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Chapter Twelve

Morality, the Sacred, and God in Ghanaian Hip Hop

Harry Nii Koney Odamtten

The adoption of Hip-Hop by the world's youth is a turning point in the history of youth culture in particular and global public culture in general. The embracing of Hip-Hop in the West African country of Ghana is exemplary of this worldwide transformation. The indigenous Ghanaian version of Hip-Hop is Hip-Life. This Ghanaian musical genre is a combination of Hip-Hop and High-Life. High-Life is also a Ghanaian genre with West African and Afro-Diaspora roots. It emerged in Ghana as part of the anti-colonial struggle in West Africa, and has spawned of many varieties until the emergence of Hip-Life. Hip-Life is therefore viewed as a direct musical descendant of Hip-Hop and High-Life, and is performed and produced mostly by people of Ghanaian heritage. These performers rap in one of many indigenous Ghanaian languages such as Ga, Twi, Hausa, or Ewe, English, Black English (U.S./U.K. Ebonics), Jamaican Patois, and Ghana's version of the West African English (Creole) locally termed broken or Pidgin English.¹

In terms of Hip-Life's significance to humanity, and the shift in public culture, the leading originator of the genre, Reggie Rockstone says it best, "our people there in America who do not necessarily know what's going on in Africa; this music here will definitely bridge the gap. This will be the one that conveys the different messages and styles across . . . so we learn about each other; *the one world drum, the one world beat.*"² Rockstone's one world beat brings us to one of the enduring facets of most human societies worldwide, that is religion. Hip-Life artistes also rap about their spirituality, drawing inspiration from the various religions that occupy the Ghana public space. Such religions include traditional Ghanaian religions, Islam, Christianity, and Rastafarianism.

Rhymes by the cosmopolitan Hip-Life legend Reggie Rockstone and his local compatriot Obrafour certainly point to the expression of diverse spiritual and religious notions, as well as a Black spiritual consciousness in Ghanaian Hip-Hop. Such an understanding was not immediately evident to an older Ghanaian generation, when in the 1990s Reggie Rockstone pioneered the Ghanaian Hip-Hop movement, known in Ghana as Hip-Life. Back then, Hip-Life was viewed as an epitome of the gradual creeping of negative foreign values into Ghanaian civil society, with special emphasis on Ghanaian youth. Even though Hip-Life has since then become the soundtrack for harnessing the country's creative energy for growth and development, and emerged as Ghanaian youth's "signature worldwide," some of the old prejudices about moral decadence and loose values still exists.³

THE MORAL, SACRED, AND PROFANE

Harvard historian Emmanuel Akyeampong's analysis of Ghanaian public culture, its intellectual, religious, secular, and aesthetic dimensions, has been useful in helping recognize the social pulse of the country.⁴ However, in his co-review of Ghana's fiftieth anniversary with Ama de-Graft Akins for the journal *Transitions*, the two scholars seem to portray some generational friction. While the two esteemed scholars are successful in capturing the festive atmosphere in Ghana during the celebrations, they appear to what would be considered in Hip Hop, *diss*, that is, make Ghanaian Hip-Life appear insignificant. This perceived slight epitomizes the older generation's pessimism about Hip-Life. The generational schism is immediately evident in the duo's commentary on the anniversary celebrations. The review also gives credence to Akyeampong and Aikins's *diss* in bold font:

Ringtones of the national anthem and patriotic songs of the 1950s sneaked their way into the *noisy* [Italics mine] repertoire of soul, hip-life (a distinctly Ghanaian blend of high life and hip hop), reggae, and gospel so beloved to mobile phone-obsessed urbanites.⁵

However, apart from this seeming *diss*, Akyeampong and Aikins also offer good descriptive analyses, and raise critical questions about Ghana's independence celebrations, including capturing its religious connotations. They, for example, notice that Ghana's "Liberation Square was transformed into a *public shrine* [italics mine] for the founding fathers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now renamed the African Union (AU)."⁶ Nonetheless, in their description of Hip-Life as part of a noisy repertoire of older Black genres—soul and reggae—Akyeampong and Degraft-Aikins seem to be denying Hip-Life and its role as a vehicle or conduit for the expression of the sacred. Further, they seem to deny the stories of "hope, joy, comfort, relief,

and understanding” in human living with which Hip-Life artistes allow Ghanaians to experience the sacredness of their music.⁷

This is therefore not only a questioning of the aesthetic and creative quality of Hip-Life, but also a denial of its practical function as a means of communication capable of creatively using and harmonizing the sensory perceptions of vision, speech, and hearing for remembering Ghana’s past and religiosity.⁸ On the contrary, as Emeritus Historian of Religions Charles H. Long explains:

The experience of the sacred reveals the social structure as an arena in which intimacy and obligation, actualities and potentials, and habits and conduct are defined and clarified. It is within the social structure that the dynamic relationships between groups and persons express a generality of conduct and behavior that becomes normative for the society, thus defining the events of social life.⁹

