Pan-Africanism is the idea that people of African descent worldwide share historical, cultural, sociological, and ancestral heritage to the continent of Africa. This universal kinship to the African continent reflects in their mutual conditions of socio-economic inequity based on a contrived international racial hierarchy, colonialism, neocolonialism—and their hegemonic reiterations in other institutionalized systems of oppression. As a result of this shared collective origin to the African continent and worldwide systems of socio-economic injustice, people of African descent feel a need to pool together to overcome their shared oppression.

This form of thinking concerning the conditions of Black people globally has manifested in a variety of ways including Intellectual or Philosophical Pan-Africanism, Literary Pan-Africanism, Political Pan-Africanism, Cultural and Religious Pan-Africanism. Cultural Pan-Africanists emphasize and celebrate Black cultural arts as authentic human expressions. These include cultural expressions in cuisine, fine arts, film, music, and literature. It is such cultural sensibilities and social activism that birthed the New Negro Movement in Washington D.C., the Pan-African Festival (Panafest) in Accra, Ghana, and the Pan-African Film and Television Festival (FESPACO), in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso as well as the Pan-African Film and Arts Festival (PAFF) in Los Angeles, U.S. PAFF, for example, defines its mission as:

… the promotion of cultural understanding among peoples of African descent PAFF is dedicated to racial tolerance through the exhibition of film, art and creative expression. It is PAFF’s goal to present and showcase the broad spectrum of Black creative works; particularly those that reinforce positive images and help destroy negative stereotypes. We believe film and art can lead to better understanding and foster communication between peoples of diverse cultures, races, and lifestyles, while at the same time serve as a vehicle to initiate dialogue on the important issues of our times.² [Italics Mine].

In this statement, Pan-African emphasis on a cultural understanding among peoples of African descent is apparent while at the same time lending credence to the Black creative spectrum and social activism through engagement with several others as a means of promoting Black excellence.
Hip Hop is a cultural movement that first gained world prominence beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was a socio-cultural movement among African-American and Caribbean peoples (mainly Jamaican and Puerto-Rican youth) in New York, who gave dance, artistic, fashion, musical, and other aesthetic expressions to their personal and collective experiences as marginalized peoples in the inner cities of the United States. Different forms of the spoken word characterized Hip Hop, scratching, break dancing, graffiti, freestyling, rhyme and rhythm as well as musical hybridity. Hip Hop music as an art form can be defined as a genre of music with roots in Africa. Nonetheless, it is pioneered by African-American and Afro-Caribbean artistes and includes stylized rhythmic music, Scratching and DJing (Disc Jockeying) Emceeing (Master of Ceremonies), rapping and other verbal arts as seen in the practice of some of its pioneers, which include DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, The Sugarhill Gang, Afrika Bambaataa and others too numerous to enumerate here.3 Thus, in furtherance of political aims and social activism, Hip-Hop as art and music is also a counter-cultural tool used by marginalized groups to overturn the stark realities of Black life worldwide.

It is therefore not happenstance that Hip-Hop as a cultural expression—and rap as a musical genre that emerged from the wellspring of Black existential realities draws specifically on a Pan-African ethos to affirm Black cultural philosophies, social organizing, and pragmatic leadership, leading to a dynamic relationship between Hip-Hop and Pan-Africanism. This interdependent relationship, I argue here, is mediated by a set of interrelated factors: global Black circuits, glocalization, intentionality, and the notion of Africa as a primordial center or the ancient center of dispersal for people of African descent (Back to Africa/Africa Returns).

