

Ghanaian Hip-life Rap Music as a Popular or Political Rap, and a Mixed Cultural Bag of Ghanaian High-life and North American Rap Music

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This article examines *Hip-Life*, a Ghanaian music genre, as a hybrid culture of *Highlife* (Ghanaian) and Rap (North American) music. It explores the themes in five popular hip-life hits as an attempt to identify some of the dominant and recurring themes in hip-life songs. I use the themes to determine whether hip-life songs fall into Boyd's categorization of rap music as *popular rap* (that is rap music that does not attack the social and political order) or *political rap* (rap music that challenges the social and political order). I also make the case that hip-life is influenced by North American rap in terms of its critical lyrical messages.

This article examines *hip-life*, a Ghanaian music genre, as a hybrid culture: a combination of traditional Ghanaian *highlife* and rap music. Rap music from the United States of America (U.S.A.) has become popular worldwide through the commercial activities of music-selling companies and music videos. Music sold by American and other international record labels have contributed to the spread and popularity of rap music to the extent that other cultures have developed their own rap music. Hip-life of Ghana is one such form of music. I attempt an explanation of hip-life as a cultural hybrid; a mixture of Ghanaian high-life music and rap music. I also examine the themes of five hip-life songs and use the themes to determine whether the songs fall into Boyd's categorization of rap music as popular rap—rap that does not attack the social and political order, or political rap—rap that challenges the social and political order. Most hip-life songs have lyrical messages that are usually analyzed by listeners. It constitutes over 80% of all music played on Ghanaian urban radio stations, some of which can be accessed online on the web sites like <http://music.galizur.com/> and <http://www.modernghana.com>.¹ Hip-life is described by Jesse Shipley, director of the Africana studies program at Bard College, as “a musical style...It's a way of combining rap, hip-hop and other musical traditions and different kinds of rhythms.” “But it's also a cultural style. It's an attitude. It's a way people express themselves. It's a way for the youth of Ghana to see themselves as public players” (Lee, 2007).

Cumming and Roy (2002) used the lyrics of African American rap music to discuss the rhetorical dimensions of Afrocentricism in music. Their study indicated that rap artists often link their concerns with African-American history and traditions in order to emphasize the importance of their own immediate experiences. Cumming and Roy (2002) pointed out that in conforming to the Afrocentric view of rhetoric; the objectives of rap artists seem to be to achieve stability and peace in their community. They further indicated the need for more intellectual analysis of such music in terms of its influence and connection to ancestral Africa. This paper does not address these issues but rather focuses on whether hip-life is hybrid music in terms of how similar it is to North American rap music, and whether hip-life can be categorized as popular or political rap.

Hip-Life as a Hybrid Culture

The emergence of hip-life is a continuation of the cultural evolution of Ghanaian music from its earliest forms of folk music as it existed among various Ghanaian ethnic groups. High-life is a form of Ghanaian music that originated from the innovative use of traditional Ghanaian musical instruments (drums, bells, vocals, etc.) alongside conventional musical instruments (like the guitar, keyboards, and wind instruments such as the saxophone and trumpet). The outcome of such innovation was the creation of two types of high-life music; the *dance band* and the *guitar band* music. These two types of high-life have developed different strands over the years. Since the late 1960s high-life has become everybody's music in Ghana, but what has become significant in the past 15 years is the emergence of hip-life. Hip-life has emerged on the Ghanaian musical scene as a hybrid of high-life and rap music. It emerged in the urban areas of Ghana especially in Accra and Kumasi². What has sustained hip-life is the nature of the songs, the messages they convey, the frequency with which the songs and albums are released, and the tremendous support it enjoys from the youth of Ghana. Canclini's (2001) description of urbanization as a culture intertwined with serialization and anonymity in production and the restructuring of immaterial communication, rightly explains the environment of the music production industry and the culture surrounding hip-life. Reggie Rockstone (Reginald Osei), considered to be the pioneering hip-life musician, states in an interview with a personality of the website <http://museke.com> that:

