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Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism in Ghanaian Hiplife Lyrics

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
Requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in

Music

by

David A. Garfinkel

Committee in charge:
Professor Jann Pasler, Chair
Professor Anthony Davis
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2013
The thesis of David A. Garfinkel is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm.

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2013
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism in Ghanaian Hiplife Lyrics

by

David A. Garfinkel

Master of Arts in Music

University of California, San Diego, 2013

Professor Jann Pasler, Chair

Ghanaian Hiplife is a musical style that emerged in the early 1990’s, and has steadily gained popularity since. The music is a combination of Ghanaian Highlife – an early 20th century mix of both European and local traditions – and American Hip Hop. As a musical hybrid, Hiplife often blurs the lines between the global and the local. Its re-contextualization of Western synthesized beats with local languages and music traditions has created a music that in many ways represents the cosmopolitan. However, it often simultaneously symbolizes a sense of patriotism for the relatively young country, emphasizing local significance of ethnicity and location. Through the use of various languages – Akan languages, Pidgin English, and Hip-Hop Vernacular English – current Hiplife artists demonstrate a complex give and take between the cosmopolitan and the patriot.
The Emergence of Hiplife

Hiplife in Ghana arose as a consequence of various outside influences. 
Highlife, which began near the turn of the 20th century, was the primary popular music genre in Ghana up until the mid-1990’s when Hiplife took over.

Highlife – a shortening of high-class life – began as palm wine and guitar band highlife. Coastal Ghanaian musicians created it with instruments that had been given to them by sailors. These instruments included guitar, banjo, mandolin, harmonica, accordion and concertina.¹ The coastal placement contributed to a mix of Afro-Caribbean, American ragtime, and European musical styles.² Highlife gained quick popularity in Ghana, initially in urban and coastal areas. That, however, soon changed. Rural areas began to adopt highlife and incorporate it into their musical traditions:

… over time and especially when they spread into the hinterland villages, a more rootsy variation of palm-wine music was created. Sung in the vernacular languages rather than Creole and Pidgin English, the *linguas francas* of the coast, it utilized the more complex traditional 12/8 polyrhythms rather than the syncopated 4/4 rhythms of earlier palm-wine highlife styles like mainline, dagomba, and fireman.³

Highlife showed early on that it had the ability to not only spread into rural areas, but also to expand into other nations of Africa. Later highlife evolved from more colonial influences:

The second major stream of highlife developed out of the brass and fife bands associated with the European forts dotted along the West African coast (for instance Ghana had 200 forts). From early on these used local musicians to play military marches and music.4

The early inclusion of outside musical styles into highlife is a sign of acceptance and incorporation, rather than cultural imperialism. In fact, Nkrumah heavily backed highlife performances in the year of the country’s independence, 1957.5 Highlife and popular music were to play a major role in the forming of nationality as far as Nkrumah was concerned. He expressed a need for Ghanaians to be “tri-musical,” in that they could incorporate African, Western, and popular music forms to create “the African Personality.”6

As the independence movement gained steam in the 1950’s, Highlife artists and politicians began to see the usefulness in the popular music in creating an “African” image.7 Highlife bands began to support independence leader Kwame Nkrumah, and in return he supported them, both pre- and post-independence. These styles played a large role in the creation of a “national” music style during Ghana’s pivotal nation-building process immediately following their independence in 1957. The style continued to represent Ghana’s popular music scene up through the 1970’s,

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and was widely supported by the government through various programs. However, the collapse of the Ghanaian economy in the early 1980’s, and the military rule that would follow for the next decade drastically altered the popular music landscape in the country.

Jerry John Rawlings became the 10th Head of State of Ghana on December 31, 1981 after several coups d’état. In 1982, Rawlings instituted a curfew prohibiting nighttime gatherings, which decimated the country’s musical scene. This curfew lasted until 1984, and saw many artists flee in an act of self-exile to other countries. One popular destination for these highlife artists was Hamburg, Germany. A combination of affordable living, a similar port-style city that Highlife artists were accustomed to, and relatively relaxed immigration laws all contributed to the massive Ghanaian immigration to the area.

Hamburg clubs were very different musically than those found in Accra. They featured electronic instruments like synthesizers and drum machines in a largely Disco repertoire. Many of these were unfamiliar to Highlife artists, who began to use them in their own styles. This eventually led to a musical style known as Burger Highlife, named for the city that influenced the style. The first Burger Highlife album, *Friends* by the group Bus Stop, became popular in Ghana in the mid-1980’s. Burger highlife returned as a prominent style to Ghana due to another political action of the Rawlings administration.

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After 1984, although the musical curfew had ended, Rawlings instituted an import duty of 160 percent on all musical instruments. Musicians made the logical decision to bring back electronic synthesizers and drum machines, and greatly cut down on the cost of large highlife bands by using these instruments. The style quickly caught on in Accra clubs, and although classic Highlife returned, Burger Highlife was quickly becoming the predominant style.

Eventually, Rawlings relinquished his military rule on Ghana and created The Fourth Republic of Ghana. The 1992 Constitution went into affect on January 7, 1993. With the new democracy came the privatization of media outlets. A number of radio stations developed and brought with them a heavy diet of American Hip-Hop programming, which also spread to clubs in both Accra and Kumasi, the former center of the Ashanti Empire and the second largest city in Ghana. Initially, small venues and talent shows in Accra featured youths “rapping over beats and samples, emulating English rap flows.”