Bridge

By global Black circuits, I mean spaces, cities, locales, towns, halls, or collectives where Black folk of diverse continental, cultural, ethnic, social, or religious backgrounds have usually congregated to pursue Pan-African goals, discourse on local and international Black issues, and to formulate policies or philosophies for engaging with such existing global Black problems. Two examples of such Transnational Black public culture should suffice here. David Walker’s classic Pan-African text, *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World,* which argued for an immediate and violent end to slavery was written and developed in his discourse with the Black Bostonian community, which organized African lodges, Black Freemasons, and churches. The community’s discourse and organizing concerning slavery also produced the Abolitionist career of Black Womanist precursor, Maria Stewart. To demonstrate the international and Pan-African dimensions of the city of Boston as a discursive space for Black organizing and Pan-African activity it is essential to state here that it was Walker, an interlocutor of Maria Stewart, who delivered the toast and introduction of Abdul Ibrahim Rahman Sori when he arrived in Boston. Sori was in Boston to give a speech and to raise funds for the purchase of the freedom of his children who had been born into slavery at a dinner organized by Black Bostonians. Rahman Sori was a prince of the Senegambian kingdom of Futa Jallon, who had been kidnapped and sold into slavery in Natchez, Mississippi. He had been free from his owner as a result of his agency, the benevolence of friends, and the intervention of the sitting President of the United States, John Quincy Adams. Sori was seeking to return to his home in West Africa, with all his children still enslaved on the plantation of his former owner.4 The intersection of the lives of Sori, a formerly enslaved Muslim West African, Stewart, a free Black woman intellectual, and
Walker, an abolitionist, and Pan-Africanist illustrates the city of Boston as an international Black public sphere or global black circuit.\(^5\)

Africa Returns, the notion, and practice of returning to Africa, physically, spiritually, or periodically is an enduring Pan-African practice that hearkens back to the period of trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and plantation slavery in the Americas.\(^6\) The government of the African nation of Ghana declared 2019, the Year of Return. The declaration was in remembrance of the 400 years since the arrival of Africans in the Americas as enslaved peoples. The Year of Return also has the Pan-African theme of “Re-Uniting the African Family: Reaching Across Continents Into the Future.” Before its official commemoration in Ghana, however, Diasporic Africans have already been returning to Ghana. One of such people is U.S. African-American rapper, Diggy Simmons, who returned to Africa alongside diasporic Africans of Ghanaian heritage, actors, Boris Kodjoe and Nicole Parker, as well as international executive, Bozoma St. John, alongside other U.S. African-Americans. Diggy recently shared his feelings on returning to Africa. Clad in a Kente cloth, Diggy wrote on his Instagram page:

Perhaps I’m ignorant. Perhaps I have been for some time now. Many of my perceptions, or misperceptions rather, were overdue to be rightfully shattered. It’s a shame—as one with many friends from Cameroon, Nigeria, and other countries throughout the continent of Africa—that I have remained so unaware. These friends raved about their homelands, and somehow their praise fell upon deaf ears, in part due to [the fact that] as a child, Africa, to me, seemed branded as less than alluring. The media and my societal narrative has often viewed Africa with a lens of violence, poverty, and underdevelopment. This portrayal has caused generations of Africans to abandon their own heritage and traditions. During my trip to Ghana, I can’t say I’ve ever felt more comfortable in a space. I don’t think I stopped my Shaku Shaku from the time I got off the plane. Every stereotype that’s been perpetuated never pointed to me feeling this free. I was also fortunate enough to visit the slave dungeons in Cape Coast—small quarters where over a hundred of my potential ancestors were held captive on any given day with no nourishment, suffering in their own faeces and urine. As heartbreaking as it was to stand on those grounds, my takeaway—apart from feeling both inspired and devastated—was a galvanized sense of pride. I felt as if I gained a more authentic and emboldened sense of self, furthering my own understanding of endurance through my ancestors’ plight.

Here, Diggy’s sense of the history of Africa, slavery, his sense of self, fashion, pride in his African heritage and the erosion of his sense of shame about Africa epitomizes the Pan-African goals of the Year of Return. It also demonstrates the fulfillment of Pan-African ideals evidenced in the mission of PAFF and definitions of Pan-Africanism offered in this chapter. Nonetheless, Diggy is not the first Hip-Hop artist or Diasporic African to have returned to Africa. Stevie Wonder, Isaac Hayes, and Hip Hop group Public Enemy have been coming for years. Others like Muhammad Ali, Maya Angelou, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, have all at one time returned to visit and stay in Ghana and other parts of Africa for extended periods. Distinguished U.S. African American intellectual, W. E. B. DuBois, and Jamaican Reggae icon, Rita Marley, are some of the most prominent returnees. DuBois lays in Ghana, and his gravesite, which is his former residence is a national shrine (W.E.B. DuBois Center for Pan-African Culture), whiles Rita Marley has lived quietly in Ghana for the past two decades. An African return narrative like Diggy’s is also evident in Hip-Hop forerunner, Afrika Bambaataa’s name. Bambaataa (Lance Taylor), sometimes referenced as the godfather of Hip-Hop, replaced the name of his street gang—
the Black Spades—with a Pan-African moniker: Universal Zulu Nation, after a return to the African continent. Much like Diggy Simmons, Bambaataa, a descendant of Jamaican and Barbadian immigrants in the South Bronx, claims a transformation in his worldview following a 1975 return to Africa at the behest of the international organization, UNICEF. According to Bambaataa his visits to Ivory Coast, Nigeria, and Guinea Bissau:

... was a big inspiration, seeing black people controlling their own destiny, seeing them get up and go to their own work. Seeing their own farmers and agricultures, it was very interesting, when you were seeing all the negativity that you were seeing as a young cat in America, and all the stuff just coming out of the '60s with the civil rights and human rights, so it was very inspirational seeing this.7

What is most significant from the preceding is that from its very beginnings, Hip-Hop was shaped by the Back to Africa narrative. A centering of Africa or mythologizing Africa as the centripetal force for a Black agency and continues to influence successive generations of Hip Hoppers including Diggy Simmons, who is also the son of Rev. Run, one half of the thriving Hip Hop group RUN DMC.

Glocalization, on the other hand, is the dual process by which a receiving culture indigenizes universal or external cultural influences. As Msia Kibona Clark’s detailed and enterprising work on African Hip-Hop demonstrates, African Hip-Hop practitioners are influenced by global Hip-Hop trends but have also advanced the genre in their unique way using homegrown ideas that reflect the lived realities of diverse communities in Africa.8 Thus, while African Hip Hop acts are influenced by global Hip-Hop trends, they indigenize such global impacts to the extent that global Hip-Hop is in turn influenced by indigenized African Hip-Hop practices, innovations, and culture. This process of glocalization in Hip Hop is evident in collaborations between global Hip-Hop performers and African Hip-Hop musicians, as well as sampling of African Hip-Hop music by the global Hip-Hop artists.

This is, however, neither a novel practice, nor is it limited to Hip-Hop music. In discussing historical context and exchanges, social processes, and actual physical mobility between Black populations, Ruth Simms Hamilton introduced the term “circulatoriness.” Circulatoriness is emblematic of the “ongoing continuous geo-social mobility and displacement of people of African descent.” Hamilton avers that within this “proliferation of passages” is social identity formation, as well as the exchange, and flow of Black music within global Africa. That is, the circulations of musical genres like Reggae, Zouk, Highlife, Soul, and Jazz within Africa, the Caribbean and the United States.9 All of these flows are a reflection of the continued dynamic Pan-African exchange that exists between Africa and its Diaspora.

Finally, much like David Walker’s explicit call for the end to slavery, Hip-Hop songs and albums, from Public Enemy’s “Black CNN” and “Fight the Power,” Queen Latifah’s “U.N. I.T.Y.,” X-Clan’s “Raise the Flag,” NAS’ “I Can,” to Kendrick Lamar’s “Pimp, a Butterfly,” Hip-Hop musicians reflect an intentionality. That is, a self-conscious effort to portray or seek to infuse public culture in general and Black cultural publics and discourse with Pan-African themed lyrics of African returns, fighting oppression, seeking Black unity, Black self-worth, and Black excellence worldwide.

With this as background, it is not surprising that an International Hip Hop Pan African Diaspora Family ReUnion- Summit (IHHADFR) is part of the program for the 2019 edition of PANAFEST, with its central theme, “Reuniting the African Family” and a sub-theme, “Pan-Africanism, and the African Continent.”10 This demonstrates how Hip Hop has become integral to various Pan-African projects globally. PANAFEST itself emerged as
a Pan–African cultural festival in the late 1980s under the guidance of Efua Sutherland, herself a Pan-Africanist with connections to a wide range of Pan-African figures including Maya Angelou and her Sutherland’s African American husband, Bill Sutherland. The festival took global prominence in the early 1990s as it became a homecoming event for Diasporic Africans. The festival usually addresses issues of slavery, emancipation, trauma, healing, and self-determination as well as Black tourism. Since then it has attracted artists from all over the Black world. These artists include Dionne Warwick, Jermaine Jackson, Hugh Masakela, as well as Hip Hop acts like Public Enemy, and the London group, PLZ (Parables Linguistics, and Zlang).