I wanted to share something that I was very informed about. Most Africans are musical. I wanted to share my experience with people (hip hop). I came home [US, was born in the UK] to meet a different Ghana. They didn't understand what was being said in these hip hop songs—the slangs, lyrics, [Ebonics], etc. I gave it a name—hiplife—and today, it is feeding a lot of people....Hip hop gives a lot of oral information, [and] there's a lot to be said in Africa. (Museke, 2008)

Rockstone gives a background to the origin of the hip-life. He explained how he emerged as the pioneer and how the name hip-life was derived. This happened in the late 1990s when Rockstone released his first music album "Makaa Maka (I Said It Because I Said It), 1997" and later "Me Na Me Kae (I Was The One Who Said It), 1999" "Me Ka (I Will Say), 2000" and "Last show, 2004" (Wikipedia.org, n.d.; bbc.co.uk, n.d.). It is with such creative artistic dynamism that "hip-life" emerged on the Ghanaian musical scene as a further hybridization of Ghanaian forms of musical expression. What sustained hip-life were its defiant nature; its continuous critical commentary, its entertainment value and the tremendous support it got from the youth who bought the CDs and attended hip-life events. For many Ghanaians (the youth) the complexity of life and the need for social commentary made hip-life a source of information in a culture that appreciated the didactic (informative and moralistic) value of music.

Although Reggie Rockstone is credited as the pioneer of hip-life, he cannot be described as the originator of rap music, because rap music has a North American origin. At best he could be described as the chief proponent of its manifestations within the Ghanaian music and media industry. The fact that hip-life emerged in urban Ghana cannot be over emphasized because Ghanaian urban cultures could be understood in terms of Canclini's (2001)

explanations of how hybrid cultures emerge in communities that experience constant interaction of the local with national and transnational networks of communications. He emphasized that hybridization is a consequence of any dynamic change that has traditional, national and international components, and it is usually the product of multiple dimensions of social change (Catelles, 1973). The emergence of hip-life is not peculiar to Ghana. Similar forms of music exist in other African countries; Kwaito in South Africa and Boomba in Kenya. In their edited book *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*, Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook (2008) discuss the global flow of the hip-hop culture using concepts like transnationalism, cultural flow, syncreticism, hybridity, indigenization, (im)migration, and diaspora.

New Technologies and the Background of Hip-life Artists

The availability of less expensive digital recording software and hardware; “new processes” in the words of Canclini (2001, p. 422), has been crucial to hip-life’s success. Canclini (2001, p. 433) explains new processes as “the decentralization of corporations,” “the adaptation of certain international forms of knowledge and images to the knowledge and habits of communities,” the “delocalization of symbolic products through electronics and telematics, and the use of satellites and computers in cultural diffusion.” Certainly, hip-life cannot be explained in all the terms used by Canclini. However, hip-life as a hybrid culture has benefited from digital technology and its impact on world cultures. The ease with which musicians can record, edit, arrange, and package their creative works is phenomenal. Hip-life artists have taken full advantage of such possibilities.

Hip-life Artists

Reggie Rockstone³ is the acclaimed pioneer of hip-life in Ghana. Reggie Rockstone as an artist, has the flair of composing lyrics in Akan⁴ and English. This is a major strength because this way of singing is not common among Ghanaian musicians. This skill has enabled him to reach a much wider audience, especially the youth. Rockstone has four albums to his credit that were released between 1997 and 2004. He also has numerous singles. He calls his first three albums the trilogy. Like the Greek dramatic trilogy, they are a series of three musical compositions that are closely related and develop with identical themes *Makaa Maka* (I Said It Because I Said It), 1997; *Me Na Me Kae* (I Was The One Who Said It), 1999; *Me Ka* (I Will Say), 2000. The themes of his songs are radical outbursts on social, political and economic issues; in his outbursts he spares no one. He criticizes the ordinary citizen, the state, and the political and economic powers of the world. He calls them to reform their ways for a better world.