Complementing Long’s description is the noted scholar of Ghanaian music, Professor John Collins, who points out in his survey of Ghanaian music over a hundred year period, the close relationship between religion and music. This relationship, he explains, draws from the circular and dynamic exchange in Ghanaian religiosity in which the sacred and the profane are seen as entangled.¹⁰ It therefore should not be surprising that Hip-Life musicians with an awareness of the dynamics, intimacies, and obligations of their audience, as Long explains, are mindful of what the normative communication modes are for Ghanaian society. Artistes like Samini, who also perform Afro-Pop and Reggae-Dancehall, expresses Hip-Life musicians’ awareness of morality in Ghanaian public practice. In describing Ghana’s distinct brand of Hip-Hop, Samini explains that:

One thing unique about what we doing from Ghana, is that we are mindful of the harsh language, we are mindful of negative messages, before a[sic] music could come out and be a big tune in Ghana, you have to be careful [about]what you are saying. If you are talking about sex, be constructive. If you are talking about [life in general], be careful who [you use] as an example.¹¹

Samini’s statement is corroborated by a number of people within and outside of the Hip-Life Movement including the Godfather of Hip-Life, Reggie Rockstone, and John Collins.

Rockstone, a bilingual rapper with a culturally diverse background, was born in the United Kingdom, but was raised in Ghana, and stayed intermittently in the United Kingdom and the United States. As a result of these travel experiences, Rockstone became familiar with various urban cultural practices in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Ghana. He has in some contexts contrasted his American urban experience with that of Gha-

na.¹² Reggie explains in a documentary that the neighborhood where he currently lives in Accra, called Labone-Cantonments, is a plush neighborhood of the capital, Accra. “[My] neighborhood is residential, far from thug neighborhood; all the stereotypes went out the window.”¹³

Rockstone is also quick to correct young Ghanaian rappers unaware of the social meaning of terms they may have heard from American rap music, such as using terms like “Nigger.”¹⁴ On other occasions, Rockstone complains about the manner in which some Hip-Life artists carelessly bandy “the word ‘bitch’ around, and the F-word—[because] this is how they see their brothers in the Diaspora, because they watch movies and the videos and they think this is how it is.”¹⁵ In Rockstone’s case, we see a clear attempt to sanitize Hip-Life, and keep it within the *moral* norms of the country. Professor John Collins also describes this need of Ghanaian Hip-Life artists to be attentive to the moral demands of the Ghanaian public. He elaborates on Ghanaian rappers’ concern with public perception, explaining that “[in] Ghana, [Hip-Life musicians] decontextualized rap music, they didn’t take the *whole* [Italics mine] ethos, or cultural ethos of Black Americans, they simply took the vehicle, put their own voice; so it’s more *positive*.”¹⁶

On the evidence of the above, it is apparent that Ghanaian Hip-Hop performers are conscious of the Ghanaian public’s concerns with moral decadence, and the injurious influence of foreign culture on Ghanaian mores and values. Such consciousness includes an engagement with the moral and sacred in Ghanaian culture—a fact gleaned from the various references to God and ancestors in the sound recordings of these Hip-Life musicians. As an Akan proverb states “Obi Nkyere Abofra Nyame,” that is no one teaches a child who God is. The assumption is that the existence of God for an Akan child is self-evident, an axiomatic truth. This is why the Ga—an ethnic group in Ghana—conceptualize human beings as both biological and spiritual beings, “receive the undying part of [their] spiritual nature from the Supreme Being.”¹⁷

HIP-LIFE AND THE SUPREME BEING

Ghanaian rapper Lil Shaker’s *Allah Dey* (exists/is) *mix tape* is an ample demonstration of a Ghanaian Hip-Hop musician’s acknowledgment of the eternal existence of a Supreme Being.¹⁸ Lil Shaker, rapping in Ghanaian Pidgin English, begins by calling on his listeners to remember Allah. He does this using a call and response method in which his respondents repeat most of his last statements. He begins with verses that may be compared with a Muslim muezzin’s daily call to Muslims to prayer: *Allāhu Akbar*, meaning God is most great; and continues with, I testify there is no god, but God, and

Muhammad is his prophet, God is most great, there is no God but God.¹⁹ Lil Shaker's explication of Allah, like the muezzin's begins:

Lil Shaker, God Dey [God exists]
 Bra Kevin (featured rapper)
 You for remember; remember
 That life is short, be careful how you spend am; spend am
 So make u no forget to thank Jah; thank Jah [Rastafarian Supreme Being]
 Everybody must remember; remember
 Sey Allah Dey; Allah Dey [Arabic/Islamic word for God]
 Allah Dey; Allah Dey.²⁰

It is clear from the above that while Lil Shaker may be either unaware or minimally familiar with Islamic theological teachings, by using Allah, he is reifying to Muslim listeners the beauty, majesty, and mysteries of God as Muslims understand the notion of a Supreme Being. Having established this Islamic beginning, Lil Shaker continues by extolling the protective qualities of God even in times of bad fortune, scary, and dangerous situations:

With God by me Charley, am not afraid; not afraid
 Of any kind of bad luck wey go come my way; come my way
 I see they are trying to scare me, but I no dey shake, no dey shake
 Cos Allah Dey
 I dey see danger; danger, but Allah Dey
 You go sey danger; danger, but Allah Dey
 We dey See danger; danger, eiih but Allah Dey
 Charley, see danger; danger, but Allah Dey.