The influence of radio, and other technological advances, can still be felt heavily in today’s Hiplife landscape. According to UNESCO data in 2001 Ghana had 12.5 million radios. There are two nationwide radio stations, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation 1 and 2. There are 29 FM stations within Accra alone, and over 50 others

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outside of the capital. There are radio stations that broadcast in English and local languages. Generally the stations feature mixtures of programming that include allotted times for local DJ’s, playing of commercial popular music recordings, news, and talk shows. Some of the top stations, like Joy Radio based in Accra also broadcast live over the Internet. Others, like gfmradio broadcast solely on the Internet and cater not just to Ghanaians, but also to the international African Diaspora.

The Internet has also played a major role in the spread of hiplife. Ghana’s Internet usage has drastically risen from only 30,000 in 2000, to 1.3 million in 2009. This provides considerable access for the people of Ghana to listen to new hiplife. Many videos and articles on musicians can be found on Ghanaian based sites such as GhanaMusic.com, ModernGhana.com, GhanaWeb.com, and more. In addition, many of the Ghanaian radio stations are accessible online, as well as international music stations. Couple this with the still growing cellular phone market and Ghanaians, especially in urban environments, are becoming more and more connected. Not only does this connection lead them to hiplife, but it also gives easy exposure to foreign artists to inspire musicians.

Soon after the institution of the new Republic of Ghana, aspects of cosmopolitanism began to creep into Ghanaian urban culture. Modern Western fashion styles became the image of cosmopolitan Africans in Accra between locals

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and those from Ghanaian villages who would return home in their newfound styles. This image and the musical styles of African American hip-hop became markers for modern Ghanaian urbanites.\(^{15}\)

Local Akan languages also began to fall out of style, being referred to as “colo” – or colonial – and slowly were replaced by English, particularly African American vernacular learned from hip-hop on the radio. This was a distinct marker of class between the youth of Ghana and the older generation. For the older generation, British English was a marker of social class, while youth saw African American English vernacular as a more authentically modern form of communication.\(^{16}\) Slowly, local DJ’s began incorporating more local popular music styles like Reggae and Afrobeat into American hip-hop songs at local clubs. Many Ghanaians had noticed the lack of local popular music while American songs were dominating the airwaves.

In 1994, Reggie Ossei Rockstone, a Ghanaian living in London at the time, returned to Ghana with raps in Twi, English and Pidgin English, fluidly switching between the three.\(^{17}\) Rockstone’s initial recordings and performances blended New York hip-hop style at the time with both cosmopolitan and patriotic languages, ushering in a new era of Ghanaian popular music. His first album, *Makaa Makaa*, was released in 1997 and according to Rockstone was aimed at reaching both a local and diasporic audience. However, he later attested that he couldn’t find the right combination of styles, and while his music caught on in Ghana, it was largely

\(^{15}\) Shipley, “The Birth of Ghanaian Hiplife,” 33.
\(^{16}\) Shipley, “The Birth of Ghanaian Hiplife,” 34.
unnoticed in the rest of the world. Shipley describes the three main influences of Hiplife as “African diasporic popular expression,” “proverb-based Akan-language performance genres”, and “rapid development of commercial electronic media in Accra.”

Although it was unsuccessful globally, Rockstone’s music became a local craze, and Ghanaian artists quickly took notice. More Hiplifers popped up throughout Accra and Kumasi. These artists began to forge the basis for contemporary Hiplife, a term Rockstone is credited to have coined. Further hybridized by the growing availability of cheap travel, Internet and cellular phone access, and increased tourism, Hiplife has become the crowning jewel of Ghana’s popular music scene.

It is due to many of these historical factors – notably Rawlings military rule that created a forced – or pressured – cosmopolitanism – that Hiplife has become the musical style it has today. As a young, forming nation, Ghana has often struggled with ideas of cosmopolitanism and patriotism, and how to best represent the country through music. It is with this in mind that I present the ways that current Hiplifers – both in and out of the country – brand the image of Ghana through popular music.

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Musical Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism

People who are curious search for sounds; they seek out harmony and melody because they are curious. Your curiosity can be limited by your environment, or you can expand it to take in things from outside; a bigger curiosity for a bigger world. The extent of your curiosity should not be determined by the village, or the town, or a city in another continent. The musician moves in these circles, but he moves to break out of his limits.¹

- Manu Dibango

Of course any discussion on cosmopolitanism and patriotism must focus first on the definition of these two concepts, and how they specifically relate to music.

The cosmopolitan view most aligned with music is cultural cosmopolitanism. Pauline Kleingeld outlines the basic foundation of this type of cosmopolitanism in late 18th-century Germany: “Cultural cosmopolitanism is the view that humanity expresses itself in a rich variety of cultural forms, that we should recognize different cultures in their particularity, and that attempts to achieve cultural uniformity lead to cultural impoverishment.”² This form of cosmopolitanism allows for diversity in cultural styles, while also allowing for universal trade of ideas. It differs from other versions of cosmopolitanism in that it assumes not a universal concept of ideas, but a variety of forms that can freely mix with others. Kleingeld continues by expanding upon Georg Forster’s thinking: “Forster's main idea, expressed in later theoretical essays, is that all humans share the same essential natural predispositions (Anlagen) for reason, feeling, and imagination; but that these predispositions have developed differently in different

regions of the world, depending on external circumstances, thus leading to different cultures.” This accounts for regional differences that can affect cultures, like geographical peculiarities, climate, and life in various regions. Martha Nussbaum continues on the ideas of the Stoics:

The Stoics stress that to be a citizen of the world one does not need to give up local identifications, which can frequently be a source of great richness in life. They suggest that we think of ourselves not as devoid of local affiliations, but as surrounded by a series of concentric circles. The first one is drawn around the self; the next takes in one's immediate family; then follows the extended family; then, in order, one's neighbors or local group, one's fellow city-dwellers, one's fellow countrymen -- and we can easily add to this list groupings based on ethnic, linguistic, historical, professional, gender and sexual identities. Outside all these circles is the largest one, that of humanity as a whole.