Rockstone was born in the U.K. in the late 1960s but was raised in the U.K., U.S., and Ghana. He was a dancer in the early 1980s. He was a member of the UK (London-based) rap group PLZ (Parables, Linguistics, and Zlang). He returned to Accra, Ghana in 1994 and realized how popular North American rap was. He started rapping in Akan and that led to the emergence of hip-life. He launched an independent label called KASSA RECORDS, of which he is part owner, and he currently produces other hip-life artists. He has traveled widely and his music videos are aired on South Africa’s M-Net’s 24 hour music television station. M-Net

is one of Africa's largest satellite television service provider and is available in over 44 African countries. His songs have a wide range of themes, but are mainly social commentary.

Lord Kenya is another popular hip-life musician with a large following. Like Rockstone, Kenya has three albums that have similar titles *Osei Krom⁵ Anigye* (*Osei Krom Happiness*) (1998), *Sika Baa* (*Money Girl*) (1999) and *Yeesom Sika* (*Money Worship*) (2001). He was the winner of the Ghanaian hip-life of the year award for 2001. He was invited to the tourism paradise Sun City, South Africa, to perform at the Face of Africa 2001 after-party. In addition, he won the Ghanaian Rap Music Award at the Anansekrom Festival in Canada in 2000. Kenya combines Akan and English lyrics in his songs, but his success lies in his effective compositions of humorous songs that address mostly social issues related to love relationships.

He was born Abraham Philip Akpor Kojo Kenya on September 19, 1978 in Kumasi. He had primary and secondary education in Ghana. He was a high school athlete turned musician, even though his parents wanted him to be a lawyer. As a musician he gained more popularity when he featured on an album of a more conventional highlife artist, Daasebre Gyamenah's Kokooko which was a hit. He has performed locally and abroad in Ghana and in Europe (Thinkghana.com, n.d.).

Kontihene (Emmanuel Nana Appiah Boateng) was raised in Kumasi. He plays the piano and saxophone. He is noted for his innovative hip-life songs that make use of Ghanaian cheer songs. His song "Aketesea" won him Ghana's best song of 2002 and "Krohinkuro" was nominated for several Ghana Music Awards in 2008 (Ghanaweb.com, n.d.).

Soni Achiba (Emmanuel J. B. Danquah) was born in the late 1970s in Kumasi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. He had primary and secondary school education in Kumasi. The name ACHIBA is an acronym for Action, Compassion, Humble or Honest, Irresistible, Blessed and Achiever. He played soccer at the amateur and professional levels with GIHOC Babies Colts Club and Industrial United Football Club. As a child, he was raised in a neighborhood in the commercial center of Kumasi close to the Concert Hall.

His debut album *Odo papa bi* was released in 2000. His second album, *Indian Ocean 1*, was released in 2001 with hit songs like *Onipa bonia yefo* which was nominated in three categories during the 2002 Ghana Music Awards. *India Ocean 2* was released in 2003. His kind of hip-life is a fusion of highlife, hip-hop and Indian music rhymes. He has recorded a duet with the Indian musician Peenaz Masani (Sonyachiba.s5.com, n.d.).

Most hip-life artists have a middle-class Ghanaian background with a high school education, with a few having two and four year university educations. The titles of the albums of Reggie Rockstone and Lord Kenya illustrate how hip-life artists confront issues in their communities. Like North American rap music, hip-life is social commentary on every aspect of society. The similarity between hip-life and rap is unmistakable; it attests to the cultural interplay between sub-Sahara Africa and North America. According to Real (1977) interaction and cultural flow between West African and North American music has been more-or-less continuous for several centuries. Therefore it is reasonable to say that hip-life is a contemporary manifestation of this relationship.

Hip-life is a prosocial cultural expression that needs to be regarded as an attempt by Ghanaian musicians to address concerns of their society. The hip-life artist is to be considered as a street journalist who looks at society through the lens of his or her experiences and then identifies and comments on human and institutional behaviors in his or her society.