**Track 1: New York**

New York, with its high rise buildings, bright lights, and intoxicating culture is often rightly portrayed as a center of international activity in music, commerce, literature, art, and theater. At least, that is the feeling one gets listening to the first few verses on Jay-Z and Alicia Keys’ “Empire State of Mind” with shout outs to some of New York’s legends in film and music, like De Niro and the Simmons. Jay Z then raps about being the new Sinatra, and that if he made it in New York, he could make it anywhere. He also sends greetings to Harlem’s Dominicanos and ends up contrasting New York’s streets from Texas, the home state of his wife, Beyoncé Knowles.

However, critically listening to the third verse on this track, as well as Jay-Z and Cameron’s lyrics on the track, “I am from New York,” then Nas’ “Empire State of Mind,” a different sense of life in New York, particularly the peculiarities of Black life in New York becomes apparent. These Hip Hop artistes through their descriptive lyrics help us to reframe New York as a historic Black public sphere founded on the backs of enslaved and free Africans. New York was a site for the circulation of Black literature and cultures like the New Negro Movement and the Harlem Renaissance, historic Black Parades and Marches by DuBois’ NAACP and Marcus Garvey’s UNIA. It was also the site of Slave Rebellions, a haven of freedom for escaped slaves, and a popular destination for Southern Blacks during the Great Migration, as well as for Black Caribbean migrants. More importantly, New York City is a sphere of Pan-African mobilization and activity.

Beginning with European settlement of New York as a mid-Atlantic colony in the early seventeenth century, Dutch settlers imported Africans with diverse cultural backgrounds to the then New Netherland, which includes portions of present-day New York, with New Amsterdam (Manhattan) as its Capital. In this period, enslaved Africans arrived mostly from the Caribbean and South America and a significant minority directly from West Central Africa. When the Dutch ceded New York to the English, they also imported African souls from the Caribbean and Africa as the system of slavery in the colony became increasingly oppressive. These Africans became domestics, maritime, and artisanal workers who helped build the colony’s roads, docks, and ports. By the eighteenth century, increasing numbers of enslaved Africans were coming directly from Africa as opposed to transhipped Africans from the Caribbean in the previous century. The New York Slave Plot of 1741 believed to have been fomented by “Spanish” Blacks, and Cuffe, an enslaved person of Akan, Gold Coast heritage led to more diminution in freedom for Blacks in the city.

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, New York slowly emerged as a space of Black affluence and socio-political activities. It had groups like the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, the New York Manumission Society, which established the New York African Free School in 1787. New York’s Lower Manhattan during this time comprising “all colors, white, yellow, brown, and ebony black,” but also a thriving Black
community like Seneca in Upper Manhattan. Seneca Village having gardens with “cabbage, and melon patches, with hills of corn and cucumbers, and beds of beets, parsnips.” By the first decade of the twentieth century, there were about 5,000 foreign-born Blacks in New York City, and 12,000 by 1910. The NAACP organized the Silent March there, after the Race Riots in St. Louis. The Victory Parade also happened there after WW1. New York also became the destination for Black Southerners migrating during the Great Depression.

These migrants adding on to the historically Black communities made New York City a historical global Black circuit. It is, therefore, no coincidence that New York City by the last quarter of the twentieth century, with its boroughs, districts, and satellite communities became the site for the emergence of a musical genre with an underlining Pan-African ethos as well as Pan-African participants that includes Black Puerto Ricans, Black Dominicans, African-Americans, and other Caribbean Blacks.

**Track 2: Pan-African exchanges**

Eduardo Paulino, writes emphatically that working-class Black and Mullatta Dominicans became more racially aware and “learned that they were black and belonged to a larger African diaspora.” He notes that it was, in fact, these New York-based migrants, through their interactions with U.S. African Americans, and Puerto Ricans, who returned home to make the “coifs, music, spirituality, and clothing associated with the US Black Power movement” visible in the Dominican Republic. Specifically, “Santo Domingo’s La Calle El Conde as they were on the Grand Concourse and 149th Street in the Bronx.” In other words, New York as a global Black circuit was influential in the rise and making of Black identity in another Black sphere of the African Diaspora.

