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A Capsule History of African Rap

ERIC CHARRY

The notion that rap has arrived home, in Africa, common in much rhetoric both inside and outside Africa, demands investigation. African rap artists get little international respect. Representing the inspirational homeland, Africans can find a small audience abroad, but there is hardly any competing in the international marketplace in that role. Some Africans, young and old, vigorously object to some of the surface values purveyed in commercial hip hop culture, such as the pursuit and display of high price consumer goods, glorification or romanticizing of street violence and vulgar language, and public degradation of women. If rap has come home, something that could be said of any artistic form created by peoples of African descent around the world that has been embraced within Africa, it has been primarily young people, part of an African hip hop generation, who embraced this distant relation.

After an incubation period in the 1980s, marked by imitation of its American source, African rappers came into their own in the 1990s. African hip hop has reached a maturity and urgency illustrated by a recent intense and remarkable flurry of documentary films from across the continent—Morocco, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Equatorial Guinea (see the videography)—each in their own way making compelling cases for how the genre has become one of the most relevant cultural forms of expression for African youth. The presence of African hip hop videos on YouTube is equally remarkable and overwhelming. MP3 audio recordings can be found easily enough, but still, one has to search hard to find CDs on the international market, one sure sign of a lack of record label and hence economic support.

What follows is a preliminary history of rap in Africa.

Out of New York

The story of the growth of rap and hip hop in the United States is well known, and there are hundreds of books and theses and many magazines, films, and websites seriously documenting the genre.[1] It originated in the streets of New York in the 1970s, born out of those specific historical circumstances that threw

Caribbean immigrants in with local African American urban culture, marked by concerns of neighborhood security and pride, which often erupted into gang turf battles. Rap emerged as a grassroots party music associated with neighborhood DJs (disc jockeys or record spinners) and then MCs (masters of ceremonies or rappers).[2] It was part of a broader New York borough youth culture (e.g., Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens) that came to be known as hip hop, which included break dancing and graffiti. Semiprivate and public events throughout the mid- and late 1970s were more or less confined within this geographically limited culture. Commercial recordings, which could disseminate the music and dance beyond its borders of origin, were not being made, and MCs and DJs were not yet performing for a broader public.

In the late 1970s, rap and hip hop moved outward on two fronts: recordings and live events. Break dancers doing their moves (usually to recorded music) on Manhattan sidewalks for passersby became more common, although the first major newspaper report to take it seriously did not come until 1981 when hip hop had already gone commercial (Banes 1981). While graffiti had beleaguered the streets and subway trains in New York City for at least a decade (the general public did not necessarily see it as "art"), graffiti taggers (writers) began to gain attention as artists. In 1979 street and subway train graffiti taggers "Fab Five" Freddy Brathwaite (from Brooklyn) and Lee Quiñones (from Manhattan's Lower East Side), both only 19 years old, landed an art show in Italy. Brathwaite had been hanging out in downtown Manhattan, and he became hip hop's ambassador to the predominantly white world of trendy art galleries and music and dance clubs. By the end of 1980 he was immortalized in the downtown white new wave group Blondie's "Rapture," a pseudo-rap that went to number one on the pop singles chart early the next year. Brathwaite's entrepreneurial work bore fruit by 1982 with the making of *Wild Style,* a film he helped conceive and in which he appeared (the first film to document rap and hip hop culture), Friday rap nights at the Roxy, a dance club in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, and a legendary hip hop tour of England and France. Brathwaite was the obvious choice as co-host for American MTV's first regular show dedicated to rap in 1988.

Rap recordings—the primary means of disseminating the genre abroad—became a viable commercial product as the New Jersey–based Sugarhill label released "Rappers Delight" by the Sugarhill Gang, which broke into the top ten of the Black Singles chart in late 1979 and the Pop Top 40 by early 1980. The pantheon of pioneer rap artists (those who would later be called old school) and labels would very quickly establish themselves on the commercial market. The earliest stars included Harlem MC Kurtis Blow, whose "The Breaks" (1980) was the first rap single to be certified gold (500,000 copies sold), DJ Grandmaster Flash (born in Barbados, raised in the Bronx) and the Furious Five ("The Message," 1982), Bronx DJ, community organizer, and Zulu nation founder Afrika Bambaataa ("Planet Rock," 1982), and Queens natives Run-D.M.C. ("It's Like That," 1983), whose 1986 album

Raising Hell was the first rap album to hit number one on the R&B chart, to break into the top ten of the pop album chart, and to be certified platinum (1 million copies sold).[3]

Wild Style was a small budget independently produced film. A series of more lavish Hollywood-produced films were distributed widely and were among the first wave of videos to expose Africans to break dancing and rap performance. The first major exposure was a brief scene featuring dancing by the Bronx-based Rock Steady Crew in the hit film *Flashdance,* released in the United States in April 1983. The first films devoted exclusively to the new culture included *Breakin'* (May 1984, with Ice T), *Beat Street* (June 1984, with Afrika Bambaataa, Kool Herc, Melle Mel, Kool Moe D, Rock Steady Crew, and New York City Breakers), *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo* (December 1984, with Ice T), and *Krush Groove* (October 1985, with Run-D.M.C., Kurtis Blow, and LL Cool J). Through video cassette copies, these films made their way to Africa and were some of the most important models there for the development of hip hop culture, especially dancing.

Beyond audio and video recordings, foreign tours of American hip hop practitioners, beginning when Kurtis Blow had a support slot on Blondie's 1980 British tour (Terrell 1999: 46), were one important means of spreading the genre. Tours to Europe became more common throughout the 1980s, and Africa became a destination by the end of the decade.

African Origins?

While rap historians point to the spoken word artistry of public figures such as boxer Muhammad Ali in the 1960s and musical artists like the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron in the early 1970s as progenitors, it is important to distinguish between the commercial genre known as rap (and its accompanying hip hop culture) and more deeply rooted noncommercial oral traditions, including those which laid the artistic groundwork for the birth of the genre. Using this same reasoning, one must make a similar distinction in Africa. American rap was the source for African rap, and it was not necessarily the deep historical and cultural connections that caused Africans to embrace American rap. On the one hand, it was initially only an elite Westernized segment of African youth that embraced rap, and on the other hand, rap has been embraced around the world by peoples that have few, if any, kind of connections with Africa or African Americans. Rap was a youth music, which was perhaps its most attractive quality. Furthermore, it was a malleable form and could be shaped to fit local circumstances.

The myriad traditions of public speaking, poetry, storytelling, epic recitation, chanting, and percussion performance in Africa that resemble in one way or another some stylistic element of modern-day rap (some of which are described in the chapters that follow) may indeed have laid the groundwork centuries ago when they moved across the Atlantic. But African rap did not emerge from these homegrown traditions. Most first-generation African rappers had little relationship with the traditional performance genres of their home countries and were often more culturally allied with the United States. Rap as the expressive genre of choice for the children of the post-independence generation of Africans did not emerge out of any traditions on African soil, but rather began as a direct imitation and appropriation of imported American rap. African rap did not gain a voice of its own until rappers began to shed some American influences, which entailed rapping in their local tongues about local issues. Second- and third-generation African rappers completing the loop and making organic connections with deep-rooted traditions is one of the most fascinating recent developments, adding a degree of linguistic and cultural sophistication that moves the genre to a whole new level.

The historical connection and at least partial origins in Africa for African American ways of speaking, moving, and making music are not in dispute here. After centuries of living on American soil, however, African Americans have created their own signature cultures and expressive genres, such as blues, gospel, jazz, and rhythm and blues, all of which were unknown in Africa until imported from the United States (either directly or indirectly). So it was with rap. And so it is with so many musics in the African diaspora, such as reggae, ragga, and rumba.

There were several routes through which rap made its way to Africa. In the 1980s, rap was rarely played in the African mass media, such as radio and television (with some exceptions), but rather it had to be physically imported in the form of audio and video cassettes and vinyl records. Because there was no significant market yet, it was literally brought over in bits and pieces by Africans traveling abroad. The two primary routes were via New York and Paris. In the mid-1980s New York began receiving significant numbers of African travelers and immigrants. Paris, by contrast, already had a thriving, though not always welcome, African community due to its French colonial past and the need for imported menial labor. As a result, France became a crucial first link in the chain that brought rap to Africa— or at least to Francophone Africa. The emergence of an original French rap scene in the early 1990s preceded that of Africa by just a few years.

