

Alain-Philippe Durand (ed.): *'Hip-Hop en français'. An Exploration of Hip-Hop Culture in the Francophone World.*

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Alain-Philippe Durand is not a new name in Hip-Hop Studies, on the contrary: In 2002, his essay collection *Black, Blanc, Beur: Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture in the Francophone World*, the first comprehensive English-language study of rap and hip-hop in the French-speaking world, was highly acclaimed by critics. Today, experts in popular culture owe him recognition for a second volume, also exclusively in English, which takes up the thread of the first, but spins it out in a new way. *'Hip-Hop en français'. An Exploration of Hip-Hop Culture in the Francophone World* includes a foreword, an introduction and 13 articles from a wide range of disciplines. Some of the contributors are the same as in the first essay collection, and in some cases they deal with similar questions, so that reading both books 'crosswise' gives rise to new perspectives on the current volume and, in retrospect, to new chronologies. Moreover, the contributors cover different – and often several – professional fields, from freelance researcher to university professor, museum curator, journalist, and even rapper and organiser of hip-hop concerts. This diversity of expertise, professional know-how and artistic experience allows for a highly diversified approach to the complex subject matter – possibly the only viable one, since rap and hip-hop refer to nothing less than “the aesthetic, social, intellectual, and political identities, beliefs, behaviors, and values produced and embraced by its members, who generally think of hip-hop as an identity, a worldview, and a ‘way of life’” (x, quoting Morgan and Bennett 2011). Finally, the book complements the knowledge of the various disciplinary and professional backgrounds with a network of geographical references illustrating the tension between localization and globalization so characteristic of this form of art: Paris and the province(s), France and the francophone world, the US and a – nearer or farer – Africa.

But how has the scene evolved since 2002? On the credit side of change, Durand enters such new developments as the 'academization' of the object of investigation, the technical achievements of the past 20 years, and the worldwide spread of hip-hop culture. He provides an impressive panorama of the new field of Hip-Hop Studies with its booming (primarily US-American) research centres (Harvard, Stanford, Cornell, Colorado), its study programmes (University of Arizona) and initiatives of hip-hop based education (HHBE), to which the essay collection dedicates a separate chapter. The references to publications by young researchers are also very useful although they remain essentially focused on the Amer-

ican and English-speaking world, which is all the more regrettable as in the past two decades countless – and relevant – studies of (French-language) rap have been published in languages other than English that inevitably go unnoticed (as an example, cf. the German-speaking academic community with Eva Kimminich 2002 and 2004, Susanne Stemmler 2007, Daniel Tödt 2012, Florian Werner 2015, Marc Dietrich 2016, and others). In contrast, among the aspects that have not changed Durand enumerates the “eternal quests for identity, authenticity, legitimacy, and the dilemmas or paradoxes that reign in hip-hop culture” (xxi). Twenty years later, rap artists still address “social justice, migrations and oppressions, colonialism and post-colonialism, terrorism, race and gender, love and hate, and wit and multilingualism” (xxi), but more than ever they run the risk of letting themselves get absorbed by market economy. One of the crucial questions therefore is, “Is signing with a record company or an agent buying into a system?” (xxi) Finally, still speaking of the two introductory chapters, one could argue whether a definition of hip hop and rap (while keeping in mind possibilities of overlap) would not have facilitated further reading. Such a conceptual clarification will be presented in Steve Gadet’s and Jean-Marie Jacono’s contributions, but the reader would appreciate to obtain it in advance so as to use it as a foil for the rest of the book. This *desideratum* seems all the more understandable as the book deals with a vast array of facets of one and the same phenomenon and this, methodologically speaking, in a very diverse way by alternating case studies and overview chapters.

