

Hip Hop World – Where the Local Meets the Global

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There can be little doubt that hip hop music is now a global phenomenon. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find countries, or even regional areas, where the music has not made an impression. It seems certain that the spread of hip hop is tied to global economic trends and the changing nature of technology. However, hip hop music has not become a single homogenous entity. On the contrary, in countless cases it has become a platform on which localized communities can make their voices heard. Within an increasingly interconnected world, hip-hop is employed to articulate distinct social and political situations. As such, hip hop can be alternatively used as a vehicle for ethnic pride and national dissent – sometimes simultaneously. Notably, both the words and sounds of contemporary hip hop clearly demonstrate the ‘glocal’ push/pull interactions between the global and the local. The genre has also been a space where debates between modernity and tradition are played out. With its immense popularity, the music is both a form of (economic) globalization and a reaction against it. Many artists are endeavoring to mediate distinct cultures while attempting to be incorporated into worldwide solidarity networks. By employing a form of music most often associated with mainstream American music, many global hip hop artists are both helping to perpetuate a hegemonic industry, while simultaneously attempting to challenge or invert its cultural and economic power. It should be noted that I am aware that hip hop is comprised of (at minimum) three elements - rap music, break dancing and graffiti art. For the purposes of the paper I will primarily focus on the musical portion of the hip hop. As well, while not wishing to in any way exclude the United States, references to ‘global hip hop’ will usually refer to occurrences of the genre in other parts of the world.

Due to its immense popularity hip hop music might be viewed as both a dominant culture and a subculture. It might also be observed through a postmodern

lens in that the very 'cut and mix' nature of the genre seems to be an aspect of contemporary globalization. When considering its potential for resistance, George Lipsitz writes that, "Strategies of signification and grammars of opposition ... speak powerfully to the paradoxically fragmented and interconnected world created by new structures of commerce culture and technology."² At the same time, hip hop can be seen as part of the ongoing discourses within postmodernism. Is the hybrid nature of hip hop new, or have artists always been involved in recombining elements of the past? Is the sampling of sound materials (especially in the cases of folk and traditional music) a form of homage or merely a hollow nostalgia-oriented surface reading of the past? Are artists creating new works or merely mining old forms?³ To what extent does artistic context matter? Is meaning being exchanged for irony? And is globalization merely a new form of multinational capitalism? When considering (post)modern tendencies to mix and select identities, Nan Ellen notes, "globalization and the emergence of mass culture have contributed to supplanting traditional identity markers (... class, ethnicity, and community) with market-related ones, depriving us of endowed identities (both individual and group)."⁴ These are just a few of the debates and questions that need to be kept in mind as one examines hip hop and its spread around the world.

The Roots of Hip Hop

While it is commonly assumed that hip hop and rap music have origins that are strictly confined within the United States (US), this is not necessarily the case. Depending on how far one wants to reach back in time, there are fragments of rap to be found in previous US genres, as well as in the music from the Caribbean and

specific regions in Africa. As far back as the 1960s, Jamaican sound system operators would tell small stories and rhymes over the instrument recordings.⁵ Notably this trend was in part influenced by the on-air banter of radio disc jockeys that were coming over the airwaves from the southern US. A number of music journalists have also linked hip hop to griots – African individuals who are genealogists, historians and story tellers.⁶ Dating back before written language, griots (a position that was usually hereditary), were usually linked to specific royal families and more recently tied to wealthy patrons. Emily Wax notes that, “Important dates, intricate names and famous deeds involving not just their families but entire villages and kingdoms were remembered in song.”⁷

Many hip hop commentators have noted how many African and European musical traditions interacted and spread in the southern United States (particularly in New Orleans) during the period of slavery.⁸ More recently, the roots of hip hop can be traced to genres such jazz, blues, funk and disco. In addition, early hip hop music also contained elements of European electronic music. There is also evidence that hip-hop has connections to various forms of spoken-word poetry. Of particular importance is a group named The Last Poets who appeared in New York during the late 1960s. The group would often recite politically and socially charged poetry in a rapid-fire musical fashion. What is important about the interrelationship of these musical/historical threads is that hip hop was not necessarily a static or homogenous entity from its very beginning. Significantly, it could be argued that from its origins the genre contained histories and sounds that were both new and old ... both local and global. Noting how rap has had a similar function to reggae by providing a voice for people in low income groups, Dick Hebdige observes, “It got them noticed again and it helped to forge a sense of identity and pride within the local community.”⁹