The notion of cosmopolitan identities consisting of various “concentric circles” suggests that cosmopolitanism is an additive and actively changing process, rather than an achievable end goal. It defines the cosmopolitan as one who pursues interests outside of their local affiliations, yet still allows individuals to maintain aspects of their local identity.

Much of cosmopolitan writing has focused on the theory as a means for political and moral values in an increasingly global world. However, the ideas within them are hardly incompatible. Kant, as a leading cosmopolitan theorist, believed that

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the cosmopolitan was one that was willing to share the world. The idea of sharing a world does not assume that one must give up all local specificity in order to be cosmopolitan, but is more a mindset that allows all musical or cultural styles to exist on an equal level.

In terms of musical cosmopolitanism, Martin Stokes marks a difference between the acts of cosmopolitanism and globalization.

At this point I would like to turn to that messy and compromised term *cosmopolitanism*. For all of its problems (and there are many, which I will come to), there is one simple and distinct benefit. It restores human agencies and creativities to the scene of analysis, and allows us to think of music as an active process in the making of “worlds,” rather than a passive reaction to global ‘systems.’

The most important aspect of this is the idea of agency. This is particularly attractive as a definition for the musical Cosmopolitan because it allows a sense of creativity, as Stokes points out. Agency marks the difference between cosmopolitanism and globalization, the latter being a result of outside forces acting on a passive citizen unaware of the implications.

Several of these same ideas apply to patriotism as well. In many ways, patriotism resides at the opposite side of the spectrum as cosmopolitanism. Patriots identify themselves through the local. But again, it is important to think of patriotism as an ongoing process, just as Nussbaum sees cosmopolitanism. There is no ideal patriot, only a citizen with patriotic tendencies or ideas. Kwame Appiah writes

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“Cosmopolitanism and patriotism, unlike nationalism, are both sentiments more than ideologies.” These sentiments, Appiah goes on to explain, can be present in many forms of ideology, but give more freedom to the individual as how to address these sentiments.

The two ideas are also not necessarily completely separate. In fact, it seems unrealistic to expect a musician could completely ignore either the global or the local. If we think of patriotism as an active process, much like the process of cosmopolitanism, then it is possible to act in both ways simultaneously. Appiah makes the same argument, as he writes “we do not have to deal decently with people from other cultures and traditions in spite of our differences; we can treat others decently, humanely, through our differences. The humanist requires us to put our differences aside; the cosmopolitan insists that sometimes it is the differences we bring to the table that make it rewarding to interact at all.” This also supports Nussbaum’s explanation of the Stoic theory of concentric circles. One can still keep local significance – a sense of patriotism, for instance – while still acting outside of ones specifically local interests. It is in this way that someone could occupy both ideas of cosmopolitanism and patriotism simultaneously, without severely contradicting either idea. Appiah believes that these processes, present in one person at the same time, would make that person a “cosmopolitan patriot.” It is this realm that many Hiplife artists seem to fall into, addressing cosmopolitan issues with aspects of local patriotism. It of course also works the other way as well, with both sentiments, or

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processes, having an effect on the outcome of the individual and the music produced by the individual.

Through hiplife we will see many of these ideas come into play within the choice of languages for lyrics, how those languages blend in to each other, and the topics discussed by the artists. Seeing both cosmopolitanism and patriotism as ongoing acts alleviates the need to look for absolute cosmopolitans or patriots, and allows a subtler, more complex look at the intricacies of identity demonstrated within the musical text.
Multi-Lingual Lyrics as Global and Local

Contemporary Hiplife artists approach ideas of global and local in a variety of ways. The musical soundscape is of course incredibly diverse. However, it is in the lyrics that Hiplife truly shows its wide spectrum of intertextuality. Hip-hop has always used lyrics and language as a key component in their various messages. Hiplife artists have continued this trend, but their choice of the language or languages used within a song create an extra layer for the cosmopolitan and patriot.

First it is important to outline the various languages used within contemporary Hiplife. There are three main categories: Akan languages (usually Twi or Fante), Pidgin English, and English.

Akan languages seem like they would truly represent the local. The language is generally specific to Ghana and parts of the Ivory Coast. However, the various dialects are mutually understandable, and allows for cultural exchange across disparate parts of the country. This could be seen as a relative global to many Ghanaians in rural areas that have cultural exchanges with urban Ghanaians.

Pidgin English is a strong combination of the cosmopolitan and patriot. It’s a language widely understood – at least in part – across the English-speaking world, and especially within English-speaking Africa. However, it does have a certain amount of specificity to Africa and the African Diaspora. The use of Pidgin English, therefore, often expresses a shared origin with many English-colonized regions of Africa and the Caribbean.
Finally, there is the seemingly global English. Except that the English used is not based on British or American English, but more specifically rooted in African American Hip-Hop vernacular. Again, like Pidgin English, this language seems global on the surface. It is still understood by the majority of the English-speaking world. But, the Hip-Hop language has often been seen as a sort of code with its own dialects and specificities. Vernacular often evolves within the context of music, and can help form specific language styles within a community of music producers and consumers.