The series of individual contributions, not all of which can be discussed in detail, begins with a survey of “Forty Years of French Rap”, in which Karin Hammou tries to tackle the immense challenge of not letting major developments get lost in the abundance of names and facts. The starting point is the late 1970s and early 1980s when in the “cultural effervescence” (1) of the Mitterrand era in France rap presented itself as “insider music” (1). At the end of the 1980s, Hammou identifies a new wave of rap with such names as MC Solaar or IAM, increasingly characterized by musical cross-overs. Finally, from the 1990s onward, public opinion continuously reduces the rap scene to the problematic image of the *banlieue*, rappers thus acquiring a dubious visibility. What is particularly interesting and will be confirmed by other articles in the volume, is the fact that rappers “were not assigned to a specific ethnic group”, but instead “identified by their distance from the ethnic majority group” (4). Likewise, their music was not seen as that of an ethnic minority, but as “a practice of social actors of minor status” (4). Their ensuing stigmatization as representatives of the *banlieue* and “the figure of a new domestic enemy” (12) is reflected in the themes of their songs in a paradox reversal and reinforcement of cause and effect. Hammou eventually discusses public support for hip-hop practices and the “integration of rappers into cultural industries” (4), with a special focus on the interactions between the rap scene and the media: the mainstream press, which came up with the distinction between ‘cool’ and ‘hardcore rap’, the free radios, which had the power to control musical fashions, the record business, which went through a global crisis in the 2000s, and much more. In short, a scholarly contribution extremely rich in information which – for this very reason – constitutes a challenge for the reader.

The second chapter, Jean-Marie Jacono's contribution "Hip-Hop Music in Cities in Crisis. The Case of Marseille" represents an impressive combination of overview and case study, in which the author succeeds in harmonizing social science-based and aesthetic questions. In terms of content, Jacono concentrates on two moments, "[t]he emergence of rap in a divided city" (18) and the "artistic evolution and gentrification" of Marseille starting in the 1990s with the urban renewal program *Euroméditerranée*. As to the first, his point is that the early forms of rap in Marseille – his main reference is IAM – visibly undermined old postcard clichés of the city by means of both social (and antiracist) critique and musical inventiveness in the way of dance, rhythm, and musical contrast. They basically represented "the reaction of the working class and the youth towards the crisis of the city", testifying to an urban identity that "manifest[ed] itself not by postcolonial demands but rather in recognition of the city's special features" (20). As to the second, Jacono subsumes it under the heading of normalization, a process initiated in the late 1990s that brought rap closer to song formats and was fostered by state subsidies and the new economic conditions in a gentrified city where culture played a decisive role. The result was a visible change: More minimalist in sound and influenced by American R&B rhythms, rap songs turned away from city realities making space for more general themes in their lyrics. Accordingly, Jacono spots four coexisting trends in the current Marseille rap scene: the distancing from local problematics in favour of political, philosophical, and moral issues, the musical 'writing-in' into a globalized sound world as conditioned by gentrification and urban restructuring, the partial abandonment of 'confrontational' identity concepts and, now and then, genuine voices of resistance. The normalization of hip-hop and rap thus essentially means the loss of marginal status and (largely also) of originality.

Three of the following contributions revolve – albeit with a different focus – around a topic particularly characteristic of rap, that of blackness and racialization. Samir Meghelli draws on two key events from 1990 and 1991 – the concert by the US 'conscious-rap' group Public Enemy at the *Zénith* in Paris (1990) and the Transatlantic Conference on Hip-Hop in Harlem (1991) – to show how they engender hope *and* fear, but above all misunderstandings between the (largely) postcolonial youth dominating the French rap scene and the establishment. Through the US-American mirror, in a nation that pretends to be neutral and "color-blind" (29), the rappers recognize their own experience as "racialized" (29), while 'official' France hopes to integrate them into the national project or at least to prevent them by whatever means from creating 'American conditions'. The second article, Paul A. Silverstein's "Ghetto Patrimony: Rap and Racialization in France", is particularly stimulating: Silverstein examines gangsta rap and uncovers the insinuations by the political right that rappers disseminate anti-white racism as ideologically motivated accusations, the frequency of which has increased since Sarkozy. He also calls attention to collusions between the state and professional rappers: Do state subsidies justify the nation's expectations to turn rappers into "role models of 'integration'" (50)? Or do they ironically encourage "the commodification [...] of lyrical 'hate' (*haine*) directed against the state and its representatives" (51)? And ultimately, there is what Silverstein calls ghettocentricity and adds yet another facet to