Lil Shaker having made several references to the Islamic word for God-*Allah*, breaks into a praise song for God with an obvious Christian chorus, "Say Hallelujah; Hallelujah eh lujah eh X 4. Charley say Hallelujah eeh." He continues with his expression of his trust in God, and then goes back to the use of the Islamic/Arabic Allah:

Dem no dey like my life so dem want end am; end am
 Ibi like say Satan wey ei send am; send am
 Making me suffer is their agenda; agenda
 But me I no get nothing I go tell am, tell am
 Cos Allah dey, Allah dey.

Lil Shaker again asks his listeners to remember by returning to a Christian theme, this time referring to Jesus Christ, a divine personage in Judeo-Christian religious practice. Lil Shaker's reference to Jesus Christ as his pen pal in the verses below is also a reflection of the intimacy that Christian theology emphasizes on the person of Christ. Christ, who in his time on earth was both human and divine, can relate to the human strivings of Christians, yet he also

set an example by his spiritual successes as a human being. His divine resurrection also served or continues to serve as an inspiration for all Christian followers. However, it's not all Judeo-Christian theology, because Lil Shaker uses the Akan and Ga word for Christ, Yesu Christo, thus localizing Jesus Christ and making him Ghanaian:

You for remember; remember eh
 That Yesu Christo (Ga/Akan) is my pen pal; pen pal eh
 And he told me never to surrender; surrender eh
 So when in trouble just remember; remember
 Sey All ah dey, Allah dey; x2

After looping his chorus two times, Kevin Beats, who is featured on the track, raps at a faster tempo incorporating the Christian “Our Lord’s Prayer,” the act of kneeling and praying, and referencing that he (Kevin Beats) is made of iron despite the existence of wizards and witches. Just as Lil Shaker, Kevin Beats claims he is also not afraid because he believes he is God’s creation, and because of his God-given blessings, he is impervious to the machinations of any adversarial force.

What this song demonstrates is not only Hip-Life artistes’ deep understanding of God in various religious contexts, but also shows the religious pluralism and tendency to be ecumenical in their views. One may for example interpret Lil Shaker’s *Allah Dey* as not only a celebration in Islamic ethos, and the dual power and tenderness of God, but also a reflection of the intimate and dynamic relationship between the cosmic and daily human travails, as well as joys. Allah Dey, which means God exists, therefore expresses as the Sunnah or Hadiths, written records of the sayings and deeds of the Muslim Prophet Muhammad, explain *La ilaha il Allah*, the oneness and indivisibility of God-Allah—the Supreme Being’s divine unity.²¹

Lil Shaker does not only use Allah to reference a Supreme Force, but also uses the Rastafarian notion of God, Jah above. Apart from various Rastafarian sects that exist in Ghana, Rastafarian fashion, hairdo, and other aesthetic qualities also pervade Ghanaian urban space. Rastafarianism is originally an indigenously Afro-Diaspora social, cultural, and spiritual movement that began on the Caribbean island, Jamaica. It began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and has gained global prominence, along with adherents in Ghana. Rastafarians believe in the humanity of God, and the divinity of man. As a result they claim[ed] Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Sellasie I, as the living God, and the Black messiah—fulfilling the second coming of Christ.²²

Above, Lil Shaker’s combination of the Judeo-Christian notion of a Supreme Being with the Akan equivalent of Jesus Christ, Yesu Christo, may be interpreted as an apparent reference to the Akan experience of Christianity.²³ Pashington Obeng explains that such African agency goes as far back as the

sixteenth-century when Portuguese Catholics arrived in Ghana. In this period, the Catholic rituals and images for St. Anthony and the Virgin Mary were incorporated into the traditional practices of the people of Elmina, in the central region of modern Ghana. Obeng goes on to explicate this agency to mean “when the African uses the models of a foreign religion to articulate aspects of his or her own religion. Furthermore, indigenous religions did and do sometimes use foreign religious models to renew themselves.”²⁴

One may surmise that Lil Shaker’s *Allah Dey* in poetic or aesthetic terms is a reflection of the mystical importance of the spoken word in both traditional African societies and among the Bedouin Arab among whom the lyrical and mytho-poetic quality of the Surah or Quranic verses merged with the revelations and prophetic career of the Prophet Muhammad. Allah Dey combines these Islamic and African meanings with the understanding of Christ in Christian thought. Christ as the word of God, his divine birth, as the manifestation of God’s word that had become flesh—which also combines with the anthropocentrism of traditional African religions.