The French Connection

Rap and hip hop quickly took root abroad, but with a stark contrast. Hip hop developed on its home turf in New York as a relatively unmediated local form of entertainment and expression for urban working-class and marginalized youth—part of what is known as street culture. Abroad, however, it was typically the mass media (radio, TV, newspapers), recorded objects (audio and video cassettes, vinyl singles, and LPs), and occasional tours that introduced the various elements of hip hop to young people. Furthermore, initial adherents (at least in Europe and Africa) typically came from a socioeconomic elite, those who had better access to, and stronger interest in, foreign imports.

The way in which rap took root in France is instructive not only because it became the second largest market (after the United States) for the genre, but also because it was a major conduit to Africa via its sizable African population—immigrants and their children—living and working there. France's first and most successful rap star, MC Solaar, was born in Senegal to parents from Chad and raised in France.

The year 1982 was pivotal. In November the New York City Rap Tour reached Paris.[4] Produced by two Frenchmen in New York—Jean Karakos (head of the French Celluloid label) and Bernard Zekri (New York correspondent with the French newspaper *Actuel*)—under the sponsorship of the European station Radio 1, the tour featured the cream of the crop: Fab Five Freddy; deejays Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmixer D.S.T. (and the Infinity Rappers); dance groups Rock Steady Crew and Double Dutch Girls; and graffiti artists Futura 2000, Phase 2, Ramelzee, and Dondi. To coincide with the tour arrival, *Liberation* published an article on Afrika Bambaataa (Thibaudat 1982) and a first-person account of the New York hip hop scene by Rock Steady Crew member Mr. Freeze (Zekri 1982) alerting the French public to the new culture; tour members appeared on Alain Manéval's TV show *Megahertz*.[5]

The tour did not arrive in a vacuum. A small fan base had already been established by local radio shows and a small club scene. Two key deejays were largely responsible for the popularization of rap in France at the time: Sidney Duteil and Dee Nasty. The child of immigrants from Guadeloupe in the French Caribbean, DJ Sidney was born and raised in the northwestern Parisian suburb of Argenteuil.[6] He obsessively collected American records from the few import record stores operating in Paris (later making trips to London), and his deejaying at the club L'Emeraude beginning about 1978 attracted a crowd, including a younger Daniel Efferne, who as Dee Nasty would produce the first album of French rap and host a radio show on Radio Nova that would help launch many careers. A regular at the club was a radio announcer, Clémentine Célarié, who recommended Sidney to her boss, Marie-France Brière, resulting in him being hired about 1982 to host a show on the state Radio France affiliate Radio 7, which aired 10 p.m. to midnight Monday through Friday. DJ Sidney played the latest music available from the United States, including rap. As his show could only be picked up in the vicinity of Paris, people would record his shows and give cassette tapes to their friends.

When the Rap Tour was in Paris in November 1982, Sidney hosted Afrika Bambaataa on his radio show. During the show, at the radio station studio, Futura 2000 put on graffiti exhibitions and Mister Freeze taught people how to break dance, quickly attracting a crowd. The popularity of Sidney's show led to him hosting a TV show at the national station TF1 in 1984. Called *H.I.P.H.O.P.*, it was the first French television show hosted by a black person, and it was the first regular national TV show in the world dedicated to hip hop.[7] In 1987 an artistic director for the show, Sophie Bramly, would be tapped by MTV to create their first rap show, in London, called *Yo!* This became the model for the first national rap TV show in the United States, *Yo! MTV Raps,* beginning in 1988.

Broadcast every Sunday afternoon just after the U.S. television series *Starsky and Hutch* and lasting less than a year, *H.I.P.H.O.P.* was crucial to the growth of rap in France. According to Marie-France Brière, the executive at Radio 7 and then TF1 who hired DJ Sidney for both his radio and TV shows, "Seven years later I understood that it [the show] was important when MC Solaar said to me that it was because of *HIPHOP* that he decided to go into music" (Brière in Peigne-Giuly 1996). The presence of Afrika Bambaataa (who established a French branch of his Zulu Nation) on Sidney's radio and TV shows gave them credibility: "He [Bambaataa] was a DJ and an MC. So [on the TV show], he selected some records, he mixed a little, and performed. It was just his presence. . . . He didn't really need to do anything more. And he helped give the show authenticity, like FUTURA 2000. FUTURA 2000 would come and do these big graff pieces" (Sidney Duteil in Spady, Alim, and Meghelli 2006: 287).

Perhaps the starkest contrast with the United States can be illustrated by what happened when *H.I.P.H.O.P.* ended. In an ironic process, rap went from Parisian clubs, radio, and TV to the streets or, rather, the suburbs (*banlieues*) of Paris, home to low-income immigrants and others. As Zekri noted, "Trendy Paris was burying rap . . . but no one told the banlieues" (Zekri 1994: 88; Cannon 1997: 153). Bramly, who would become director of new media for the global conglomerate Universal Music in 1999, said, "After that [the end of the TV show], it was gone. Everyone was fed up with rap. And it went back in the suburbs" (Bramly in Spady, Alim, and Meghelli 2006: 310).

DJ Sidney had a direct impact on African rap beyond his work in France. He toured Francophone West Africa with a show that included the Paris City Breakers, who had danced on his TV show. Modeled on the New York City Breakers, the three-member Paris crew included Solo, whose Malian immigrant parents sent him to Bamako for summers while he was growing up in France. Seeing the Rap Tour on TV had a major impact on Solo: "And I saw that on TV and I saw the Rocksteady Crew and I was like, 'What the fuck is this shit?!?! I gotta know how to dance like that, that's the new shit in America, I gotta know, I gotta know, I gotta know!'" (Solo in Spady, Alim, and Meghelli 2006: 337).[8] Sidney's account of his African tours gives some insight into what was happening there in the mid-1980s.

> M[eghelli]: But, when you arrived in Africa, you saw that people had videocassettes of the show?
>
> S[idney]: Yeah, because there are always Africans traveling between France and Africa. So, some young folks had brought back with them some videocassettes so others could see what was going on in France. . . . I became famous there, because of that . . . and also, because of RFO—a TV station—that re-airs shows in Africa. Quite a while afterwards, some TF1 shows were stocked up,

> and then re-aired. So, six months later, they would see the shows that were already aired here.[9]
>
> M: But were there Hip Hop dancers there already when you arrived?
>
> S: Yeah, definitely. They were dancing just like we had been doing on the show. They created the Abidjan City Breakers [in Côte d'Ivoire]. The dancers were real good, they were even on the same level as me. They had that same Hip Hop spirit: the track suits, all fresh and fly, they had their shirts with their names on them. . . . Later on, when we went back to Africa, we brought more stuff with us. I gave them basketball shoes. . . . You get there with the newest gear, and you leave with nothing. (Spady, Alim, and Meghelli 2006: 289)

Break dance crews became important forces in Africa in the mid-1980s. Abidjan City Breakers released one of the earliest rap albums in Africa. Bamako City Breakers, Dakar City Breakers, and Cape Town City Breakers were pioneers in raising the profile of the new American style of dancing.[10]

Sidney was not the only one spreading the rap word in France. In 1981 Dee Nasty had a weekly radio show playing rap on a small independent neighborhood station broadcasting to some of the Parisian districts and banlieues that would become flashpoints for hip hop culture (18th, 19th, and Saint Denis).[11] His account of the immediate impact of the 1982 Rap Tour is vivid:

> From one day to the next, there were some news reports about the famous tour. It was on a show called *Megahertz* on FR3. . . . The next day, in all the housing projects around France, people were break-dancing on cardboard boxes, trying to do the same thing they had seen in the footage aired on the show. And, people just took to it, immediately. For everyone, it was like we were waiting for something powerful like that. Since Soul music, there had been nothing conscious, nothing with a voice. And this was something positive, but also political at the same time, and that belonged to us, the youth, whether that be the Arabs, the Blacks. Everyone felt that it related to them, and that took on that importance. (Dee Nasty in Spady, Alim, and Meghelli 2006: 314–15)

In 1983 Dee Nasty had a show on the independent radio station Carbone 14. He met another radio host, Bad Benny, from the station RDH, and soon they began to rap in French on the radio. The move to rapping in a local language was fundamental and would be done over and over again around the world: "First off, we were like, 'The only way that Rap music will ever work in France is if it's in French.' . . . Everyone was rapping in English. But we said, 'No, the only way for this art to progress is to rap in French'" (Dee Nasty in Spady, Alim, and Meghelli 2006: 316).