Hip-Hop’s pioneers reflect this Black cultural mélange. The U.S. born, Afrika Bambaataa speaks of his Jamaican and Barbadian heritage, whiles DJ Kool Herc (Jamaican born), Grandmaster Flash (Barbadian born), DJ Red Alert (Antigua born) all brought an eclectic influence on the music scene in New York. It was the evolution of this cultural movement that Ghana’s Reggie Rockstone came to be influenced by as the son of an African fashion legend, Ricci St. Ossei, raised by both an Asante mother and an African American step-mother. Reggie was born in London but raised tri-continentially between New York, Crenshaw, London, Kumasi, and Accra.

It is the year 2010, the venue is Accra, the capital city of Ghana, and the occasion is Ghana’s emcees featured on a cypher broadcast on the Black Entertainment and Television network in the US. There are seven Ghanaian rappers: D Black, Kwaku-T, Sarkodie, Tinny, Edem, Baby G, and the Godfather of Ghanaian Hiplife, Reggie Rockstone. Rapping variedly in English, West African English, Akan-Twi, Gá, and Ewé; all six preceding rappers demonstrate their expressive versatility in the languages they choose to rap in. Reggie Rockstone dressed up in boubou steps in to close the cypher. Some of the lyrics from Rockstone’s cypher depict him as an itinerant on the global Black circuit in London and New York; Who asking/seen it all, done it all/from Brooklyn to Brixton [England]. He follows up these lyrics by pivoting to become a cultural translator now, owing to his tricontinental experiences in Ghana, UK, and the US. Rockstone, the transcultural savant raps, Y’all say snitching/In Ghana we say chooking. He then cements his place in Ghanaian Hip Hop lore as the originator of Ghanaian Hip-Life; Hip-Life be my woman, and I love what she cooking/And I love all my children/Living legend. Following this, he uses wordplay on LL Cool J’s name and Hip-Hop cultural registers to rap about Jay-Z’s return to Ghana for
a concert. He raps, you could call me LL, it’s cool J[ay] Z passed through for a second/That was so swirl.  

In doing this Rockstone comes full circle, rapping about both the continued Pan-African exchanges between African and American rappers—the glocalization process.  

PANAFEST was, in fact, the site for the glocalization and global emergence of Hip–Life, Ghana’s unique Hip-Hop genre. It was a moment of improvisation in PLZ’s performance that Ghana’s Hip-Life and its Godfather, Reggie Rockstone began to gain global renown. The duo, Rockstone and Funkstone, began rapping in local languages when the DJ set broke. The response of the crowd will lead them to begin experimenting with rapping in local languages in clubs and shows. First, a note about the Pan-African composition of PLZ is appropriate here to be followed by a discussion of London and Accra as Pan-African city circuits that enabled Hip-Hop culture. PLZ comprised the groups Disc Jockey, mentor, and producer for the group, DJ Pogo (Montout), who is of Afro-Jamaican heritage but born and raised in East London. One of the emcees of the group was Fredi Funkstone (Fredi Fyle), raised in Accra, and London by Sierra Leonean parents. The other emcee was London born Reggie Rockstone (Reginald Ossei), whose parents are Ghanaian. While born in England, Rockstone was raised in Accra and Kumasi, Ghana as well as London, and Brooklyn, New York. The less written about muse and hype man of the PLZ crew is Jay (Junior Anno-Bempong) also Ghanaian.  

Track 3: the PLZ background: London as a global black and Pan-African circuit

Rockstone was born in the United Kingdom in 1964, when his mother, Aunty Hannah, a Nurse, and his father, Ricci St. Ossei, a world-renowned fashion designer, both lived in London. He returned to Ghana with his mother in the early 1970s and attended school in Kumasi, Ghana. He went on to attend the famous Achimota Secondary School in Accra and was well known as a martial artist and break-dancer until he returned to London to attend Drama School. In the 1980’s Rockstone settled in London, whiles traveling to New York to buy Hip-Hop clothes from another Ghanaian born Hip-Hop fashion icon, Dapper-Dan, and selling them in London.