Rap music has also been traced back to the African-American notion of signifyin(g).¹⁰ Adam Krims has defined the practice as when “an element of cultural production is quoted a troped for the purpose of critique.”¹¹ Noted hip hop author Russell Potter refers to a “repetition with a difference; the same and not the same.”¹² Although the concept of signifyin(g) is broad and complex, it involves elements of word-play, boasting and tricking often done in a way that is meant to tell lessons within stories. It may entail the playful reworking of an existing text whereby previously unseen political elements are revealed. For Potter signifyin(g) points to a clear link between two African American attitudes - one which involves a reverence for the past (stories and story-telling), and another that pointed to a contested presence (enacted in verbal competitions).¹³ The element of spoken-word sparring can clearly been seen in rap music as well as in some of its roots – the picong (verbal) duels of Calypsonians in Trinidad being one key example. A musical conception of signifyin(g) can also be heard in the way in which rap music ‘samples’ existing music (usually from older recordings) and playfully/politically employs that music in a new context. Potter describes sampling as a form of musical and economic resistance, noting “hip-hop relied on the tactical aural recycling of previously existing sounds, a reclamation of the consumed (the vinyl record, whose use value was supposed to be exchange-value) as a praxis of production (use-value).”¹⁴ In many ways the original use (or intention) of the sampled sound is inverted – a sensation that is further emphasized when a hip-hop artist ‘scratches’ a record by noisily manipulating it and literally playing it backwards. In this way European musical conceptions of melody, instrumentation and musical narrative are challenged.

Many hip hop writers link rap music’s contemporary roots to activities that were taking place in the Bronx (New York) during the mid-1970s. It has been

frequently noted that the Cross-Bronx Expressway (initiated in 1959) disturbed the balance of many local neighborhoods. Hundreds of homes and businesses were displaced during this period.¹⁵ In addition a further sixty thousand Bronx homes were destroyed as part of dubious redevelopment projects in the late 1960s and early 70s.¹⁶ Those that were left behind (low income people unable to afford relocation costs) occupied a wasteland where crime and poverty flourished. Significantly a number of early hip hop artists described the desolate and crime ridden neighborhoods that made up the Bronx in the late 1970s. It is for this reason that rap music was (partially or sometimes exclusively) associated by subsequent artists (inside and outside of the United States) with both tales of hostile street life and resistance directed at the political and social forces that brought the conditions into being. However, it should also be noted many early hip hop songs employed humor, exaggerated boasting and descriptions of dances and parties.¹⁷ From the very beginning rap songs simultaneously presented images of fanciful escapism and harsh reality. Tricia Rose has noted, “Rap music uses repetition and rupture in new and complex ways building on long-standing black cultural forces.”¹⁸

It is noteworthy that a high number of global hip hop artists draw inspiration from a particular period in American hip hop. Possibly in reaction to the Reagan administration, a number of politically charged (second wave) rap groups emerged in the mid-1980s. Groups such as NWA became highly controversial figures within the entertainment industry as they had a degree of mainstream commercial success with songs that contained streams of violent and unsettling imagery. Perhaps even more significant in terms of enduring influence were the New York based group Public Enemy. The group (rightly or wrongly) became associated with a new brand of confrontational hip hop nationalism, as lead-rapper Chuck D drew on influences from

both the Black Panther Party and the Nation of Islam.¹⁹ While the groups' lyrics were striking, a great deal of the influence they have had globally comes from their sound. With the scream of sirens and drills as background, Public Enemy sounded as noisy and chaotic as an overcrowded New York street. When describing the intensity of the group's agitated sound, ethnomusicologist Robert Walser writes, "Noisiness is always relative to whatever articulates order in a discourse or a culture, and the noisiness of hip hop contributes to its ability to express dissent and critique ..."²⁰ The group might have been offering stark and urgent social and political commentary, but amid the chaos and noise they too sounded as if they were struggling to be heard.

