We Rock Long Distance: M.anifest and the Circulations of Diasporic Hip-Hop

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This section of a dissertation is often the shortest, but it should be the longest. Many people all over the world have helped make this project possible, and knowing that I have the luxury of scrolling credits in the documentary means that I can be a bit more circumscribed here, if only for lack of space rather than lack of gratitude.

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Finally, to my parents: no words can express my gratitude for all you have given me.

Dedication

For

Minja

+

Mikey

+

Abdulle

Abstract

We Rock Long Distance is about the life and music of the emerging diasporic Ghanaian hip-hop artist M.anifest. Tracing complex threads of geography and generation, home and family, I examine what it is like to make hip-hop from someone in M.anifest's position, but also what it's like to make a dissertation and documentary *about* someone in M.anifest's position. After outlining the major questions motivating the project, I articulate the distances crossed in music and life between Minnesota and Ghana, the methodological distances that inevitably arise in ethnography and documentary film, the digital distances crossed through new media and social networking sites, and the generational distances explored between M.anifest and his grandfather, J. H. Kwabena Nketia. To tell these stories, I use numerous pieces of embedded media (photos, audio, and video), positioning *We Rock Long Distance* at the intersection of textual and visual knowledge production as I explore the question of where M.anifest both comes from and where he's at.

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Preface

If I could do it, there'd be no writing at all here.
It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments
of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech,
pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors,
plates of food and of excrement.

James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*[1]

The first time I came across this passage by James Agee, I had that incredible feeling of reading an eloquent summarization of a multitude of disparate feelings and ideas that had roiled inside me for months, as I grappled with how to both accurately and evocatively portray the life and music of the diasporic Ghanaian hip-hop artist M.anifest. In short, it spoke to the contradiction at the heart of any project like this: how to tell someone's story without speaking for them. Agee grapples with this throughout the entirety of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, never being able to fully overcome the multiple levels of difference between he and the tenant families he comes to know and eventually write about. It is in this passage that Agee finds one possible solution to narrowing that gap, supplementing his descriptions (and Walker Evans' photographs) with physical articles—phials of odor, lumps of earth—from the lives of those he describes with words alone.

These two dynamics—the act of writing someone else's life and using more than just text to do so—are in many ways the foundation of this dissertation, both in what I write about and *how* I write about it. At the core of any documentary project, including *We Rock Long Distance*, is movement, be it literal

[1] James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (New York: Mariner Books, 2001), 10.

or metaphorical (and most often both), especially movement *across* boundaries. As Paula Rabinowitz writes, "One goes somewhere as a documentarian—Polynesia, Alabama, Poland, downtown; the documentarian is drawn elsewhere by an other."[2] This going somewhere, however, as Rabinowitz and numerous other writers have discussed, is inseparable from questions of ethics and power. I have found inspiration in a number of ethnographic works that both foreground the fraught conditions of their own making—the fundamentally extractive character of ethnography, as someone imposes themselves on another person or group's life for an extended period of time for ambiguous purposes: a dissertation, a journal article, the advancement of knowledge, contributions to the scholarly community, assisting in preservation efforts, cultural activism—while at the same time utilizing a narrative voice that represents the "subjects" of a work with greater humanity and individuality, rather than only using them to illustrate theoretical or conceptual ideas, what Deborah Wong refers to as "academic pimping."[3]

One such text is Vincent Crapanzano's *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*.[4] In describing, after the fact, his far-from-conventional encounters and relationship with the far-from-conventional tile-maker and mystic Tuhami, Crapanzano writes

> Above all—and I write with uneasiness and a certain regret—“Tuhami” both as text and as a fellow human being enables me to raise the problematic of the life history and the ethnographic encounter. Tuhami becomes, thereby, a figure within an imposed allegory that in a very real

[2] Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (London: Verso, 1994), 6.
[3] Deborah Wong, *Speak It Louder: Asian Americans Making Music* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 141.
[4] Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

> sense bypasses him. My own obtrusive presence in his life not only enables Tuhami to tell his story; it also permits me the luxury of entering that allegory in the name of a science that is unknown to him.[5]

While Crapanzano eloquently states the disjunction between his own life and project and the life of Tuhami, this passage articulates a fundamental difference between the two men, perhaps bordering on the "pre-scientific primitivism" that has marked so many ethnographic and anthropological texts of Euro-American researchers going to study non-Western "Others."[6] Despite this, Crapanzano's book displays the strengths of ethnographies most influential on my own project: vivid portraits their authors paint of individuals, fusing narrative, storytelling, description, and theoretical rigor.

One example from the field of ethnomusicology is Bernard Lortat-Jacob's *Sardinian Chronicles*, a slim volume that details the author's travels through a number of villages on the island of Sardinia.[7] Michael Leris, in his Forward, characterizes the book as a "gallery of living portraits," and this is true not only of the many individuals Lortat-Jacob describes with poetic, well-crafted prose, but of the villages and indeed the island itself. What is most impressive, however, is the way that Lortat-Jacob can touch on so many pertinent themes in critical ethnomusicology and musicology: music's relationship to poetry and dancing; generational continuity and change; community identity; soundscapes and cosmology; migration and returning home; recorded performances vs. live performances; and many others. Despite these and many more themes, Lortat-

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[5] Crapanzano, *Tuhami*, xi.
[6] For more on this concept, see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
[7] Bernard Lortat-Jacob, *Sardinian Chronicles* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995), x.

Jacob's book is not plodding; far from it, one gets the sense that all of these themes are hovering beneath the surface or in the background (choose whatever metaphor you'd like), informing the writing without overpowering it. In addition, Lortat-Jacob examines his own role in this, not with hand-wringing, but by talking about the emotional intricacies and complexities involved in an ethnographic project, even his relationship to that fundamental piece of contemporary ethnomusicological "data collection," the audio recorder.

Above all, Lortat-Jacob does his work in *Sardinian Chronicles* through stories. In a similar vein, Steven Feld's recent work in Accra, Ghana about what he terms "jazz cosmopolitanism" makes explicit use of storytelling as the main vehicle and voice for the work. Feld's work has greatly influenced my dissertation, not least because it takes place in the same geographic area and engages many of the same underlying theoretical ideas—diaspora, creative production, transnational music, and cosmopolitanism. Even before his work in Accra, Feld has gone beyond conventional academic audiences with his work, not only in his style of writing but also in the fact that he undertakes creative projects in close collaboration with those who are nominally his "subjects."[8]

Feld opens *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra* with a disarmingly simple sentence: "I'm here to tell stories about jazz cosmopolitanism in Accra."[9] The book is comprised of three portraits—the drummer and composer Kofi Ghanaba

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[8] See, for instance, Steven Feld, "Dialogic Editing: Interpreting How Kaluli Read *Sound and Sentiment*," *Cultural Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (May 1987): 190-210 as well as Steven Feld and Mickey Hart, *Voices of the Rainforest: A Day in the Life of the Kaluli People* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways, 1991).
[9] Steven Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra*: *Five Musical Years* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 2.

(Guy Warren), the drummer Nii Nortey, and the La *Por-Por* honk horn ensemble.[10] Feld writes each portrait without section breaks in a fluid narrative style. In the "Four Bar Intro" that serves as a type of preface, Feld describes some of the theoretical and methodological questions that he examined in the process of deciding to adopt a storyteller's voice for the book: "How then to write about musical cosmopolitanism? How to inquire into the substance of unanticipated global entanglements in contemporary musical life-worlds? How to render the entanglements of ethnographic precision and personal empathy?" Feld's answer was to find a voice based on stories. "I was very much caught up in the complexities of finding this kind of storytelling voice for the work," he writes.

> Yes, I knew, many expected something more conventional: more conventional theory, more conventional analysis, more conventional critical distance, more of the familiar *locus classicus*—the music in its sociocultural context. A gentle edge was there in the reactions, a sort of "that was very interesting, but you didn't really analyze 'the music' or tell us what it means." While people indulged me in my storytelling, I could tell that some were anxiously waiting for me to get to the bottom of it all, to perform an analytic authority.

Finally, while he concedes that "stories are not analyses in the academic scheme of things . . . this does not mean they are unanalytic."[11] Like Feld's stories, the stories that make up *We Rock Long Distance* cross distances, ask questions, and create new ones from Minnesota, America, Accra, Ghana, Africa, points in between, points online. They provoke, evoke, and illuminate different ideas and

[10] Furthermore, Feld recorded and edited three hour-long documentaries, collected under the same title, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra*, as well as an audio recordings of the honk horn ensemble. See Steven Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra* (Santa Fe: Vox Lox, 2009) and The La Drivers Union Por Por Group, *Por Por: Honk Horn Music of Ghana* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways, 2007).
[11] Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism*, 7-8. Theoretical discourse makes appearances here and there, but most of it happens in the endnotes, of which there are nearly 50 pages.

emotions relating to concepts like home and family, but do so through the experiences and emotions of both myself and M.anifest throughout the process of creating *We Rock Long Distance*.

We Rock Long Distance is part of an emerging field that's been termed "multimodal scholarship," as part of the larger emerging field of "digital humanities."[12] I have incorporated media (photos, audio, and video) directly into the text, rather than solely as supplemental material attached afterwards. Moreover, the media is integral to the text itself. Sometimes the media illustrates a point, sometimes it serves to introduce a story, sometimes it tells a story in itself. But in all cases, it vivifies the voices and images inside its frame far better than a block of text could. This dissertation is not an argument that audio-visual media are inherently better than text as a source of knowledge, but rather an exploration of the intersections of written and audio-visual knowledge.

Yet with all of the technological possibilities available to scholars to create different formats of their work, or combine existing formats of work (as I'm doing here with text, photo, audio, and video), the form of the dissertation still suffers from technical limitations. Due to these limitations, there is no way to embed the media directly into the dissertation PDF and have it be the official dissertation document. To do so would require embedding actual audio and video files into

[12] For instance, see *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, edited by Matthew K. Gold (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012) and David Shorter, "On Multimodal Scholarship," *Ethnomusicology Review* 16 (2011), accessed 17 July, 2012, http://ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/journal/volume/16/piece/459

the PDF itself, and while this is certainly easy to do, the resultant PDFs would be too large to archive with the amount of video that is part of this dissertation.[13]

In order to work around these limitations, I have created an online version of the dissertation, with all of the media embedded from the University of Minnesota's Digital Content Library, a secure, long-term storage site for the media files resulting in a much smaller chance of broken links. This online version can be viewed at the following link:

http://z.umn.edu/wrld

For this conventional dissertation PDF, the only media will be photographs. However, for audio or video content, there will be a screenshot of the media with playback controls visible. Here are what audio and video examples will look like in the pages ahead.