ORATORY, GOD TALK, AND THE BIRTH OF A NATION

The question one would ask then is where did this form of oratory, God talk, and obvious ecumenical sensibility among Hip-Life musicians originate? One may begin answering this question by saying it is evident that notions of a Supreme Being among the various ethnic groups of Ghana has translated into an inter-religious national culture. John Mbiti has also argued about the religious notoriety, plurality of religions, communality, anthropocentrism, and ecumenism of African traditional religions.

In the context of religious pluralism as a facet of the nation-state, in Ghana the idea begins under the leadership of the first President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, who Hip-Life musician Obrafour above pays respect to as an ancestor.²⁵ Nkrumah gave the country its ecumenical beginning. This has recently become a subject of debate in the Ghanaian press. The debates have ensued because at a number of recent national occasions such as Independence Day, traditional priests have been disallowed from pouring libations, a ritual that they usually performed, concurrently with Muslim Sheikhs and Christian priests.

First, Nkrumah was one of the best public orators, earning standing ovations at the All Africa People’s Congress held in Accra in 1958 and the United Nations in 1960.²⁶ It is possible to speculate that Nkrumah would earn props—or respect—from contemporary Hip-Life rappers for his oratorical skills. Like some Hip-Life acts, Nkrumah learned to combine the traditional oratorical skills of his indigenous heritage with that which he learnt from observing Black American preachers and American politicians. In

1943, for example, while a student at Lincoln University, in the state of Pennsylvania, Nkrumah fell afoul of his theology professor for pouring libations at the graveside of James Kwegyir Aggrey. Aggrey, like Nkrumah after him, was an America-trained nineteenth-century Ghanaian intellectual who lived in the United States. He also taught Nkrumah at Achimota School in the then Gold Coast. Nkrumah's history and philosophy instructor, one Professor Johnson, queried Nkrumah for his oratorical participation in a "heathen" ceremony. Nkrumah in characteristic fashion tried to show Johnson that there was a thin line between the oral act of pouring libation and his Christian beliefs orally projected from the pulpit:

May I say however that to meet Christ on the highway of Christian ethics and principles by way of salvation, and turn back is a spiritual impossibility. The burden of my life is to live in such a way that I may become a living symbol of all that is best both in Christianity and in the laws, customs, and beliefs of my people.²⁷

Nkrumah's response therefore revealed the underlying philosophical or ecumenical reasons for engaging in the traditional oratorical act of libation pouring at Aggrey's final resting place, and why such oratorical acts became important in the shaping of a nascent Ghana. Nkrumah also admits to honing his oratory skills in Harlem, New York, listening to "the soap-box orators at the street corners. I was quite happy to spend my evenings there either quietly listening or, as was more often the case, provoking arguments with them."²⁸ Nkrumah's oratorical development therefore bears great similarity to many Hip-Life performers who maintained their indigenous Ghanaian heritage and ethos even as they learned and imbued foreign music of any kind.

In intellectual terms, Nkrumah in his much acclaimed *Philosophical Consciencism*, pursued the idea of harmonizing Africa's external Islamic and Euro-Christian with "the original humanist principles" of traditional Africa.²⁹ For Nkrumah "practice without thought is blind; thought without practice is empty," so his pursuit of a philosophical synthesis of the best aspects of Euro-Christian and Islamic civilization with "African humanism" was given a practical platform throughout his campaign for Ghanaian independence and after. Nkrumah believed that his *Philosophical Consciencism* would help "contain the African experience of Islamic and Euro-Christian presence as well as the experience of the traditional African society, and, by gestation, employ them for the harmonious growth and development of the society." This theoretical postulate became a part and parcel of the national fabric when Ghana gained independence in 1957, becoming the first Black African country south of the Sahara to achieve such a feat.³⁰

Nkrumah's political party, the Convention People's Party (C.P.P.), who adopted the Christian hymn "Lead Kindly Light," also poured traditional libations at their political rallies. Moreover, while Nkrumah was president, he adopted a number of indigenous rhetorical strategies including that of libation pouring. Barbara Monfils documents the various occasions on which Nkrumah had traditional priests from different ethnic groups such as the Akyem, Ga, Asante, Ga, and Bono, pour libations at official ceremonies. She also shows Nkrumah's use of both indigenous and Christian religious imagery, including his referencing by followers as Messiah, Savior of Africa, and Pillar of Fire.³¹ Kwesi Yankah also points out Nkrumah's appointment of a state linguist or Okyeame, thus incorporating the position of Okyeame, into modern Ghanaian statecraft.³² In traditional societies in Ghana, the Okyeame is an orator, diplomat, and interpreter, and therefore possesses superior linguistic and oratorical skills. In fact one of the early Hip-Life duos named themselves Akyeame—that is, linguists.