Hip Hop Diaspora

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of global hip-hop is the way in which it has been employed to represent conceptions of nationalism. When considering counter-hegemonic political forces within the US, Decker has noted, "The language of nation is appropriated by the hip hop community as a vehicle for contesting the changing discursive and institutional structures or racism in America."²¹ In part this was achieved by a number of hip hop artists who drew on images of 1960s protest movements and symbols of African pride and achievement. However, in the global arena, conceptions of nationalism take on a number of complex forms. For instance, rappers in Cuba intentionally temper their critiques (often related to the economy and the sex trade) of the government. One artist reports, "We try to give a new message in a positive way and with the principles of the Revolution which made us develop."²² In this particular case, a complex dynamic develops as many artists have both a strong sense of nationalism and an overt appreciation of American hip hop artists.²³

Elsewhere, national sentiments are hidden in humorous observations. In a song titled 'My England', a youthful rapper from England named Lady Sovereign challenges the misconceptions outsiders might have about England when she sings, "It ain't about tea and biscuits, I'm one of those English misfits/I don't drink tea I drink spirits, and I talk a lot of slang in my lyrics."²⁴ Toward the end of the song she takes on a more serious tone and raps, "Big up Oliver Twist, letting us know the nitty gritty of what London really is/It ain't all pretty, deal with the realness, it's gritty, deal with the realness."²⁵

Elsewhere, in the Basque regions, more direct links with an independence-minded brand of nationalism can be found. Describing the now disbanded Negu Gorriak, Jacqueline Urla writes that the group had, "always been clear about its strong affinity with Basque nationalism" adding that they used their "resources to fashion a new image of a militant Basque nation that was simultaneously transcultural, hybrid, and media driven."²⁶ In an article that examines Maori hip hop performers in New Zealand, Tony Mitchell noted that some of the artists are using rap to express sentiments of political independence.²⁷ A variation of this attitude is echoed by the members of DAM (Da Arab MCs) who live in the town of Lod twenty-five kilometers northwest of Jerusalem. The first appreciably popular Palestine rap group, DAM rejects the hyphenated Arab-Israeli label, stating in a recent interview, "We belong to Palestine and Palestine belongs to us."²⁸ Describing Hawaii's most prominent rap group Sudden Rush, Halifu Osumare writes that they "grasp their historical bonds of oppression with black Americans and allude to them within their strong pro-sovereignty rap messages."²⁹ Much like the Basque and Palestinian rappers, Sudden Rush view themselves as part of a larger and on-going struggle for liberation.³⁰

Strongly linked to conceptions of nationalism is the use of language. For instance, the group Negu Gorriak made a point of rapping only in Basque in an effort to bolster and revitalize their culture.³¹ An artist's decision to rap in their indigenous language (or localized dialect) carries a degree of political weight. This notion can be found in Aboriginal hip-hop artists who elect to rap in Cree for instance.

Interestingly, DAM occasionally rap in Hebrew, not so much because they are looking to build alliances but because they want their descriptions of Lod's dire living conditions to be heard by Jewish-Israelis.³² Notably, some of the Cuban rappers point out that it is the very fact that they rap in Spanish which gives their music a distinctly Cuban flavor.³³ The use of a particular language can also draw lines of inclusion and exclusion. By publicly rejecting one language and selecting another artists are potentially making political statements or calling for cultural independence.³⁴ In Holland, rappers perform both in Dutch and in English. Krims notes that some of the artists who rap in Dutch do so with pride, and yet often fans of the genre dismiss Dutch rappers.³⁵ The situation is made increasingly complex as some musicians associate English with elitism and considers those rappers who perform in English distanced from every-day people.³⁶ There is both a desire to identify with the social and political themes present in rap from the United States, and a yearning to stress the differences between that situation and the one young people face in Holland.³⁷ A high degree of social complexity is evident as, through language, artists seem to be trying to forge solidarity linkages that are either local or global – and sometimes both.