Adding to the complexities of what these languages themselves represent, are the multitude of ways artists use them within their music. Content used within the languages can often reassert one side of the cosmopolitan-patriot spectrum, while other times it may seem to contradict it. Also, the blending of languages – sometimes within sentences and other times used to separate song sections – add yet another layer to Hiplife’s lyrical complexity. To demonstrate the multitude of possibilities I will highlight the material of three separate artists, each with a distinctive cosmopolitan and patriotic style.

i. Sarkodie – “U Go Kill Me”

Ghanaian Hip lifer Sarkodie is a native of Tema, a seaport city within the Greater Accra region. He has become known for his rapid lyrics, often described as being “machine-gun style” raps. His song, “U Go Kill Me (Feat. EL),” uses all three language varieties discussed earlier, but in varying concentrations and situations. The lyrics are as follows:
**Intro - Sarkodie**
Alright you now say money no be problem
Homies on the block, alright I’m back again
You know what time it is, right up, hi what’s up?

**Verse 1 - Sarkodie**
ɔbaahema na ɛda hii ma me sina
me hya wo Lashibi na me ɛ wo su wan gyina
wo awuɔnɛ nu akyikyiri me ɛɣɛaa mɛn muna
na wo sɛn bawyii sei na adei wo ye diɛ ɛguma
wo pai buc wo de dadiɛ kɔ ɛkyima
wo ti tema, tema fɔ hii nti wo nim ɛtima
ne mame pan adiɛ ne papa su kra apuna
ɛnyɛ se mɛn gye wo hu me pe obi asuma
ashawo ne abrabɔ diɛ yɛn kɔ kua
gyise ampia perfume rice mu ngye nua
na tema abubuanu me ne bi nti ma mua
wo nunu gyama wa carry eii me nip takua
asaasi wora bebiaa mu na mu wyi niama
mu pappy weaa mu se ɛnyɛ mua tofiaaku
azonto bia me sa aka diɛ nyame ama
the whole Quashima ɔtɔsu Five Lady Bianka

**Pre-Chorus – Sarkodie**
Edru anagu na ma bɛ kuraa
Me ʃri eguma na me dru fieaa
Nsuo tɔ ɛwyia bɔaa
Ade san a ye tu pumaa
Joo nanu nsuo se champagne
ɔye azonto still I go maintain
ah ɛbɛ tsi wo nti skin pain
pe ɛdro bi num ne gai complain
you know what time it is

**Chorus – EL**
Eh eh the way she dey be my speck ooo
This girl go dey kill me ooo
(money no be problem)
when I see am I dey mess ooo
baby why you dey do me so
(obidiponbidi)
shay dey mash up my head ooo
saa this girl go make I go kolooee
the way she dey be my speck ooo
this girl go dey kill me, kill mee

**Verse 2 – Sarkodie**
Alright listen, eeh
It’s been a long time since, I saw Milicent
But she will always be my number one chick
Cus εbraa me ne bao nu ωnuaa na ηtii me asiε
Chale EL mpo bε ka kyεε wo
Fri εhɔ kɔ pim anɔpa
Efι sεε na hɔ nim sε esugya fɔɔ Suffer
Min tai mpe nu pim efι sεε na me di ka
Esu ωnu die εnfa ne hu )ma me bu atumpa
)yi w) di me figure wo di wo car be flexy
eπε pε beebi dao me ne ye nanti
ne ni bree hwee ya titi nu w) fie
)ti Obo asiεε nti ne ne ebιε
Abuagyi Milicen nfrε ne dufie
Hwε me tia de di agro me si baa nie, no

**Pre-Chorus – Sarkodie**

**Chorus (2 times)**
Immediately apparent is the wide use of Twi within “U Go Kill Me.” Sarkodie’s verses almost exclusively use the Akan language. However, it is where multiple languages collide, that provides an interesting look at cosmopolitanism and patriotism.

The intro mixes a use of Pidgin English and Hip-Hop English. It acts as a shout out to the local – “Homies on the block” – while using two globally – or at least much larger an audience than local Akan languages would have – understandable languages. They blend as if one, rather than two separate languages. The local reference of the “block” is reminiscent of many American Hip Hop representations of local neighborhood connections, especially in introductory shout-outs. However, the vagueness of where the neighborhood is in this intro leaves it open for the listener’s
interpretation. The “block” could be Ghana, it could be Tema specifically, it could be West Africa, or it could be the African Diaspora. Its vagueness allows it to slide across the scale of global and local freely depending on the listener’s point of view. In Sarkodie’s first verse he makes mention of his local community of Tema, asking his love interest in the song if she is from there.

Most visible in the lyrics of this song is the almost exclusive use of Twi within the verses. This points to a very localized audience. The verse carries all of the main storylines within the piece, yet it is only understandable to an Akan-speaking audience. The second verse begins with a quick two lines of English, which then seamlessly blend back into Twi, which Sarkodie blasts out in his signature “machine-gun” rap style. There is no doubt that the percussive and short nature of Twi has a powerful musical affect in Sarkodie’s rapping, but it is interesting as to why he includes the English lines at the beginning of the second verse. It is as if he is intentionally trying to work in a more global language, but use it in a way that does not interfere with the texture of his Twi rap. It also does not really serve as a plot-signifier for non-Twi speakers, as it reveals very little about the context of the song.