It may have been Afrika Bambaataa who first spread this message.

> S[pady]: When I talk to members of the Hip Hop community in France they claim that it was you who encouraged them to use their own language. What actually happened?

> B[ambaataa]: Yes, that happened back in the early 1980s, like 1982 or 1983. . . . Everybody tried to rap like Americans. I told them in France, "No, rap in your own language and speak from your own social awareness. Rap about your own problems that are happening in your own country and whatever and talk about what you want to talk about." . . . And this is what happened. Now, France is really the second biggest Hip Hop place in the world. (Spady, Alim, and Meghelli 2006: 264)[12]

In 1984 Dee Nasty self-produced the first French rap album, *Paname City Rappin',* on his own Funkazilla label.[13] The title track illustrated another tendency in early rap around the world: it was an adaptation of an American rap song, in this case Melle Mel's "New York, New York." That same year Dee Nasty met Lionel D., who was also rapping in French. These three—Dee Nasty, Lionel D., and Bad Benny—were the pioneers who demonstrated the potential of rapping in French. Lionel D. was on his way to becoming France's first rap star, but personal issues got in the way. In the late 1980s, Dee Nasty's weekly show on Radio Nova became a proving ground for French rap, with many emcees debuting, including MC Solaar (Cannon 1997: 157).[14]

The release in 1990 of *Rapattitude,* a compilation of the new scene on the new Labelle Noire, signaled that French rap had matured and was sufficiently original to gain recording contracts and challenge the omnipresence of American rap. Very few French rap recordings had been released until then.[15] *Rapline,* a weekly television show dedicated to hip hop, debuted in 1990, running for five years. And MC Solaar released his first single that year, "Bouge de la," which went to number 22 on the French pop singles chart in 1991.

Claude M'Baraly (MC Solaar), born in Senegal in 1969 of parents from Chad, grew up in France and went on to become France's first superstar of rap. He raps exclusively in French, and his style is marked by a laid-back cool sound that draws on jazz and brilliant manipulation of the French language. MC Solaar's first album (*Qui sème le vent récolte le tempo,* 1991) was certified platinum (300,000) and his second album (*Prose Combat,* 1994) was certified double platinum (600,000) in France within a few years of their release. These were decent numbers for an American rap group at the time, but extraordinary for France or a non-American rapper. His third album (*Paradisiaque,* 1997) hit number 1 on the French album charts. Solaar's jazz leanings included recording "Un ange en danger" with American bass player Ron Carter on *Stolen Moments: Red Hot + Cool,* an album featuring jazz and rap collaborations.[16] Solaar's support for the Senegalese group Positive Black Soul was crucial for their move into the international market.

A further observation contrasting French and American hip hop concerns race and ethnicity. In France the population known as *noir* (black) is comprised of two broad communities: Caribbean (called Antillaise), from former colonies and departments such as Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe; and African (meaning sub-Saharan). The other relevant minority community is called Arab or Beur (in the slang known as *verlan* in which syllables in a word are reversed), referring to those from North Africa, also known as the Maghreb (west of Egypt). Within these communities, there are strong affiliations based on place of origin, language, and ethnicity (in the case of Africa). Until recently, the French government did not keep population statistics on the ethnic or racial composition of the country. Recent estimates put the black population anywhere from 3 to 5 million, in a country of more than 61 million people (Kimmelman 2008; Ndiaye 2008: 59).

As many have noted (e.g., Cannon 1997: 161–62; Prévos 2002: 5–6), hip hop in France is multiethnic, involving children of minorities from sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and North Africa, as well as whites. The group 113, which began recording in the late 1990s, represents precisely these three French minority communities: Mokobe Traore, Yohann Duport (AP), and Abdelkrim Brahmi (Rim'K) have family origins in Mali, Guadeloupe, and Algeria, respectively. Although French rappers are predominantly black and Arab, it is more common there than in the United States to see broader types of integration.[17]

Into New York and Back

One of the oldest, most robust, and sophisticated rap scenes in Africa is in Senegal. The first African rap group to gain a major international recording contract was Positive Black Soul from Senegal. When *The Source,* the first major American hip hop magazine, celebrated its 100th issue in 1998, it featured articles on hip hop around the world, including France, Italy, and Cuba. The only African country represented was Senegal.[18]

There is a good reason for Senegal's high profile and public presence in African rap: Senegalese had both routes to rap—Paris and New York—wide open. Positive Black Soul's third CD, *New York/Paris/Dakar* (2002), recorded in Dakar and New York, with guests from the United States and France, acknowledges this triangle. Paris was not just a given because of its French colonial past; there were especially close political and cultural ties between Senegal and France. Senegal's first president, the poet and negritude philosopher Léopold Senghor, was the only sub-Saharan African ever elected to the elite 40-member French Academy, which is the official authority on the French language. Senegal is also the geographically nearest sub-Saharan African nation to France. And it is home to the Paris-Dakar rally, an annual road race begun in 1979.

By the mid-1980s, New York became a major destination—what one Senegalese official called a suburb—for both short- and long-term traders looking to expand their markets. Beginning about 1983 young male Senegalese merchants began hawking wares on the streets of New York, forming a pioneering wave of immigrants. In early 1985 the police estimated that there were about 300 Senegalese vendors working the streets of Manhattan, primarily in the commercial midtown area. Later that year the *New York Times* (1985) began reporting on this phenomenon.

In 1987 a *Times* reporter in Dakar interviewed a man who had spent two years in New York selling on the street, sending $35 to $45 home every month, planning his next trip back (Brooke 1987). Even in such a large city of immigrants like New York, the sudden presence of Senegalese in midtown was news. Less visible were the growing numbers of West African immigrants working as taxi drivers taking the late night shifts in neighborhoods that were considered too dangerous by the Yellow Cab service (Noel 2000).

The timing of the Senegalese influx can be attributed to a number of contributing factors: the ending of exit visa requirements for Senegalese citizens in 1981; a severe drought that devastated peanut farmers from 1973 to 1985; structural adjustment programs beginning in 1984, intensifying rural poverty; a new and cheap direct flight from Dakar to New York ($600 in 1987 on Air Afrique); France joining other Common Market nations in 1986 in imposing visa restrictions on visitors from Africa; the French franc (and the Senegalese currency, which is tied to it) depreciating by half against the U.S. dollar between 1981 and 1985 making U.S.-earned dollars more valuable back home (the franc regained its value in the second half of the decade); and a venerable tradition of long-distance trading. From 1980 to 1987, the number of nonimmigrant visas granted each year to Senegalese quadrupled from 1,177 to 4,369, despite a refusal rate that went from 3 to 32 percent due to pressure from New York officials complaining about Senegalese overstaying their visas. Between 1985 and 1987 alone, the number of applications for nonresident visas jumped from 300 to 800 a month. By 1997 it was estimated that there were 10,000 to 20,000 Senegalese living in New York City (Brooke 1987, 1988; Perry 1997). A recent estimate puts the current number at 30,000, with the majority undocumented (Kane 2011: 77).[19]

That the flow of goods from New York to Dakar was wide open was confirmed in a 1987 *New York Times* article in which the information director of the Senegalese government described two kinds of traders he personally encountered on an Air Afrique flight to New York:

> The traders told him they planned to spend the day in New York shops, mostly buying electronic goods and cosmetics for black people, and then return to Dakar in the evening. "New York has become a commercial suburb of Dakar," the information director said. "You cross the big lake, make your purchases, and then come home the same day."
>
> The second type of vendor, more familiar to New Yorkers, is Dakar's 'bana-bana,' or street peddler. (Brooke 1987)

No doubt the extensive traffic in goods that went back and forth in that decade between New York, the world center of rap, and Dakar included all the accoutrements and paraphernalia of hip hop culture.

Both founding members of Positive Black Soul confirmed the importance of this route, as did Faada Freddy of the Senegalese group Daara J.

> S[pady]: How did you first hear rap music?
>
> D[idier Awadi]: I had a lot of friends of mine who used to travel a lot to New York and they'd bring rap records back. The first thing I heard was Kurtis Blow and "Rappers Delight" by the Sugarhill Gang. . . . You could find all of this in Senegal. Senegalese are big travelers. (Spady, Alim, and Meghelli 2006: 648).