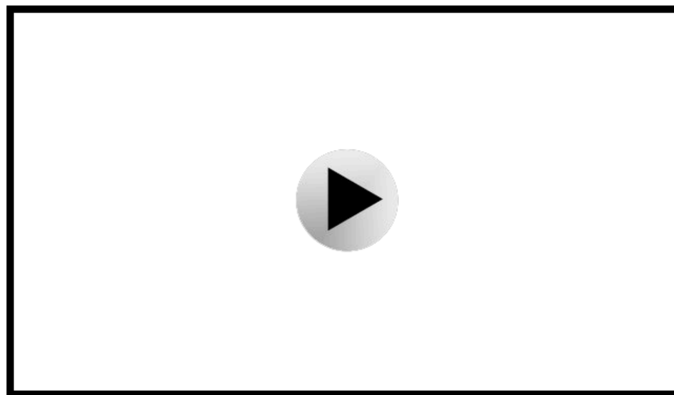

Figure P-1

[13] The only possible way to make this work would be to drastically compress the video to an extremely small resolution at an extremely low quality, taking the video from its high definition source resolution (1920 x 1080 pixels) to 320 x 240 pixels, a sacrifice I am not willing to make.

The chapter title for each section will also be a link to the online version. Not quite phials of odor, but the best solution I could come up with to both embrace the new possibilities of media and scholarship, while still working within the slightly archaic constraints of dissertation requirements.

Chapter 1: “Represent Africa with a Spectacular Street Vernacular"

I’m sitting in front of my computer in Minneapolis, looking at footage of the hip-hop artist M.anifest performing in November of 2010 at Citizen Kofi, a nightclub in Accra, Ghana. Reggie Rockstone, the godfather of Ghanaian hiplife and host for the evening’s show, warms up the crowd before the opening act. He would bring up a number of VIPs in the house that night, but the most important of those who joined him on-stage was M.anifest’s mother.

“I will bring to the stage . . . the woman . . . that gave birth to who you came to see."

As soon as he finishes his sentence, a woman from further back in the club (and outside the frame) shouts out her own characterization of who she came to see.

“A nigga from Ghana!"

Reggie nods his head as a smattering of laughter ripples through the crowd, and asks, “Capiche?" He then proceeds to bring M.anifest’s mother to the stage and the show continues.

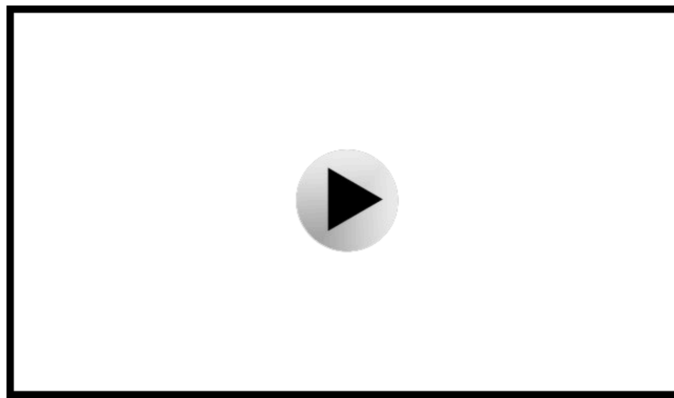

Figure 1-1

I vaguely remember hearing this “interruption" while I was in Accra shooting the event, which culminated a month in Ghana with M.anifest, but if I did hear it, I paid little attention, focusing instead on framing the shot I had of Reggie and, shortly thereafter, M.anifest’s mother as she walked to the stage. It was only until logging the footage nearly a month later that I came upon the startling realization that this was not just some random interjection by an excited fan. It had a referent, simultaneously specific and distant, and the resulting collision of these two moments sets the stage for this dissertation.

Eighteen months earlier, I filmed M.anifest and his good friend Muja Messiah at the Fine Line Music Café in Minneapolis.

Figure 1-2

I received permission to film at the very last minute, and received one of the last tickets for the evening’s show, which was headlined by a rare side-by-side

performance by Twin Cities hip-hop heavyweights Atmosphere and Brother Ali.[1] In the opening song by Muja and M.anifest, “Visualize Close," one they wrote that afternoon and never recorded or performed again, Muja transitions from his first verse to M.anifest’s verse with the following lines:

> *It’s Muja, better learn how to pronounce my name*
> *I’m hip-hop Obama/Put that on my Momma*
> *I’m here, along with my nigga from Ghana*

	[*Yes, yes that’s me, Yes Yes that’s me*]
That’s my nigga from Ghana	
	[*Yep, yep, I’m that nigga from Ghana*]

I posted a video of the song on YouTube a few weeks later. Here’s the relevant clip.

Figure 1-3

[1] Atmosphere and Brother Ali are two of the best-known artists from the Rhymesayers Record label, which started in Minneapolis in the mid-1990s and has since become one of the best-known underground and independent hip-hop labels in the United States.

These two moments, nearly two years and thousands of miles apart, share more than the contextual space of a live hip-hop show and a few words.[2] Given the lack of recordings and performances of “Visualize Close" after the show at the Fine Line, it’s safe to say that the only way for the woman at Citizen Kofi to have heard the song would be through this YouTube video. There is even more evidence of this in the *sonic* character of the two exclamations. The written word cannot capture the full similarity between the two utterances; rather, it is their *intonational* similarity, the emphasis on the first of the two syllables of “Ghana" (*Gha*-na), that really identifies the woman’s exclamation as a quotation. Here are the two videos back to back.

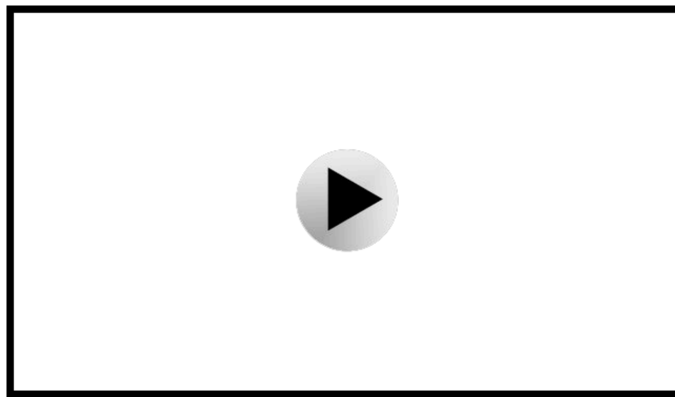

Figure 1-4

Untangling the knot of questions and ideas that emerge out of these two visual and sonic moments serves as the basis for this dissertation. What kinds of

[2] While I could write an entirely different dissertation on the circulation and translation of the word “nigga" as it has traveled the African Diaspora, I would argue that in both of these videos, the usage represents the re-appropriated and re-encoded version of the word. For more on the changes and controversies surrounding “nigger" and “nigga," see Randall Kennedy, *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002); Jabari Asim, *The N Word: Who Can Say It, Who Shouldn’t, and Why* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007), and the video documentary *The N-Word: Divided We Stand* (New York: Urban Works, 2004).

meanings are created through music produced and performed in multiple places that represent multiple homes? What kinds of networks and connections allowed for this strong of a resonance with a woman thousands of miles away? How does this relate to the global adoption and spread of new media practices online? What does it say about the act of documenting the same person in multiple countries and contexts? And how much of a role does my shooting and editing of the videos play in their meaning?

My attempts to answer these questions have resulted in this dissertation and a feature-length documentary, both titled *We Rock Long Distance*. While the dissertation focuses solely on M.anifest, the documentary weaves his story together with those of two other artists, the "Sota Rican" (Minnesota Puerto Rican) MC, singer, and songwriter Maria Isa, and the Hmong MC, spoken word artist, and community organizer Tou SaiKo Lee.

The project began as an essay about Twin Cities hip-hop in January of 2007, for which I interviewed more than 60 artists, promoters, industry figures, radio personalities, and other community figures from the entire history of Twin Cities hip-hop.[3] One of the realizations I made during this process was how many

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[3] "From St. Paul to Minneapolis, All The Hands Clap For This': Hip-Hop in the Twin Cities." *Hip-Hop In America: A Regional Guide*, ed. Mickey Hess (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009). Two other important sources for Twin Cities hip-hop history are Pete Scholtes, "One Nation, Invisible: The Untold Story of Local Hip-Hop," first published in 2004 in the *City Pages* and now available at http://www.citypages.com/2004-08-18/news/one-nation-invisible (Accessed 18 March 2013); and Zach Combs, *Headspin, Headshots, and History: Growing up in Twin Cities Hip-Hop* (Minneapolis: No Static Records, 2011). While Schotles's article is an oral history featuring the voices and stories of many of those involved in the early years of

artists and fans of hip-hop in Minnesota weren't conventionally *from* Minnesota. The state has long been a home for refugees from places as diverse as Southeast Asia, East Africa, and the Soviet Union,[4] and this, combined with the prominence of the Twin Cities in American hip-hop, makes it no surprise that these two "worlds" should intersect. Fans and artists from around the world have established new lives in the Twin Cities, from places as wide-ranging as Somalia, Ethiopia, Liberia, Russia, Thailand, Laos, Mexico, Guatemala, Vietnam, Nigeria, Liberia, Tibet, and Burma. Some are refugees, others are students, others are looking for better employment opportunities.[5]

I learned about M.anifest after reading an article about African hip-hop in the Twin Cities written by Peter Scholtes in the local alternative weekly paper, the *City Pages*.[6] Here's a quote from that article:

> Expressing himself in a gentle Accra accent, M.anifest explains how he grew up speaking English, Ghana's national language, [though] he sounds more American on his deeply funky, jazz-chopping rap tracks, which he's brought to local stages for about a year.

Twin Cities hip-hop, Combs's book is a detailed narrative of his life in Twin Cities hip-hop as an artist.

[4] For a comprehensive historical survey on the background of immigration to Minnesota, see June Denning Holmquist, *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2003).

[5] For more recent work on immigration to Minnesota, see Doug Rutledge and Abdi Roble, *The Somali Diaspora: A Journey Away* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), Chia Youyee Yang, *Hmong in Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2008), and Ahmed Yusuf, *Somalis in* Minnesota (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2012). These last two books are part of the extensive "The People of Minnesota," published by the Minnesota Historical Society. While a number of other diasporic hip-hop artists, including Tou SaiKo Lee, are part of a larger ethnic population here in Minnesota (Hmong or Somali especially), and are often held accountable for their music and actions by different facets of that community, there is no substantial presence of Ghanaians in the state.

[6] Peter Scholtes, "Payback is a Motherland," available online at http://www.citypages.com/2006-07-12/music/payback-is-a-motherland/ [Accessed 21 September 2012].

M.anifest and I first met in July of 2007 at the Acadia Cafe on Minneapolis' south side, when I interviewed him for my essay.

Figure 1-5

At that time, he was preparing to release his debut album, *Manifestations*. Our conversation ranged through a variety of topics over the course of an hour, including life growing up in Accra, the first hip-hop artists he listened to, when he started rapping, his participation in Twin Cities hip-hop, and many others.