The chorus assumes a completely different role, however. Sung by EL, the chorus is written in Pidgin English. Rather than discuss a continuing plotline, like the Twi verses that precede it, EL’s chorus speaks of a girl so perfect that it makes him crazy. The more globalized language form, in this situation, is used to talk about the macro ideas addressed within the micro elements of the plot. Not only is the language
used more cosmopolitan in its broader reach, but also it is mirrored by the global nature of the topic being discussed. In this way, Sarkodie’s localized Tema girl is discussed as an abstraction that could apply to a much broader audience. Using EL – or any different voice – helps to further distance the verse and chorus, making the listener more aware of the changing perspective in both language and scope.

At the beginning of the second verse, Sarkodie introduces the girl Millicent in English, but then seamlessly switches to Twi mid-sentence. It almost gives the non-Ghanaian audience a chance to look into the content of the verse, but quickly returns to the localized Twi.

“U Go Kill Me” is interesting in its approach to language, particularly in how it addresses cosmopolitanism and patriotism not directly in the content or plot of the lyrics, but in the choice of languages that signify the combination of local and global thinking. Sarkodie in this song seems to represent Appiah’s cosmopolitan patriot extremely well. The theme discussed in widely understood languages is clearly relevant to vast communities throughout the globe, yet the local language verses and specific references to local communities within Accra show a sense of patriotism. The split between verse and chorus in some ways represents two different opinions – the verse often takes on the local Ghanaian perspective, while EL in the chorus can be seen to represent a more global narrative. This blend of patriotism and cosmopolitanism are therefore shown as being somewhat split between separate voices, except in the instances where Sarkodie injects other languages into his verses.
ii. M.anifest – “Suffer”

M.anifest approaches issues of cosmopolitanism and patriotism much more overtly. M.anifest, the grandson of Ghanaian ethnomusicologist J.H. Kwabena Nketia, spent most of his life in Accra, before moving to Minneapolis in 2001 to pursue a degree in Economics. His album, *Immigrant Chronicles: Coming to America* was released in September 2011 to excellent reviews and award nominations in both Ghana and Minneapolis. As the name suggests, *Immigrant Chronicles* discusses the feeling of an artist caught between worlds, and the struggles and joys that came through the process and outcome of M.anifest’s immigration to the United States a decade earlier. His song, “Suffer,” addresses many of these concerns.

**Intro**  
Uh-huh! M dɔ dɔ dɔ ti dɔ, yeah!  
African man original

**Verse 1**  
Gari Soakings for breakfast, noodles for supper  
Gotta eat proper but my pockets ain't dapper  
Junk food manics economics is a bluffer  
Need to go organic or my health might suffer  
As I grew older I was told to be tougher  
Gotta shoot the five to survive but I'm a rapper  
No doubt, if the shots ring out, brucka  
I ain't goin’ out like a sucker, I might suffer  
If you got a name like Muhammed or Mustafa  
Flying might be tougher, my sympathies brother  
Cause since towers fell it’s been hell if you other  
Like Benjamin Linus, your grind is bound to suffer  
Baboon dey chop wey monkey dey suffer  
Tension dey my inside like Ghana dey play soccer

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Success ein relative chaw, aunts and wofas
The issue, no bro go biz you if you suffer

**Chorus**
Kayayo dey sufer, Taxi driver dey suffer
Musician dey suffer, Opposition dey suffer
Immigrant dey suffer, Borga sef dey suffer
You've never known joy if you've never had to suffer
Villagers dey suffer, broke rappers dey suffer
Priests no dey suffer but small boys dey suffer
Jesus Christ I'm so nice I shouldn't suffer
You've never known joy if you've never had to suffer

**Verse 2**
Sucks getting caught up in traffic in rush hour
Wish I had magic or teleporting power
Late for this interview, my fear getting louder
My chances of getting this job are gonna suffer
Ghanaian mannerisms like ebei! Aba!
Got these Yankee folks on they jokes, I'm not bothered
No no, nuh uh, the kid is toppa toppa
Top shotta, Even Jesus had to suffer
Rhythm kidnapper, known as the X-Factors
But you don’t hear me tho' like lyrics by Wacka Flocka
Liberty on lock up shackles crippling dreams
Rather speak truth and let the rhyme scheme Suffer
These crabs in the barrel more concerned about apparel
Argumentative and talkative I Silence with a gavel
Tribalist Extortionist, greed is where corruption is
Karma is a motherfucker, she gon make you suffer

**Chorus**

**Verse 3**
See, I'm not a trapper, I'm just a boom bopper
Like it or not keep it stepping like a kappa
My shit constipated, I don’t need a crapper
Wary of the zombies who smile while they suffer
I mean this, men are from Mars women from Venus
Vagina monologues, chronicles of the penis
For real though, its seem so, falling need a buffer
Miscommunication why relationships, suffer
Nananom Samanfuor (yao) Asase Yaa (yao)
For starters, for the martyrs, lick shots like POW
Early birds and night owls salute to big papas
Freedom mummies for our future they had to suffer
There’s something unusual and beautifully strange about pain
Tell me what’s sun without rain
Give up my dreams for comfort and cream?
Thanks for the offer, but I’d rather suffer

Chorus

M.anifest uses very little Akan language within “Suffer,” and focuses on a majority of English and Pidgin English. The lyrics focus on the struggles of various types of people, some specifically referenced as Ghanaian, others in a more general sense not specific to location or patriotic identity.