> S[pady]: How did your brother learn the hardcore style of rapping in West Africa? Was he watching madd videos?
>
> A[madou Barry]: Yeah, a lot. We had friends that used to work at Air Afrique. They used to bring things over from the States.
>
> (Spady, Alim, and Meghelli 2006: 641).

> [Marlon Regis:] How'd you get in touch with hip-hop, way back in the late 1980s being way over there in Senegal, Africa?
>
> [Faada Freddy:] We had some friends—middle-class friends—that used to get stuff coming from all over like the United States. Because their parents were rich and used to travel, those boys used to tell their parents "bring me this, bring me that." They brought back rap tapes. (Regis 2005)

Amadou Barry's father was a pilot for Air Afrique and so probably had even more direct access than other Senegalese.

But even though they moved goods back and forth, this generation of traveling peddlers and immigrant workers was not the one to take up rap as its music of choice. Indeed, there was occasional animosity between African immigrants and the African Americans among whom they lived.[20] The musical heroes of this immigrant generation were the 1980s generation of world music stars, some of whom sang about the predicaments of African immigrants, such as Salif Keita ("Nous pas bouger" on *Ko-Yan,* 1989) and Youssou N'Dour ("Immigrés" on *Immigrés,* 1989). By the summer of 1988, the first major solo U.S. tour of Senegalese Youssou N'Dour and Malian Salif Keita, who both were embarking on solo international careers under the auspices of new world music label support, could fill the 2,800-seat Beacon Street Theater on the upper west side of Manhattan at $20 a ticket to a crowd that was largely West African.[21]

Senegalese probably had the most direct access to New York street culture in the 1980s. Other Africans also had access, especially Ghanaians (Shipley, this volume), but perhaps not as widespread and regular.

Rap in Africa: The First Decade

One of the most fundamental challenges across the continent was how to create something original that spoke to young people. The basic components to be addressed by artists included the musical foundation, language, lyrics, vocal style (the flow), and overall message. The pioneering Ghanaian hiplife producer Panji Anoff voiced a common concern: "If hiplife was going to be about translating America into Africa, then I wanted no part of it. My idea was always to translate Africa into something global" (in *Living the Hiplife,* Shipley 2007). African rap spans the full continuum between these poles.

A key to understanding this challenge and appreciating the various solutions is that hip hop was initially embraced in Africa by secondary school–educated (and some college-educated), well-traveled, and relatively privileged youth. They represented a different kind of Africa than the stereotypes that the rest of the world was used to seeing, one that was more culturally allied with trends in the United States and Europe than the more deeply rooted traditions that were closer to home. Their compatriots often viewed them as leaving their own cultures behind in favor of foreign imports. Some were able to move beyond fascination and emulation to fully grasp the possibilities of the genre and shape it for their own communities, reaching into their own home cultures. Others, to be sure, never moved beyond the wannabe stage.

The 1980s were an incubation period for rap and hip hop in Africa, bubbling well beneath the surface of the regional stars and their music that defined broader popular tastes. Very few commercial African rap recordings were made in this decade, most likely because rappers were still trying to absorb the genre and producers did not yet see a market for their work. The sequence throughout the decade and into the 1990s was simple and widespread: direct imitation, substituting their own English language lyrics, and localizing it by rapping in African languages (or at least letting go of the American accents) about issues of relevance to their communities. It was not until the early and mid-1990s that African genres had emerged as rappers, deejays, and producers began to localize the music.[22]

Rap neither arrived nor developed uniformly throughout Africa, in part because the mass media was not involved at first. Happenstance, such as individual travelers bringing back news from France or the United States, was the order of the day. Occasional visits or tours to Africa, such as DJ Sidney's mid-1980s tour with the Paris City Breakers or Malcolm McLaren's 1983 visit to South Africa, exposed youth to the new genre and inspired them.[23]

The first commercial recordings of African rap may be from Nigeria: Lagos nightclub and radio DJ Ronnie Ekundayo's "The Way I Feel," from his 1981 LP of the same name, and Dizzy K Falola's "Saturday Night Raps," from his 1982 album *Excuse Me Baby.*[24] These are the first two recordings listed in Ikonne's (2009a) extraordinary online survey of the first decade of Nigerian rap, profiling nineteen vinyl albums released between 1981 and 1992 that have at least one track with rapping or strong hip hop inflections. Most are clearly under the influence of American disco, funk, or old school New York rap, both lyrically and musically, with the increasing presence of synthesizers and drum machines as the decade wears on. "Pump," a 1982 collaboration between Nigerian Mambo Kristo and American Gloria Hart (called Mams and Hart), contains a percussion break that features what sounds like a large Yoruba dundun (talking drum), perhaps the first example of using an African instrument in the genre.[25] Timi Gawi's 1984 "Boxing Rapping Show" features guitars, keyboard, and bass played in a Nigerian style, rather than

American. I. C. Rock's 1985 "Advice/Oge Chi Ka Nma" is distinguished by its social message and rapping partially in Igbo. Rick Asikpo's 1986 "Beat Jam" features what sounds like a bell pattern (perhaps played on a drum machine) and tenor saxophone, which conjures up the afrobeat sound created by Nigerian Fela Kuti. Ikonne points to the 1991 recording "Which One You Dey" by Emphasis (rappers Terry and Mouth MC and singer Junior) as

> represent[ing] homegrown Nigerian hip-hop finally finding its own voice. Unlike most of their predecessors, Emphasis didn't rely on barely-rhymed doggerel aping the rhythms and cadences of American old-school rap records, but instead presented a lucid narrative complete with plot, characterization, and humor, delivered with a relaxed flow in pidgin English—the true language of Nigeria's streets. (Ikonne 2009a)

Nigerian rap achieving its own voice by 1991 is consistent with what was going on in Tanzania, Senegal, and South Africa.

Outside Nigeria, early recordings include that of Abidjan City Breakers from Côte d'Ivoire, who released an album in 1986. The influence of late 1970s funk and disco is apparent, and the genre still seems like a novelty. The first film documentary of an African rap scene may be *African Wave: Prophets of the City* (Bowey 1990), made in South Africa about the time of the group's first album, *Our World,* which was the first South African rap album and among the earliest full-length vinyl albums of rap in Africa. Music video segments throughout the film reveal a firmly rooted and culturally unique scene in Cape Town. A few other countries, such as Senegal and Tanzania, were probably at a similar level of development, but only on the verge of seeing their first local rap cassettes released.

The first edition of the British-based *Rough Guide to World Music* (Broughton et al. 1994), a state-of-the-art country-by-country survey of popular music artists and genres written mostly by journalists and radio show hosts, made no mention of rap in Africa. The 1999 second edition made brief mention in just a single country entry: Senegal. The 2006 third edition, however, could not help but notice: "We have strived in this new edition to chart the changing scene, including coverage, for instance, of African hip-hop, which has swept across the continent in recent years and is the music of choice for young Africans, often in genuinely local forms" (Broughton et al. 2006: xv). In this edition, about half the African countries have entries on rap, ranging from a few sentences to several paragraphs (Senegal has the longest entry).

The most widespread introduction of hip hop culture to Africa came in the form of dance in the early and mid-1980s, being dispersed by the enormous popularity of Michael Jackson and the first wave of American films featuring break dancing, beginning with *Flashdance* in 1983.[26] Early examples of local interest include the start of break dancing competitions about 1982 in Cape Town, South Africa (L. Watkins 2004: 130) and a 1984 festival in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, showcasing the first generation of hip hop films (Perullo 2007: 253). Young people in Bamako, Dakar, Abidjan, and Cape Town formed their own "Breakers" troupes modeled on the New York City Breakers or Paris City Breakers.[27]

Bamako City Breakers member Amadou Philippe Konate suggests that three major events beginning about 1983 were responsible for the rise of hip hop culture in Bamako: (1) the popularity of Michael Jackson, especially his performance on the televised *Motown 25th Anniversary Special* in 1983; (2) Sidney's *H.I.P.H.O.P.* show in France (in 1984); and (3) an inspiring performance in Bamako of Abidjan City Breakers.[28] Typical for the first African hip hop generation, Konate knew little about the traditional music of his country. He recognizes the flow of hip hop into Bamako as coming principally from France and the United States, relayed by Dakar and Abidjan, and confirms that initially hip hop was primarily accessible to, and carried by, those from more comfortable socioeconomic classes.

