
REVIEWS

Hip Hop in Africa: Prophets of the City and Dustyfoot Philosophers. Msia Kibona Clark, 2018. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press. 25 illustrations b&w, bibliography, index, 266 pp.

From South Africa, to Senegal, Somalia and beyond, Msia Kibona Clark's *Hip-hop in Africa: Prophets of the City and Dustyfoot Philosophers* offers an extensive record of African hip-hop by examining the historical, cultural, and political influences that form the foundation of African hip-hop. Published as part of the series, *Research in International Studies, Global and Comparative Studies*, from Ohio University's Center for International Studies, Clark's work demonstrates how African hip-hop produces diverse cultural representations from artists across the continent while simultaneously contributing to the construction of a global African identity. While acknowledging hip-hop's origins in African American culture in the United States, Clark makes strong claims for recognising hip-hop as historically rooted in Africa, and for an African hip-hop genre that stands on its own.

In Chapter One, "Boomerang," Clark argues that hip-hop music created by Africans in Africa, as well as in the African diaspora, is as authentic as the forms created by African American artists in the USA. Clark states, "Some argue that hip-hop music is African only if artists are performing in local languages and over African rhythms. These arguments narrow the definition of hip-hop to simply a focus on music, ignoring the culture that surrounds African hip-hop" (11). Clark develops this point by discussing the prevalence in African culture of lyricism with rhyme in multiple languages, particularly Wolof; traditions of East African poetry/poets in countries like Somalia or Tanzania; and the history of griot culture across Western Africa, which she likens to a modern-day emcee. Clark also affirms the authenticity of African hip-hop forms by demonstrating how African artists faithfully adhere to a major principle of hip-hop-representation. That is, by locating their work within their own cultural worlds. Clark points to early African hip-hop pioneers such as, Kwanza Unit and De-Plow-Matz in Tanzania, Kenyan artist Hardstone, and Ghanaian artists Reggie Rockstone and Talking Drums (to name a few), who have all contributed to establishing African hip-hop as a product of local African communities rather than purely imitation of American forms. Clark characterises these artists' works as not only speaking to a local hip-hop audience, but contributing to global hip-hop discourses, and even inspiring the creation of new musical genres in Africa.

Chapter Two, "Understand Where I'm Coming From," traces the origins of modern African hip-hop to the late 1980s and the political and economic strife facing many African communities that led to governmental acceptance of foreign support in exchange for enacting neoliberal economic policies in various countries across the continent. Such policies contributed to the urbanisation/ghettoisation of major African cities and consequently the appeal of hip-hop music as a means to respond to how said

policies pushed people into economic despair. Clark presents modern African hip-hop as both a response to the lived realities of African youth, and a platform for engaging in social and political commentary and at times, activism. Whether by challenging apartheid in South Africa (Prophets of da City) or organising protests in Burkina Faso (Smockey) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Filimbi), African hip-hop artists have readily and regularly engaged in political and social dissent since the beginning. This chapter also looks at the progression of hip-hop into mainstream African culture, and the subsequent development of related cultural forms such as, fashion, graffiti, breakdancing, and online platforms. Like the Matatu workers of Nairobi who provide transportation for millions in buses decorated with graffiti and cruising to hip-hop music, or the online hip-hop platforms such as, OkayAfrica.com or ThisIsAfrica.me, Clark makes a case for the ubiquitous presence of hip-hop culture in spaces of African life.

In Chapter Three, "Lettre à Mr le Président," Clark takes Frantz Fanon's theory of protest and combat literature and applies it to contemporary African hip-hop artists. She likens early hip-hop in Africa to an imitation or assimilative phase in which artists took African American forms and recreated them in their own understanding. However, most of the chapter examines the strong degree of "protest literature" which she describes as a direct, albeit peaceful attack on various forms of oppression as a means to develop social-consciousness amongst the populace. Some of the protest music Clark highlights is linked to actual political events, including presidential elections in various countries in Africa, but this section mostly focuses on themes of corruption, migration, foreign exploitation, neoliberal economic policies, and human rights found in the genre. There is only a brief section on "combat literature" which she explains, according to Fanon's work, as music written directly to the people to incite their participation in combating their oppressive conditions. She highlights artists from Senegal, Burkina Faso, and South Africa as the main producers of combat literature. In Senegal, for example, artists contributed to the creation and spread of the *Y'en a Marre* movement, or "Enough is Enough," which forced then president Wade to rescind certain proposed changes to electoral laws, and later worked to register and mobilise the youth vote which prevented Wade from a third term.