As with rap in the United States, and dancehall music in Jamaica, particular inflections and uses of slang may make particular songs unintelligible to 'outsiders' (who may be either within or outside of the country or community in question). This is the case with some South African rappers – who, even when they rap in Afrikaans,

do it in a way that is highly stylized and influenced by words and expressions from American hip hop.³⁸ Lee Watkins observes that, "... like the language, rap music is ideologically loaded because its representational nature legitimates forms of knowledge and certain kinds of power."³⁹ Regionalized distinctions between inclusion and exclusion can even be found within American hip hop as groups sometimes employ highly localized expressions and forms of jargon.⁴⁰ Tony Mitchell has also noted how slang can be a way to invert or challenge the "rules" of language particularly when a performer is engaging in a dominant language.⁴¹ Regarding the complex 'immigrant' rap scene in France, and drawing on the notion of 'resistance vernaculars', Mitchell writes, "Combined with the use of borrowings from English, Arabic, gypsy expressions and words from African dialects, the vernacular of some North African immigrant French rappers displays a rich linguistic dexterity ..."⁴² The form of hip hop might be global, but often the language being employed is uniquely local – even when the 'local' is a changeable hybrid composition.

It is evident that language is only one portion of the composition making up contemporary global hip hop. The genre also involves a high degree of musical syncretism. As hip hop artists employ digital samplers to make music, a distinct 'cut and paste' collage-type style emerges in the sound. Tricia Rose has noted that rap is in part a "means of archival research," and "a process of musical and cultural archaeology."⁴³ Within global hip hop, musical syncretism frequently takes the form of blending hip hop elements with traditional (or local) forms of music. For instance, Wax describes how Senegalese hip hop artists have blended rap with traditional drumming.⁴⁴ She also notes how these contemporary hip hop-influenced griots blend local village music with jazz and rock music.⁴⁵ Androutsopoulos and Scholz have observed that in all of the European countries they considered (France, Germany,

Italy, Greece and Spain), rap musicians blended samples of American and local music.⁴⁶ They add that the musical elements were drawn from, “traditional folk music, contemporary popular music, mass media samples and even poetry.”⁴⁷ Similar mixes of folk music and rap have been observed in Turkish music.⁴⁸ Describing artists in Cuba, Hernandez and Garofalo write, “... rappers have sought to indigenize rap by adding Cuban rhythms and instruments.”⁴⁹ This phenomenon of mixing the old and new can also be heard on some Aboriginal hip hop songs in North America.⁵⁰ It seems certain that there is a dual purpose involved in such combinations of music. On the one hand, there is an observable demonstration of pride in place and cultural heritage. On the other hand, by using technology and American musical influences, many of these artists want to emphasize that they are contemporary musicians. In a way, they are negotiating a complex and layered identity that is simultaneously looking to the past and the future.

Perhaps it is not surprising that the hip hop which employs elements of traditional music prompts a degree of generational conflict. While younger people may see the genre as a way to respect, or even perpetuate, their distinct history and culture, it is unlikely this view is shared by all generations within communities. Hip hop is frequently tied to both misogyny and images such as gangsterism within American popular culture, and is frequently seen by older generations as, at best, obstructive, and at worst, dangerous. When describing the hip hop-influenced Senegalese griots, Emily Wax writes that they, “still sing family songs, but that they also write about contemporary issues that older generations have avoided ... lyrics about HIV, marrying outside caste and homosexuality.”⁵¹ It is certain that many of the younger griots want to be both linked to their ancestors and at the same time, distinct from those who went before. Again we see a clear desire to demonstrate

contemporariness. A senior griot tells Wax how he realizes that the younger generation needs to carve out a unique identity, but that he hopes they don't completely discard their culture, stating, "We hope some middle ground emerges."⁵² These comments are particularly interesting if one holds the belief that griots are a key root in hip hop music. A similar generational conflict can be found in hip hop music that employs chants and phrases from the Qur'an. The Bradford, England-based group Fun-Da-Mental reports that many orthodox Muslims in their community believe that it is prohibited to link passages from the Qur'an with dance music.⁵³ For the group, a mix of hip hop and Islam provides a medium by which youth can negotiate a contemporary identity – one that involves resistance to pressures coming from both older members of the immediate community and the larger British society.⁵⁴

Given the urban/ghetto roots of American hip hop, it is perhaps inevitable that the musical genre would be, at least in part, associated with protest and resistance. This is not to say that all hip hop music is protest music – the genre has a wide spectrum and covers a variety of topics. However, there has been a distinct global trend toward using hip hop as a platform for dissent. David Brooks notes, "American ghetto life, at least as portrayed in rap videos, now defines for the young, poor and disaffected what it means to be oppressed."⁵⁵ The Palestinian rap group DAM has drawn direct parallels between their perceptions of harsh ghetto life in America and their own danger-filled living conditions.⁵⁶ Additionally, the notion of hip hop encompassing strong elements of social dissent has been emphasized by the media, as many recent articles on the demonstrations in Paris have quoted hip hop artists and highlighted the content of current songs.⁵⁷ Significantly the rap industry in France is largely made of individuals who are either African or Arab.⁵⁸ A study on rap music

in France reveals that over half of the music emerging can be classified as ‘protest’ music.⁵⁹