> This is not due to ideology, but rather is explained by the ease of access to the media of the epoque: reserved for those who had the possibility to travel, to view television emissions abroad, to bring back VHS recordings of these emissions and . . . in order to view them one needed a VHS player, an apparatus reserved at the time for an elite. Therefore, rap came by VHS and not the radio! There was only the national radio station, which was not interested in this kind of music.

While dance could be immediately appreciated and imitated, lyrics presented a barrier. In the 1980s, small but growing numbers of youth were listening to rap, and some were directly imitating the language and the fashion. While many subtleties of the semantic aspects of the language must have escaped many—English would have been their second or third language, and the dialect of African American street culture was not taught in schools—the overall linguistic flow could have a more direct impact.[29] In 2007, pioneer Senegalese rapper Aziz Ndiaye could still repeat verbatim some of the classic lines from the 1979 hit "Rappers Delight" that he had memorized two and a half decades earlier. He recalls copying, along with Didier Awadi of Positive Black Soul, the likes of Kurtis Blow, Grandmaster Flash, and Melle Mel (*Democracy in Dakar,* episode 5, 2007). Ndiaye and Awadi were among the first rappers in Dakar (Spady, Alim, and Meghelli 2006: 650).

It is difficult to gauge the impact of rap in Africa in the 1980s before recordings were made, although the genre was slowly developing in live performance for five or ten years before it was commercially recorded. This was also the case in its initial rise in New York, developing at parties and clubs throughout the 1970s. The term *underground* may indeed be appropriate for rap during the 1980s in Africa. I saw no signs of rap or hip hop culture in 1988–90 when I was in the capital cities of Senegal, Mali, and The Gambia, although reggae was present, especially in Anglophone Gambia.[30] But there was a small scene in Dakar, and two of the earliest rap groups there—King MCs and Syndicate, which would soon merge to form Positive

Black Soul—were already active, although not recording (Herson 2000: 17; Lobeck 2002: 21). In Dakar and Bamako, it was the then-current world music generation of Youssou N'Dour, Baaba Maal, Ismael Lo, Salif Keita, and Oumou Sangare who were capturing the attention of everyone, young and old. I do not recall seeing any cassettes of African rap in any of these countries during these years.

The pioneers of the genre began gaining a young audience through live performance rather than recordings. It is no coincidence that when national political systems opened up to multiparty democracies in many countries, rap began to flourish. A key factor was the privatization of radio, which took place in various countries in the 1990s, both broadening the audience and serving as an outlet to stimulate local creativity.[31] As the 1990s began, the popularity of Public Enemy, Los Angeles-based gangsta rap, and then Tupac Shakur were important stimuli. In Francophone countries, MC Solaar's success was key.

Rap in Africa: The 1990s and 2000s

In Tanzania, the first public rap competition was held in Dar es Salaam in 1990, and the following year the first major national rap competition, Yo! Rap Bonanza, was held to find the best rapper in the country.[32] Twenty-year-old Saleh Abry (aka Saleh J) won by rapping partly in Swahili. He released the first Tanzanian rap single in 1991, "Ice Ice Baby," adding lyrics about AIDS to Vanilla Ice's hit. Soon after, he released the album *Swahili Rap,* which was not commercially distributed. It was not until 1995 that the first commercially distributed album of Tanzanian hip hop was released: Mac Mooger's *The Mac-Mooger.*

In Senegal (Tang, this volume), Positive Black Soul started gaining radio airplay in 1990. In 1992 they opened for MC Solaar at the French Cultural Center in Dakar. Solaar was sufficiently impressed to bring them to France for a national competition. A guest appearance on "Swing Yela" on Baaba Maal's 1994 big-budget album *Firin' in Fouta* brought them in contact with British producer Jumbo Van Renen, who in turn produced their first CD album, *Salaam* (1996), on Mango Records, a subsidiary of Island Records (Bob Marley's label), which was a subsidiary of Polygram, one of the six conglomerates that dominated the industry. This was the first African hip hop album to be released on a major international label, a significant milestone.[33] The strength of Senegalese Baaba Maal and Youssou N'Dour on the world music market undoubtedly cleared the path. So, surely, did the fact that PBS co-founder Amadou Barry spent years growing up in France, one step closer to the source, before returning to Senegal.[34]

The first major South African hip hop concert took place in 1990 in Cape Town, featuring Prophets of Da City (POC) and coinciding with the release of their first album (*Our World*), followed two years later by the first album of Black Noise (*Pumpin Loose Da Juice*), the second major group from Cape Town, which was the crucible of South African hip hop (L. Watkins 2004: 131–32). The move of POC to the UK to record their sixth album (*Universal Souljaz*) in 1995 was covered by *Billboard* (Kwaku 1995). In Ghana (Shipley, this volume), the first PANAFEST (Pan-African Theatre Festival) celebrations in 1994 featured a homecoming for rap pioneer Reggie Rockstone, who had already established himself in the UK rapping in English and would soon begin rapping in the Twi language. In Kenya (Kidula, this volume; Rebensdorf 1996), producer Jimmy Gathu inaugurated a television program in 1993 on the Kenyan TV station KTN to popularize rap.

In the 1980s local producers understood that the stage of imitation, rapping in English and using African American accents and slang, had little commercial potential. By the mid-1990s, however, there was a breakthrough, not just in the release of rap recordings across the continent but in recordings that demonstrated that African youth had embraced the genre and made it their own. When the breakout came in 1994 or 1995, African rap had emerged as a mature genre, featuring creative use of mother tongues, smart multilanguage word plays, messages that were relevant to the experience of African youth, original rhythmic flows, and, within a few years, instrumental tracks that drew on local music.[35]

The release of commercial recordings is one important indicator of the status of rap. Two of the most productive and relatively well documented African countries can serve as examples. In Tanzania, the first five years of commercial rap releases, 1995–99, produced twelve albums and one compilation (see discography). The first five years of rap releases in Senegal, 1994–98, produced roughly the same number of albums and two compilations (Nouripour 1998). This level of production in the second half of the 1990s (estimating the combined numbers of the most productive African countries) is probably similar to that of the commercial beginnings in the United States fifteen years earlier (1979–83). The first six years in France (1984–89), by comparison, were relatively fallow (see discography in Bocquet and Pierre-Adolphe 1997: 251–63).[36]

An explosion of releases after this initial period marked a number of African countries. For example, in Tanzania in 2001 alone about 15 albums and more than 100 singles were released (Perullo and Fenn 2003: 49); between 1999 and 2001 several rappers sold over 100,000 copies of their albums (Perullo 2007: 268). Perullo (this volume) estimates about 50 commercial recording studios recently operating in Dar es Salaam for bongo flava artists and perhaps over 100 producers composing and recording bongo flava beats, up from just four producers in the mid 1990s.

Releases of national rap compilations toward the end of the millennium marked a certain maturity for the genre in Africa. These include Senegal (*Senerap: Freestyle*, vol. 1, 1997; vol. 2, 1998), Kenya (*Kenyan: The First Chapter* 1998; *Second Chapter* 1999), Algeria (*Algerap*, 1999; *Wahrap*, 2000), and South Africa (*Kwaito: South African Hip Hop*, 2000). The first continent-wide survey marked the definitive arrival of African rap in the world music market (*Rough Guide to African Rap,* 2004).

Relying on recording industry data alone to assess the impact of rap can be deceptive. In Malawi, the bulk of rap and ragga played on the radio or sold on cassette in Blantyre, the largest city at over half a million people, is of foreign origin. Local rap and ragga, at least until recently, has had little commercial market appeal and functions primarily as a form of local expression in live performance, especially in competitions sponsored by nongovernmental organizations (Fenn, this volume). Malawi stands out in that local rap recordings are minimal, yet the genre has important meaning in the daily lives of its youth population.