After completing the essay and starting to focus specifically on immigrant, refugee, and diasporic hip-hop in Minnesota, I started going to many such artists' shows, including those of M.anifest. At first I only brought an audio recorder and a notebook, but after I began working with video in 2008, I started filming these shows. It was then that I decided to make a feature-length documentary about this type of hip-hop in Minnesota, but soon realized such a topic was far beyond the scope of one documentary. I decided to focus on M.anifest, Maria Isa, and Tou SaiKo Lee, whom I met while writing the initial essay and who were two of

the most prominent diasporic hip-hop artists in the Twin Cities along with M.anifest.

Figure 1-6. Photo by B Fresh Photography

Over the course of the next two years, I would film at least one interview with each artist, write articles about them in local publications, and work with them on a number of different projects. [7] I traveled to different places in the country with M.anifest, including Chicago, the University of Notre Dame, and Seattle to film his participation in different festivals. Eventually, the artists and I developed the key element of *We Rock Long Distance*: traveling with each of them to their “homes" of Ghana, Thailand, and Puerto Rico.[8] While these trips

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[7] Publications I wrote for included *The Chord* (the newsletter of the Electric Fetus record store), *MNArtists.org* (part of the Walker Art Center), and the *Twin Cities Daily Planet*. Many of the articles for the Daily Planet can be found online at http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/profiles/justin-schell/bio [Accessed 17 October 2012]. In 2009 and 2011, I helped organize and film an event called "Boom Bap Village" with Tou SaiKo Lee, a two day Hmong hip-hop festival.

[8] I traveled to Ghana with M.anifest in November of 2010, Puerto Rico with Maria Isa in July of 2011 and Thailand with Tou SaiKo Lee in December of 2011.

were about exploring "where they come from," at the same time they complicated easy conceptions of home, a theme I explore throughout this dissertation.

The genesis and meanings of my project's title serve as a convenient starting point to discuss the themes of this dissertation. *We Rock Long Distance* is a transformation of a quotation by the revered and complicated Afro-Beat pioneer and political radical Fela Kuti. Journalist Fola Arogundade asked Fela about the length of his songs, some of which would fill the entirety of an LP, Fela responded “I can’t stand all that short music. We dance long distance here, so no three-minute music for me."[9] Fela’s Afro-Beat had many diasporic components to it, despite Fela’s own neo-traditional philosophical characterization of the music. Founded upon Ghanaian highlife, he infused it with James Brown-style funk and the harmonic complexities of jazz, which he learned about not only through records but also from his time in London and the United States.[10]

When I first read this quote, I immediately thought of “distance" not as time but as geography, a transformation of the temporal to the spatial. M.anifest's life, as well as that of Tou SaiKo Lee and Maria Isa, revolves around long distances: long distance calling plans, connections across oceans via music and video

[9] Fola Arogundade, “How Fela Creates His Music," *Punch*, September 23, 11. Quoted in Michael Veal, *Fela: The Life and Times of an African Musical Icon* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 173.
[10] Other books on Fela include his authorized biography by Carlos Moore, *Fela: This Bitch of a Life* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 2009); Tejumola Olaniyan, *Arrest the Music: Fela and His Rebel Art and Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Trevor Schoonmaker, *Fela: From West Africa to West Broadway* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Sola Olorunyomi, *Afrobeat!: Fela and the Imagined Continent* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003); John Collins, *Fela: Kalakuta Notes* (Amsterdam, KIT Publishers, 2009); and Niyi Coker, *A Study of the Music and Social Criticism of African Musician Fela Anikulapo-Kuti* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellon Press, 2004).

sharing websites like Skype, SoundCloud and YouTube, speaking words and shaping beats to better elicit far away roots, and traveling the long distances to Ghana, Thailand, and Puerto Rico itself. As for “rock," a verb made popular by b-boys and b-girls in hip-hop’s early years, its most famous usage is by the narrator of the formative hip-hop documentary *Style Wars*:

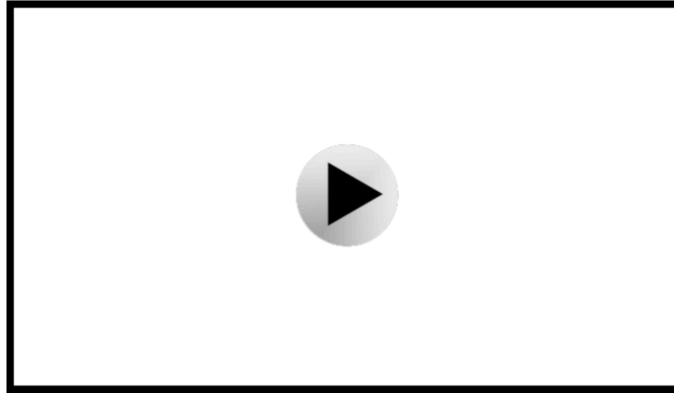

Figure 1-7

Another famous hip-hop usage of “rock" in relation to hip-hop is Afrika Bambaataa’s groundbreaking “Planet Rock," released in 1982 with the Soulsonic Force.

Figure 1-8

From its opening words of “Party people, party people," the song takes the listener on an electro-journey, with Kraftwerk, Babe Ruth, and Stravinsky (in the guise of a Fairlight ORCH5 orchestral stab) along for the ride.[11] For Tommy Silverman, who released the song on his Tommy Boy label, “Planet Rock" was “when they started pouring in from France and England to cover hip-hop. That’s when hip-hop became global."[12] For writer Hua Hsu, songs like “Planet Rock" were emblematic of Bambaataa’s overall aesthetic, “voracious, inclusive, and global. Anything with a beat could be assimilated into his genre-resistant DJ sets."[13] Finally, hip-hop writer and historian Jeff Chang considers “Planet Rock" as hip-hop’s “universal invitation, a hypnotic vision of one world under a groove, beyond race, poverty, sociology, and geography."[14] Of course, as the history of hip-hop and beyond have shown since the release of "Planet Rock," this is an ideal vision that reality has fallen well short of reaching.

As I was designing and initial logo for the film with a graphic designer, I realized the greater significance of "long" to the project.

[11] For more on the ORCH5 sample, see Robert Fink, “The Story of ORCH5, or, the Classical Ghost in the Hip-Hop Machine." *Popular Music* 24, no. 3 (2005): 339-356.
[12] Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop* Generation (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005), 173.
[13] Hua Hsu, “Seeing Jay-Z in Taipei," *Daedalus* 140, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 163-173.
[14] Chang, *Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop*, 172.

Figure 1-9

From the start, I envisioned the four words forming a box, yet the number of letters in each word made it so that “long" would be the largest in the logo. In addition to aesthetic misgivings I had about this, I was also concerned about its implicit meaning, since part of the project focuses on how M.anifest and the other two artists *bridge* these long distances, participating in global media flows that blur and often collapse distances of great length. The solution to this was to utilize negative space created by the waveform that serves as the logo’s background. “Long" still stands as the largest word in the logo, but it is simultaneously emphasized and de-emphasized; the length of these distances are very real, both physically and emotionally, but also can be bridged through hip-hop and the diasporic media currents these particular artists’ hip-hop travel on. Finally, the word "distance" has come to be an organizing principle for the dissertation, which I will outline in the pages ahead.

M.anifest was born Kwame Amet Tsikata in Accra, the capital city of Ghana. He grew up in the city’s Madina neighborhood (an area northeast of the

city center and near the University of Ghana at Legon) and comes from a long line of intellectuals. His mother, Priscilla Naana Nketia, is a professor and pastor. His father, Tsatsu Tsikata, graduated from Oxford University and, after serving as a lawyer, was chosen by President Jerry Rawlings as the head of the Ghana National Petroleum company in 1988;[15] finally, his grandfather is the legendary and world-renowned ethnomusicologist, composer, poet, and educator J.H. Kwabena Nketia. M.anifest showed a talent for reading at an early age, and quickly developed a strong interest in literature. He earned a full scholarship to Macalester College to study economics, and moved to St. Paul, Minnesota in 2001.[16]

In a story repeated by artists and fans throughout the world, M.anifest's first exposure to hip-hop came via cassette tapes that were brought back to Ghana from friends or family who traveled to the US or UK; (Naughty by Nature was a particular favorite of his growing up). While he did some rapping in high school, as part of a group called Rebel Camp, it was not until 2005 that he began to take his music seriously.[17] He adopted the name M.anifest, an acronym for

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[15] In 2008, Tsikata was imprisoned by the Kufuor government on charges of “causing financial loss to the state." There was a strong movement to have Tsikata released, with both M.anifest and important popular music figures such as Ebo Taylor contributing songs to the movement. He was released in 2009 upon receiving a pardon by Kufuor on the last day of the president’s term, yet Tsikata refused to accept the pardon and continues the attempt to clear his name.

[16] M.anifest’s decision to attend Macalester College isn’t as surprising as one might think. Macalester has a long history of students from around the world, including a number of Ghanaians, the most famous of whom is Kofi Annan. Currently, the college has students from 93 different countries enrolled. Many of these students come from their partnership with the United World Colleges, of which the SOS high schools in Ghana (which M.anifest attended), are members.

[17] M.anifest’s partner in Rebel Camp, Senam Gbeho (who went by the MC name Evil Twin) also went to Macalester College and has his own famous lineage: his grandfather is Philip Gbeho, the composer of the Ghanaian national anthem.

"Music always needing illumination for every soul today."[18] His hip-hop would fall under the far too-general "conscious" category.[19] It features an emphasis on storytelling, wide vocabulary and references, and deft rhyming skills. He raps in a mixture of three languages, Twi, English, and Ghanaian pidgin, often on the same song, sometimes even within the same line. M.anifest has independently released a number of records, his full-length debut *Manifestations* in 2007, a free 2009 mixtape entitled *The Birds and the Beats*, released in support of the non-profit Youth Entrepreneurs Africa, and an EP with the group A.R.M. (featuring the Ugandan MC Royunga and American producer Budo) called *Two Africans and a Jew*. In September of 2011, he released *Coming to America: Immigrant Chronicles*, his second full-length album. In addition to performing in Minnesota, he has performed in Chicago, New York, London, Paris, Spain, South Africa, and Ghana.

[18] This usage of an acronym has a specific hip-hop lineage, that of the strong presence of the Nation of Gods and Earths, also known as the Five Percent Nation, in the history of hip-hop. Numerous hip-hop artists subscribed to Five Percent beliefs, including members of the Wu-Tang Clan, Eric B. and Rakim, Brand Nubian, X-Clan, and the Poor Righteous Teachers, to name a few. In fact, "Rakim" is itself an acronym, short for "Ruler-Allah-King-I-Master." For more on the relationship between Five Percent theology and hip-hop, see Felicia Miyakawa, *Five Percenter Rap: God's Hop Music, Message, and Black Muslim Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

[19] Conscious hip-hop is often uncritically championed in opposition to so-called "gangsta" rap (with a distinction between "hip-hop" as better than "rap"). However, in addition to shortsightedly dismissing the complexities of so-called "gangsta rap," such divisions often give a pass to problematic representations of women, masculinity, and homophobia that still persist within so-called "conscious hip-hop." For more on this, see Sujatha Fernandes, *Close to the Edge: In Search of the Global Hip-Hop Generation* (London: Verso, 2011) and an in-depth discussion of the "conscious" label by artist and activist Guante, found at http://www.guante.info/2011/03/new-mixtape-in-week-plus-thoughts-on.html (Accessed 20 September 2012).