The links between rap and protest can be traced to many other global applications of hip hop. For instance, it has been noted that hip hop in South Africa emerged as part of the protest movement against apartheid.⁶⁰ There is evidence that hip hop is still linked to protest and dissent with the country. Lee Watkins notes, “Presently, hip hop is still in the forefront of raising the concerns of those who feel excluded from various domains of power.”⁶¹ Similar voices of protest can be found in many songs sung by Aboriginal hip hop artists living within Canada. In their song ‘This Land Was Ourz’ (sic), the Native group War Party makes reference to land appropriations and the legacy of residential schools. The song contains a rhyme which questions the ‘official’ version of colonial history which states, “This was his story, because my story is red – from the blood of my people ...”⁶²

It has been noted in most of the academic writing about hip hop music that women have been marginalized within the genre. This is not to say that there have not been a multitude of female artists – in fact some of the pioneering rappers in the United States were women. However, it seems safe to say that the genre (which is frequently associated with strongly masculine images) has been largely dominated by male producers and performers. In their study of European rappers, Androutsopoulos and Scholz have noted that, like in the United States, males control the rap scene. Some of the same barriers that exist within the United States exist in other countries as well. While there are female rappers in South Africa, Watkins reports that women are often discouraged from participating in activities that are strongly associated with “street culture.”⁶³ However, in Cuba there are a number of mixed groups (featuring male and female performers) as well as several all female rap groups.⁶⁴ Describing

how women artists in Japan are challenging traditional notions of gender, Halifu Osumare writes, “When rap aesthetics and hip hop style are embraced, the acquiescence implicit in the ascribed ‘place’ of the female is often contested by the signifier of rebellious youth.”⁶⁵ Notably, within Canada there are a number of female rappers who are of First Nations or Métis descent. One of the more successful performers is a rapper from the Muskoday First Nation named Eekwol (pronounced equal). Her views demonstrate how artists often wrestle with both self identity and the labels which are put on them. In a recent interview, Eekwol commented: “I don’t strive to be known as a ‘Native’ or ‘female’ emcee because, predominantly, I’m a hip-hop artist.”⁶⁶

It needs to be stressed that many global hip hop artists and admirers see their roles extending beyond mere dissent. As with some of the early artists in the United States, there is a conception that the role of rappers is to be educators for younger generations. Chuck D of Public Enemy frequently gives lectures about race and identity, and has often referred to rap as the ‘black CNN’. This notion of rap as both educational and a form of alternative media can also be seen on the global stage. Commenting on the intentions of Fun-Da-Mental, Swedenberg writes, “Islam instills religioethnic pride among Asian youth, serves as an image of antiracist mobilization, creates links between Asians and Afro-Caribbeans, and shocks and educates white leftists and alternative youths.”⁶⁷ In Italy it has been noted that many of the mainstream rap artists serve a role in educating young people about such issues such as safe sex and drugs.⁶⁸ At the same time, formal educators in various parts of the world have adopted hip hop as a way in which to teach and motivate young people. Some educators have recently made the case that hip hop can be used as a way to both examine linguistic concepts and promote literacy.⁶⁹ Morrell and Duncan-Ardrade

argue that “Hip-hop texts are rich in imagery and metaphor and can be used to teach irony, tone, diction, and point of view,” adding they can be studied for “motif, plot and character development.”⁷⁰ They also note that engagement with such texts can promote critical thinking.⁷¹ Instructors working in the Maritime Provinces of Canada have described the potential benefits of using hip hop to teach (and sensitize) teachers about race issues and the divides between urban and rural populations.⁷² In Germany, the Berlin Senate has spent three million marks in an effort to inform social workers about the existence of Kurd and Turkish rappers within Germany.⁷³