the “bandit persona” (52), the fraternity with all ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ in the ghetto. However, this so-called ghetto-centric imaginary is at the same time a transnational pan-ghetto imaginary or, in other words, a “counterfraternity of those marginalized from the structures of racist nationalism and global (neo-)imperialism” (56). Blackness and racial discourse in French hip-hop are therefore not ‘anti-white’ but ‘inclusive’. Last but not least, the idea of transnational solidarity also forms the basis of Stève Puig’s article “French Rapper-Writers and Activism. Global Black Solidarity and (In)Visibility”. He demonstrates the striking frequency of references to Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr (and, more recently, to movements like Black Lives Matter) both in French ‘urban literature’ and in French rap and shows how both personalities – instead of Aimé Césaire or Frantz Fanon – become role models for the French rap scene.

So far, so good, but the title of the book – *Hip-Hop en français* instead of rap – is also the key to a series of chapters dedicated neither to the message or form of rap song lyrics nor to their musical style but to other manifestations of hip-hop culture such as graffiti and dance, or to the interactions of rap and hip-hop with the new media scene. In “New Media, New Voices: Booba’s and Sofiane’s Uses of Social Networks to Promote Aspiring Rappers”, Kathryn Kleppinger convincingly shows how social media not only undermine the power of big radio stations like Skyrock and set the stage for new voices, but also skilfully circumvent legal and commercial pressures and counter biased interview practices of traditional media. The question of resistance against institutional frameworks is also addressed in “Illegal Mural Expressions: Graffiti as an Act of Resistance?” by Alain Milon, who – in keeping with the book’s general tenor – traces not the aesthetic but the anthropological and political significance of graffiti by confronting philosophical, psychological, and political positions. Resistance *against* versus recognition *by* the establishment is furthermore the subject of Hugues Bazin’s finely nuanced examination of “The Body Politic of Hip-Hop Dance”, where he discusses the following ideas: the body as a tool of expression that mediates between the individual and the group, the body as a place where “different vocabularies and cultural heritages, both traditional and modern” (124) come to the fore in dance and at the same time constantly reinvent themselves, the body in motion as a place that provokes reflection, and more. According to Bazin, hip-hop dance can make both an aesthetic *and* a political statement: political because it inevitably makes visible the “dominated body” (126) of a disadvantaged and ‘speechless’ (colored) youth, yet when it moves from the street to the stage, when it receives subventions, it risks to be interpreted as a purely aesthetic statement, its political impact being neutralized and assimilated by the institution. The recent attempt of a new generation to reappropriate the street as “the shared space of cultural mixing”, of “meetings with otherness”, and “experimentation” (132) is its consequence. On the other hand, the famous French *politique culturelle* can also have positive effects on the hip-hop artist, as insinuates Felicia McCarren in her case study “‘Beats Working’. Performance Economics in *The Roots* (2013) and *Divines* (2016)”. As compared to American show business, “state-supported cultural work” (140) and the system of *intermittence* are the secret of better career chances in France. Finally, Charles Norton’s contribution deserves particular attention as

it illustrates – in a methodologically exemplary way – a further facet of the much-praised French cultural policy, the phenomenon of the “HHBE in Paris and Its Suburbs”. Starting with concise surveys of hip-hop origins and hip-hop in France as well as clarifying observations with regard to the theoretical and methodological background, Norton presents the core of his investigation, infrastructure, institutions, and actors of HHBE in and around Paris, and very commendably does so without refraining from an exemplary approach or even tabular appendices where appropriate.

A final group of four essays refers to another aspect mentioned in the subtitle of the book, the francophone world, and pays increased attention to the ambiguous interaction of localization and globalization with Paris being the ‘imagined’ centre. ‘Imagined’, because reality may prove to be different or simply depend on the perspective. Thus, only Guadeloupe still belongs to France as one of the country’s *départements d’outre-mer*, having been a colony from 1635 to 1946. The former colony of Senegal became independent from France in 1960, and Quebec’s *régime français* ended as early as 1759. Accordingly, the ties to the former mother country are different in nature and may impact differently on culture and cultural relations as can be seen in the following four contributions (regrettably, neither of the two introductory chapters provides any information on this complex issue).

