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| African Hip-Hop |
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| There are several features that distinguish African Hip Hop Music from the genre's American origins. Principal targets of its social critique such as disenfranchisement and social discrimination are obviously based on different grounds in Africa than in the (once) racially separated United States or in Europe. Moreover, certain strata of the continent's educated youth, with sufficient leisure time and access to foreign media, have played an instrumental role in its rapid spread and development since the 1990s. This decisively urban connection underlines African Hip Hop's role as a compelling cultural icon of transnational and sociopolitical modernity: the adoption and adaptation of a broad conglomerate of music, dance, protest culture, idioms and fashion-trends allowed various generations of young (male) Africans to assume a simultaneously black and cosmopolitan identity. |
| There are several features that distinguish African Hip Hop Music from the genre's American origins. Principal targets of its social critique such as disenfranchisement and social discrimination are obviously based on different grounds in Africa than in the (once) racially separated United States or in Europe. Moreover, certain strata of the continent's educated youth, with sufficient leisure time and access to foreign media, have played an instrumental role in its rapid spread and development since the 1990s. This decisively urban connection underlines African Hip Hop's role as a compelling cultural icon of transnational and sociopolitical modernity: the adoption and adaptation of a broad conglomerate of music, dance, protest culture, idioms and fashion-trends allowed various generations of young (male) Africans to assume a simultaneously black and cosmopolitan identity.  However, the creation of new styles such as South-African Kwaito, Ghanaian Hiplife, Kenyan Genge, Tanzanian Bongo Flava or Ugandan Lugaflow, as well as the further development of Francophone rap models in linguistically like-minded Senegal, neither permits a sharp distinction between Hip-Hop as a (sub)cultural lifestyle and Rap as (artistic) practice, nor must it be confused with eventually commercialized expressions of gangsterism in marginalized suburbs. Ghanaian Hiplife, for instance, initially thrived in a couple of renowned boarding schools, whose peculiar atmosphere allowed students to display a blending of slang expressions with a highly versatile code-mixing between Twi and English during entertainment or sport competitions. In other countries, breakdance imitations (South Africa and Senegal) or youth festivals and competitions (Kenya and Tanzania) were crucial for the early consolidation of Hip-Hop in Africa, which initially faced stiff opposition from elders and more traditional minded elites.  This criticism has often fostered the emphasis of ‘imagined commonalities’ with both pre-colonial African traditions and the communicative features of earlier types of Popular Music such as Afrobeat and Highlife: through the increasing use of indigenous languages, globally spread images of ‘gangsterism’ could on the one hand be tamed and combined with educational campaigning, religious messages, political propaganda and (post)-proverbial speech or morality tales. Old school social critique on the other hand became — for instance in South Africa — increasingly sidelined by deliberate displays of affluence and black consumerism. The route from a non-recording ‘underground’ artist to (inter)national fame nevertheless remains a challenging one. African Hip Hop has never produced or relied on overhyped superstars such as Tupac Shakur, 50 Cent, and Kanye West in America. Rather, its early pioneers such as Prophets of Da City (South-Africa), Reggie Rockstone (Ghana) or Positive Black Soul of Senegal were eventually joined and to some extent sidelined by a second and third generation of rap-artists. Unlicensed copies and downloads are yet another obstacle for sustainable commercial success, though they willy-nilly uphold the importance of live gigs as a major source of a musician's income. Whose Modernity and Whence Origins? In his widely quoted *Black Atlantic* (1993) Paul Gilroy describes the emergence of Hip-Hop and Rap in the New York of the late 1970's as a prolific cross-fertilization of African American cultures with their Caribbean counterparts. The focus on the genre's hybrid and essentially non-essential character prompted the renowned black British cultural theorist to downplay somewhat shallow and yet continuously invoked connections to (West) African performing traditions: his highly influential book neither considers Africa as a performative source nor acknowledges the continent as a potential area of adherence to the genre. In this vein neither Popular Music Studies (in spite of an early awareness of rap's global extensions as varieties of an internationally malleable youth culture) nor mainstream (ethno)musicology paid more than passing attention to African rappers. (A casual glance at the 2004 and 2011 editions of Forman and Neal's seminal Hip Hop-Reader *That's the Joint* serves as an instructive case in point.) In more recent history, however, both the genre's sundry African origins and its prospective future are about to turn into a major bone of contention, that boils down to the confrontation of tradition's implicit modernity with modernity's explicit past.  Scholars have weighed and debated the importance of features such as speech melody, the presence of persistent rhythmical patterns and textual allusions in songs or story-telling to construe a direct link between African traditional music and Hip-Hop. However, there are (even by some of the artists themselves) also arguments against an all too neat and captivating narrative of Hip Hop's ‘boomeranging’ back to Africa. The genre's inherently oppositional stance, for instance, does not really concur with the affirmative function of griot's or jeli's praise appellations and thus points to a more general participation in a larger network of black orality. There is, after all, a considerable gap between an (ethno)musicological comparison of vocal rendition in rap and traditional performance, identity politics such as the transfer of semantically charged buzz-words like ‘griot’ to the US, and the coming to voice of the African youth within an existing fabric of social hierarchies and cultural conventions. Future Developments and Directions for Research Opinions are equally divided on the actual scope of the genre: in spite of some notable exceptions, African Hip-Hop remains a primarily male medium of expression; different perspectives on (street) authenticity and a somewhat narrow focus on its role within the protest movements against vastly different governments like that of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe or Abdoulaye Wade in Senegal leave considerable room for interpretation. Two essay-collections from 2011 and 2012 respectively, *Native Tongues,* edited by sociologist P. Khalil Saucier and *Hip Hop Afric*a, edited by musicologist Eric Charry, put particular emphasis on Hip-Hop's Africanisation as a broad and flexible spectrum of conversions and rearrangements. However, the trend towards overtly apolitical ‘crunky’ and danceable beat patterns has not been met with unanimous enthusiasm. Various contributors to a 2013 issue of the *Journal of Panafrican Studie*s put considerable efforts into erecting new barriers between forms of African Hip-Hop with stronger leanings to African-American models and its autochthonous adaptations.  Relatively few authors have (in the vein of Adam Bradley's groundbreaking *Book of Rhymes*) addressed the literary qualities of African Hip-Hop, and even fewer have ventured to study the practical interrelation of these lyrics, that in many languages coincide with tonal movements such as ‘downstep’ and ‘downdrift,’ with a multidimensional and signifying framework of beat-patterns and background sound. There is, thus, an increasing need to complement the knowledge on African Hip Hop's dissemination and its appropriation by a steadily growing cultural industry with more detailed attention to the genre's technical, artistic and musical dimensions. |
| Further reading:  Due to the limited available space this article offers a general overview on Hip-Hop's African extensions and thus has to refrain from the discussion of individual songs and artists. Their names can however be easily ascertained from the following selection of post-2000 books and articles. Essay Collections (Clark)  ( Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalising World)  (Native Tongues: The African Hip Hop Reader) Monographs (Ntarangwi)  (Osumare)  (Senghor)  (Weaver Shipley)  (Wetaba) Selected Other Articles (Barz and Liu)  (Cho)  (Fenn and Perullo)  (Gesthuizen and Haas)  (Keyes)  (Khan)  (Klein)  (Künzler, Beyond the Prophets of Da City. South African rap music, counter discourses, identity, and commodification)  (Künzler, The 'lost generation': African Hip Hop movements and the protest of the young (male) urban)  (Njang)  (Nyairo)  (Omoniyi)  (Perullo)  (Prestholt)  (Savedra Casco)  (Thompson)  (Watkins) |