At present, Ghana has no state linguist, but the pouring of libation, which is prayer by traditional priests as well those offered by Islamic and Christian clerics, continued until the former was suspended under current president, John Evans Atta Mills. In a March 9, 2011 report by *Joy FM*, a radio station in the nation's capital, social commentator Kwesi Pratt describes the recent cessation of libation pouring at national gatherings as "Taliban Mentality." Pratt explains that the current president's refusal to have traditional priests pour libation is "a clear case of religious intolerance. Once you become a president or whichever position you find yourself, you don't have to impose your religion on others. It should not be tolerated."³³

The president's response was to explain "as a nation, we should know that it is God who is the president of this nation and indeed I [he] owe[s] nobody an apology for giving him [God] his due."³⁴ Wading in on the debate, the Emeritus Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi, The Most Rev. Dr. Kwesi Sarpong, described the ban on libation as an uninformed and sentimental decision about the value of libations. He elaborated "those who see libation as anti-Christian are making a mistake" as forms of libation "draw us near God."³⁵

At this point one may ask what all of this God talk, religion, and pouring of libation to ancestors and deities has to do with Ghanaian rappers? The relationship is that Hip-Life rapper Obrafour uses the oratorical style of the Ghanaian traditional priests used by Nkrumah and the State as a part of his craft. Obrafour incorporates aspects of these oratorical styles in his rendition of the Ghanaian national anthem in a song revealingly dedicated to Kwame Nkrumah. In Obrafour's selected rhyme that opens this chapter, Obrafour has his song set to a chorus which utilizes the religious incantation and call and response format in traditional Akan libation pouring. Obrafour in his song therefore shows his libation to God, and continues by calling on the heavens,

mother earth, and the ancestors, and then closes with a praise song for Nkrumah:

Osoɾo ne asaase yaa, nsa, yao
 Nananom nsamanfoɔ nsa, yao
 Yeyi Kwame Nkrumah pae
 Ghanafoɔ

The heavens and mother earth, a drink of libation, yao
 Ancestors who have passed, a drink of libation, yao
 We sing praises of Kwame Nkrumah
 Ghanaians.³⁶

In his lyrics translated below, while utilizing the traditional prayer genre, Obrafour also pays homage to the oratory/spiritual foundations of Ghanaian society and honors the ancestors whose sweat and blood was used to achieve independence. In traditional oratorical fashion, Obrafour begins by telling the ancestors that if they hear him calling on them, then it is not for evil, but that the country needs direction. Obrafour rhymes:

Yekɔgyina baabi na se yefre mo a na nye adebɔne
 Ghanaman mu ha, yebu ye nne, yeye nkwankeyere
 Nsenkyerenee kyere se Ghanaman no empe nsemmane
 Kofi babone, mebo wo kɔko gyae ne bone
 Kyerema asantebo se Ghanaman se montie
 Me nie, Obrafoɔ, mewɔ fahodie.³⁷

If we call on you it is not for evil
 Ghana needs direction
 Our past shows Ghana detest evil
 Kofi bad-child, I warn you, stop evil
 Drummer Asante, calls Ghana listen
 Here I am, Executioner, I have freedom
 Nkrumah mmɔdenmmɔ, nkunimdie
 Hunu se, yen ara asaase ni, eye abɔdenden ma yen
 The courage and victory of Nkrumah
 Saw that our own land is valuable to us.

In the next verse, Obrafour proceeds by including aspects of the Ghanaian national anthem in Twi, noting the sacrifices that the ancestors made in order for the present generation to earn their freedom. Obrafour pontificates that because of the past toils of the founding ancestors, Ghana would not be a state that engulfs itself with scandals:

Mogya a nananom hwie gu nyinaa de too ho ma yen
 Dom yen, boa yen, gye yen
 Aduru me ne wo so se ye nso beye bi atoa so
 Muamua so, kata so, ɔman mu dee emma so

The blood our ancestors shed for us
 Saved us, helped us rescued us
 It's now you and I's turn
 Deep cover ups, against the state, won't happen in this country

Obrafour continues by appealing to the sense of patriotism of Ghanaians of different ages, professions, and classes, asking and exhorting them to contribute to the nation-building process.

Enne yebisa wo deɛ woayɛ ama ɔman Ghana, wobeka sen?
 Lɔyafɔɔ, dɔktafɔɔ, ma memmisa nɛɛsefɔɔ
 Adwadifɔɔ, draevaɔfɔɔ, ma memmisa fitafɔɔ
 Ɛkwaafɔɔ, teelaɔfɔɔ, ma memmisa baabaɔfɔɔ
 Solgyaɔfɔɔ, tikyafɔɔ, ma memmisa sukuufɔɔ
 Ɔbrafɔɔ, Ghana rap sofɔɔ

Today if you are asked what you've done for Ghana what would you say?
 Lawyers, Doctors, let me ask the nurses
 Traders, Drivers, let me ask the mechanics
 Farmers, Tailors, let me ask the barbers
 Soldiers, Teachers, let me ask school kids
 Obrafour (Executioner), Ghana Rap Priest

In these lyrics, Obrafour, who styles himself as rap sofour (Priest), has clearly assumed the traditional priest's position—rap priest. Viewed in this capacity, Obrafour shows that contrary to the older generation's claims, it is the elders who may have in their public quarrels become apathetic to the moral and spiritual foundations of the country. It is not Obrafour and his contemporaries in the Ghanaian urban arena who have forgotten the past simply because of a founding of a contemporary musical genre that has foreign influence. It seems that it is the elders, who in Ghanaian traditional society are supposed to be the custodians of the past, and are usually responsible for the pouring of libation, who are fighting over recognizing the Ghanaian religious and oratorical past. Ghana's religious pluralism and ecumenism has therefore not been lost on Hip-Life artists.