M.anifest is firmly a part of hip-hop in the Twin Cities, an epicenter of underground hip-hop in America.[20] While hip-hop in the Twin Cities dates back to the early 1980s, it was only with the rise of the Rhymesayers record label in the mid-1990s that the Twin Cities (and especially Minneapolis) began to gain greater national attention. Now, Rhymesayers artists such as Atmosphere, Brother Ali, and P.O.S., frequently appear as musical guests on late-night talk shows, appear on many of the most influential hip-hop websites and magazines, and sell hundreds of thousands of albums across the country. M.anifest has shared songs and stages with these and other prominent hip-hop artists in the Twin Cities, and counts many as personal friends. He has performed at many of the biggest venues in the Twin Cities, including First Avenue (of *Purple Rain* fame), the 7th Street Entry, the Fine Line Café (as I mentioned in Chapter 1), and smaller venues such as Cause, the Cabooze, the Red Sea, a number of colleges and universities around the state, and others. His music is sold in two of the biggest record stores in the Twin Cities, the Electric Fetus and the Fifth Element, which is the store owned and operated by Rhymesayers, and has also been nominated for a number of Twin Cities Hip-Hop Awards. He's appeared on albums by artists like I Self Devine and e.g. bailey, and has collaborated with other Twin Cities artists on songs of his own, including Desdamona and Brother

[20] While there are certainly "underground" components to hip-hop in New York and Los Angeles, other cities comparable to the Twin Cities would be places like Chicago, the Bay Area, Philadelphia, and Seattle. For more on these and other hip-hop scenes in the United States, see *Hip-Hop in America: A Regional Guide* (cited above); Anthony Kwame Harrison, *Hip-Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009); Marcyliena Morgan, *The Real Hip-Hop: Battling for Knowledge, Power, and Respect in the LA Underground* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); and Sujatha Fernandes, *Close to the Edge* (cited above).

Ali. M.anifest is also part of the wider arts community in the Twin Cities. He has appeared as an "Art Hound" on Minnesota Public Radio, a weekly segment that has artists discuss an event they are looking forward to, and is the co-founder of Giant Steps, a yearly event dedicated to fostering collaboration between what they term "artistic entrepreneurs" and "entrepreneurial aesthetics."[21]

While M.anifest's music, firmly couched in the conventions of American hip-hop (both through lyrics and the beats his producers provide him), make him one of the most musically-recognizable and accessible artists in Twin Cities hip-hop, he suffuses his music with a greater level of ethnic difference than many of his fellow MCs. Often performing in clothes that signify his Ghanaian identity (be it kente cloth, agbada, or various types of beads from Ghana), he raps about his Ghanaian background and life as an immigrant through three different languages. As I will show in the following pages and the following chapters, these signifiers at the intersection of Ghanaian and Minnesotan, African and American, not only give M.anifest's music a far greater cosmopolitan feel than other Twin Cities hip-hop artists, but complicate easy distinctions between "here" and "there," and what kinds of images fans may have of Minnesota, America, Ghana, and Africa.

[21] For more on Giant Steps, see http://www.giantstepsmn.com/. [Accessed 12 October 2012]. To listen to M.anifest's appearance on "Art Hounds," visit http://minnesota.publicradio.org/collections/special/columns/state-of-the-arts/archive/2011/04/art-hounds-womens-work-native-bags-and-an-afrobeat-legend.shtml [Accessed 12 October 2012].

A lyrical quotation that's become nearly synonymous with discussions of so-called "global hip-hop," such as that of M.anifest, is from Eric B. and Rakim's song "I Know You Got Soul," off 1987's *Paid in Full*. [22]

It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at.

In the context of the original song, which is a classic braggadocio track demonstrating Rakim's rhyming abilities, he's not speaking about Japan, Brazil, South Africa, or Ghana, but someplace much closer to the home of hip-hop in the South Bronx.

The Bronx, Queens, or Long Island Sound,
Even other states come right and exact.
It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at

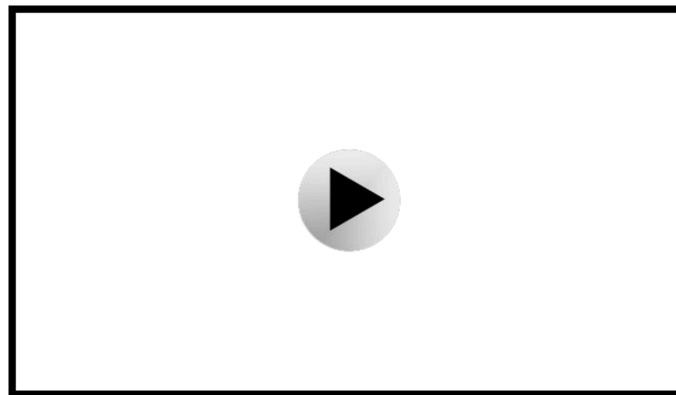

Figure 1-10

Rakim's scope does not extend much beyond the boroughs of New York, and certainly not past the borders of America. It is ironic, then, that this quote has been marshaled to serve as a kind of rallying cry in discussions of hip-hop beyond America. Patrick Neate entitled his travelogue of global hip-hop *Where You're At: Notes From the Frontline of a Hip-Hop Planet*. Jeff Chang considers it

[22] Eric B. and Rakim, *Paid in Full*. (4th and Broadway BWAY 4005, 1987). As for "global hip-hop," see, for instance, Tony Mitchell, ed., *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).

an "open invitation to the hip-hop nation." And finally, Paul Gilroy wrote an article that used the lyric phrase as its title."[23]

What I'm suggesting here in relation to M.anifest and other diasporic hip-hop artists is that it can't just be one or the other: it's both *where you're from* and *where you're at*, but neither of these terms are as stable as Rakim (or those adopting/adapting his words) might think them to be. *We Rock Long Distance* is a project about where these three artists are from, but the "from" in this case is both a geographic place of origin and an image of home(s) and histories. The *at* of this project mixes places of belonging, not only in terms of M.anifest's movement back and forth between Ghana, but also the global reach of his music through new media sites like YouTube and Facebook. In doing so, it breaks down the artificial divide between "global" and "American" hip-hop, seeing instead how they are intricately linked in both the mind of an artist like M.anifest, in audiences around the world, and in the beats and rhymes themselves.

What Rakim's quote does unequivocally display, however, is one of the best-known characteristics of hip-hop that has stayed consistent throughout its spread around the world. This is the idea of *representing*, showing where you come from, your history and background. This goes back to the earliest days of what would become hip-hop, with the first well-known graffiti writer, Taki 183, who based the second half of his tag on the street he lived on, 183rd in

[23] Patrick Neate, *Where You're At: Notes from the Frontlines of a Hip-Hop Planet* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004); Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*, 321; and Paul Gilroy, "It Ain't Where You're From, It's Where You're At: The Dialectics of Diaspora Identification," in *Small Acts* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993), 120-146.

Washington Heights.[24] Since then, it's a common convention of hip-hop to represent where you're from in some way, regardless of what "element" of hip-hop you do. There are specific styles of breaking (not to mention clothing) that can be geographically located (even though people throughout the world may adopt them), musical styles associated with an area (Dirty South synths, LA G-Funk, etc), graffiti styles that come from certain places, and, perhaps most immediately, the language, accent, intonation, and vocabulary an MC uses in his or her rap.[25]

There are two poles to M.anifest's diasporic existence that are represented in his music, Minnesota and Ghana or, in a more detailed way, Minneapolis and Accra. Yet in discussing these locations, though, neither Minnesota nor Ghana should be viewed as a stable, homogenous space. Given M.anifest's life outside of Ghana for the last decade, it is difficult for him to identify completely with Ghanaians of his generation who have lived in Ghana all their lives.[26] At the same time, there is a negotiation that happens around his musical identity in Minnesota. Such negotiation is rooted in 1) M.anifest's own background in places and/or identities other than normative (white) Minnesota

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[24] For more on Taki 183 and other writers in New York, see Joe Austin, *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art Became an Urban Crisis in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) and a website dedicated to Taki 183, http://www.taki183.net (Accessed 17 October 2012).

[25] For more on hip-hop's relationship to space and place, see Murray Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002) and Adam Krims, *Music and Urban Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2007) and *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[26] I am not assuming a stable, homogeneous identity for those living in Ghana, somehow unaffected by the same streams of globalization and cosmopolitanism that inform M.anifest's life and music, but rather that they are visibly and audibly expressed to a higher degree by M.anifest.

identities and 2) the norms of racial and ethnic identity in hip-hop. And yet, in the end, I hesitate to reduce M.anifest just to an artist who makes "diasporic hip-hop," as not only his words and music, as I will show, go far beyond only Ghanaian, Minnesotan, American, or African, but that hip-hop as a form simultaneously is part of, yet goes beyond such classifications.[27] Put more simply, M.anifest's music illustrates the dialogue between being an MC from a specific racial or ethnic background and an "MC" without any of these markers.

In articulating this more complicated conception of where M.anifest comes from, I use two themes. The first is that of *geography*, the distances that M.anifest's music—and M.anifest himself—have traveled. The second is that of *generation*, not only his parents and grandparents, but also styles of music, artists who made them, and their influences on M.anifest's own musical creation. In discussing these two themes over the course of this dissertation, I'll employ the images of *narratives* and *networks* to articulate the distances both literal and metaphorical that are part of M.anifest's diasporic hip-hop, and how he represents these distances on stage, song, and screen.

