

Hip Hop Ukraine: music, race, and African migration. Adriana N. Helbig. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014. 258 pp. Ethnomusicology Multimedia Series. Notes. Bibliography. \$25.00

Meredith L. Roman, SUNY Brockport

Adriana Helbig's magnificent study, *Hip Hop Ukraine: music, race, and African migration*, represents the culmination of a series of ethnographic fieldwork experiences. Helbig conducted her research in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and other communities throughout Ukraine between 2004 and 2010, which she supplemented with a two week journey to Uganda to visit the families of African musicians living in Ukraine. Helbig consistently reflects on how language (Ukrainian, Russian, or English) conferred on her insider or outsider status depending on the context. As the granddaughter of U.S. immigrants who fled western Ukraine at the end of the Second World War, Helbig connects her own family's history of upheaval (and the Ukrainian nation as a whole) with that experienced by the African immigrants to Ukraine who constitute the monograph's main protagonists. By exploring the ways in which race, gender, and migration shape hip hop in Ukraine, Helbig adds to the burgeoning scholarship on global hip hop and furthers our knowledge of the African diaspora in Eastern Europe. Readers can access various songs, music videos, and commercials that Helbig analyzes on the Ethnomusicology Multimedia website.

Helbig begins her study with a historical overview of the contradictory attitudes surrounding persons of African descent that span the period of the Russian empire and the Soviet Union. She argues that the widespread popularity of Paul Robeson and his anti-racist politics helped create opportunities for African musicians. However, while the stereotypes of black people as inherently musical have afforded Africans opportunity, they simultaneously reify ideas of black inferiority. The notion that Africans are only good at singing and dancing is fueled by persistent Soviet era representations of Africa as a primitive, tropical paradise where wild animals abound but where economic and social progress is absent. Interconnected with this racist discourse, Helbig notes that blackness is associated with the absence of dignity and respect, rendering as "black labor" the menial, degrading jobs that Ukrainians perform abroad (87).

In post-socialist Ukraine, African migrants have often become greater targets of discrimination compared to those coming from China, Vietnam, Turkey, India, or Afghanistan, according to Helbig (75-8). Not in the least part, this is linked to a stereotype that imagines African migrants as shiftless and lazy. Although the Cold War is over, the channels of exchange remain open as young African men from middle-class families in Uganda, Kenya, and Mozambique pursue university education in Ukraine while others explore economic opportunities as merchants at Ukrainian bazaars. Since Ukrainian and European Union authorities think of Ukraine as a temporary stop for these migrants (whether students or merchants) on the road to Western Europe, leaders and civic organizations do little to integrate them into Ukrainian society (65-66, 79-80). Although Human Rights Watch reports document the egregious treatment of African migrants at the hands of Ukrainian police and the judicial system, the extent of racism against Africans in Ukraine remains difficult to gauge. As Helbig suggests, individuals are reluctant to report incidents to law enforcement officials whom they generally believe are racist, and Ukrainian police do not keep records of racially motivated crimes (69). Moreover, the Ukrainian media underreports

instances of racial violence including murder, and politicians often fuel racism by encouraging ethnic Ukrainians' fears of migrants (72-3). As Helbig laments, "the lack of antiracism oversight within the government, within the educational system, and in the public media sphere has contributed to escalating issues of racial violence in the first part of the twenty-first century" (79).

As the main targets of racial violence, African men cope with stress by creating hip hop performances that expose their struggles to those who would otherwise ignore them. Among Ukrainian cities, Kharkiv boasts the greatest level of racial integration, and it constitutes the unofficial capital of Ukrainian hip hop. Helbig contends that Kharkiv has traditionally been seen as ethnically more mixed than Western parts of the country where a Ukrainian ethnic majority predominates, thereby making it more conducive to immigrant contributions and the formation of alternative identities. Ukraine's hip hop community exists largely as a word of mouth network that individuals use to locate music studios, break dance classes, hip hop clubs, and dance parties (110, 118-23). Helbig argues that hip hop is not simply a genre of music transplanted from the United States but has grown into a local hip hop culture that "broadly encapsulates rapping, MC-ing, DJ-ing, break dancing, graffiti, skateboarding, and increasingly, as a result of growing corporate sponsorship of hip hop events, BMX biking" (109). The Ukrainian hip hop scene allows young men to forge interracial friendships while affording ethnic Ukrainian women space to defy the "feminine hypersexuality" of mainstream society by wearing baggy clothes (rather than see-through blouses and tight fitting clothes) that they purchase from unisex stores (120). While ethnic Ukrainians use the presence of African (male) musicians to legitimize their music, African immigrants invoke real and imagined connections with African Americans so as to position themselves in close proximity to the genre's origins. Indeed, as Helbig stresses African immigrants and ethnic Ukrainians have appropriated the Black American aesthetic (like other youth worldwide) without recognizing the racist associations of blackness with musical performance that they reproduce. Thus so-called "black" popular music coexists with increased incidents of racial violence against African men in Ukrainian society (126).

Nonetheless, Helbig maintains that Ukrainians demonstrate growing interest in "Africa" partly because the media promotes mixed race performers like the Afro-Ukrainian singer Gaitana Essami. African migrants have also established folk fusion ensembles that integrate reggae and rap music with Ukrainian folk songs and fashion. Helbig highlights pro-Western politicians' efforts to use Afro-Ukrainian fusion music to promote tolerance in a new Ukraine that is distinct from the xenophobia that Ukrainians typically associate with Russia. To this end, Afro-Ukrainian folk groups like Chornobryvtsi performed Ukrainian-language songs for the crowds of protestors during the 2004 Orange Revolution. Helbig posits that many African immigrants enthusiastically supported the Orange Revolution because of struggles over identity and language in their countries of origin. Overall, academics and students alike will learn a great deal from Helbig's rich, accessible analysis. One is only left to contemplate the impact of the most recent Ukrainian crisis on hip hop and anti-African sentiment throughout that country.