Approach to the Analysis of Selected Hip-life Songs

In this study I examined five hip-life songs. I conducted a textual analysis as an exercise to explore the themes of the songs, and identify the dominant and recurring themes. I used the themes to determine whether hip-life songs fall into Boyd's categorization of rap music as popular rap (music that does not criticize the political order) and political rap (music that challenges the social and political order). I also make the argument that hip-life is a hybrid culture, a fusion of North African rap and Ghanaian highlife.

The songs used in this study are Reggie Rockstone and Nkasei's *Eduano abu* (2002)—The Tree has fallen, Lord Kenya's *Mr. P.O.P.* (2002), Soni Achiba's *Nipa bonniaye fo* (2001)—The evil one, Reggie Rockstone's *Se wompe noa* (2000)—If you don't love her, and Kontihene's *Akatesia* (2002)—Lady. These songs were selected through a simple lot system. I created a pool of 20 hit hip-life songs based on the Ghana Music Award results between 1997-2002. I numbered all the songs and drew five songs out of the pool of 20. These songs are among the earliest hip-life songs played by leading hip-life artist, they could be considered as some of the greatest songs ever played by a hip-life artist.

The lyrics of the songs are rich in themes that illustrate some concerns of Ghanaian societies. Most of the songs are composed in Akan, with occasional English and other Ghanaian language insertions. It is not uncommon to have hip-life songs rendered completely in English or other Ghanaian local languages. However, the very popular songs are those sung in local languages, especially Akan. The songs analyzed in this article were mostly rendered in Akan. The lyrics bear testimony to the substance of hip-life in comparison with rap music. They are critical commentary on various aspects of Ghana, social, economic, and political life.

Themes of Hip-Life

Reggie Rockstone and Nkasei's *Eduana abu* (2002) (The Tree has fallen) is a song with a political theme that addresses issue of power and racism:

*True soldiers speak the truth
The truth will be told
I have said it because I have said it, I will say it, and we are saying it
The Tree has fallen, the tree has fallen, but it is still standing
The tree under which children sleep.*

The song starts with defiance, voicing out the sentiments of the oppressed. It addresses the main motive behind the exploration activities of European adventurers in the 15th and 16th century that culminated in colonization. Rappers are to be considered as present day griots and are expected to be fluent, testify and speak the truth (Smitherman, 1997). In this song, Reggie and Nkasei are like oral historians, and consider it their obligation to address historical issues. They use hip-life as a means to inform those who are still oblivious of the true political and economic impact or implications of those exploration activities. Reggie and Nkasei see themselves as the militant voices that boldly introduce controversial and highly political issues into popular discourse.

*Those who brought the bible were the very people who brought the gun
 Those who said they were our helpers were the very people who hurt us
 Before popcorn we had roasted corn...
 We played music with empty tins and danced
 When we used thatch to roof our houses we slept well.*

The highly debatable issue of the linkage between religion and power is introduced in this section. Here the argument about the use of religion to exploit and eventually gain political control over unassuming people is introduced. Its aim is to make people examine those social institutions that directly or indirectly lend themselves to be used politically and exploitatively. In this song a series of comparisons are made by the artist between what used to be established practices that were replaced with non-Ghanaian and European ones.

*Ouch are they human beings? ... We are animals...
 God created us the same way he created you
 Africa nice "Abrokyire" (abroad) poor
 Whiskey and wine... are not better than palm wine
 Chorus:
 We are demanding our basket
 We are demanding our basket.*

The artists express some anger here, because their humanness is called into question. Racism, and black-white relationships that are sometimes fed with misconceptions of each other, are addressed. The notions of equality and the pride a person (African) has in his or her endowments are expressed. The "Africa nice *Abrokyire* poor" phrase is an example of intertextuality that characterizes rap music. It resonates with Yellow Man's song *Jamaica nice, London poor* that sings praise to the homeland of the artist and points out its rich endowments.

*God drives away flies from the tailless animal
 Every northern Ghanaian likes his okra soup
 Because your teeth are rotten does not mean
 You should lick the gum of someone else*

These lyrics are derived from popular Ghanaian proverbs that admonish the fans to cherish what they have. It also draws attention to the divine or supernatural as the source of great feats, endurance and the resourcefulness of every human being.