[27] Although not the primary focus on my dissertation, *We Rock Long Distance* does align with scholars paying greater attention to hip-hop on the continent of Africa itself, and the disparate meanings and uses of hip-hop there. In his introduction to the edited volume *Native Tongues: An African Hip-Hop Reader*, Khalil P. Saucer argues that "as hip-hop has become more prominent in Africa, it has become a powerful means of cultural expression, a means by which old identities are deconstructed and new identities are established." For some it has become "the voice of change and represents a future of promise and hope, Pan-African unity, and national growth," while for others "it has become a source of tragic consequences: the spread of hypermaterialism and the end of "traditional" Africa. See Khalil P. Saucer, "Introduction: Hip-Hop Culture in Red, Black, and Green," in *Native Tongues: An African Hip-Hop Reader*, ed. Khalil P. Saucer (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011). Other works that look at hip-hop on the African continent include Mwenda Ntarangwi's *East African Hip-Hop: Youth Culture and Globalization* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009) and Brad Weiss' *Street Dreams and Hip Hop Barbershops: Global Fantasy in Urban Tanzania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

The most prominent narrative for this dissertation is that of *diaspora* itself. One person, of course, cannot make up a diaspora. Conventionally, the term has been used to designate a large group of people forcibly removed from their homeland, though with a promise of return at some point in the future. The Jewish Diaspora is the archetype for conceptions of diaspora, but the term has undergone an expansion of what it can encompass. Reflecting more recent trends in scholarship away from thinking of diasporas as solely the study of communities,[28] I consider M.anifest and his music to be "diasporic," encompassing many of the characteristics of someone living in diaspora: leaving home (although not always forcibly), making home someplace else while at the same time remembering and creating images and sounds of that original home, and participating in global networks of media and communication to stay in touch with people back in that original home.

The narratives and networks of circulation that M.anifest's music travels along both literally and metaphorically are just the latest chapter in a long history of dialogue and exchange through the African Diaspora. While noting that the effect of this dialogue has not always been harmonious or unifying, J. Lorand Matory argues that "the diaspora and Africa itself are united by 'discontinuous' and mutually influential dialogue that has continued long beyond the end of the

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[28] See for instance, Su Zheng, *Claiming Diaspora: Music, Transnationalism, and Cultural Politics in Asian/Chinese America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and *New Routes for Diaspora Studies*, edited by Sukanya Banerjee, Aims McGuiness, and Steven C. McKay (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

slave trade."[29] Since the 19th century, there were numerous people who brought music from the Diaspora back to Africa itself. Sailors and soldiers both within the continent and on its coast brought styles of guitar playing and brass band traditions; touring artists, such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers or, later, Louis Armstrong, brought vocal and instrumental music that shaped, and sometimes inspired, the creation of new music by those they visited. Returning or returned slaves (especially to Liberia) were another source of ideas, musical and otherwise. Later, with the advent of recording, hundreds of thousands of records were sold in the colonial centers, places like Accra and Lagos.[30] This dialogue was not uni-directional, however: ideas and sounds also shaped musicians in the Diaspora, including the many African-oriented and sometimes audibly imitative jazz experiments by musicians like Art Blakey or Max Roach, or, in a different musical world, Steve Reich finding inspiration for his early minimalist experiments in Ewe drumming.[31] And while a select few African artists would gain worldwide fame, such as Fela Kuti, Hugh Masekela, Manu Dibango, Miriam Makeba, and

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[29] J. Lorand Matory, "Afro-Atlantic Culture: On the Live Dialogue Between African and African American Cultures," in *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, edited by Henry Louis Gates and Kwame Anthony Appiah (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 36.

[30] For more on these earlier forms of circulation, see Veit Erlmann, *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and numerous works by scholar and guitarist John Collins, including "The History of West African Highlife Music," *Popular Music* 8, no. 3 (1989), 221-230. Building on Collins's work is Marcus Coester, "Localising African Popular Music Transnationally: 'Highlife Travellers' in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 20, no. 2 (2008), 133-44.

[31] For more on these experiments, see Norman Weinstein, *A Night in Tunisia: Imaginings of Africa in Jazz* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992); Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Robin D.G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, American Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012). On Reich's use of Ewe drumming, see Steve Reich, *Writings on Music, 1965-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Ladysmith Black Mambazo, with the rise of digital recording and distribution, many more artists can now be heard all across the world, especially through digital venues such as blogs and websites, as well as iTunes.

Recognizing this history of dialogue, a number of scholars in various fields have proposed new ways of understanding the African Diaspora, and the music within it. Most notably is Paul Gilroy's conception of the Black Atlantic, which focuses more on "routes" than "roots," identity as "a process of movement and mediation," [32] the ways that people and that which they create have traveled around the Afro-Atlantic, making music and other forms of cultural expression impossible to reduce to a singular, essentialist idea of rootedness. Hip-hop, now in its fourth decade of existence, is the latest chapter in this narrative of circulation and dialogue, though it now reaches outside of the African Diaspora. There is little reason for hip-hop to be conceived monolithically, with its bewildering diversity of styles, audiences, sub-genres, and political aims (or lack thereof). While it would be shortsighted to ignore the dominant African American presence in hip-hop,[33] it makes more sense now to understand hip-hop as a

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[32] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 19.

[33] This is due not only to the strong presence of African Americans participating in hip-hop, but also the identification of hip-hop with that particular group in the popular imagination. Furthermore, these particular images of blackness (and black masculinity) circulate around the world, whether officially as part of American media hegemony or unofficially as models for resistance and political solidarity with local political struggles. as well as images of blackness that circulate around the world (be it as part of American hegemony or political solidarity. On the debates about the African American identity of (and in) hip-hop and racial authenticity, see Bakari Kitwana, *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop: Wangstas, Wiggers, Wannabes, and the New Reality of Race in America* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2005); Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); William Upski Wimsatt, *Bomb the Suburbs* (Berkeley: Softskull Press, 2001); and Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap*

"multileveled, multifaceted, and constantly changing process of self-expression and resistance, within state practices, colonial legacies, and the political economy of the music industry."[34] Furthermore, the ubiquity of digital sampling has now made it possible for artists (with the right equipment and technological access) to sample music from around the world.

Starting from this conceptual foundation, I join a growing number of scholars that looks at the specifically diasporic and global character of hip-hop, challenging simplistic divides between "American" and "global" hip-hop by showing how artists outside of America not only are in America itself, but also engage with the signifiers and codes of American hip-hop as they reshape and transform it for their own background and experience.[35] In Ghana, this process has resulted in *hiplife*, a combination of hip-hop and highlife, a popular musical style with roots back in the early 20th century that has spread throughout West Africa.[36]

Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

[34] Dipannita Basu and Sidney J. Lemelle, *The Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip-Hop and the Globalization of Black Popular Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 10.

[35] These include James Spady, H. Samy Alim, and Samir Meghelli, *Tha Global Cipha: Hip Hop Culture and Consciousness* (Philadelphia: Black History Museum Press, 2006); H. Samy Alim, Awad Ibrahim, and Alastair Pennycook, eds., *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip-Hop Cultures, Youth Identities and the Politics of Language* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Ajay Nair and Murali Balaji, eds., *Desi Rap: Hip-Hop and South Asian Americans* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008); Nitasha Tamar Sharma, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness*; *The Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip Hop and the Globalization of Black Popular Culture* (cited above); and Marina Terkourafi, ed., *The Languages of Global Hip-Hop* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2012).

[36] For more on hiplife, see Jesse Weaver Shipley, *Living the Hiplife: Celebrity and Entrepreneurship in Ghanaian Popular Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013) and Halifu Osumare, *The Hiplife in Ghana: West African Indigenization of Hip-Hop* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). See also the documentary by Jesse Weaver Shipley, *Living the Hiplife* (New York: Third World Newsreel, 2007).

I have chosen to write this dissertation from a position that is itself one of "betweeness," a tension between that of M.anifest as an individual and M.anifest as representative of the narratives and networks that make him "diasporic."[37] In tracing how M.anifest navigates these narratives and networks of belonging in his everyday life, I build on recent works of hip-hop studies that specifically employ ethnography as their main methodology, which better reflects and describes the daily, lived practices of this music and its makers.[38] One example of this is the idea of "hiphopography," developed and practiced by James G. Spady, H. Samy Alim, Samir Meghelli, and others. As defined by Alim, hiphopography "integrates the varied approaches of ethnography, biography, and social, cultural and oral history to arrive at an emic view of Hip Hop Culture." For Alim, this method reveals hip-hop artists as "critical interpreters of their own culture . . . 'cultural critics' and 'cultural theorists' whose thoughts and ideas help us to make sense of one of the most important cultural movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries."[39]

As much I would like to identify with this work, sometimes I have found the practitioners of hiphopography content to *only* let creators interpret hip-hop. To take one example, in Alim's article in the collection *Muslim Networks from Hajj to*

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[37] For more on the wider Ghanaian diaspora, see John A. Arthur, *The African Diaspora in the United States: The Ghanaian Experience* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008) and Ian E. A. Yeboah, *Black African Neo-Diaspora: Ghanaian Immigrant Experiences in the Great Cincinnati, Ohio Area* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008).
[38] See, for instance, the work by Joseph Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004) and *Foundation: B-Boys, B-Girls, and Hip-Hop Culture in New York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Anthony Kwame Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground*; and Marcyliena Morgan, *The Real Hiphop*.
[39] H. Samy Alim, *Roc the Mic Right*: *The Language of Hip-Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 11.

Hip-Hop, he quotes Poor Righteous Teachers' Wise Intelligent, a member of the Nation of Gods and Earths. “You have to understand that the potency of the melanin in the black man makes him naturally rhythmic. So when he hears anything that has that rhythm he's going to become part of that instantly. Anything that rhymes."[40] In reading this, I was surprised that such a problematic notion—a biologically-inherent African rhythmic capacity—does not receive any comment. While I recognize the motivation to avoid a not-so-subtle colonialist move of perpetuating historically white and Eurocentric notions of “truth" over those offering different interpretations of the world, it seems necessary to situate, while not thoughtlessly challenge, Wise Intelligent's words as part of the wider stakes of diasporic blackness and its relationship to hip-hop.

In hopes of guarding against such occurrences in my own work, I balance ethnographic (or hiphophographic) details and statements by M.anifest with my own textual and sonic analysis. One of the ways I do this is through addressing the *aesthetic* character of hip-hop.[41] I look closely at rhyme structures, beat construction, and the sonic characteristics of language and intonation that M.anifest infuses his words with as a means for expressing his past and present as being from multiple places simultaneously. While not concerned with

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[40] H. Samy Alim, “A New Research Agenda: Exploring the Transglobal Hip Hop *Umma*," in *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip-Hop,* edited by miriam cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 266.

[41] Other works in this vein are *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*, edited by Jeff Chang (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2009); H. Samy Alim, *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip-Hop Culture*; Adam Bradley, *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip-Hop* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2009); and *The Anthology of Rap*, edited by Adam Bradley and Andrew Dubois (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011). For a non-academic, artist-driven exploration of hip-hop aesthetics, see Jay-Z, *Decoded* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2011).

validating hip-hop's aesthetic value, as are scholars concerned with conceiving of hip-hop as *poetry* specifically,[42] I am concerned with paying equal analytical attention to both the lyrics and the music of hip-hop; the two are inseparable and should be treated not just as an aesthetic whole, but as a specifically *sonic* one. Rather than seeing ethnography and textual/sonic analysis as mutually exclusive, with social analysis taking a back seat to musical analysis or vice versa, I show how these two forms enhance each other, portraying a much more powerful and vivid picture of M.anifest's diasporic music and life, while at the same time showing the negotiations around that meaning between scholar and subject.

