CHAPTER 8

Hip-Hop Culture and Youth in Lagos: The Interface of Globalisation and Identity Crisis

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Introduction

Hip-hop culture came into Nigeria about 1989 and rapidly became a dominant feature of youth culture. It changed the type of music played and enjoyed by Nigerian youth, the way they dressed, spoke and behaved. The songs have been criticised as noisy and beat-based, meaningless, lewd, and immoral; dance is said to be sexy and erotic; dress is described as “riotous”. It is claimed women are disrespected and exploited and the music is over-commercialised. Motivated by this recent debate, this chapter explores the influence of hip-hop on youth culture in Lagos. It looks at sexual morality and a possible crisis of youth identity. It also asks whether hip hop is a sub-culture or a contra-culture.

An incontrovertible reality of social life today is globalisation (McLuhan, 1968; Van Der Bly, 2005): the shrinking of social and geographical space and diminution of the significance of physical space between continents, cultures, peoples, economies and countries. This process has been variously described as homogenization of world culture or Americanization (Schiller, 1976), mondialisation (Cerami, 1962), complex connectivity (Tomlinson, 1999), incorporation into single world society (Albrow, 1990), and McDonaldisation (Ritzer, 2000). Other western scholars have identified hybridisation (Neverdeeen Pieterse, 1995), the clash of civilizations (Huntington, 1993) or McWorld vs Jihad (Barber, 1995). Yet certainly it is not yet Uhuru (victory) for the dependent global South. Moreover, the prospect for a level playing ground for rich and poor countries or even of universal global wealth and prosperity for all comers is not foreseeable.

Debate over the ravaging effect of globalisation by way of continued cultural hegemony of America and Europe against the dependent half of the world is gradually shifting focus from economy and finance to fashion, aesthetics and expressive aspects of culture. The driving force in the new agenda is information and communication technology (ICT). A powerful medium of cultural penetration and take-over, particularly among youth in the global south, is hip hop music and culture. Hip hop penetration and ICT strongly influence youth
due to their receptivity, experimental attitude and impressionable disposition. ICT globalisation is said to have created a window and a gazing effect that allows young people to observe, imbibe, learn, as well as sample, other tastes, cultures, values and ideas (Siziba, 2009). Guguleti Siziba identifies this as the origin of what he calls Africa's crisis of “rebellious youth” and identity crisis. He argues young people are claiming spaces in which to exercise their agency and through music, language, art and lifestyle. Here they generate their own identities, divorced from adult imperatives.

In our view, hip hop in Nigeria has emerged as a popular cultural form through which young people are projecting their own identity and contributing to the production of dominant or mainstream culture of their society in the contemporary world. In this process they are looking outside their own society,

The worldview of children and young people are being shaped by phenomena in ways that often make them look for role models or aspire to things outside their own societies. With far broader horizons than the youth of previous generations, their aspirations can easily go beyond what the material conditions of the societies where they live in can allow. A strong urge and, in some instances, desperate attempts to migrate to the industrialized countries are among the consequences.

SALL ET. AL. 2009, 1

There is a compelling urge to think act, appear and behave like European or American youth, the direction from where new ideas, values and tastes are coming. Caught between the local and the global milieu, they are faced with difficult choices. The attraction of Nigerian youth is to get closer to youth in other parts of the world and to key into the universalising global culture of young persons through hip hop.

Characteristics of Hip-Hop Culture and the Story of Its Penetration

Children and youth in Lagos are greatly influenced by hip hop culture. In addition to received American hip hop, a burgeoning industry for the local reproduction of the Nigerian genre has taken root. We argue that hip hop has become the single most powerful movement driving the globalisation, even Americanisation, of Nigerian youth culture. Children and youth dress, play, talk, sing, reason and share social and ethical values that characterise the hip hop culture tradition that came from New York. Yet the dynamics of its