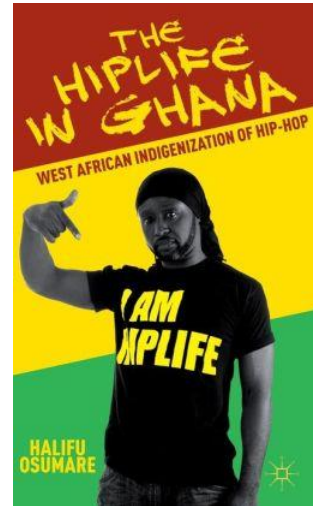


Halifu Osumare, **The Hiplife in Ghana: West Africa Indigenization of Hip-Hop**, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 219 pp., \$85.00 (hardcover).

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Ghana's music industry can be described as a thriving one, much like its film industry. The West African sovereign state is well on its way to becoming a force to reckon with on the international music market. With such contemporary rap artists as Sarkodie, Fuse ODG (Azonto), Reggie Rockstone, R2Bs, and Edem in its fold, Ghana's music is transcending borders and penetrating international markets. Historically, Ghana's varying ethnic groups, as well as its interaction with countries on the continent, greatly influences the genres of music that the country has created over the years. Traditionally, Ghana's music is geographically categorized by the types of musical instruments used: Music originating from the North uses stringed instruments and high-pitched voices; and music emanating from the Coast features drums and relatively low-pitched voice intermissions.



Up until the 1990s, "highlife" was the most popular form of music in Ghana, borrowing from jazz, swing, rock, soukous, and mostly music to which the colonizers had listened. Highlife switched from the traditional form with drums to a music genre characterized by the electric guitar. "Burger-highlife" then erupted as a form of highlife generated by artists who had settled out of Ghana (primarily in Germany), but who still felt connected to the motherland through music, such as Ben Brako, George Darko, and Pat Thomas. By the late 1990s, however, some of the younger artists who had settled in the diaspora had introduced the "hiplife," a new music genre whose discovery is credited to Reggie Rockstone.

Hiplife is basically hip-hop that incorporates elements of highlife with lyrics in the local dialects. In ***The Hiplife in Ghana: West African Indigenization of Hip-Hop***, author Halifu Osumare guides readers through what can be categorized as the metamorphosis of the Ghanaian music industry, vis-à-vis the various adaptations of the music genre in the country. Ghana's music has gone through many changes, as noted, from music accompanying folklores to what is now termed hiplife. At the very onset of this music genre, critics—particularly the older generation who were much more accustomed to highlife music—were quick to identify the nonsensical pattern that characterized this genre. For most of the older generation, "kasahare,"—as rap was known locally—was a crazy venture, one not likely to attract listeners and fans, not because the lyrics did not make sense, but because its critics could not see how talking fast constituted music. Halifu's book tells a different story, covering the myths that have been associated with hiplife, its progression as a music genre, and the factors that have influenced it.

In her introduction, Osumare outlines the transnational influences on hiplife that transformed this particular music genre to one representing the epitome of musical inspiration drawn from all parts of the

world. What stands out is that hiplife speaks to the progress that the African continent, and in particular, Ghana has made with regard to creating this music genre and merging it into one's everyday existence to the extent that it is now an integral part of the lives of the indigenes. This type of immersion, for instance, is achieved through the various musical competitions that radio stations, television stations, private organizations, and even religious groups hold to rouse the interest of the youth and guide them to create music that is representative of their individuality. The "Zain's Jammin' Africa" show that Osumare mentions in her book is one such radio program.

The content of *The Hiplife in Ghana* is grouped into four distinct chapters that are designed to draw readers into a discourse that not only covers the empowering of the agency of youth—enabling them to own the music they create and to show their agency through their choice of lyrics and rhythm—but that also invites us to critically evaluate the role that corporate agencies and hegemony play in all of this. Of course, in any venture, corporations stand to win, playing out the age-old "we-are-here-to-help" card. The Globalization and "Boomerang Hypothesis" revolve around the exchange of ideas and concepts globally, and the assertion that hip-hop originated from the African continent. Osumare's use of these theories here highlights the importance of locality and globalization and also emphasizes the convolutions of the global-local dimensions of hiplife in the first chapter. This is important for the reader to know, because it plays directly into the origin of this music genre. As expatiated in the introduction of this review, whereas music from the diaspora has influenced the evolution of music in Ghana, it is, however, not the impelling factor that singly fueled the conception of this new music genre. The controversy may very well be fueled because the rhythms that most of the hiplife artists use are direct adaptations of hip-hop rhythms. For instance, the rhythm for Reggie Rockstone's "Keep Your Eyes on the Road" is a direct adaptation of American hip-hop artist Q-Tip's "Breathe and Stop." This does not, however, detract from these rhythms being adapted to reflect the local Ghanaian rhythm and culture.

Chapter 2 focuses on subculture theory, developed from cultural studies, and uses this theory as a basis to analyze the relationship between the elderly and the youth in the Ghanaian cultural context and how this contentious relationship affects the ability of young people to express their individuality. Hiplife tells stories about life, about traditions that are revered in the society like childbirth, marriage, and death, whereas to the elderly, the rhythm of hiplife itself denotes a lack of a storyline. Obviously, the youth do not share the same opinion, and in a society where the elderly are respected, it becomes somewhat difficult for young people to express their agency through their songs. Halifu covers this very well, elucidating this relationship, but not blaming either group, as both the elderly and the young are entitled to their views and opinions on hiplife.

In Chapter 3, Osumare covers important issues in a discourse on hiplife and indigenization in economics and sociopolitical contexts. The author identifies neoliberalism as the new form of colonization in the country and highlights the actions of some companies in Ghana, especially telecommunications companies that feed this modern form of capitalism by holding music competitions and inviting the youth to explore their talents as musicians while encouraging the general populace to vote for competitors in the show via phone-in or texting. Osumare also considers the potential for global exposure for the artists, noting MTV Base Africa and Channel O (South Africa) as some avenues for realizing this globalization idea. Indeed, some of the artists have an online presence with Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, or Instagram

accounts. The world is now an open market, and the sort of boundaries that were present in the 1990s are not present anymore. However, the author is accurate to point out the possibilities for both opportunities and threats to new artists in the music industry.

In the fourth and final chapter, the author explores the role of counterhegemony in the indigenization of hiplife. Citing Obour and Okyeame Kwame and their use of music to tackle political issues in the country. Anyone familiar with Ghanaian music will agree that these two artists turned heads with their songs about political activism and civic engagement. They not only tackle political issues in the country but economic and hegemonic issues as well, including the affairs of the Ghana Musicians Associations and the distribution of music. A common practice of "payola," where one has to pay to get one's song played on air was especially detrimental to the progress of the local artists. Obour tackled this issue in his songs and finally prompted rules about payola to be revamped in favor of the musician. New artists have taken his lead, using hiplife as a tool for political activism.

Osumare's book is a contemporary one, one of the few written that examines Ghanaian music. Jesse Weaver Shipley, associate professor of anthropology at Haverford College, has written on the culture of music in Ghana as well in *Living the Hiplife: Celebrity and Entrepreneurship in Ghanaian Popular Music*. Shipley tackles issues including, but not limited to, how Ghana youth use hiplife music as tools to help them create their identity and gain recognition in the society. Ghana's music industry continues to show promise and will continue to evolve to fit the needs of the young. Music is a part of the people of Ghana, a tradition, if you may. Osumare's assertions, arguments, and ease of writing makes *The Hiplife in Ghana* a must read for everyone who holds an interest in the music industry as it evolves in contemporary Africa, and in particular, in Ghana.

### References

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