London had long become a global Black circuit going back to the days of Olaudah Equiano (c. 1745–1797), Ottobah Cugoano (c.1757–unknown) in the late eighteenth century who lived at the same time of the repatriation of the so-called Black Poor of London to Freetown Sierra Leone. Both were members of the group “The Sons of Africa,” which comprised free Blacks living in London. They also had working relationships with various Abolitionist groups and the radical working-class group, London Corresponding Society, and offered critiques of the Freetown resettlement. As the colonial metropolis, London in the 1800s received professional migrants from the peripheries of the empire; from the Caribbean, as well as West and East Africa in particular. Pan-Africanist intellectuals Edward W. Blyden (1832–1912), Dusé Mohamed Ali (1866–1945), J. E. Casely Hayford, and (1866–1930) were all a part of these Victorian-era Black engagements in London.

London was also the scene for the gathering of the fathers and mothers of Pan-Africanism Henry Sylvester Williams W. E. B DuBois, Benito Sylvan, Anna H. Jones, and Anna J. Cooper for the Pan-African Conference in 1900. London was also the place where Sierra Leonean, I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson, Trinidadians George Padmore, and C.L.R. James, as well as Guyanese, T. Ras Makonnen formed the International African Service Bureau to oppose the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Whereas Manchester is not London, the 1945 Pan-African Congress is part of the general colonial metropolis scene, and the Congress
produced many of Africa’s post-colonial leaders such as Hastings Banda of Malawi, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana who had all come to London to pursue education or professional training.\(^\text{21}\)

It was under Nkrumah’s government that Reggie Rockstone’s father, St. Ossei gained a scholarship to study in London. Rockstone’s tri-continental experiences began around 1966, after high ranking Armed forces and Police service officers of Ghana ousted Nkrumah, whose government had sponsored St. Ossei’s schooling. Government-sponsored students were asked to return home, but St. Ossei chose to go to the U.S. with Rockstone in tow. Following the divorce of Rockstone’s parents, his father, St. Ossei, married an African-American fashion model; by Rocksone’s account, two strong women raise him in the multiple locations. When he was not in Accra or Kumasi, Rockstone lived in the United States with his father and stepmother, allowing him to shuffle between London, Brooklyn, New York, and Crenshaw, Los Angeles.\(^\text{22}\)

During this time a Hip-Hop scene was emerging in London, a transition from the Disco-Funk, Jazz, Reggae (Roots and Dub, Lovers Rock) scene in London in the late 1970s–1980s in places like Covent Garden. There was the development of breaking, popping, graffiti in train yards, football gangs, and the harassment of the increasing black population by skinheads.\(^\text{23}\) This was a perfect environment for a martial artist and b-boy raised by Pan-Africanist parents. Influenced by a childhood friend, Fredi Funkstone, Rockstone transitioned from a b-boy to a rapper, the childhood friends setting up shop with Jay, and DJ Pogo, a prominent DJ who grew up in East London. The group released hits like “If it Aint PLZ” and “Build a Wall Around Your Dreams.” They enjoyed some popularity but little commercial success.

**Track 4: Accra**

In 1994, Reggie Rockstone returned home to Ghana under the auspices of PANAFEST to perform alongside the Jungle Brothers, who had been on tour with PLZ. The 1994 edition of PANAFEST “witnessed the participation of over 4,000 international participants from 32 countries” including the festival co-chairman, Stevie Wonder, who was also the leading artist for the festival. He, therefore, inaugurated the festival in Accra.\(^\text{24}\) Accra has served as the crossroads for the meeting of different cultures for centuries. The indigenes of Accra, the Gámei or Gá people themselves migrated within the region whiles encountering and transculturating with Guan and Akan groups. Atlantic encounters with Europeans will produce an additional layer of the so-called Mul-latofoi, that is, Gámei who were of Afro-European descent. Migrations from several West African groups, the Hausa of Nigeria, Yoruba and Fulani traders, the Kru of Liberia, West Indian missionaries, and Afro-Brazilian returnees characterize the colonial period beginning in the 1800s.\(^\text{25}\)

Since its beginning as the colonial capital in 1877 and then subsequently the capital of an independent Ghana, Accra has served as the locus for political organization. From the Accra Rate Payers Association to the All African Peoples Conference, Accra has raised nationalists and Pan-Africanists. Arguably the Pan-African capital of the world, Accra has attracted the likes of I. T. A. Wallace Johnson who raised funds for the defense of the Scottsboro Boys in the US. Both he and Nigeria’s first president, Nnamdi Azikiwe had their political start as anti-colonialists in Accra. Others like Robert Mugabe taught at the famous Achimota Secondary School, Reggie Rockstone’s alma mater.

