With the proliferation of communication and speed technologies, there has been a ubiquitous movement of resources, corporate ideologies, and cultural practices from the First World to so-called “Third World” regions in the post-industrial era, which has allowed, according to hip-hop icon, Talib Kweli, hip-hop culture to become “the language of the children” (Runnel, 2006). On one level, hip-hop culture, like so many artistic forms produced by minoritized youth, has not only been colonized by Western political and economic leaders to exploit and profit from disaffected urban youth, but also has been procured to represent the Other in ways that “play into the racist, misogynist agenda of (W)hite supremacy” and imperialism (Keyes, 2002, as cited in Kato, 2007). In essence, the “language of the children” has become a transnational corporate configuration. White record executives have sought to manipulate the public by supporting and promoting hip-hop artists who embody a materialistic, misogynist, homophobic, and violent ‘gangsta’ image,’ which undermines the emancipatory elements of this counterculture (Magubane, 2006; Dyson, 1996). Unlike the debilitating hegemonic characterization of the hip-hop world concocted by the corporate elite, some hip-hop artists’ lyrics and their cultural activism represent a counter-hegemonic movement against the corporate, economic, and cultural status quo. Youth cultural manifestations are predicated on bringing awareness to the social and economic forces responsible for urban violence and institutional racism, on challenging neo-liberal economic, political and social arrangements responsible for human suffering and misery in other contexts, and on engendering autonomous zones through their aesthetic expression that, momentarily, give these hip-hop pedagogues the power to overcome alienation and oppression associated with growing up in blighted, militarized and impoverished communities (Kato, 2007). Consequently, the public has incorrectly blamed hip-hop and urban youths for social ills occurring in various urban contexts containing poverty, joblessness, racism, and violence, and has been prevented from seeing hip-hop intellectuals courageously emulating and building upon the cultural work of hip-hop pioneers. As an intuitive response to the unjust conditions impacting their social world in the mid-1970s, several African American youths and “the sons and daughters of immigrant youth [who] had been displaced by the movement of global capital,” launched the hip-hop movement through break dancing, tagging/graffiti, MCing, and DJing (Kelley, 2006, p. ix).
The cultural manifestations and activists’ agendas proffered by rap pioneers in the US also resonated with other minoritized youths whose social worlds were similarly sundered by the social and cultural conditions caused by racism, de-industrialization, over-policing, and the globalization of capital (Magubane, 2006). For example, the economic conditions and social realities that permeated the *banlieues* in France during the 1980s proved vital in sparking alienated French youths’ interest in hip-hop. Specifically, the loss of permanent blue-collar work and other low-income jobs “created an atmosphere of depressed sterility,” and *banlieue* youths experienced a sense of social exile when the elite in France pushed them to the margins of French society, despite the fact that many of them were French citizens (Silverstein, 2005, p. 50). They were positioned as being the “immigrant problem,” which was equated to being the source of economic and social maladies permeating France (Beau, 1999). Not coincidentally, these youth identified with the messages of Afrika Bambattaa, a former gang member from New York, who visited France in 1984 in order to establish a branch of the Zulu Nation (Helenon, 2006). The message of the Zulu Nation, which was grounded in the ideals of “social responsibility, culture, and peace”, was established by Bambattaa to combat gang violence (Helenon, 2006, p 153). He believed that hip-hop needed to “make a commitment to stop the violence and shift toward more political advocacy in urban communities” world-wide (Chang as cited in Prier, in this volume).

With the ascendency of the neo-liberal agenda in France as well as in former French colonies during the 1990s, the social and economic conditions deteriorated for most minoritized youth in these regions. Many disaffected youth found solace and inspiration that they could overcome their unjust realities through the lyrics and cultural work of the early French hip-hop movement, such as MC Solaar, IAM, and Suprême NTM as well as their transgressive hip-hop counterparts in the US, such as Public Enemy, NWA and Ice-T. Today, the hip-hop counterculture in France has broadened to not only reflect the local concerns and struggles of youth residing in the cities but also to provide “an immanent critique” of how neo-liberalism fosters institutional racism, classism, police corruption, Western imperialism, and environmental degradation in geographical spaces across the globe (Magubane, 2006, p. 214).

In the pages that follow, we mine the cultural manifestations of French hip-hop pedagogues to illustrate how Western colonialism, imperialism and neo-liberalism are “largely responsible for the swelling of abject poverty, suffering and misery, environmental degradation, the Western world’s growing police state, the military-prison-education-industrial complex and virulent forms of racism, sexism, and homophobia” (Giroux, 2004). In particular, we uncover three recurring themes that surface in the artists’ texts, which elucidate their critical insight towards what fuels injustice and oppression in France and in the wider social world: 1) life and oppression in the *banlieue*; 2) making visible the impact of Western colonialism and reconstituting and transforming self; and 3) current manifestations of neo-liberal globalization and Western imperialism. The paper also illuminates the power that the youths’ cultural work has had in confronting the institutions, policies,