Immediately, M.anifest references local food items in his difficulties. Gari, a Ghanaian staple made from cassava soaked in cold water and low in nutrients, represents the difficulties M.anifest is having as a struggling immigrant. He expresses his inability to eat healthier or fancier food due to his lack of funds, but uses local food to survive. This indicates a local solution to a cosmopolitan immigrant problem of nourishment. Later in the first verse, M.anifest makes a reference to Ghanaian soccer, and interestingly uses the word “soccer,” rather than the more common “football” used in Ghana. This acts as a close rhyme to the previous four lines which all end in an “er” sound, which may be the main reason for this inclusion. However, it also shows a blending of American – where soccer would be the more usual term – and Ghanaian language usage. This blending of American and Ghanaian cultural references can also be seen in other areas: Benjamin Linus, a character from the American television show
Lost, singing competition show The X Factor, and American rapper Wacka Flocka. This first verse uses mainly English, but throws in one line in Pidgin English:

“Baboon dey chop wey monkey dey suffer.” This is a Ghanaian saying expressing how people in power (baboons) earn money, while the lower class workers (monkeys) put in the hard work and suffer for little gain. This input is extremely localized to Ghana, as the Pidgin English would not directly translate to this metaphor for non-Ghanaians, yet the overall theme of the metaphor is quite a universal feeling.

The recurring chorus follows a similar pattern to Sarkodie’s “U Go Kill Me.” Instead of discussing a personal storyline – in the verses he uses first person pronouns often – the chorus is addressed outward and uses a more universal image of suffering and struggles. The chorus also switches over to a primary usage of Pidgin English. While the language used in the chorus is a mirror image of Sarkodie’s song, the switch from local to global is reversed. While Sarkodie goes from Akan in his verses to Pidgin English in his chorus -- in essence, local to a more global – M.anifest goes from English to Pidgin English. This contrast possibly emphasizes M.anifest’s desires to reach as large an audience as possible with his verses. This seems a reasonable expectation, seeing how M.anifest has a somewhat split audience between Minneapolis and Accra. The chorus is also sung by M.anifest, rather than another artist. Listening to the same voice in the chorus as the verse gives the song a less

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29 Although originally British, the American version of the show has been on air since 2004, and is likely the show referenced by M.anifest.

rigidly separated feel than “U Go Kill Me,” and shows M.anifest’s language-switching capabilities. Although the chorus seems global, some of the intricacies within it point to a more locally specific viewpoint, while also allowing a large English-speaking audience to understand the overarching theme.

The lyrical structure in the chorus is quite repetitive; M.anifest names various types of people that suffer, ending the grouping with the line “You’ve never known joy if you’ve never had to suffer.” This line summarizes the overall message of the song, which is a listing of the various types of difficulties M.anifest and other immigrants have faced, while showing an appreciation for how those same difficulties help people understand joy. It also stands out as one of the few English lines in the chorus, making the main thematic material accessible to a wide audience. However, the intricacies of some of the subjects listed are a little more locally specific. Kayayo, for instance, is a Ga word meaning “market girl.” Usually, these market girls—which greatly range in age—move from Northern, more rural areas of Ghana to Accra where they sell market goods to travelers and others within markets. This local language reference differs from the generally cosmopolitan representations of problems within the verses and most of the chorus. Other groups of people M.anifest mentions are Taxi drivers, musicians, immigrants, and villagers. While all of these subjects may have specific meanings to Ghanaians and M.anifest himself, the overall picture is one shared in many parts of the world.

31 “M.anifest – Suffer Lyrics.”
The one other specifically local reference in the chorus is the Borga. A Borga is a Ghanaian who leaves the country – most often for a first world country – and then returns to visit. The title generally comes with a positive connotation, and a Borga is seen as someone with great potential and an often-romanticized Western lifestyle. The Borga is often also used to describe someone who has picked up Western traits from their travels, and is sometimes expected to bring back money to the local Ghanaian family members that they have left behind. It seems highly likely that the Borga in the chorus is self-referential. The Borga represents a sort of cosmopolitan patriot – one that has left the country to explore different cultures, picks up some of their traits, but then returns to help their home country. M.anifest seems to be performing this type of person with his mix of American and Ghanaian references. By including Borga within the list of people suffering, M.anifest seems to be battling against the perceived assumption that those who leave Ghana for Western nations automatically succeed. He is also performing the role of a Borga throughout the song by mixing references and languages, perhaps accentuating his status as an immigrant, while firmly placing his identity in both the local and global.

The final verse contains one very localized Akan tradition. The line, “Nananom Samanfuor (yao) Asase Yaa (yao),” is in reference to ancestors – Nananom Samanfuor – and the God of the Earth or nature, commonly thought of as an older

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34 “M.anifest – Suffer Lyrics.”
woman. This localized religious input seems out of place with the last verse being exclusively in English otherwise. M.anifest seems to use sharp contradictions that highlight the difference in language – both in sound, meaning, and context. This inclusion seems rooted in more traditional Highlife characteristics where Western musical styles were blended with local Akan parables.