On a song M.anifest released on his website in July 2010, "Ghost of Kwame Nkrumah,"[43] he made one of his most explicit statements in the vein of how he and his music should be interpreted:

> *Please don't put my cd in the world music section*
> *Don't fuck with my sound without a condom or protection*
> *Don't put me underground with my above ground percussions*
> *And my essence and identity is not up for discussion*

[42] See, for instance, Bradley and Dubois, *The Anthology of Rap*, and Alexs Pate, *In the Heart of the Beat: The Poetry of Rap* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010).
[43] M.anifest recorded new lyrics over the beat of Jay Electronica's "Ghost of Christopher Wallace." Wallace is better known as Biggie Smalls or the Notorious B.I.G.

Figure 1-11

After explicitly distancing himself from conceptions of “world music" and “underground" hip-hop, both problematic and limiting categorizations, M.anifest ends the stanza by claiming his essence and identity are not up for discussion.[44] Of course, discussing his identity is *precisely* what I’m doing in this dissertation, though from a wider variety of different roles stemming from my simultaneous position as scholar and filmmaker. These include journalist, producer, director, camera operator, sound recordist, editor (of both audio and video), a facilitator of conversations and meetings, production manager, mistaken for M.anifest’s musical manager on numerous occasions, detached observer, and many more.

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[44] Since its creation by British record executives in the early 1980s, the category of “world music" has is generally conceived as popular music originating outside the Euro-American mainstream and going hand-in-hand with recent discourses on globalization, often with characteristics of hybridity and, more often than not, a reliance on conventional discourses of exoticism that replicates global patterns of inequality, musical or otherwise. See Steven Feld, “A Sweet Lullaby for World Music," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 145-171; Timothy Brennan, “World Music Does Not Exist," *Discourse*, 23, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 44-62; and Jody Diamond, “There is No They There," *MusicWorks* 47 (Summer 1990): 12-23. For broader discussions of music and globalization, including world music, see Ingrid Monson, “Riffs, Repetitions, and Theories of Globalization," *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 31-65 and Martin Stokes, “Music and the Global Order," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 47-72.

These roles, however, were anything but constant, and especially so given the multi-site and transnational character of *We Rock Long Distance*.

For example, in Minnesota, I would occupy the more normative "inside" position, because I better fit the conventional image of a Minnesotan, even though M.anifest in fact has lived in Minnesota longer than I have. I'd argue, however, that M.anifest has more of an "inside" presence in Twin Cities hip-hop, due to his status as an artist, even though his home is in Ghana. When we traveled to Ghana, however, instead of M.anifest being in "my home," as it were, now I was in *his* home. M.anifest had to vouch for me on numerous occasions, explaining the project (due to my lack of Twi language skills) to people we wanted to work with, or people who questioned why we were filming at a certain point or at a certain place.

What should be clear in the pages ahead is that my discussion of M.anifest's identity is not in any kind of simplistic way, as I articulate the variety of narratives that shape, and are shaped by, M.anifest's music, some of which M.anifest may not be aware. This line of thinking, however, requires a fine interpretive line between the place of the scholar/writer and the place of the artist/subject. In taking this methodological position, the project becomes an example of an "ethnography of an individual." While textual analysis of specific songs and statements by an individual is not uncommon, using ethnographic methodology is less common and perhaps even contradictory, given that ethnography is generally conceived of as the study of groups. In a recent article, ethnomusicologists Timothy Rice and Jesse Ruskin write that, "on one hand,

ethnomusicologists tend to define their work in terms of the role and meaning of musical practice within social groups and communities." On the other hand, however, "when conducting fieldwork, ethnomusicologists work with and rely on individual musicians, sometimes but not always some of the most exceptional individuals in a given musical community." In attempting to resolve this methodological disparity, they argue that "ethnomusicology's ongoing engagement with individuals has revealed the intensely personal aspects of culture, and the fundamentally social aspects of the individual." [45] In tandem with showing how M.anifest as an individual embodies narratives of music, history, identity, diaspora, and more, I also show him as one (albeit privileged) node in an ethnography of the media and media circuits in which M.anifest's worlds, music, and videos travel.

I'm reminded of a statement by famed foundational b-boy Crazy Legs, member of the Rock Steady Crew. In response to those who see similarities of b-boying to forms of movement like Angolan and Brazilian capoeira, he says

> "We didn't know what the fuck no capoeira was, man. We were in the ghetto! There were no dance schools, nothing. If there was a dance school it was tap and jazz and ballet. . . . Our immediate influence I b-boying was James Brown, point blank."[46]

Of course, there *are* links between b-boying and capoeira, yet Crazy Legs' statement shouldn't be taken as false. I would argue that the majority of artists or scholars can't see all of the narratives running through their own cultural

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[45] Timothy Rice and Jessie Ruskin, "The Individual in Musical Ethnography. *Ethnomusicology* 56, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2012): 1, 3.
[46] Crazy Legs is quoted in Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't* Stop, 116-117. Crazy Legs is also the silhouetted dancer in the clip from *Style Wars* referenced earlier.

expression, not due to a willfully limited engagement with history, but rather to the demands of genre, form, style, and economics.

Yet there are also things that I, as a white, middle-class scholar, clearly in a more privileged position than M.anifest, cannot escape and must confront in this project. As I discussed earlier in my Preface, any project that is "ethnographic" or "documentary" brings it with fraught questions of ethics and power. When I was writing the essay on Twin Cities hip-hop, the publisher of the encyclopedia needed a release form for every single quote I used, of which there were many. This meant approaching artists *after* the initial interview (since I wouldn't know what quotes I would use, and the release form had to reference the specific quote I chose) and have them sign it. Hip-hop (and popular music in general) is littered with tales of shady managers, record company executives, and many others cheating, exploiting, and outright stealing music (especially from poorer, often non-white musicians) for their own gain, leaving the original artist with little compensation. And although no money was at stake with this encyclopedia article, the very act of signing this piece of paper made me reconsider if I should use these quotes at all, rather than venturing onto the path of so many before me who sought out someone else's words in order to tell their own story. This was confirmed by the first artist (not M.anifest) I had sign a form for his quote: he signed it, but there was definitely a look of suspicion, a moment of hesitation before putting pen to paper. He did sign it, and I used the quote, but that was the *only* quote I used.

While I discuss the specific dimensions that the camera itself brings into these ethical questions later in this dissertation, there is also a more practical dimension to these differences, that of the eventual goals between artist and scholar. For M.anifest, the short-term is much more important than the longer term; the music video I would shoot or record review I would write is much more immediately relevant and helpful than the years-in-the-making dissertation or documentary. And yet the numerous talks that have resulted from the project before the completion of the dissertation or documentary itself *have* resulted in new fans and new opportunities for M.anifest. There is no easy way to resolve this tension, one rooted in fundamentally extractive ways of knowledge gathering and production; it can only be minimized to a certain extent without, as I discussed above, giving complete interpretive authority over to the artists themselves. Clearly, without M.anifest, this project does not happen, or if it did happen at all, it would be in a *severely* truncated form, reduced to musical analysis of the most basic type. My decision to write with a less conventional academic voice, one based on stories and storytelling, while still actively engaging with the stakes of documentary, is an attempt to balance both the necessity of a critical viewpoint while being sensitive to the relationship I have built with M.anifest as an individual over the last five years.

Finally, and turning back to M.anifest, as much as I focus on M.anifest as an individual, it's important to emphasize that M.anifest's story is not unique. His background, participation in hip-hop, and the subjects he raps about are intimately linked to his own life, and though no one quite shares the same

experiences as him, many have *similar* experiences. There are stories of diasporic hip-hop artists throughout the world, in the United States, in Canada, in Germany, in France, in Australia, on nearly every continent. In other words, I am not writing about M.anifest as somehow being the *best* example of diasporic hip-hop, although he and the other artists unquestionably possess incredible lyrical and poetic talent, imagination, and skills. Rather, I see him as one of many tributaries of diasporic hip-hop that circulate around the world, be it online or in person. While this might be interpreted as somehow negating his individuality, I'd argue that it actually makes him more easily able to connect with other hip-hop artists with very different backgrounds, not only in Minnesota, but around the world.

In looking at M.anifest, then, I offer a highly individualized and detailed portrait of someone in diaspora and the narratives and networks of circulation that help to make up that life and help that music reach fans around the world. While M.anifest's life and music are certainly part of the socio-historical contexts and forces that have driven migrations of more recent Africans to come to the United States, they are not defined by them. Given that M.anifest's music and, more broadly, diasporic hip-hop in general, is still emergent and in formation, much like the process of identity negotiation of immigrants and others in diaspora, I feel compelled to reflect this material reality in this dissertation, retaining as much as possible the tension between global cosmopolitanism and local specificity that characterizes his hip-hop, as a way to shed greater light on both what it's like to make hip-hop from someone in M.anifest's position, but also

what it's like to make a dissertation and documentary *about* someone in M.anifest's position.

Each chapter of this dissertation revolves around a particular type of distance, be they literal, metaphorical, or both. In "'I Rap with the Continent on My Back': Hip-Hop Evocations of Diasporic Life Between Minnesota and Ghana," I describe the distances between Minnesota and Ghana that M.anifest travels, whether it be in his music or in his life. Utilizing a more complicated idea of home, I show how diasporic hip-hop such as M.anifest's offers a particularly vivid way of representing his life and background between the two anchors of his diasporic life, Minnesota and Ghana. The first part of the chapter focuses on how he musically brings both of these homes in a number of songs through musical and lyrical references, as well as through close readings of two specific songs. In the second part, I place these songs and their vivid representation of a musical space between Minnesota and Ghana in tension with the very strong affective presence of home, which I witnessed when I traveled to Ghana with him. It became clear after the trip to Ghana that though the pull home was strong, with his family and, perhaps more important to his success as an artist, a strong fan base residing there, in many ways he was still an outsider. Further, the music industry infrastructure in Ghana is severely lacking in comparison to that of Minnesota (and Euro-America, generally), and M.anifest would face many obstacles in trying to find success if he would base himself in Ghana alone.

After elucidating these ideas of geographic distance in M.anifest’s diasporic existence and the more complicated notion of home they suggest, I more on the specifically filmic dimension of *We Rock Long Distance*, both in its production and reception. Through this, I discuss the negotiations of difference, power, and insider/outside dynamics that characterized the production, especially after what Faye Ginsburg calls the "decolonization of ethnographic film."[47] Foregrounding how I engage with the ethical questions and debates familiar to any discussion of ethnographic knowledge and authority as to my role in both facilitating and documenting the ideas and events that constitute *We Rock Long Distance*, I engage with the intersubjective potential of filmmaking as a means of overcoming cultural boundaries, while always being aware of the realities, stakes, and sometimes necessities of those boundaries. In the second part of the chapter, where I discuss the entire lifespan of a particular music video, I turn towards reception as a means of both showing the important place of new media in M.anifest's "digital diaspora," an important way that his music bridges the long distances of his diasporic existence, as well as key sites to understand how media made in a place like Ghana is unevenly interpreted by different people *in* that digital diaspora.