In “Rap Music in Guadeloupe”, Steve Gadet, former rapper and producer, presents a beautifully crafted introduction to the history and specificity of rap in Guadeloupe, which constitutes a valuable supplement to *Black, Blanc, Beur* by focusing on the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Although Gadet cites a considerable number of names, his presentation remains clear and takes the reader from the eras of the radio, the record, and the video clip to that of the internet. In Guadeloupe, rap originates from France but at the same time it visibly draws on such local realities as language (creole) and music and, conversely, influences local understandings of identity. Guadeloupe eventually exports to France such big names as Kery James or Joey Starr, although “[f]rom the end of the 1990s, an increase in popularity of the reggae/dance-hall movement downgraded rap to secondary importance” (70). Catherine M. Apperet is interested in another former French colony although her perspective – “Of Melody, Markets, and Mobilization” – is somewhat different. In “A History of Hip-Hop in Dakar, Senegal”, she traces the changing transnational flows between West Africa, Europe, and North America as they manifest themselves in Senegalese rap music, which – originally imported from the US in the 1980s – is labeled ‘Rap Galsen’ around 1988. In doing so, she also looks at internal Senegalese political and social developments, from the role of SICAP and the ‘soft’ sound emerging there to the Dakar workers’ movement, which subsequently gave rise to a form of hardcore rap reminiscent of that of the “black American urban struggle” (164). The new millennium is characterized by a particular dynamism and the stylistic convergence of mainstream and underground, especially with regard to the “‘squareness’ of hip-hop beats as opposed to the triple internal rhythms of much indigenous music” (166). If the processes described here definitely fall within the concept of hybridization, the term itself is explicitly mentioned in the heading of Maxime Delcourt’s study on “Rap Music in Quebec”, which he considers “An Essentially Hybrid Genre”. A fundamental hybridity

lies in the mere fact that Quebec (or Montreal) rap not only juggles between French and US-American impulses, thereby humorously undermining both major hip-hop nations and especially U.S. codes (176), but also fluctuates between two languages. And language is a highly political statement in Quebec. No wonder that Quebec rap has a tendency to use “patois expressions and local jargon” (174) and feels closer to IAM and their understanding of cultural diversity than to rap groups from Paris. The current – and booming – Quebec scene, so Delcourt, is characterized by five trends, one of which consciously uses the officially disavowed *franglais* as a symbol of freedom and concentrates on the innovative variation in flow and on the “consonance of the two languages along with the energy this could bring to a musical piece” (177). The final contribution by Ariane Gruet-Pelchat takes up this idea in a convincing case study of the Quebec group Alaclair Ensemble as an example of the “unsettling multilingualism, deconstructing a long-lived linguistic protectionism” (183) just mentioned. Alaclair Ensemble is considered one of the great innovators of Quebec rap in the 2010s and represents the “post-101 law generations” (185) inclusive vision of being a Quebecker.

To conclude, this volume impresses with its richness and diversity; it is a worthy successor to *Bleu, Blanc, Beur* and certainly another milestone in hip-hop research. Again, its orientation is interdisciplinary, with an undeniable preference for social and political science perspectives, which, perhaps, might have been indicated in the title. Literary, musicological, and visual arts analyses in the proper sense of the word, aesthetic judgements with regard to the rappers’ skills and creativity, are mostly absent (but this may have been the editor’s intention), and not all contributors handle the difficult task of harmonizing the abundance of facts and details and the famous ‘read thread’ in the same perfect way. I have also claimed that some basic conceptual clarifications would have been helpful, but this in no way diminishes the impact of the book as a whole: *Hip-Hop en français. An Exploration of Hip-Hop Culture in the Francophone World* – like its predecessor – is an *incontournable* for any researcher in the fascinating field of contemporary Text and Music Studies.

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