These lyrics represent the concentric circles aspect of cosmopolitanism, and M.anifest’s ability to exist within many different circles of identity simultaneously. There are several layers of local specificity and global expansion within the lyrical context and languages used that seem to represent the conflict of identity found in many immigrants. This can be seen in many other songs on the album, like “Blue,” where M.anifest also laments the lack of local Ghanaian cuisine available to him and the absence of Pidgin English, something he equates with being a Ghanaian citizen – “Talking Pidgin, Ghanaian citizen.” Then there is the intro song, “Ghana-Must-Go,” which expresses his need to escape his home country. In addition to the additive process that M.anifest’s immigration to the United States has allowed, he has also proven that it is his agency that allows him to continue his cosmopolitan lifestyle. This can be seen in his final line of “Suffer”: “Thanks for the offer, but I’d rather suffer.” M.anifest seems accepting of the challenge, and chooses his cosmopolitan lifestyle rather than being forced into it. Yet he still acts as a patriot in many ways, reminiscing on food, Ghanaian market girls, and people like him returning as immigrants.

35 “M.anifest – Suffer Lyrics.”
From this example and Sarkodie’s, there is a general curve that can be seen in terms of switching from the local to the global throughout song sections. A common story-telling form in hip-hop is to use a personal narrative within the verse, and a more globalized theme or moral in the chorus, just as a Greek chorus is expected to bring a personal story into the realm of the general public. Both Sarkodie and M.anifest do this in these examples. Sarkodie gives a first-person account of his courtship of a woman in Ghana, while M.anifest tells of his personal struggles making it as an immigrant in the United States. The chorus for Sarkodie expresses the more global understanding of a woman so perfect that it can drive a man crazy, while M.anifest brings in several examples of others that struggle in life, and the joy that can come from those struggles.

Where these two differ is in the language they use to bring these stories to their listeners. Both seem to structure their languages within their set song structures. Sarkodie’s linguistic structure seems to mirror the curve of his thematic content. The localized and personal account is rapped primarily in Twi. When his chorus’ thematic content expands to a more general moral, so does the songs language usage as EL sings in Pidgin English. M.anifest, however, has the opposite approach. The first-person content is in English – with a few exceptions – while the chorus is in Pidgin English with some specifically Ghanaian localized words like Borga or Kayayo. This creates the opposite curve, going from a global language in the verse, to a much more localized language in the chorus, which goes against the curve of the thematic content. This somewhat balances out the local and global, and with it the aspects of patriotism
and cosmopolitanism seemed to be split between content and language throughout “Suffer.” The song remains simultaneous in the two sentiments at nearly all times.

iii. M3nsa – “No One Knows”

M3nsa released his latest solo album, No. 1 Mango Street in October, 2010. M3nsa worked with a wide variety of collaborators – from other musicians, to producers and Web designers – throughout Europe, America, and Africa. He travelled around with partially completed songs on a Pro Tools file on a flash drive, handing in-progress songs over to people from varied backgrounds. The piece is a culmination of cosmopolitan thinking from an artist constantly thinking outside the box. Although many of M3nsa’s songs incorporate all three of the language styles previously discussed, “No One Knows” uses only English, and in context with the rest of the album takes on an interesting cosmopolitan appeal.

Verse 1

Just the other day, the other day
I was talking to the weather man
About today oh oh oh
And all, all he could say
Was no one knows tomorrow
See I can read the weather child
I can say maybe the rain will fall
The sun will shine oh oh oh
But that's as far as my story goes

Chorus
Cos no one knows tomorrow
Oh oh ha, no one knows tomorrow

Verse 2
Tell me what's the need
To go to war, all the killings
Just to settle some one else's score oh oh oh
When the victory isn't even sure
No one knows tomorrow
See, we can study history
and philosophy and Plato's ideology
oh oh ohh
But tomorrows still a mystery oh oh oh

Chorus
No one know tomorrow Oh oh ha
no one knows tomorrow

Verse 3
Tomorrow is your opportunity to fail
Or be successful if you please, yes indeed
Tomorrow is a politician's today
it's the victim of decision
and the future of our children
So if I die someday,
Will I be in heavenly places?
Singing halleluiah with an angel
On the piano or will I be
Just another contribution
To the earth, the tress, the grasses
As tomorrow slowly passes
No one knows, no one knows

“No One Knows” is a completely different take on lyrics and hiplife style than the previous two songs discussed. Immediately apparent is the complete lack of both Akan languages and Pidgin English. Rather than a concrete story within the verses, this song is completely based upon abstractions. The overall theme, as emphasized by the chorus, is that tomorrow cannot be decided by past events alone, and that the future is largely up to the individual person. It is an optimistic take on life, which is punctuated by various personal hypothetical scenes. In this way it is somewhat similar to the Sarkodie and M.anifest pieces discussed previously. The verses are personal
while the chorus is general advice to listeners. Where it differs is the lack of a clear story.

Also lacking in M3nsa’s song is any mention of location or specificity to Ghanaian culture. Upon listening, it is not apparent in any way that the artist is Ghanaian. The language is explicitly in English, and no places are mentioned by name. The musical style also is an amalgamation of various artists used by M3nsa on the recording, and hardly traces directly to Ghana or Hiplife in general. It would appear that M3nsa is writing in a completely cosmopolitan fashion, writing about problems of humanity rather than local community. However, within the context of the rest of the album, this song plays a cosmopolitan counter to some of the patriotic aspects.