As Obeng explains above Ghanaians have been in the habit of renewing religious traditions with foreign models, a practice that has also been taken up by Hip-Life artists. This is evident in song of Hip-Life duo, Nkasei's *Adua ne bu*, meaning the tree is broken or fallen.³⁸ Jesus Christ is metamorphized as an African-ancestor whose earthly or natural way of life is defiled by the coming of European goods, and the Atlantic slave-trade. Nkasei start their song off lamenting this turn of affairs, and they are helped along by Reggie Rockstone who proclaims, *the revolution will be televised*, a popular American phrase. The song also reflects the influence of various African Diaspora notions of a Black God or Christ on Hip-Life musicians. Nkasei begin their verse after Rockstone's televised opening, rapping about Euro-

pean arrival in Africa in the Atlantic era, and the deleterious effect of religion as practiced by the Europeans.

Here, while Nkasei identifies Christian religion as a weapon wielded by Europeans, in identifying it with the gun, religion is cast as a destructive weapon and the cause of the woes of African societies. As if to turn the destructive religion into an asset, Nkasei cast Christ, the Christian divinity, in an African setting and imbue him with an African Identity, thus allowing Kkasei to see Christ in their own image, ways of life, and social identity. In their lyrics Nkasei remodeled Jesus Christ to reflect the duo's African traditions. They first named Christ as Kwame, a name given to Ghanaian children born on Saturday. Kwame is also the name given to the Supreme Being in Akan society. It is the same Twediampong Kwame used by Obrafour as portrayed in the introductory epithet above. This usage of Kwame for Jesus Christ reflects the anthropocentrism in Ghanaian traditional religions, which is more concerned with humanity's material needs. This material concern is seen in how Christ's miracle of feeding the multitude with one loaf of bread is translated into the Ghanaian context.

Here, Christ is shown feeding ten thousand people with three balls of a Ghanaian staple, a corn paste called Kenkey. Significantly, while Kenkey is consumed by Ghanaians of all classes, because it is relatively cheap and weighty and it fills bellies quickly, it is consumed more often by low income earning Ghanaians.³⁹ Nkasei's substituting of a loaf of bread for Kenkey may therefore be understood as fashioning a social philosophy that embraces the Ghanaian masses. Also instead of turning water into wine, Kwame Kristo turns water into Pito. Pito is an economical local brew which is made with fermented millet or sorghum, regularly patronized by the lower classes. And to be clear about Kwame Kristo's identity, Nkasei describe his African identity as including a natural way of life, love for the earth, and pride in his African identity. This African Christ—while similar to the Judeo-Christian Christ in other contexts—is in many ways also different from the Christian Jesus Christ taught to Africans by Europeans. Nkasei in this deliberate ambiguity depict the doctrine of the African Kwame Kristo as in conflict with a foreign deity, in their next set of lyrics clearly expressing a nativistic conception of religion—that is a return to old African ways of using herbal products, and peaceful societies before the African contact with Europeans in the Atlantic period. They conclude by asking who will save Africa, and Rockstone seems to have an answer as to how to repair the broken tree, and return to the time when African societies lived naturally yet had complex social systems. Rockstone's lyrics delivered in ebonics reflect not only an interest in a United States of Africa, but bridging the gap between Diaspora Blacks and Africans through music, an expression of Pan-African sentiments dating as far back as the eighteenth century. In addition, while Rockstone himself wears dreadlocks, it is unclear whether Rockstone has any Rastafarian lean-

ings. Among Rastafarians, wearing dreadlocks reflects pride in a Black identity and phenotype, a natural way of life, and a mystical connection to the ethereal.⁴⁰ In the traditional African-sense, certain traditional societies reserve dreadlocks for children born of or dedicated to a particular deity. What is clear is that Rockstone sees the wearing of dreadlocks as a reflection of the natural way of life *Nkasei* described Kwame Kristo as having.