From this focus on methodological distance, I turn to my final type of distance, that of distance between generations. In the dissertation’s last chapter, "‘Listen to My Rap’: M.anifest and the Creative Legacy of J. H. Kwabena Nketia," I foreground history and generation most explicitly within this framework of

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[47] Faye Ginsburg, "Institutionalizing the Unruly: Charting a Future for Visual Anthropology," *Ethnos* 63, no. 2 (1998): 177.

diaspora and an aesthetics of revision, quotation, and sampling. A founding figure for African musicology and ethnomusicology, Nketia is perhaps best-known for his textbook *The Music of Africa*, though he has written many books and articles, both scholarly and policy-oriented, written books of poetry and plays, and composed more than 40 musical works. For M.anifest, Nketia was always more “Grandpa" than “Professor," and though he knew of his grandfather’s importance in times of Ghanaian (and African) music and history, he did not know many of the specifics of Nketia’s life and work until explicitly engaging with them as part of *We Rock Long Distance*. I examine the parallels and divergences between these two men from very different generations of Ghana’s history, including questions of creative process, the relationship between music and poetry in each of their works, the subject matter each one pursues in his creative works, and how they see their own works in relation to conceptions of tradition.

I want to resist the urge to write a nice, tidy conclusion that artificially “wraps up" my engagement with M.anifest's music, giving it a sense of methodological closure and finality that feels artificial. I end the dissertation with a few more stories from the time after we returned from Ghana, stories that give a kind of “full-circle" character to the project, and how this project became woven into M.anifest's music as it progressed.

One morning in Madina, M.anifest's mother picked up the multiple strands of beads her son wears around his neck from their place on the couch. Surprised at their heft, she turned towards her son.

"Don't you feel the weight of these at home?"

If the anecdote I opened this chapter with represents the seemingly random digital interplay and convergence of words and music across multiple times and spaces, this closing moment reflects the intimacy of family and home, yet with an almost poetic slippage around what actually *constitutes* that home. Is it family? Is it the beads and other physical markers M.anifest carries with him on a daily basis? Is it the burden of more intangible representations, of Ghana, of Africa, that these beads and material things represent? And how does being in diaspora affect one's view of home upon return? In the end, it is all of these, and *We Rock Long Distance* details what it means to, in M.anifest's words, "represent Africa with a spectacular street vernacular." Or, in other words, hip-hop.

Figure 1-12

Chapter 2:
'I Rap with the Continent on My Back': Hip-Hop Evocations of Diasporic Life Between Minnesota and Ghana

Travel the Seas with the Red-Gold-Green/I'm a black star caught in between
- M.anifest, "Black Star"

I'm crammed into the back of an SUV, bouncing over unpaved roads as M.anifest, his DJ, and I head to the north of Accra to get speakers for the concert at Citizen Kofi. After numerous turns in seemingly every direction, we finally arrive at our destination, a small shack that has music blaring from numerous towering speakers inside the building.

Figure 2-1

We make room in the trunk and the backseat for two speakers, placing our bags (most of which contain my camera and audio gear) on top of them. We then drive to an area not too far away, where we obtain a third speaker. (Citizien Kofi doesn't provide sound monitors, despite its boast of providing a "First Class experience in a Third World country.") After getting this speaker somehow into

the SUV—the owner of the first shop is practically sitting on top of it—we realize we don’t have speaker cable, so it’s back to the first shop to get it, and then we’re off to Osu, one of the more trendy, cosmopolitan areas of Accra. Along the way, we run into the nightmarish traffic that marks every rush hour in Accra. We finally get to the venue, and immediately encounter more problems. I had made a number of videos to show on the venue’s many large, flat-screen monitors, but the manager did not know how to operate them, and what needed to go where to send a signal through the system. The sound person hired by the venue refused to hook up the sound monitors, instigating a back-and-forth with M.anifest as to the reasons why. Tensions were high until the sound man relented and hooked up the monitors; all of the artists that evening refused to perform if there weren’t monitors, which were necessary to be able to hear themselves while on stage. Then we realized the DJ’s set up was not compatible with the sound system of the club, which sent a number of people out into the streets of Accra to borrow a set of turntables or CDJs for the evening.

Eventually, though, everything was worked out, hooked up, and running smoothly. As I set up the microphones and dealt with other logistics for the show (talking to the person in charge of lighting, last minute ideas and changes to the set, etc), I looked out at the audience and realized that it was unlike any I'd encountered in Minnesota, not only because the audience was predominantly black, but they were specifically *Ghanaian*. The barrage of obstacles before the show seemed to vanish as M.anifest stepped to the stage. He had come home.

As the strains of his song "Africa Represent" started to boom through the club, M.anifest channeled Jay-Z as he spoke his first words on the mic.

"Allow me to re-introduce myself . . ."

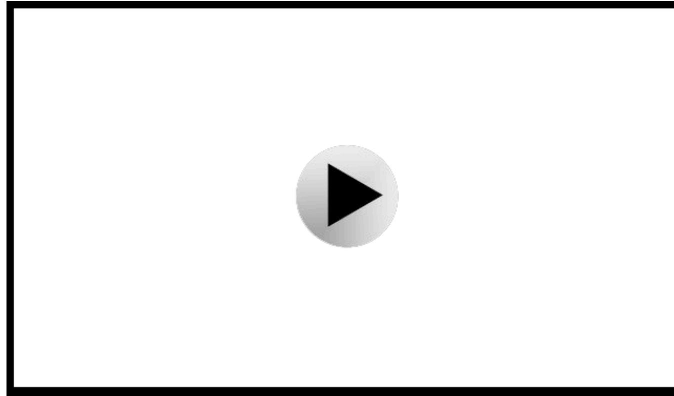

Figure 2-2

Home is Accra, Ghana. A lot of my music is nostalgia about home. It's narratives about home, it's memories about home, it's stories about people from home, stories about how I left home, stories about how I'm tryin' to go back home [laughs].

- M.anifest, in conversation with Maria Isa and Tou SaiKo Lee

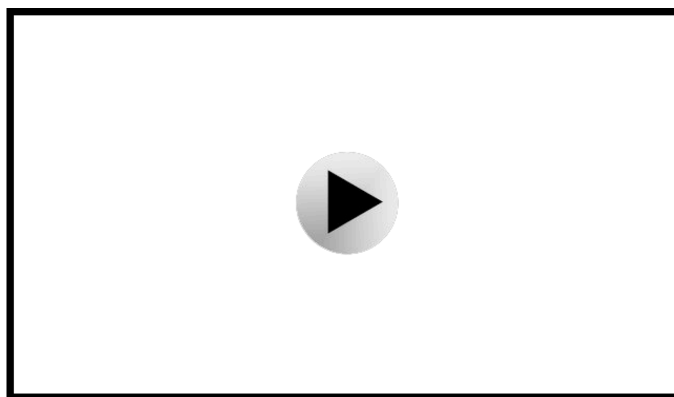

Figure 2-3

In conversation with the other two artists of *We Rock Long Distance*, M.anifest makes a very clear definition of home, and how it gets represented in

his music. Elsewhere, however, M.anifest has told me how he needed to leave home in order to better appreciate and understand what home meant. It is this idea of home in Accra and elsewhere (the idea of "diasporic" I've discussed so far) that form the two interpretive poles of this chapter. Conceiving of "home" in this way, be it from a personal or scholarly perspective requires as expansion of what home means. At another point in this conversation, M.anifest talked about how his music is filled with "narratives of stories untold." While M.anifest may have meant this in terms of stories not usually represented in hip-hop, be it Ghanaian, African, or the kind of diasporic betweeness that marks so much of his music, in this dissertation I'm going to flip it to mean something else. I was reminded of this statement by M.anifest upon reading a phrase by John Berger, who wrote that home is "no longer a dwelling but the untold story of a life being lived."[1] While I don't believe that a home no longer constitutes a physical place, I agree with Berger's expanded conception of what home means, in line with more recent conceptualizations of home away from ideas of stable dwellings, to one more based on movement and the creation of home in other places through a variety of expressions and practices. Inspired by John Berger's characterization of home as a story, Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson translate the concept into that of *narrative* and expand upon it.

> Because a story, a narrative, can itself be conceived of as a form of movement; and because stories, narratives, can be approached from two very different directions, this one describing the art of narration as the orderly telling of people, objects, and events that did not previously exist, the ultimate creative act, and the other claiming, in contradistinction, that it is narratives that do the telling, that pre-exist their particular narrators,

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[1] John Berger, *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 64.

> speak through the latter's lives unbeknown to them, and to that extent remain 'untold.'[2]

It is this intersection of narrative movements, the stories that "tell" M.anifest as well as the stories he himself tells, be it through his music or in his day-to-day life, that form the basis of this chapter. These are narratives of history, of identity, of space and place, all shaped—and in turn shaped by—M.anifest's music. They speak details of life in Accra and in Minnesota, of history and politics of both places, and what it's like to live in each. After discussing how M.anifest represents the two main points of his life experience (Minnesota and Ghana) and how they anchor the narratives of his life through music and lyrics, I'll talk about two songs in detail and how they represent the diasporic condition itself. Finally, I'll share stories and observations about the complicated weaving of insider and outsider that marked M.anifest's presence in Ghana when we traveled there in 2010, and how these experiences both clarified and complicated M.anifest's notions of home within a diaspora.

In keeping with hip-hop conventions of *representing*, as I discussed in the previous chapter, there are numerous references to things Minnesotan in M.anifest's songs, not just to the state and its cities, but to many aspects within it, all filtered and transformed through his lyrical lens. Beyond songs like "Soul Sound" and "Babylon Breakdown," where he makes a basic reference to Minneapolis as the place where he currently lives, he references the violence in

[2] Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson, *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of "Home" in a World of Movement*, (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 28.

the city on "Africa Represent" and "Ghost of Kwame Nkrumah." On the first song, he makes a more general statement about violence, as he raps "Minneapolis guns go ratatatat," while the second reference was specifically inspired by a sharp spike in homicides in the summer of 2010 ("my rep on the rise like Minneapolis homicides").