The title of the album is one of the initial clues to its underlying patriotism. No. 1 Mango Street is the childhood address of M3nsa in Accra. It’s a nostalgic aspect to this album, which he released while in London. The name of the album sets the listener up for a nostalgic and localized Ghanaian musical experience. In fact, nearly all of the songs included on the album are in either an Akan language or Pidgin English, other than “No One Knows.”

This song demonstrates the extreme lyrical differences found within Hiplife songs. The complete lack of location, nationality, class, or even gender allows this song to exist devoid of much outside context. However, within the context of the
album it seems to represent a knowing shift from the local to the global, and in some ways has become the most popular song on the album.

The three analyzed songs show a diverse cross-section of the current musical landscape in Ghana. Both Sarkodie and M.anifest use multiple languages, largely separated by song structure, in varying contours throughout their songs. They implement small bursts of different languages within these structures to add significance to either the global or local. M3nsa, however, seems to address this structural contour within the album as a whole. These songs show how to these artists, language acts as a tool for communication on many levels, and is able to represent very specific and very broad ideas simply through the language chosen to express those ideas.
HiLife, Language, and Ghanaian Identity

Kwame Nkrumah, charged with the task of leading Ghana through its independence, realized the strong influence of both Western and Islamic ideas in Ghana at the time. Nkrumah writes, “I have stressed that the two other segments, in order to be rightly seen, must be accommodated only as experiences of the traditional African society. If we fail to do this our society will be racked by the most malignant schizophrenia.”¹ Nkrumah believed that to create a national identity for Ghana, it was important to accept various outside influences within a framework of the “traditional African society.” The wide acceptance of these religions today – 68.8% of Ghanaians identify as Christian, while 15.9% identify as Muslim, compared to only 8.5% of Ghanaians practicing traditional religions² – and the varying local adaptations that many of these religions have gone through seem to follow Nkrumah’s words.

These views seem to place Nkrumah within Appiah’s framework of a cosmopolitan patriot. Nkrumah believes in the creation of a local identity – a “traditional African society” – but believes that the identity should be formed from the myriad options of global influences. These views highly factored into Nkrumah’s wide support of the arts – especially highlife – in his early presidency. Highlife would slowly start to define the musical identity of the newly formed country. Shipley writes, “The appropriation and reinterpretation of Afro-cosmopolitan styles is at the

center of highlife.” He continues, writing “(Highlife artists) distill multiple, disparate sonic influences into a sound that defines Ghanaian nationhood through an aesthetic of newness.” This cultural cosmopolitanism began to define what Ghana was as a nation, acting in both a cosmopolitan and patriotic fashion. Even now, Highlife still is a large part of Ghana’s musical capital. Glorya Cho writes, “When interviewed on 15 August 2006, a National Theatre official referred to highlife as ‘the national, traditional, indigenous music in Ghana’.”

Hiplife also started with similar goals of merging “disparate sonic influences” into a distinctly Ghanaian style. Panji Anoff, producer of one of the formative Hiplife groups Talking Drums, wanted to make Africa global, not to translate, “America into Africa.” This distinction seems to coincide well with cosmopolitanism. Rather than simply translate, Anoff shows that artists could actively spread music anywhere without simply translating other musical forms. Rab Bakari, Rockstone’s producer for his first album, felt that hip-hop was a way to bridge Africans and the diaspora together, while still having an authentically Ghanaian style. And while Hiplife may not have received that kind of governmental praise yet, it is slowly being included into their musical programs.

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41 Cho, “Hiplife, Cultural Agency and the Youth Counter-Public,” 408.
Kiddafest – a teen performance workshop – was started by The National Theatre in 1994 with government funds to promote traditional Ghanaian culture as an aspect of national identity. Traditional music and dance were commonplace at the start of Kiddafest, as was Highlife. However, it wasn’t until 1999 that hip-hop became a part of the program. Shipley writes, “their programming pointed at the ways that hip hop became creatively integrated into the gamut of Ghanaian expressive cultural practices. Innovative young artists began to draw upon idioms of storytelling, proverbial speech, and traditional indirect speech culture in creating a new type of critical public voice.”

This gave the government a way to use Hiplife – or perhaps just realize its potential – as a national musical branding tool. Local traditions were incorporated into global contemporary music practices, and then packaged as Ghanaian popular music.

Of course, the idea of language is paramount to this discussion. Many early Hiplifers struggled with the idea of which language to use. In the early 1990’s, most rap in Ghana was an imitation of African American English hip-hop flow and rhyming patterns. Rockstone changed that by incorporating local languages and Pidgin English, which has become commonplace in the music scene today. What the three songs analyzed in this paper show us is how Hiplife artists actively address the ideas of language within song structure, often times separating verses and choruses with a new language, or having other vocalists sing different languages to change the intended audience. This active cosmopolitan shows how artists can use language

effectively, rather than simply switch back and forth. More importantly, the use of language allows Hiplifers to exist both in the local and global at the same time, connecting with millions of English speakers while still retaining local significance. While the musical aspects of Hiplife play a large role in its cosmopolitan nature, the backbone of hip-hop has always been the text. This marker of cosmopolitan and patriot within the confines of language is certainly not unique to hip-hop in Ghana, but gives an insight as to how popular music can place one foot in the global and the local simultaneously, and that cosmopolitanism and patriotism do not necessarily exclude each other, but in many ways have a very co-dependent relationship.
Bibliography