This is also the second time Reggie Rockstone has made a statement on Jesus Christ being Black. The first time was in the second verse of his groundbreaking song *Keep Your Eyes on the Road*, when he raps, “Jhericurles [as opposed to dreadlocks] baby, now that’s a sin, Jesus Christ was a bibini [Black], is what I believe in.” The song was part of Rockstone’s album *Meka* (I will say it.)⁴¹ So clearly, Rockstone believes in the black pigmentation of Christ. I suggest that the source of Rockstone’s beliefs stem from his sojourn in the African Diaspora, where he was exposed to notions of a Black Christ and Black particularism evident in the teachings of Falasha Jews, *Nation of Islam* (NOI), and lately, five percenters.⁴² The NOI founder Elijah Muhammad, for example, taught that his mentor or teacher, Wallace D. Fard, who inexplicably disappeared in 1934, was Allah or God.⁴³

Reggie Rockstone, as explained earlier, grew up in London and New York, and as he rhymes, he has “seen it all, done it all from Brooklyn to Brixton [Black neighborhood in London].” This statement was in his contribution to Ghana’s representation on the BET cypher during the BET Hip-Hop Awards in 2010.⁴⁴ Rockstone has also indicated that while in the United States, he had close association with some members of the erstwhile Black Panther Party.⁴⁵ It is therefore possible that through these associations, Reggie Rockstone was introduced to ideas of the Black Madonna and other ideas held by many Blacks in and outside of the Black Panther Party and during the Black Power cultural movements of the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁶ In fine, Rockstone’s reference to African Dreadlocks, Black Jesus, the reparation movement, and Pan-Africanism is a reflection of his cosmopolitan knowledge of different Black cultures in Ghana, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Rockstone, like many others with diverse cultural experiences such as Ghana’s first president, Kwama Nkrumah, incorporates a global Black consciousness to the urban local space of Ghanaian Hip-Life.

CONCLUSION

The intent of this chapter is to contribute to the discourse on spirituality in the works of Hip-Hop musicians around the world. From the above analyses of various verses of Hip-Hop practitioners in Ghana, it is evident that the caricaturing of young Hip-Life musicians in Ghana as simply adopting foreign ways and promoting materialistic culture does not take into account

their references to the holy, moral, and sacred. While Hip-Life as a genre draws on foreign models and ideas, it is autochthonous to Ghana and the charge of unbridled foreign influence or Hip-Life being raucous music is fallacious. This is because the varieties of Ghanaian Highlife that the older generation grooved with were neither immune to foreign influence, nor were they less Ghanaian for incorporating foreign elements into their homegrown music. Early High-Life bands like the Tempos, Ramblers, and Sunsum (Soul) Bands, High-Life greats, E. T. Mensah, Jerry Hanson, and Ampofo Adjei, as well as more recent musicians like Daddy Lumba, Kojo Antwi, and Amakye Dede have successively drawn on percussive and instrumental styles from Europe, the Caribbean, and North and Latin America. Ghanaian Hip-Hop performers have also engaged in such fusion of musical styles, including High-Life, yet have fitted such synthesis within the context of the modern Ghanaian agenda and its normative communication styles. The lyrics of Rockstone, Obrafour, Nkasei, and Lil Shaker show that a close understanding of Hip-Life songs portrays their intimate understanding of the diverse spiritual traditions permeating Ghanaian public culture.

NOTES

1. I have offered a similar definition of Hip-Life in my chapter, "Hip-Hop Speaks, Hip-Life Answers: Global African Music," in *Native Tongues: The African Hip-Hop Reader*, edited by Paul Saucier (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2011).

2. Reggie "Rockstone" Ossei on Al Jazeera, "Playlist," <http://blip.tv/file/1990882>.

3. Wan Luv Kubolor, on Al Jazeera "Playlist," <http://blip.tv/file/1990882>.

4. See, for example, Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Between the Sea & the Lagoon: An Eco-Social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana, c. 1850 to Recent Times* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001); "Bukom and the Social History of Boxing in Accra: Warfare, Citizenship in Precolonial Ga Society," in *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35 (2002): 39–60; *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change: A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana c. 1800 to Recent Times* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996); with Pashington Obeng, *Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History* (Boston, MA: African Studies Center, Boston University, 1995).

5. Emmanuel Akyeampong and Ama de-Graft Aikins, "Ghana at Fifty: Reflections on Independence and After," *Transition* 98 (2008): 24–26.

6. Akyeampong and de-Graft Aikins, *Ghana at Fifty*, 24.

7. Andre E. Johnson, "Call for Papers: Hip Hop Spirituality and Urban God Talk," e-mail communication with author, February 14, 2011.

8. For a discussion of the pragmatic function of communication systems in Ghana and Africa see Kofi Ermeleh Agovi, "The Philosophy of Communication in Traditional African Society: The Literary and Dramatic Evidence," *Research Review NS* 5 (1989): 52–59.

9. Charles H. Long, *Significations, Signs, Symbols and Images in the Interpretation of Religions* (Colorado: The Davies Group Publishers, 1999), 37.

10. John Collins, "Ghanaian Christianity and Popular Entertainment: Full Circle," *History in Africa* 31 (2004): 407–423.

11. Al Jazeera, "Playlist," <http://blip.tv/file/1990882>.

12. CopkillahP, Hiplife in Accra, Ghana, 2008. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vh5TOQVP3to> (cantonments, residential not a thug neighborhood).

13. CopkillahP, Hiplife in Accra, Ghana, 2008. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vh5TOQVP3to&feature=related>. This is not to say that there are no non-plush urban

neighborhoods in Accra or Ghana. In fact Hip-Life group VIP was formed in a hard neighborhood of Accra, Nima.