In terms of mainstream exposure, African rap was about a decade behind the United States. The first nationally syndicated rap-oriented television show in the United States, *Yo! MTV Raps,* debuted on the seven-year-old private cable channel MTV in 1988. In 1990 a major television network (NBC) debuted the show *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air,* starring rapper Will Smith. But perhaps a more definitive moment of arrival came shortly thereafter when the Fab Five, an astonishing group of five freshman starters on the University of Michigan basketball team, went all the way to the final round of the national collegiate basketball championship tournament during the winter 1991–92 season. Their new-styled oversized baggy uniforms (a sharp contrast to the tight short shorts of the 1980s), youth, and generally brash demeanor announced to a mass American television audience that a hip hop generation was a national phenomenon.[37] Spurred by a second wave of African American–directed hip hop–inflected Hollywood films, such as Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989, featuring Public Enemy's "Fight the Power"), John Singleton's *Boyz n the Hood* (1991, with Ice Cube), and Ernest R. Dickerson's *Juice* (1992, with Tupac Shakur), the news traveled quickly, not so much as a novelty or fad (although fashion was a major component) but as a new youth movement based in urban contemporary African American culture.

African recording industry awards for rap came about a decade after the American recording industry began recognizing rap with a Grammy Award category in 1989 (Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group). Other Grammy categories were established in 1991 (Best Solo Rap Performance) and 1996 (Best Rap Album).[38] The intermittent pan-African Kora awards (based in South Africa), which began in 1996, gave its 1999 Best African Group award to the France-based Congolese rap group Bisso Na Bisso. In 2003 they established Best African Gospel male and female categories. The next year the rap group JJC and 419 (from Nigeria/UK) won the Best African Group award, and Ghanaian rapper Reggie Rockstone won the Best Video award. In 2005 the Best African Hip Hop Group/Artist (won by Koba from Gabon) and Best African Reggae-Ragga categories were established.[39]

National (and subsequently international) hip hop awards and festivals beginning in 2000 marked the mainstreaming of hip hop within Africa. The first annual Ghana Music awards in 2000 had several categories devoted to hiplife (Shipley, this volume). The same year Senegal started its annual Hip Hop Awards. The first annual Festival International de la Culture Hip Hop au Burkina Faso was held in

2000. Now known as the Festival International des Cultures Urbaines or Waga (or Ouaga) Hip Hop, after the capital city in which it is held (Ouagadougou), it has gained a solid international (albeit primarily Francophone) roster of artists.[40]

In the first decade of the 2000s, African hip hop became widely exposed in local and national media. Continental mass media is often skewed toward American or highly commercialized African music videos. In 2005 MTV Networks launched its 100th channel and first pan-African station, the 24-hour English language MTV Base targeted at African youth. In 2006 they met their first-year target of 30 percent African content. In 2008 the MTV Africa Music Awards debuted, with hopes of raising their international profile, although MTV award shows in Europe and Asia have been criticized for leaning too heavily on American and British performers. In 2011 MTV Base reached 10.5 million households (48.5 million viewers), up from 8 million households in 2006. South Africa's Channel O not only broadcasts music videos across the continent but also sponsors music video awards. Private radio stations serve hip hop at the local level, and governmental and nongovernmental organizations alike use hip hop to marshal youth for their various causes.[41]

Collaborations between African and American rappers, though, remain rare. A notable exception was KRS-One being featured on Positive Black Soul's *New York/Paris/Dakar* (2002).[42]

As African rap has matured and second and third generations have emerged, both more critical and more commercial voices have emerged, sometimes in the same time and place.[43] One widespread effect has been to rekindle interest in older local traditions. That is to say, African youth continually search for new ways to make rap relevant and unique, which often means digging through local culture, almost like American deejays would crate-dig—search through crates of obscure vinyl record albums for new sounds. Some of these efforts at connecting with African culture through rap are documented in this volume.[44]

Back in France

Some of the most compelling and commercially successful African rap in the 2000s emanates from France.[45] This perplexing statement points to the increasing difficulty of affixing a single national identity nowadays. One might feel safe in considering rap conceived and produced in Africa as African rap (whether or not it was actually recorded there), even though some artists may have spent significant portions of their life abroad, such as Reggie Rockstone or Amadou Barry. French rappers of African descent (those who grew up and remained in France) may have varied relationships with Africa, ranging from a kind of love or nostalgia for the Africa of their parents, which brings them into close contact with African music, to Africa being just one symbol of their identity among others.[46] Three particularly successful French rappers of the post-MC Solaar generation (in terms of awards, sales, or critical acclaim), whose parents emigrated from Africa, can illustrate. In addition to their personal artistic talent, their appeal also lies with the perspective that comes with having one's feet straddling two continents packaged with the advanced production values and opportunities that come with recording in state-of-the-art studios under multinational patronage.

Serigne Mbaye (also known as Disiz la Peste) was born in France to a Senegalese father and Belgian mother. His third solo album, *Itinéraire d'un enfant bronzé* [Itinerary of a bronzed child], features guest Senegalese and Malian vocalists. "N'Dioukel" is an homage to his father's generation of 1960s Dakar when fashionable young people went out to clubs dancing to the Senegalese variety of salsa, soon to become transformed into mbalax by Youssou N'Dour. The music on the track, performed by a live band, moves imperceptibly from New York–based salsa to Dakar-based mbalax, including Senegalese percussion. Mbaye raps in French about his father's generation, alternating with Pape Djiby Ba, one of the great vocalists who emerged in the 1970s, singing in Wolof. "Santa Yalla" [Praise Allah] is straight up mbalax, with a message that is unusual for rap but common for Senegalese pop singers: affirming one's deep faith in Islam. This mix of rap and a genre (in this case mbalax) which itself was the result of a reshaping of foreign (in this case Cuban) influences, a meeting of generations, is a hallmark of the new music from Africa and children of African immigrants.

Mokobe, whose family name Traore places him in the nobility of traditional Malian society, was born in France to what he calls a Malian-Senegalese father and Malian-Mauritanian mother.[47] His 2007 debut solo album, *Mon Afrique,* made after a decade of working with the French rap group 113, pushes the limit of invited guests in a broad pan-African sweep. Separate tracks, with the music appropriately shaped for each one, feature Malians Salif Keita, Babani Kone, and Amadou and Mariam (who are joined by Ivoirian Tiken Jah Fakoly), Senegalese Youssou N'Dour and Viviane, Guinean Sekouba Bambino Diabate, Nigerian Seun Kuti (son of Fela), Ivoirian Patson, and Congolese Fally Ipupa, among others. His music videos, such as "Safari" shot with Viviane in Senegal, have the look of a Ministry of Tourism production with vivid colors, bright smiling faces, and vibrant street scenes. The video for "Mali Forever" opens with Mokobe meeting with president Amadou Toumani Toure (who knighted him in 2009) and continues with upbeat scenes showing a modernized urban Mali, ending with chanting over jembe drumming and dancing, an activity as Malian as are earlier scenes of the Niger River, or of Salif Keita singing, for that matter.

Abd al Malik was born in France, but spent his early childhood in his parents' native Congo-Brazzaville before moving back to France, where he grew up in Strasbourg. Al Malik does little collaboration with African musicians, but rather is rooted in French popular song traditions rich in harmony, sometimes orchestral, sometimes that of a jazz trio, as in "Gibraltar," based on a piano riff from Nina Simone's "Sinnerman" with a bridge that sounds like John Coltrane's pianist McCoy Tyner in the early 1960s. He tends toward spoken or so-called slam poetry rather than the melodic style of Mbaye or the American-style declaiming of Mokobe. And perhaps distinguishing French rap from its American forebear, al Malik takes his literature and philosophy seriously: "The aesthetic should always serve a moral purpose, it's what's called artistic responsibility. The French writer Albert Camus and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre followed this idea, and I want to do the same" (Abd al Malik in de Blank 2007). What al Malik lacks in overt references to Africa, such as language and music, he makes up for in critical and social perspective as the son of African immigrants.[48]

Because of their base in France and proximity to centers of the music industry, performance venues, and capital, these rappers of African origin, and more like them in France, enjoy greater visibility—and record sales—than their African counterparts.

African rappers in the United States are much less numerous and have a much harder time gaining recognition, surely because they are outsiders with little opportunity to break into such a highly commercialized industry that has little interest in immigrant cultures. Sierra Leonean rapper Chosan's "This Is My America," a powerful look at the plight of African immigrants in the United States, seems oddly out of place in the context of American rap, which can appear highly provincial in the face of global currents. Unlike in France, commercially successful American children of African immigrants, such as Akon, Chamillionaire, and Wale, have assimilated enough that their music and public identity bear little trace of Africa.

With this introductory foundation, readers should be able to better appreciate and contextualize some of the stories told in the following chapters. In the concluding chapter, which is similarly comparative, I cover some of the broader issues that are raised throughout this volume.

