kuul" (cool) citizens of the world (p. 131).

Stephanie Shonekan, a Nigeria-born scholar, discusses Nigerian hip-hop, cultural hybridity, and the newly created cultural and artistic products in her contribution, "Nigerian Hip Hop: Exploring a Black World Hybrid." According to Shonekan, "by the early 1990s, the most popular music produced by young Nigerian artists was reggae and ragga" (p. 147). Considering the influence of musical antecedents on Nigerian hip-hop in the last decade of the twentieth century, distinctions in the cultural products amplify local and foreign stylistic elements. Shonekan, above all, explores the elements that make "this musical genre relevant and appropriate within

the local Nigerian setting, and how [performers] interpret this African American music form to produce a unique hybrid rap style that fits the Nigerian youth identity" (p. 145).

The two chapters in part four are "The Local and Global in Kenyan Rap and Hip Hop Culture," by Jean Ngoya Kidula, and "Imitation and Innovation in the Music, Dress, and Camps of Tanzanian Youth," by Alex Perullo. Both emphasize the development of popular music between the African continent and its diaspora: Kidula examines the local and global in Kenyan music, the accompanying hip-hop culture, and the antecedents to rap styling emanating from indigenous ethnic and popular music; Perullo examines three areas of what he describes as *bongo flava*, which he explains as "music, dress, and camps to comprehend the ways youth innovate on physical, aural, and ideological elements associated with rap music" (p. 188). He adds that "it is [in] the artiste's [*sic*] understanding of each of these communities that innovations are made" (p. 188).

Parts 5 and 6 consist of "Popular Music Panoramas (Ghana and Malawi)" and "Drumming (Mali)," by John Collins; "Contemporary Ghanaian Popular Music Since the 1980s," and "Popular Music and Young Male Audiences in Contemporary Malawi," by Jochen Malawi; and "Urban Drumming: Traditional Jembe Celebration Music in a West African City (Bamako)," by Rainer Polak—all of which provide historical overviews of the research on hip-hop music in their part of the African continent and reveal opportunities for continuing revision. John Collins traces the development of Ghanaian transcultural popular music from its origins, in the 1880s, dividing it into three broad epochs, beginning with, "as a result of colonialism in Southern Ghana, the introduction of foreign regimental brass band music and classical and ballroom music of Western orchestras and the guitar and accordion music of foreign seamen" (p. 212). He analyzes the factors that affected Ghanaian traditional music and how they managed to survive and how new genres evolved.

"Music for an African Twentieth Century," by Charry, serves as an epilogue. It discusses compelling concerns confronting Africans as they participate in these musical cultures, using two terms to explain the overarching and interrelated phenomena on display in the dispersion and reception of hip-hop culture around the world—*globalization* and *authenticity* (p. 285). Charry says: "This book is about the vital musical currents that young Africans are now creating or continuing to carry on" (p. 283).

*Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World* succeeds in establishing a "presence and appreciation for African music outside the continent, [and] the generations of the 1990s and 2000s have new challenges, including the onslaught of music from the United States" (p. 283). Most certainly, the collective success of these essays includes their embrace of globalization, authenticity, and the search for opportunities in Africa and the diaspora. As expected, readers will gain a lot from the volume's grasp of the politics and history that underpin hip-hop culture in Africa. The depth of knowledge in this book, as well, will appeal to readers who seek a richer

understanding of hip-hop culture on the African continent. The knowledge to be gained from this publication will give readers a better understanding of the authenticity of hip-hop music in Africa.

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