In Chapter Four, "Femme de Combat," the author discusses the role of women in African hip-hop as key to presenting otherwise hidden narratives of life on the African continent that male artists mostly ignore. By employing "braggadocio" as a key element in their work, female artists produce feminised narratives in a mostly male-dominated genre and artistic space. Through these narratives, female artists contest representations of women while also presenting authentic, everyday experiences of women across the continent. This chapter also addresses the embodied representation of femininity that female artists must negotiate in the African hip-hop world, such as choosing to either resist or embrace a sexualised representation of themselves. There are examples of those who fully resist being sexualised and focus on the power of their words, such as Kanyi of South Africa, and others like Mzbel of Ghana who toe the line

yet often end up being criticised for it. Clark claims that the debates on this topic often obfuscate the agency of female artists by assuming they are engaging in some type of clichéd identity as women of hip-hop. Ultimately, this chapter makes a strong case for the claim that “female artists in Africa represent their communities, womanhood, and hip-hop in varying and legitimate ways” (147). While their representations may be either supported or challenged, Clark recognises that these artists are inextricably linked to their environments and therefore authentically representing local discourses on womanhood and femininity.

Finally, in Chapters Five and Six, “Make You No Forget,” and “Brkn Lngwzjz,” Clark uses anthropological discourses on transnationalism, diasporic and Pan-African identities, and language ideologies to dive more deeply into the artistry and identity of African emcees across the globe. Chapter Five focuses on African immigrant emcees whose work presents common themes of immigrant life in the USA, such as the myth of the American Dream, issues of legality, and working at low wage jobs. The discussion later expands to include the often difficult nature of immigrant identity-having to live a hybrid life, an in-between-ness, which often includes loneliness and a nostalgic view towards one’s homeland. She primarily focuses on artists such as K’naan, M.anifest and Wanlov the Kubolor in this section, and later links them to a segment on “Afropolitanism.” Afropolitans, according to Clark, are multicultural in both lifestyle and expression and often considered part of the African elite. In hip-hop, however, they present a counternarrative to common negative tropes of African identity. In Chapter Six, Clark’s examination of identity is deepened by a focus on artists’ language choices in African hip-hop. African emcees contribute to the representation of a pan-African identity by resisting dominant language ideologies and promoting/representing local languages. However, they also strategically and creatively utilise their multilingual abilities to reach across the globe and engage in global hip-hop discourses by including European languages and forms of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) or Hip-Hop Nation Language (HHNL).

In this book, Clark states that she “takes a more constructionist approach, looking at how hip-hop, as a cultural representation, constructs certain narratives for its audiences,” particularly in “understandings of political institutions, social change, gender, migration, and identity in Africa” (2). *Hip Hop in Africa* accomplishes such an aim, and its core strength lies in demonstrating that among African immigrants in the USA and Europe, and African artists across the African continent, emcees are constructing and contributing to the discourse on what it means to be “African” in a globalised world. Furthermore, this book explores other central questions and themes, including: Is hip-hop music “African”? To what extent does African hip-hop borrow from African American artists rather than establishing its own artistic foundation? What is unique about hip-hop lyricism by African artists, and how is it locally presented/represented? In what ways do African hip-hop artists contribute to culture, politics, and change? Finally, how can examining African hip-hop contribute to an understanding of African life, language, culture, politics, gender, and music?

This extensive work on African hip-hop not only provides the reader with an introduction to some of the most famous artists and works coming out of Africa, such as the titular artists of Prophets of da City and K'naan ("dustyfoot philosopher"), but also has scholarly links in linguistic anthropology, cultural anthropology, gender and migration studies, as well as more broadly to socio-political movements in Africa. Furthermore, the book includes beautiful photographic portraits of many artists across Africa created by the author herself, and a companion website that provides chapter summaries, an index of all represented artists with links to their social media sites, and links to other sites and resources in the African hip-hop genre. The sheer ambition of the work- discussing an art form on an entire continent- however, can at times leave the reader wanting more from the cultural analyses on topics such as gender, transnational identities, and language ideologies. The book would also benefit from an introductory chapter, or a methodology section, which would likely do justice to the assumed depth and breadth of this research. Notwithstanding, this book will prove valuable for students and scholars at any level who are interested in Pan-Africa or African diaspora studies, cultural anthropology, hip-hop studies, and perhaps even discourse analysis. As a researcher on diasporic and transnational identity in the field of education, I found the discussions of hybrid identities and language ideologies particularly aligned with the current scholarly discourse in these areas, which signifies and reinforces the interdisciplinary approach Clark took to ground her arguments.

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