Lord Kenya's *Mr. P.O.P* (2002) topped the Ghanaian music chart for 34 weeks (Ghanamusic.com, n.d.). It portrays male domination in male-female courtship. The expectation is that as a critical social art form, hip-life is supposed to criticize sexism and work against the male macho and patriarchal nature of most African societies. But that is not what Kenya discusses in this song.

*A man with a lazy mouth
 A comedian who engages in unnecessary talk*

*You would hear him say
 Araba, Yesterday I saw your father
 I guess you folks call him Dada
 The other dog of yours is "wildoo" it came over to eat in our house
 It is very beautiful*

In this song, a man who is in love with a woman loses her because he is unable to initiate a relationship with her, and because he was not bold enough to propose to her, another man did. The perception created is that the world is still a man's world. There is the absence of a female voice; it seems so real that in hip-life culture, although the rights of women are recognized and protected, women are still caught up in the male dominated world. Barker (2000) refers to the male dominated world as "a fundamental and irreducible axis of social organization, which to date, has subordinated women to men" (p. 24).

*Araba is gone,
 You have allowed the eagle to take the meat from you
 A strong man who is not capable
 You cannot engage in a direct talk...
 Chorus: I would like to have this woman
 When he talks with his fellow men he is a braggart
 ... He would brag till you get angry with him
 But... he is unable to flirt with women*

The song appears to urge men to be macho and be in control in all female-male relationships. It prescribes a particular attitude for a man and any behavior short of that is considered unacceptable. Although the song is popular, its message has some connotations that could be negative; that is the complexity of hip-life. This same message could mean the depiction of some males as jerks, and urges women to ignore them.

Soni Achiba's *Nipa bonniaye fo* (2001) (The evil one), was nominated in three categories during the 2002 Ghana Music Awards (Sonyachiba.s5.com, n.d.). It addresses non-progressive people. Like many popular hip-life songs, it is a commentary on a moral issue. It discusses human relations introducing the principle of reciprocity and the metaphysical element of divine justice. It follows the traditional didactic themes of most high-life tunes by drawing on the supernatural to claim legitimacy for the messages embedded in the lyrics.

*Chorus: I gave you salt and you thanked me with pepper
 Evil one remember, evil is not good
 You have planned to destroy the world because you are about to die
 If you lift yourself up, God will humble you
 When I had money we spent it together,
 You promised when you get money you will reciprocate,
 When you had money, you told me HPIC⁶ has affected your pocket*

Here the artist gives a narration of the untrustworthiness of a friend who has proved to be unfaithful and cannot live up to his commitments. The artist happens to be kind-hearted and

reliable. In his discussion of North American rap, Asante (1987) indicated that the element of mythication in the lyrics of rap music is an attempt by the musician to suggest that his or her message is sanctioned by some supernatural force as a demonstration of the righteousness of the cause. This approach to legitimizing the lyrics is a feature that is prevalent in high-life music. The divine element is mostly present because the musical messages go beyond the entertainment value and incorporates pro-social messages that usually called on the listeners to a higher social moral conduct.

*All you are telling me are lies
You don't know how to swim, but you want to swim in a lake
Are you crazy, do you know you are making a mistake?
You claim a priest's advice is rubbish
You have eaten the food and you tell me you don't like bad food*

In these lyrics dubious human personalities are discussed as dishonest behavior that affects all aspects of society including the relationship among peers and the older generation and the disregard for authority (presented here as the institution of priesthood). The nature of hip-life as a critical social force is portrayed. Hip-life does not seek to upset the traditions and social institutions that have preserved society, rather it seeks to preserve the norms and traditions of society and question any behavior that shows disrespect to them. Like North American rap music, hip-life opens what may be identified as a cultural space as explained by Bernard-Donals (1994). It is not a subversive social activity but a commentary on disturbing social activities.

