

Living the Hiplife: Celebrity and Entrepreneurship in Ghanaian Popular Music. Jesse Weaver Shipley. 2013. London and Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 329pp.

Ghanaian music – diverse, vibrant and irreducibly global from time immemorial – has been a staple of African musical scholarship for almost a century. And it continues to stimulate the imagination of scholars writing from a rather diverse set of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives, as exemplified by Steven Friedson’s *Remains of Ritual: Northern Gods in a Southern Land* or Steven Feld’s *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra*, to name but a few titles. Yet in Ghana, as much as in the rest of Africa, nothing quite so much captures the minds and ears of listeners as does hip-hop.

And those of scholars too. *Hip Hop Africa*, a collection of essays curated by Eric Charry; *The Hiplife in Ghana: West African Indigenization of Hip-Hop* by Halifu Osumare, *Native Tongues: An African Hip-hop Reader* edited by P. Khalil Saucier; and Mwenda Ntarangwi’s *East African Hip Hop: Youth Culture and Globalization* are just some of the more visible examples illustrating the enormous interest of hip-hop to African musical scholarship. Anthropologist Jesse Weaver Shipley’s study is the latest addition to this literature and it is also the first major work on African hip-hop rooted in ethnography. Above all, however, it is the most compelling attempt to date to critically examine hip-hop’s ambivalent position in a vastly changed political, cultural and musical landscape defined by the potentials and hazards of the free market.

The scope of *Living the Hiplife* is impressive. Based on multi-sited research in Accra, London and New York, its eight chapters trace the early origins of hiplife in Ghanaian highlife and hip-hop (a fusion that initially met with considerable skepticism from the country’s elite as being too “foreign” and of questionable morals), follow hiplife star Reggie Rockstone as his education and professional career took him from the UK to Accra; explore the subtle if infrequent use of hiplife in political satire; or examine male hiplife performers’ authoritative status against the background of misogyny and sexual violence against female rappers. But rather than summarize the contents of each chapter, a few words about some of the key issues at stake are in order.

The most important analytic category for Shipley is value – aesthetic, moral, linguistic and economic value – and its transformation in fluid circuits of exchange and social reproduction. Inherently unstable, these circuits turn performers into hustlers who constantly have to navigate a blurred terrain between legitimate and illicit forms of value production while they seek to increase the potential of their celebrity status to act as a mode of producing value. Thus it is that aesthetic and commercial practices merge to the point of becoming inextricably intertwined in a logic of artistic entrepreneurship. The aesthetic practices of hiplife artists, as Shipley convincingly argues, are of the same order as those values that mark good entrepreneurs. The downside of these “new systems of moral-aesthetic valuation” is that the individual freedom that was formally gained in the wake of decolonization is increasingly becoming aligned with market-driven criteria of taste. “Without the sheen of market value audiences remain suspicious of aesthetic worth.”

Another major topic is the production of fame as a result of the adroit manipulation of language and style in expressive forms such as music, oratory and dress. Yet in a country such as Ghana, where traditional patterns of authority based on age and gender have not completely dissolved, the freedom of personal expression celebrated by hiplife is a double-edged sword. While virtuoso flowing and rapping allow marginalized youths to claim authoritative public stances, such demonstrations of linguistic prowess and self-reflexivity – interwoven with more formal oratory imparting traditional wisdom and moral exhortation – can also be viewed as disciplinary practices. Flanked by narratives extolling the virtues of self-fashioning through mobility, hard work and success hiplife performances organize power relationships and hierarchies of value derived from and feeding into neo-liberal ideology.

The black diaspora, inevitably, is Shipley's third focal point. Although hip-hop counts among the most visible (and audible) signs of the pervasiveness of global cultural flows, young Ghanaians' appreciation of hip-hop is subject to a local-global dialectic that has been one of Ghanaian music's most enduring sources of vitality throughout the twentieth century. But although such diasporic flows are one, if not the defining feature of Ghanaian popular culture, they cannot be reduced to a mere mimetic relationship in which Africa is figured as a place of origin and African American expressive culture in turn functions as the measure of all things modern. To overcome this dichotomy Shipley invokes what he calls a "third term." This implies the ability to replicate power not by inverting it as in nationalist attempts to upset dichotomies of colonizer and colonized while maintaining the binary logic, but by crafting entirely novel forms of mediation and control out of widely dispersed traditions. Thus, while in contrast to their African American peers for whom hip-hop is an indicator of ghetto toughness, young Ghanaians initially associated hip-hop with cosmopolitanism. But as more young people of Ghanaian descent grew up in London or New York this positive attitude toward upward mobility hardened into a more rebellious stance against racial and class exclusion.

For all its theoretical astuteness and rhetorical bravado, however, *Living the Hiplife* does raise a number of questions. There is, for instance, the chemistry of ethnographic representation. Shipley's account is framed by two types of narrative. The first are lengthy discussions of hiplife's broader theoretical significance for the issues mentioned above. Often repetitive and resembling a long staccato of ponderous promulgations this type of narrative stands in marked contrast to (often extended) quotes from interviews and conversations with key hiplife artists. But there is little in between. For instance, with few exceptions, other scholars' work is frequently referenced but seldom engaged at a deeper level. An example of this is Shipley's concept of circulation and its mediation through digital technology. Yet while he refers the reader to a rich literature on technologies of mediation, both the arguments made in this literature and the everyday, practical dimensions of digital audio production in the ethnographic present of Accra remain somewhat elusive. What exactly are the discrepancies between some of the more modest home-studio facilities visible in several photographs and the kind of

tech-savvy citizen routinely held up as the ideal model of cosmopolitan identity? How might the uneven technological basis for celebrity status in the West and in the global South complicate or even undermine Afropolitan models of self-fashioning?

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The Dance of Politics: Gender, Performance, and Democratization in Malawi. Lisa
Gilman. 2009. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 252 pp.

In this work, Lisa Gilman explores the historical use of women's song and dance in the Malawian political sphere. Through ethnographic experiences, historical research, and interviews, the author discusses how the practices of women song leaders have had an enduring impact on women's political participation, gender parity and power relations. Gilman demonstrates how women have garnered support for political parties and candidates, through the performance of song and dance at political rallies. Though women have had much to gain through participation in these rallies (including material gifts, the creation of social bonds, and opportunities to articulate political opinions within a sanctioned space), Gilman reveals that participation in these events reinforces the existing patriarchal system that disenfranchises women. Throughout the work, Gilman exposes how female praise performers negotiate these contradictory