In many ways the globalization of rap music is both altering the genre and reflecting changes within the hip hop movement within the United States. Murray Forman has noted that many regionalizing trends have already occurred in American hip hop. In the late 1980s he observed that there was a tendency to move away from songs that described the ‘ghetto’ (a general term) toward songs about ‘hoods’ (specific locations).⁷⁴ Many of the songs emerging during this period emphasized the distinction of place. Being true to your neighborhood, and loyal to your cultural roots, was increasingly seen as an aspect of authenticity.⁷⁵ Even when neighborhoods were critiqued for their negative aspects (crime, poverty etc.) there was still a degree of pride evident in the ways they were being described. Mitchell notes that, “Even as a universally recognized popular musical idiom, rap continues to provide attention to local specificities.”⁷⁶ Forman has also noticed that this shift toward the local has also changed the way music is being made. He notes that there has been a shift back to period reminiscent of the 1920s and 30s, when music was often regionally produced for distinct local markets.⁷⁷ This ‘glocal’ notion would seem to challenge conceptions of globalization that merely point to an increased homogenization of culture. If the medium of rap has become a world-wide art form it seems that the reaction to this

popularity is an increased emphasis on particulars and difference. Perhaps this is why Forman refers to rappers as “alternative cartographers.”⁷⁸

Industry and Technology

One of the interesting questions about hip hop is whether or not it has maintained its force as social critique in light of its immense popularity. Is it possible for a genre that was selling over 80 million CDs and tapes per year in the late 1990s to represent something other than the hegemonic status of the American entertainment industry? Sheila Whiteley has observed that, “As a form of resistance rap ... appears contradictory, due largely to its heavily mediated commercial presence worldwide.”⁷⁹ Music journalist Dick Hebdige has described an occurrence that he calls ‘recuperation’ whereby forms of musical resistance are commodified, domesticated and absorbed by the larger (dominant) culture.⁸⁰ In this view originating ideas and innovations are both neutralized and “frozen”⁸¹ While acknowledging the considerable success of rap within the United States, Mitchell bluntly talks about how the genre’s “rhetorical conventions and tropes have become increasingly atrophied, clichéd, and repetitive.”⁸² It is perhaps for this reason that many global rap artists actively draw inspiration from rap music of the late 1980s – the (real or imagined) ‘golden era’ of political hip hop music. In addition many hip hop groups continue to form and develop their own independent recording labels and publications.⁸³ Artists engaged in global hip hop continue to be both influenced by the marketing behind hip hop (how they originally were exposed to the music), and reacting against its current (hyper-commodified) incarnation.

Clearly several aspects of technology have been involved in the spread of hip hop music around the world. Prior to the Internet, satellite television was perhaps the biggest factor as American music videos and films were broadcast around the world. Furthermore, digital technology made producing rap more affordable (and less reliant on formal musical training) than other forms of music. To an extent, hip hop invites participation – especially in its freestyle (a cappella) form when rappers merely need a voice and an opinion rather than instruments. The Internet has drastically changed both the time and space involved in music making. The network has made new forms of interaction possible – including the potential (via file swapping) for artists to record duets with other performers they may have never met and who might live in other regions of the world. In many ways music, as a commodity, has made a transformation from the tangible (album or CD) to the intangible (a computer file). Of course one is left to ponder the commercial implications of music in an era where it can increasingly be found in the (digital) public domain. Is music valued more because of its increased volume and accessibility, or is it valued less because of its increased volume and accessibility (which frequently no longer comes with a price attached)?

Recently, interactive music and video sharing websites such as MySpace and YouTube have provided platforms on which both aspiring and established artists can post their music. These sites have enabled musicians (particularly those without record contracts) to seek out and develop fan bases. For instance, Aboriginal hip hop artists in Canada have promoted entire tours of the United States via on-line activity. In addition, many musicians have their own websites which feature both song and video samples. However, as such hosting websites as YouTube are acquired by larger corporations, it remains to be seen how ‘free’ and accessible they will remain, and

whether or not new on-line alternatives continue to materialize. It should also be stressed that not all parts of the world have equal access to both electronic equipment and communication networks. For instance many rappers in Cuba report that their development has been stunted due to shortages in technical equipment and the high costs of making videos.⁸⁴ This observation reminds us that access to technology (like hip hop itself) might be in the process of becoming increasingly global, but it also has localized (and economic) implications.