Se wompe noa (2000) (If you don't love her), by Reggie Rockstone is a song that addresses the issue of domestic violence. This song talks about the abuse of a woman by her husband.

*If you don't want me let me know
Chorus: Divorce her I will take care of her
You have a kid with him
He does not stay at one place
By the time you get home he is drunk and you fight all the time
He has beaten you again your face is all swollen.*

The song describes the plight of a woman who is going through marital problems and physical abuse. The description here captures the agony of the abuse of a woman at the hands of her husband. It depicts the unfair social contract between some spouses, where the woman takes care of most of the marital responsibilities, while the husband indulges in vice at the expense of the family's welfare. Child-care and housekeeping are some of the domestic chores reserved exclusively for women in some homes, while the men apart from their regular jobs do virtually nothing in their homes. The stark fact is that most women who complain are either ignored or physically abused. The artist calls on an abused woman to make a decision, because her situation is not a hopeless one. She is told that there are other men who are willing to take care of the woman in a decent relationship.

*You have a big issue to deal with
 Rockstone, I have my doors opened, I have love vitamins a b c and d
 If he confronts me, I will beat him like Bruce Lee . . .
 How long have you lived with him? When he hits you, reciprocate!
 Don't you have a key, lock him up?
 Julie I know it is difficult,
 If you don't make a decision he will kill you before your child is of age*

This song tries to empower an abused woman. It urges her to make a bold decision to end the violence in her life. He describes himself as a love doctor who will give the battered woman all the love she needs if she is prepared to end the abusive relationship. The usual bashing of men in domestic violence cases is not what this song does. Rather it calls on battered women to take their destiny in their own hands, and avoids becoming the punching bags of their men. The song also indicates the willingness of some men to champion the course of women in a collaborative effort with women. Hip-life, like North American rap music, takes on difficult social issues and deals with them by pointing out the stark realities of the facts of life. It pulls away from the protective masks of melody and a pretty voice to better assert itself, and uses music as a tool of social assault (Bernard-Donals, 1994).

*Look at how bad marriage has taken its toll on you
 I saw him slap you
 Everybody was shocked
 Why do you beat a woman?
 I was told he is a boxer and his punching bags are your cheeks
 Somebody's daughter why do you treat her so bad
 Comfort, Philo, Vera it's all right
 Caro, Sharon, Doris it's all right
 Aggie, Rose it's all right*

There is every indication in the lyrics that domestic violence is socially condemned, and has a very damaging effect on women in marriages, because they suffer mostly from domestic violence. There is public disapproval of what happens to women in abusive relationships. The use of female names at the end of the song suggests that many women suffer domestic violence. The song advocates for a feminist stance on domestic violence, and indicates that the power to stop domestic violence requires a collaborative female-male effort to confront this social problem.

The hip-life artist adds his or her voice to critics of a social problem in the court of public opinion by raising awareness about domestic violence as unacceptable social behavior. Although the raising of awareness scores points from the point of view of feminism, it may seem patriarchal, because the advocate for female equality and self assertion is a male who seems to urge the docile woman to stand up for her rights.

Kontihene's akatesia (2002) (Lady), won the best hip-life song award. It is a boastful song typical of some rap artists. The artist in this song is very boastful and sexist in the sense that he portrays women as just interested in what men can do for them. The idea that a

female-male relationship goes beyond the desire to satisfy material needs is absent in the lyrics.

*Pregnancy is like character you can't hide it
 No matter what you do it will surely show
 I love you la la la
 How much would you eat? I will buy
 Ceddis, CFA, Naira, Deutschmarks, Dollars or Pounds,
 I don't spend overnight money
 All my moves are pure
 What will you take, drinks... fulla?
 When the women realized that, I have money they worry me; calling me
 Bra Eemma, Bra Eemma, Bra Eemma*

Women are portrayed as parasitic; they have nothing concrete to offer the male folk who have it all. In this hip-life song, the element of braggadocio which is evident in rap music becomes very evident. Dyson (1989) and Nelson (1991) indicated that boasting is a regular feature of North American rap music; they argued that it is used to emphasize the rappers' value and personhood and also reflects the quality in lyricism and rhythm. This song by Kontihene was one of the most popular songs released between 2001 and 2002. This type of hip-life avoids very serious social issues. It does stick to the entertainment value of the hip-life culture. In order to gain acceptance and score high rating, the artists place much emphasis on the rhythm and the rhyming of the lyrics. This involves stringing together didactic proverbs that give the songs some serious tone.

