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***HIP-HOP IN AFRICA: PROPHETS OF THE CITY AND DUSTYFOOT  
PHILOSOPHERS, MSIA KIBONA CLARK (2018)***

New York: New York University Press, xxi, 266 pp.,  
ISBN 978-0-89680-319-0, p/bk, \$32.95

*Reviewed by Catherine M. Appert, Cornell University*

Msia Kibona Clark's *Hip-Hop in Africa* is a significant and timely contribution to studies of African hip hop and to global hip hop studies more broadly. Interpreting her interviews with hip hop practitioners, her lyrical and cultural analyses and a wealth of secondary source materials through frameworks drawn from African studies, hip hop studies, feminist and gender studies and migration studies, Clark paints a picture of African hip hop that is at once sweeping in its breadth and carefully attentive to local specificity.

Clark considers the complex of practices that comprise hip hop culture – not only music but also graffiti, dance, media and fashion – both as a form of cultural representation that crafts narratives about sociopolitical realities and as a force that shapes those realities. As the title of the book makes clear, her account prioritizes the words and experiences of her interlocutors; positioning these in precise socio-historical contexts, she outlines the continental political and economic trends that created the conditions for the emergence of politicized hip hop culture throughout Africa. At the same time, she emphasizes the diversity of African hip hop, working across a multiplicity of sites in sub-Saharan Africa and its contemporary diasporas to develop a comparative analysis based on examples ranging from individual profiles of artists, lyrical analysis of songs and overviews of local scenes. Striking photographic portraits, taken by the author, fill the book's pages and underscore her definition of 'African hip hop' as tied to the identity of its practitioners.

Clark treats hip hop as an object of study in its own right and grounds her analysis in a deep understanding of hip hop as an African American cultural form and in foundational hip hop scholarship. At the same time, she shows how practitioners have claimed hip hop as African, whether through narratives that highlight the cross fertilization of diasporic music over centuries, or through current collaborations, both between Africa and the diaspora and also within Africa. She thus centres hip hop's US histories while giving as much space to intra-Africa hip hop connections as to Africa's relationship to African America. Her multi-sited methodology uniquely positions her to do this kind of work; indeed, the scope of her comparative frame is unparalleled in the scholarship on hip hop in Africa, providing a singular foundation for her discussion of topics ranging from protest, to feminism, to migration, to cultural appropriation.

Themes of protest and social change are, of course, common in global hip hop scholarship. Clark, however, undertakes a novel reading of African hip

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hop's history of protest and its relationship to the state through Franz Fanon's writing on national culture; she notes that such a reading is complicated by hip hop's status as a music of the colonized but also, in its commercial forms that circulate globally, a tool of neo-colonialism. In her treatment of 'combat music' – which she defines as music that addresses problems rather than just articulating them as protest – she shows how hip hop is more than a soundtrack to social change; hip hoppers are themselves *agents* of social change.

Clark's treatment of the relationship between African feminism and hip hop is equally rich. She reads hip hop feminism (as it has emerged in US hip hop scholarship), African hip hop and African feminisms together to highlight their points of connection and departure. She ultimately insists on the necessity of an African feminist grounding for any analysis of African women's distinct struggles in and beyond hip hop.

Particularly noteworthy is Clark's discussion of African migrant hip hoppers in the United States. Her discussion highlights significant generational differences between waves of migrants that are sometimes overlooked, and pulls apart the complicated relationship between transnationalism, Afropolitanism and pan-Africanism, with careful attention to questions of class, language and self-identification. She shows how, in its connection to locality, hip hop perhaps contradictorily becomes a tool of anti-assimilation and the guarding of African identities, cultures and aesthetics for emcees in diaspora. Broaching the controversial topic of appropriation between Africa and the diaspora, the book also includes an important discussion on language that includes emcees in Africa and transnational Africans living in diaspora. Clark brings scholarship on African languages into dialogue with scholarship on African American vernacular English to address both practical and ideological concerns that influence emcees' choices around language.

*Hip-Hop in Africa* is an important resource for scholars in music studies, sociology, linguistics and other fields whose research focuses on global hip hop, African hip hop, African popular culture or contemporary African migration. Clearly written and logically organized, it is well suited to undergraduate and graduate courses on an equally wide range of topics. Clark provides a primer on US hip hop along the way, making this a particularly useful text for courses in which students may be unfamiliar with hip hop history and issues. Her podcast, *The Hip Hop African* (Clark 2016–present), while not explicitly a supplement to the book, provides numerous artists' profiles and conversations that are easily and effectively used alongside *Hip-Hop in Africa* as a rich pedagogical resource.

In short, with this text, Clark achieves something that very few scholars could: she sketches a holistic picture of African hip hop as an identifiable phenomenon without ever losing sight of the specificity of local scenes, the singularity of individual artists and the significance of hip hop's US origins. In insisting always on a dual lens of hip hop studies and African studies, she explores the multifaceted hip hop connections between Africans and between African and African American people in ways that value practitioners' experiences without romanticizing diasporic connections at the expense of the real challenges African hip hop artists face in their lives and careers.

## REFERENCE

Clark, Msia Kibona (2016–present), *The Hip Hop African*, <https://hiphopafrican.com/>. Accessed 14 November 2021.