Conclusion

It seems certain that hip hop is part of an emerging global alliance that has highly localized elements. In the introduction to Global Noise, Tony Mitchell writes, “Hip-hop and rap cannot be viewed as an expression of African American culture; it has become a vehicle for global youth affiliations and a tool for reworking local identity all over the world.”⁸⁵ Perhaps most appropriately, Halifu Osumare describes the “connective marginalities of the hip hop globe.”⁸⁶ Contemporary hip hop is a variety of musical and cultural hybridization – a form of music that plays on (and tries to balance) both similarities and difference. It is both modern and traditional and an on-going negotiation between the local and the global. It simultaneously looks to the past and the future. By mixing and matching instruments and voices, it both perpetuates old traditions and develops new ones. At the same time, many of the debates within postmodern discourse (regarding the role of folklore, identity and fragmentation) are evident – and inconclusive. However, the music is oral proof that both culture and music are mutable and interactive rather than static and homogenous. Encompassing international industry, independent cultural activity and various points

in-between, hip hop is both a part of economic globalization and a challenge to its assumptions.

NOTES

¹ This is a revised version of a research paper of the same title prepared in December 2006 for PSCI 5501, Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, Fall 2006 - Other Worlds, Other Globalisations.

² George Lipsitz quoted by David Brackett, "Where's It At: Postmodern Theory and the Contemporary Music Field", Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 221.

³ Nan Ellen, Postmodern Urbanism (Cambridge Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), p. 117.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁵ Jeff Chang, Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), pp. 21-39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

⁷ Emily Wax, "Shunning Griot Customs, Senegalese Youth Gave Story Telling A New Spin", The Washington Post, October 27 2006, A15.

⁸ Chuck D, lecture, "Rap, Race, Reality and Technology", Algonquin College, Ottawa Canada, September 26, 2005.

⁹ Dick Hebdige, Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 136.

¹⁰ See Henry Louis Gates Jr., The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 94-97.

¹¹ Adam Krims, Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 112.

¹² Russell Potter, Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁴ Russell Potter, "Not the Same: Race, Repetition, and Difference in Hip-Hop and Dance Music", Mapping the Beat: Popular Music and Contemporary Theory (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 41.

¹⁵ Tricia Rose, "A Style Nobody Can Deal With: Politics, Style and the Postindustrial City in Hip Hop", Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture (New York: Routledge: 1994), p. 76-77.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Various artists, Rapper's Delight: The Best of Sugar Hill Records (CD – Sugar Hill Records, 1994).

¹⁸ Rose, Microphone Fiends, p. 70.

¹⁹ Jeffrey Louis Decker, "The State of Rap: Time and Place in Hip Hop Nationalism", Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture (New York: Routledge: 1994), p. 106.

²⁰ Robert Walser, "Rhythm, Rhyme, and Rhetoric in the Music of Public Enemy", Ethnomusicology, Vol. 39, No. 2, 1995, p. 197.

²¹ Decker, p. 100.

²² Deborah Pacini Hernandez & Reebee Garofalo, "The Emergence of Rap Cubano: An Historical Perspective", Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity (Burlington Vermont: Ashgate, 2004), p. 99.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁴ See the recording Lady Sovereign – Public Warning (CD – Def Jam Recordings, 2006)

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Jaqueline Urla, "We Are All Malcolm X!: Negu Gorriak, Hip-Hop and the Basque Political Imaginary", Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA (Middletown Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), p. 171.

²⁷ Tony Mitchell, "Doin' Damage In My Native Language: The use of 'Resistance Vernaculars' in hip hop in Europe and Aotearoa/New Zealand", Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity (Burlington Vermont: Ashgate, 2004), p. 119.

²⁸ CBC Radio One, The Current, October 06, 2006.

²⁹ Halifu Osumare, "Beat Street in the Ghetto Hood: Connective Marginalities of the Hip Hop Globe", Journal of American & Comparative Cultures, Vol. 24, No. 1 & 2, 2001, p. 178.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

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- ³¹ Urla, p. 171.
- ³² CBC Radio One - *The Current*
- ³³ Hernandez & Garofalo, P. 103.
- ³⁴ Jannis Androutsopoulos & Arno Scholz, "Spaghetti Funk: Appropriations of Hip-Hop culture and Rap Music in Europe", Popular Music and Society, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2003, p. 468.
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