Musically, Accra has been an incubator for different musical genres, the most popular being Highlife music and Afrobeat courtesy of Osibisa. Musical greats, Louis Armstrong, Wilson Pickett, Fela Kuti, Tina Turner, have all been to Ghana. With Ghana now styled as the gateway to West Africa, Accra continues to be the Black cosmopolitan public thoroughfare to West Africa.
Track 5: Outro

It was in such an atmosphere that Reggie Rockstone made his Africa Return after several years on the global Black circuit. At the same time, New Yorker, DJ Rab born to Ghanaian and African American parents and raised in New York was coming back to Accra/Africa to explore his Ghanaian heritage and to visit family. This proliferation of returns in an international Black public sphere will lead to the meeting of DJ Rab and Reggie Rockstone in a nightclub in Accra, where the two hit it off and collaborated to pioneer a new musical genre Hip-Life, which combined Hip-Hop and Ghana’s Highlife music. These were different times; nightlife in Accra had gradually changed in two years following Ghana’s return to democratic rule in 1992. So when Reggie Rockstone raps about “Nightlife in Accra” it was a soundtrack to his Pan-African return to Accra. According to Rab, also known as Rab the international Bakari, he “[heard them [Rockstone and Funkstone] rapping on the instrumental of Das EFX’s Microphone Checka.” I was shocked! I said to myself “Cats are getting skills like that in Accra?” I introduced myself. They could not believe that they were hooking up with an authentic producer from the Mecca of Hip Hop in Accra. It was on!26

Accra then served as the global Black circuit through which Rockstone and DJ Rab returned “Back to Africa” discoursed musically to intentionally produce a musical genre with Black languages (Ebonics and Akan-Twi) that will in the spirit of Pan-Africanism bridge the gap between the U.S. and Ghana. Encounters like this are happening more frequently among people of African descent in various Black public spheres of the worldwide Hip-Hop Social Movement. Hip-Hop scenes in Havana, and Santiago de Cuba and their exchanges with African and U.S. artistes seem to be the new frontier.27

Figure 34.1 Author with Reggie Rockstone, 2008 at a Bless the Mic Event in Accra, Ghana
Figure 34.2 Author with members of the African Atlantic Research Team and some Cuban Raperos in Santiago de Cuba, 2004. Thanks to Alexandra Gelbard, Visiting Scholar in the Global and Sociocultural Studies department, Florida International University (FIU), for sharing this picture.

Notes


2 http://www.paff.org/ accessed 03/14/2019

3 For the most comprehensive definition of Hip Hop; its African roots, Pan-African dimensions, and historiography, see Msia Bona Clark, Hip Hop in Africa: Prophets of the City and Dusty Foot Philosophers (Athen: Ohio University Press, 2018) 3, 5–10, 206–209.


5 In this work, I have used global black circuit, transnational Black public culture, and international Black public spheres interchangeably. But there is also an interrelated distinction between the three terms that I hope to explore in future work. However, for the purposes of this work, circuit references popular locales or places that are usually included in the itineraries and journeys of Black personalities or intellectuals. A transnational or an international Black public culture is on the hand the culture generated within an international Black public sphere. Such a sphere could be in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Santiago de Cuba, or Detroit, USA.


8 Clark, Hip-Hop in Africa, 21–35.
Hill Hop and Pan-Africanism

10 https://www.panafestghana.org/page/?id=2387

17 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ewx_DqwmYE accessed 01/06/2019
19 Odamtten, Hip Hop Speaks, 155–158.
20 Osumare, Ghana’s Hip-Life, 16.
23 See DJ Pogo’s fascinating description of growing up in London in this interview, “DJ Pogo breaking down his history in London UltraCab Classic Hip Hop” www.youtube.com/watch?v=0b6Jw_vXs accessed 05/24/2019.
24 https://www.panafestghana.org/page/?id=2387
For DJ Rab’s account of the encounter see “DJ Rab Sets the Standards” www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/DJ-Rab-Sets-the-Standards-191119 accessed 06/10/2019; for other accounts see Shipley, Living the Hiplife and Osumare, Ghana’s Hiplife.

Personal Conversations with Alexandra Gelbard who has been researching Cuban music since 2012.