NOTES

1. For recent extensive surveys of this material, see Leach (2008) and Meadows (2010).

2. KRS-One, one of the most outspoken definers of hip hop culture, makes a distinction between a rapper, who has verbal dexterity, and an MC (or emcee), who carries some degree of social responsibility. I use the two interchangeably here. Among his many examples is: "An MC is a representative of hip hop culture. A rapper is a representative of corporate interests" (KRS-One in the DVD *The MC: Why We Do It,* 2005). Also listen to KRS-One on "Classic (Better Than I've Ever Been)" (2007, with Kanye West, Nas, and Rakim), and see his section "Emceein" (KRS-One 2009: 115–117).

3. See allmusic.com for *Billboard* magazine chart listings and riaa.org for certified gold and platinum record sales.

4. Information about the New York City Rap Tour comes from Hershkovits (1983), Beckman and Adler (1991), Zekri (1994), Prévos (2002: 2–3), and Chang (2005: 182–84). Writing about French rap is abundant. Some of the excellent surveys include Bazin (1995),

Bocquet and Pierre-Adolphe (1997), Cannon (1997), Prévos (1996, 2001, 2002), Huq (2001), and Meghelli (2004).

5. The summer before the tour, Mister Freeze, whose parents emigrated from France to the Bronx, was in France dancing in public for money (Zekri 1982).

6. Information about DJ Sidney comes from Duka (1984a, 1984b), Peigne-Giuly (1996), Cannon (1997), Bocquet and Pierre-Adolphe (1997), and Spady, Alim, and Meghelli (2006: 272–91).

7. Also in 1984, Ralph McDaniels hosted the daily TV show *Video Music Box* on WYNC channel 31, which regularly broadcast hip hop videos to a New York audience (Newman 2008).

8. Solo credits Rap Tour organizers Zekri and Karakos: "Basically, I can say, to me, they were the people that made Hip Hop worldwide. I don't know if it's true, but from my point of view, these people made it worldwide. Him [Bernard Zekri], Jean Karakos . . . Because they exported that Shit, you know. And before them, it was mainly only in America" (Solo in Spady, Alim, and Meghelli 2006: 348).

9. According to a Radio France International biography of the Senegalese group Daara J, two of the founding members, Faada Freddy and Ndongo D, followed Sidney's TV show (RFI Musique 2003).

10. See Abidjan City Breakers (1986) in the discography. Search "Bamako City Breakers" on youtube.com for a video from 1985. Amadou Barry (aka Doug E. Tee) of Positive Black Soul was a break dancer before he began emceeing, and he spoke positively of Dakar City Breakers (Spady, Alim, and Meghelli 2006: 642). See Lee Watkins (2004: 129, 145) for a reference to Cape Town City Breakers.

11. Information about Dee Nasty comes from Prévos (2002: 2–5), Spady, Alim, and Meghelli (2006), and www.deenasty.com.

12. MC Solaar has confirmed the importance to him of Bambaataa's advice (Meghelli 2004).

13. The first rap single in French was probably made in 1982 by Fab Five Freddy, one of his few rap recordings. Produced in the United States by Zekri for Karakos's Celluloid label, "Change the Beat" featured Freddy rapping first in French and then in English. The "B" side featured Zekri's French girlfriend, simply known as "Beside," rapping over a similar instrumental track. The record was the one used for scratching by DJ Grandmaster D.S.T. on Herbie Hancock's 1983 hit "Rockit" (George et al. 1985: 11; Zekri 1994: 88).

14. Extended broadcasts of Dee Nasty, MC Solaar, Lionel D., and others rapping in the late 1980s on Radio Nova can be found on the internet.

15. Bocquet and Pierre-Adolphe's (1997: 251–63; 239-51 in the reprint edition) comprehensive discography indicates that in the 1980s only four French rap albums (all by Dee Nasty) and twelve singles (called maxis) were produced, and less than ten albums and a handful of compilations were produced each year from 1990 through 1994, at which point the numbers rose to more than 50 in 1996. In 1988 the first collaboration between French and American MCs was released: Marseille-born Philippe Fragione, known variously as Chill or Akehnaton, who would soon form Marseille's most important group, IAM, joined American MC Choice on the single "This is the 'B' Side." The next collaboration was when MC Solaar rapped on "Le bien, le mal" [The good, the bad] on Guru's *Jazzmatazz* album from 1993.

16. MC Solaar and Ron Carter perform together in episode 10 of the 2000 documentary *Jazz* by Ken Burns. French chart positions are available at http://lescharts.com and www.chartsinfrance.net. French album sales certifications are available at www.infodisc.fr/Certif_Album.php. Solaar's DJ Jimmy Jay, who had a share of the composer's royalties, indicated in Bocquet and Pierre-Adolphe (1997: 145) that their first album sold 650,000. Solaar raps about his early years on "Lève-toi et rap" [Get up and rap] from his 2001 album *Cinquième As.*

17. Examples of whites in the scene include Dee Nasty, MC Solaar's DJ Jimmy Jay, and various members of the top groups Suprême NTM, IAM, and Alliance Ethnik. Biracial rappers are also common, including Lionel D., Saliha (on *Rapattitude*), and recent star Serigne Mbaye (Disiz la Peste).

18. Elon D. Johnson, "DKNY: Dakar to New York," *The Source,* January 1998, 118. A directory of musicians and groups in Dakar from 1999 (Dieng et al. 1999) lists more than 100 individual artists and 50 groups who indicate that their musical style is either rap or ragga. Competing magazine *Vibe* published an article on South African hip hop the previous year: Farai Chideya, "Africa's Hip Hop Generation," *Vibe*, August 1997, 67.

19. According to U.S. census figures, the African-born population of metropolitan New York City went from 31,500 to 73,850 between 1990 and 2000 (Logan and Deane 2003: 3–5). Ghanaians, Liberians, and Nigerians predominate in New York, and documented Senegalese immigration to the United States as a whole is comparatively small (Takyi 2009: 246; Capps et al. 2011: 4). These figures do not take account of significant numbers of immigrants who were not counted in the census.

20. See Perry (1997), Noel (2000), and Bouchareb's 2001 film *Little Senegal* for insight into some of these animosities in New York, Stoller (2002) for a rich ethnography of the lives and work of West African immigrants in New York City in the 1990s, and Kane (2011) for an extended study of Senegalese immigrants in the United States. The whole premise of Akon's "Senegal" (released just as a 2- and 3-track with "Smack That," 2006, Universal) could be taken as an admonishment to his African American compatriots: "So don't complain about how they treating you here." See Madichie (2011) for an analysis of this piece from the standpoint of entrepreneurship and place marketing. See Philippe Wamba (1999), the son of an African American mother and African (Congo-Kinshasa) father, for an extraordinary first-hand analysis of relations between African Americans and Africans (I thank Kwame Harrison for referring me to this book).

21. I had the good fortune to attend this concert. For a review, see Jon Pareles, "New Sound Emerging for N'Dour," *New York Times,* July 2, 1988, 14.

22. A similar sequence is described by Tanzanian rapper Mr. II (Seiler and JJ 2005, East Africa [2:55]): imitate the lyrics, imitate the rhythm and flow and put it in the Swahili language, and then "come with our own compositions." Perullo (this volume) discusses some of the musical techniques used by Tanzanian producers.

23. A 2003 Cape Town video lecture by Prophets of Da City members Ready D and Shaheen Ariefdien provides an excellent history of early hip hop in Cape Town; also see Ariefdien and Abrahams (2006), Ariefdien and Burgess (2011), Warner (2011), and Black Noise member Emile Jansen, "History Our Story," http://blacknoise.co.za/site. Ex-Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren's 1983 *Duck Rock* album and videos for "Buffalo Gals" (featuring New York break dancers) and "Double Dutch" (with a South African mbaqanga-based sound) were milestones for dancers and rappers in South Africa (*African*

Wave, Bowey 1990; Ready D and Shaheen Ariefdien 2003). See Hazard (2009) for a brief description of access to hip hop in Zimbabwe in the 1980s by Dumi Right of Zimbabwe Legit.

24. The site africanhiphop.com and the broadcasts of its related africanhiphop.com /radio/ (formerly africanhiphopradio.com) are invaluable sources for early recordings as well as the most recent developments. I have relied on the research done on this site for the earliest recorded examples.