Wood (1997) in a study of gangsta rap pointed out that a study by the Public Agenda Foundation in the U.S. indicated that it is not new for popular music to be accused of being dirty or even immoral. Rap music has received a lot of opposition and bad publicity from different sections of society. Wood (1997) argued that there is disagreement about rap music in general. Similarly hip-life as a form of rap music has had its fair share of criticisms. It has often been considered as music that lowers the standards of authentic high-life and often conveys bad messages.

Like North American rap music, hip-life conveys different messages that can be categorized as political and social in nature. Political messages in hip-life addresses issues of racism (colonial and post-colonial issues), and affairs of government. While the social messages raise concerns about human activities, issues of gender relationships, domestic injustices in Ghanaian societies and entertainment. These issues are discussed in very complex poetic verbiage that is often dismissed as ludicrous. Also like North American rap, most hip-life lyrics are carefully stringed together. They display clever use of words and lyrical compositions of pithy poetic verses that convey various messages to society. Dixon and Linz (1997) emphasized that to appreciate the true value of black communication styles it is imperative to consider such works as having artistic merits. The beauty of hip-life as an art form could only be realized if it is considered as a Ghanaian popular culture with cross-cultural elements (high-life and North American rap) that are of artistic significance. The artistic competence of the hip-life artist is measured by his or her ability to express the lyrics musically and rhythmically. Asante (1987) indicated that in African-American culture, words

are often expressed musically and rhythmically and function as a basic measure of the success of a speaker. Hamlet, (1998) noted that among African-Americans the oral history perspective in discourse is often used as a way to motivate audiences to look to their culture for inspiration, wisdom, and strength in order to survive and grow. Shipley (Afropop.org, n.d.), an assistant professor of anthropology and the director of Africana Studies at Bard College, who made a documentary on hip-life titled *Living the Hiplife*, 2007, commented that:

On the most basic level...[hip-life] is a combination of rap music with direct African American influences in Africa, and all the complex diasporic implications of that, and highlife music, which is popular music which itself has multiple kinds of music, but is popular music in Accra, which has been popular since the early 20th century. And [hip-life] really brings those two together. Though within those two kinds of musical forms, [there are] multiple kinds of influences that go into [hip-life] music.

Conclusion

Thematically, hip-life is a complex form of musical expression. As a popular culture, it exhibits all the characteristic of cross-cultural hybrid phenomenon because it is a combination of North American rap and Ghanaian high-life cultures. It is a form of social commentary on complex issues. This approach to social commentary is lyrical and often misunderstood. Unlike North American rap its criticisms are less political in the sense that most of the themes center on moral issues. It does not challenge political authority the way North American rap does; rather it draws attention to the difficult social and economic concerns. For hip-life artists, the desired change in life that will change society lies more with the individual rather than with the political system. The system needs fixing but it is the individual who will do the fixing by first fixing him or herself.

Hip-life is a cross-cultural hybrid art form that has its roots in the confluence of local Ghanaian high-life culture and North American rap culture. This has produced a unique popular culture that is defiant and critical of society commenting on the realities of Ghanaian life.

Notes

1. <http://modernghana.com/GhanaHome/media/radio/radionew.asp?radio=mg#>
2. Accra the capital and Kumasi the second largest city in Ghana.
3. Reggie Rockstone's actual name is Reginald Osei.
4. Akan is the dominant local language in Ghana.
5. Osei Krom—it is another name for Kumasi the capital of the Ashanti region of Ghana
6. Highly Indebted Poor Countries; Ghana joined this category of nations as a way of addressing poverty issues in the country.

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