14. Lee Kasumba, "Emcee Africa—The Battle Chronicles #1: Ghana," <http://www.africanhiphop.com/archive/index.php?module=subjects&func=printpage&pageid=284&scope=all>.

15. BBC, "Accra Reclaims Hip Hop," <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3241007.stm>; Ghanaweb, "Accra Reclaims Hip-Hop," <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/audio/artikel.php?ID=191170>.

16. Al Jazeera, "Playlist," <http://blip.tv/file/1990882>.

17. Sylvanus K. Odamtten, *Indigenous Educational Ideas in Ghana* (Accra: Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), 1995), 1.

18. http://mp3skull.com/mp3/lil_shaker_ft_bra_kevin_allah_dey.html; see Lil Shaker, *Allah Dey*, Abuzu Music/Skillions, 2010.

19. For an extended discussion of Allah as Supreme Being or God, see translation of the Quran by Yusuf A. Ali, *The Koran: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Washington D.C.: American International Printing Company, 1946); or John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 68-74.

20. http://BiGxGh.com/mp3skull.com/mp3/lil_shaker_ft_bra_kevin_allah_dey.html; Lil Shaker, *Allah Dey*, Abuzu Music/Skillions, 2010

21. See Sunnah 83, and Esposito, *Islam*, 11-12.

22. Nathaniel S. Murrell, "The Rastafarian Phenomenon" in *The Rastafari Reader: Chanting Down Babylon*, ed. Nathaniel S. Murrell, William D. Spencer, and Adrian Anthony Mcfarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

23. A period of African history, when Akans like many Africans made Christianity theirs. This was the era of African past when European missionaries tried to convert Africans to Christianity and the corresponding Africanization of Christianity. For extended academic treatments of this subject see, for example, Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995); John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1990).

24. Pashington Obeng, "Religious Interactions in Pre-Twentieth Century West Africa," in *Themes in West Africa's History*, ed. Emmanuel Akyeampong (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 148-149; 155-157.

25. I am not suggesting that there was no religious pluralism or ecumenism before Nkrumah; I am only discussing the subject within the context of a nation-state.

26. "Pandora's Box: Black Power," produced by Adam Curtis, BBC Video, 1992.

27. Ebenezer Obiri-Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah: A Case Study of Religion and Politics in Ghana* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1997), 63-64.

28. Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (New York: Nelson, 1957), 243.

29. Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization* (London: Panaf, 1978).

30. Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 78, 70.

31. Barbara Monfils, "A Multifaceted Image: Kwame Nkrumah's Extrinsic Rhetorical Strategies," *Journal of Black Studies* 7 (1977): 313-330.

32. Kwesi Yankah, *Free Speech in Traditional Society: The Cultural Foundations of Communication in Contemporary Ghana* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1998), 10-13.

33. Kwesi Pratt, "Kwesi Pratt: Ban on Pouring of Libation at State Ceremonies is Taliban Mentality," <http://news.myjoyonline.com/news/201103/62431.asp>.

34. President Mills, "I owe no apologies for making God leader of my government," <http://news.myjoyonline.com/news/201103/62646.asp>.

35. Peter Akwasi Sarpong, "Don't downplay libation at state ceremony," <http://news.myjoyonline.com/news/201103/62509.asp>.

36. Obrafofour, Kwame Nkrumah, Yaanom, Pae Mu Ka, Last Two, 1999.

37. All translations of Ghanaian English, Twi, et cetera are mine, Harry Nii Koney Odamtten.

38. Nkasei, Adua Ne Ebu, Nsekyrene, Abib Records, 2000.

39. Thanks to Kwame Essien, assistant professor, University of Central Arkansas, for assisting in this interpretive information
40. Ennis B. Edmonds, "Dread 'I' In-a-Babylon: Ideological Resistance and Cultural Revitalization," in *The Rastafari Reader: Chanting Down Babylon*, 32–33.
41. Reggie "Rockstone" Ossei, *Keep Your Eyes on the Road*, Meka, Kassa Records 2000.
42. Edward Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam 1960–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Michael Muhamad Knight, *The Five Percenters: Islam, Hip Hop, and the Gods of New York* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007); Ted Swedenburg, "Islam in the Mix: Lesson of the Five Percent," paper presented at the Anthropology Colloquium, University of Arkansas, February 19, 1997.
43. Lawrence H. Mamiya, "Nation of Islam," *Oxford Encyclopedia of Modern Islamic World*, vol. 3, 235–236; Esposito, *Islam*, 209–210.
44. Reggie Rockstone, "BET CYPHER, Ghana," 2010 BET Hip Hop Awards, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSoEPnAGGmg&playnext=1&list=PLE77F2F0E69FE8EC1>.
45. Reggie Rockstone, Disastrous and Reggie Rockstone, interview part 2, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35-7vLMcCY>.
46. Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, *Black Power Radical Politics and African-American Identity* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005).

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