25. It is difficult to identify the instrument in the podcast that accompanies Ikonne (2009a). It may instead be timbales, which were used early on by Kurtis Blow in "The Breaks."

26. Ikonne (2009b) has reprinted nine vinyl and cassette album covers of Nigerian artists whose look or name were clearly modeled on Michael Jackson, including a very close look-alike Moses Jackson.

27. The New York City Breakers were formed in May 1983. Their international fame dates from 1984 when they performed on the TV show *Soul Train,* at the summer Olympics in Los Angeles, and with the Rock Steady Crew in the film *Beat Street* (released in the United States in June 1984). Their manager, Michael Holman, wrote a detailed history of the group, published in 1984.

28. Konate, now a doctor of internal medicine in France, posted to YouTube (search Bamako City Breakers) a mimed performance by him recorded in Bamako in 1985 of Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean." The quotation and information in this paragraph come from email correspondence with him, October 1, 2008.

29. See Tanzanian Kwanza Unit member Rhymson's story about trying to write down the lyrics—incorrectly—to Rakim's "I Got Soul": "I did not understand the meaning of the songs, but I learned the flow and about following the beats" (Perullo 2007: 256).

30. This may be attributed in part to my own interests at the time, which focused on performers of more deeply rooted music, mostly elders and their families.

31. As indicated in the following chapters, privatization and expansion of radio occurred in Mali, Malawi, and Ghana in the 1990s. In 1994 the South African Independent Broadcasting Authority legislated that stations should devote 20 percent of their airtime to local music (Bosch 2003: 221, quoting Gumisai Mutume, "Bringing Local Sounds to Radio," *Inter Press Service,* January 17, 1998).

32. This paragraph is based on Perullo's (2007: 256–263) excellent history.

33. U.S.-born and Zimbabwean-raised brothers Akim and Dumisani ("Dumi Right") Ndlovu moved back to the United States where they recorded and released a promo EP (with four versions of "Doin' Damage in My Native Language") in 1992 as Zimbabwe Legit on the Hollywood Basic label. But the label folded before the album could be properly released. See D. J. Fisher, "Dumi of Zimbabwe Legit Interview," September 18, 2007, www.hiphop-elements.com/article/read/6/7027/1/, and Hazard (2009).

34. According to PBS's Amadou Barry, *Salaam* sold 30,000 copies (Oumano 1999: 30). For more on PBS's early years see Spady, Alim, and Meghelli (2006: 650–54), the documentary *African Portraits: Positive Black Soul* (1996?), and Oumano (1999). PBS recorded early on in N'Dour's recording studio in Dakar (Williamson 2000: 20), and in 1996 they performed and guested on an album with visiting American saxophonist David Murray (1997). For more on Senegalese rap see O. Mbaye (1999), Herson (2000), Lobeck (2002), E. Baker (2002), Benga (2002), Niang (2006), and the film *Democracy in Dakar* (Herson,

McIlvaine, and Moore 2007). See Winders (2006: 150–59) for a snapshot of African rap in France and in Dakar in the late 1990s and early 2000s, especially Awadi's comments about preferring to stay in Senegal rather than emigrate to France (158). Oumano (1999: 30) quotes Amadou Barry: "In '89 we were Senegal's sole hip-hop group. Now, in Dakar alone, we have over 2,000 groups." O. Mbaye (1999) cites a figure of 3,000 rap groups in Senegal from a census taken by the NGO Enda Tiers-monde (although see Dieng et al. [1999] for a much smaller number).

35. This time frame is roughly consistent with what was happening elsewhere (except in France). In 1992 both the U.S. music industry magazine *Billboard* (Sinclair 1992) and the *New York Times* (Bernard 1992) recognized the potential of rap around the world, briefly noting rappers and scenes in Russia, Eastern Europe, China, Korea, Japan, India, Germany, France, England, Mexico, Anglophone Caribbean, South Africa (noting Taps, Prophets of Da City), and West Africa, which simply noted a fondness for American rap in Abidjan and that LL Cool J's concert there in 1988 was the first of its kind on the continent (Kenneth B. Noble, "The Many Accents of Rap around the World: West Africa, a King Yields to a New Messenger," *New York Times*, August 23, 1992, sec. 2, 23). Doug E. Fresh was in Senegal in 1987 or 1988, and Stetsasonic played a major concert in Dakar in 1990 (Eure and Spady 1991: 9-10, 137-39; www.rapindustry.com/daddy-o.htm).

36. Pages 239-251 in the reprint edition. See Androutsopoulos and Scholz (2003: 465–66) for a comparison of the number of rap recordings released in France, Italy, and Spain in the 1990s.

37. See the documentary *The Fab Five,* ESPN Films, 2011.

38. See www.rockonthenet.com/grammy

39. See www.koraawards.org

40. For the Senegal awards, see www.myspace.com/dakarhiphopawards. For a brief history of the Waga festival, see www.afromix.org/html/musique/articles/ouaga-hip-hop.fr.html ("Ouaga HipHop'5"). The festival website (wagahiphop.com) has not been updated since announcing Waga Hip Hop 10 in 2010 (all sites accessed April 17, 2011). The 2003 festival was the subject of a documentary film (*Ouaga Hip Hop*, Malapa 2005), and the 2007 festival has been documented with a single package book, CD, and DVD (Stay Calm! Productions 2007).

41. See Legrand and Paoletta (2005), Coetzer (2006, 2008), www.mtvbase.com (search about, Africa Music Award), http://beta.mnet.co.za/ChannelO, and http://channelo.dstv.com. See Bosch (2003: 185–207) for efforts made by Bush Radio, a community station in Cape Town, South Africa, to reach out to youth with a radio campaign in 2000 called HIV–Hop radio.

42. An early collaboration is Doug E. Fresh's "Africa (Goin' Back Home)" (on *The World's Greatest Entertainer*, 1988), which begins with a Senegalese sabar drum and Wolof speech (the performer is uncredited). In the piece Doug E. Fresh raps about his trip to Senegal (Eure and Spady 1991: 9-10). Senegalese drummer Mbaye Niasse is credited on Fresh's next album (*Doin' What I Gotta Do*, 1992). Kenyan Jean Kidula (this volume) describes her collaboration with Brazilian Sergio Mendes on the piece "Maracatudo" (*Oceano,* 1996).

43. An example of a critical response to first-generation rappers is Rap'adio from Senegal (see Lobeck 2002: 23); an example of an increasing commercialism is Skwatta

Kamp from South Africa (see L. Watkins, this volume). *Democracy in Dakar* (especially episode 6) directly addresses how a changing political environment may lead from youthful critique of the status quo to an acquiescence to play the game.

44. An excellent four-part radio documentary surveys the scenes in West, East, Southern, and North Africa in the mid-2000s (Seiler and JJC 2005). Afropop.org has several radio programs and numerous interviews and articles devoted to African hip hop and gospel (search hip hop, rap, gospel). To help fill in the large gap in coverage of North Africa, see Cestor and Abkari (2008) and the DVD *I Love Hip Hop in Morocco* (Asen and Needleman 2007) for Morocco; Daoudi (2000), Miliani (2000, 2002), and Maluka (2007) for Algeria, which historically has had the most active hip hop scene in North Africa; A. Williams (2010) for Egypt; and Abbas (2005); also see africanhiphop.com. See Nelson (1997) for a snapshot of hip hop in the capital city of Zimbabwe in the mid-1990s, Künzler (2011a) for an analysis of recent developments in South African hip hop, and Künzler (2011b) for a brief history of rap in Mali and Burkina Faso and an examination of issues discussed in rap there.

45. George (1998: 205) suggests that the UK has not produced many significant hip hop MCs because of its pervasive Jamaican dancehall culture, which would be a more attractive expressive form for Caribbean Brits than American hip hop. In the 2000s, however, UK-based rappers with Nigerian roots, such as JJC (Abdul Bello), Ty (Ben Chijioke), and BREIS (Stephen Ovba), have established a significant presence. See Wood (2009) for how the pioneering British hip hop group London Posse drew on Caribbean music for an original identity and Hesmondalgh and Melville (2001) for the varied impacts and repercussions of American hip hop in the UK.

46. See Helenon (2006) for an analysis of some of the varied relationships that rappers of African descent in France may have with Africa.

47. Mokobe's official Facebook page for his fans (Mokobe113Official) contains extensive media about him, including recorded interviews.

48. He has published an English translation of his autobiography in 2009.

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