M.anifest also makes a number of references that play on Minnesota's *musical* history. Prince is referenced a number of times, in songs that discuss women and dating: on "EZ Does It," M.anifest raps that "She need a Prince like Morris Day and the Time," while on "Bring Me Down," he says that "M.anifest craves for sophisticated/Rare kinda women only Prince coulda dated." Elsewhere, he references Prince's most famous album in relation to his own lyrical delivery. "Flow so cold, numb your brain like cocaine/Breeze blow like Coltrane/in the land of the Purple Rain/There's only one Prince but I'm a king when I sing."[3]

There are also references to specific streets and roads within the Twin Cities. On "Street Symphony," he says "I pen a fly poem/Listening to Sly Stone/on my way home/21 bus route, on Lake Street," a reference to the #21 bus that runs east and west along Lake Street, one of the busiest thoroughfares connecting Minneapolis and St. Paul. Elsewhere, he writes that "It's only October, say it ain't snow that I see drip drop on I-94 road," a reference to the main highway between the two cities, Interstate 94. This last reference also

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[3] Prince represents one of many music historical references that M.anifest makes in his songs; others come from predominantly from the history of African American music, ranging from John Coltrane and Miles Davis to go-go to hip-hop artists. In fact, *Manifestations* opens with a sample from *Wattstax*, the festival of Stax artists held on the ten-year anniversary of the Watts Riots.

brings in the weather, a common topic of discussion in M.anifest's music. Beyond the snow and cold, which is similarly referenced in his song "D'angelo Said"—"It was in Minnesota I saw my first snowflake"—he also uses aspects of the weather more metaphorically, like on the song "Walk Away." The chorus of the song, about a relationship that has ended, goes "Winter days/when skies are grey/I feel like walkin' away." Finally, there is one example that ties in not only Minnesota, its weather, and Ghana, but his travels between the two places. In "Change Gon Come," he says "Travel the globe in my African robes/From the Accra heat to the Minnesota bitter cold."[4]

There are many more references to Ghana than to Minnesota, which seems fitting given M.anifest's view about what constitutes home. Like many of his references to Minneapolis, the Twin Cities, and Minnesota, many of his references to Ghana are relatively uncomplicated statements of where he comes from. In fact, it's one of the first things he says on *Manifestations*, as part of the introduction to the album's first song, "Spell Check": "Representing live from Ghana, West Africa." Sometimes, as on "Change Gon Come" and "Slow Your Roll," he'll refer to Ghana by its colonial name, the Gold Coast. In the latter, he raps "So out with the old from the land of the gold."

M.anifest also cites different aspects of life in Ghana. The song which most elaborately expresses life in Ghana is "Gentleman," which takes it's name (and chorus) from the Fela Kuti song of the same name. I will go into this aspect of the song, its status as a quotation or citation of a previous musical influence,

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[4] To better fit the rhyme scheme suggested by "Minnesota," he pronouncers "bitter" more like "bitta" to have it flow more quickly at the end of a poetic and musical phrase.

later in Chapter Four, but for now I want to discuss the different ways his home of Accra (and Ghana) are represented in the song's lyrics. While the message of the song is along the same lines as Fela's original—ridiculing the colonial "gentleman" of Nigeria who have donned suits in the Lagos heat—M.anifest speaks about what he likes and targets what he deems worthy of ridicule. There are the Ghanaian foods he prefers, fufu, omo tuo, and plantains instead of cheese. He prefers medicine based on herbs for what ails him, and assails those who process their hair and whiten their skin through bleaching chemicals. "No bleaching cream, it's all melanin/No jheri curls to impress no girls, I'm all natural."[5] He contrasts day names (names given according to the day a child was born on) to European names like "Xavier" and "Octavia." Finally, at the end of the third verse, M.anifest makes his most strident characterization of the situation yet: "That's the meaning of my stanza/Eurocentricity eating my brain like a cancer." While I will return to this more "political" element in M.anifest's Ghanaian references shortly, I should point out that it's not only food and clothing that make appearances in M.anifest's songs as signs of the "Ghanaian" part of his identity. One perhaps unexpected reference is in the song "Hungry," which is about his continued striving for success. At one point, he says "the beautiful ones ain't yet in my sights," a reference to the novel by the Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.[6]

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[5] On the politics of skin-bleaching in Ghana, see J. Konadu Fokuo, "The Lighter Side of Marriage: Skin Bleaching in Post-Colonial Ghana," *African and Asian Studies* 8 (2009): 125-146 and Jemima Pierre, "'I Like Your Color!'": Skin Bleaching and Geographies of Race in Urban Ghana," *Feminist Review* 90 (2008): 9-29.
[6] Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (London: Heinemann, 1968).

Additionally, Ghana's national football team, the Black Stars, make numerous appearances in his songs. On "Golly Gosh," he raps "Organized chaos like when Ghana wins a game of soccer," and similarly on "Ghost of Kwame Nkrumah," which I discussed earlier:

> *Then he founds his goals, solid gold not copper*
> *His heart broken like Ghana in World Cup soccer*

Of course, in Ghana the "correct" word would be "football," but that doesn't match the rhyme schemes in either song, necessitating the choice of "soccer." The majority of American audiences, though, would most likely understand "soccer" rather than "football" (or think of American football instead), and so the lyrical choice serves both a poetic end as well as one to relate to American audiences. In "Ghost of Kwame Nkrumah," however, there is an even more specific reference to a key moment in the history of the Black Stars, that of their heartbreaking loss to Uruguay in the 2010 World Cup.

> *Don't speak to wife beaters and knuckle heads*
> *They can't keep their hands to themselves like Suarez*

Luis Suarez (in)famously deliberately used his hands to keep a ball from going into the goal at the end of the second half in their quarterfinal match. Since he was not a goalie, the referee immediately gave him a red card (resulting in Suarez's ejection from the match) and awarded a penalty kick to Ghana. Asamoah Gyan, their best striker, sailed the kick over the top of the goal. The two teams went on to overtime, then to penalty kicks, where Uruguay eventually won.

M.anifest's titling of his song "Ghost of Kwame Nkrumah" brings up my last category of references, that of the history and politics in Ghana.[7] M.anifest voices praise for Nkrumah in a variety of his songs, not least of which is "Ghost of Kwame Nkrumah." In fact, M.anifest wore a shirt emblazoned with the face of Kwame Nkrumah for our first video interview.

Figure 2-4

His political references, however, extend beyond Nkrumah. While some of them are part of punchlines, such as in the song "Golly Gosh," where he raps that in Ghana "Big behinds common like inflation in the economy," others are more serious in terms of their engagement with political figures and the government of Ghana. Going back to "Gentleman" for a moment, he mentions HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries), a system of categorization and debt relief by the International Monetary Fund for countries who have high levels of

[7] While the phrase "ghost of Kwame Nkrumah" has been used a number of times by writers describing the post-Nkrumah government of Ghana, there isn't any other mention of Nkrumah beyond the title of the song, and I suspect that he chose it to frame he song as an ode to an important inspiration in his life, just as Jay Electronica does in his original, "Ghost of Christopher Wallace."

poverty and debt (of which Ghana is a member).[8] Elsewhere, on "2nd Coming PSA," a short interlude on *The Birds and the Beats*, M.anifest begins one stanza with the phrase "I promise on my honor to be faithful and loyal." This is the opening of Ghana's National Pledge, the full text of which reads:

> I promise on my honour to be faithful and loyal to Ghana my motherland. I pledge myself to the service of Ghana with all my strength and with all my heart. I promise to hold in high esteem our heritage, won for us through the blood and toil of our fathers; and I pledge myself in all things to uphold and defend the good name of Ghana. So help me God.

Nowhere is this engagement with Ghanaian politics and history more apparent than on his song "Ghana '52," from *The Birds and the Beats*. The song is basically a single verse, with a repeated chorus at the end. With samples of Nkrumah's speech declaring Ghana's independence in 1957 throughout the song, M.anifest channels the African leader for a critique of various aspects of Ghana (in the year 2010, the year this song was released). Not only does he critique corruption in government officials, but also the practices of hair treatments and skin bleaching, as he did in "Gentleman." He also critiques the belief that traveling abroad for education and/or work will bring immediate success: "Some of us flee to see what's overseas but/Success is a stripper on the pole just a tease." While M.anifest in many ways followed the narrative he himself critiques—going abroad to receive an education—he chose a different path after graduating by going into music. At the end of the song, M.anifest

[8] For more on HIPC and its controversial role in Ghana, see, among others, Robert Osei and Peter Quartey, "The HIPC Initiative and Poverty Reduction in Ghana: An Assessment," WIDER Discussion Paper, 2001 and AK Osei-Fosu, "The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative Fund Micro-Credit and Poverty Reduction in Ghana: A Panacea or a Mirage?" *Journal of Science and Technology (Ghana)* 28, no. 3 (2008): 94-102.

overdubs himself saying an unofficial response after the national anthem's verses are complete.[9]

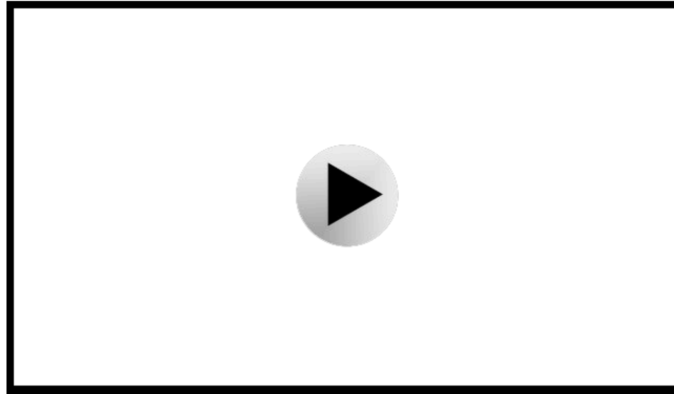

Figure 2-5

Soon after, he repeats the lines "Long walk to freedom but until we get there/Sing this song and hope that we get there." Drawing on the title of Nelson Mandela's autobiography, M.anifest marshals this powerful signifier of African struggle, progress, and triumph to propel Ghana's citizens to strive for the best of their country.[10]

These examples reveal the ways that M.anifest draws upon the narratives of his life and background as he writes his own narratives in his lyrics and, in a way, writes the narrative of his own life. There are two songs in particular, however, in which M.anifest powerfully crafts the narratives of living as part of a diaspora itself: nostalgia, longing for home, and the changes one undergoes being away from home. The first song, "How I Used to Be," focuses more on

[9] Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 8-9.
[10] Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk To Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1995).

memory and emotion, and the slippages of memory caused by time and nostalgia; the other, "Black Star," marshals specific signifiers of his own background, as well as his identity as a Ghanaian and a hip-hop artist (and, of course, a Ghanaian hip-hop artist) to talk about his position "in between" as part of a diaspora.

"How I Used to Be," off of *The Birds and the Beats*, mixes both narrative storytelling with an element of self-reflection that attests to the ambiguity of memory for someone who now lives far from the place of his or her birth. Over the course of its three verses, paired with an elaborated loop from Fela Kuti's "Water Get No Enemy" by Minneapolis producer O-D, M.anifest lyrically travels from childhood in Ghana to his present life in Minnesota. He begins the song with a cliché that opens many looks backward ("I remember back in the day like it was yesterday"). He scatters a number of facts about his life as a child, including his real name (Kwame) and how we was born on a Saturday ("Kwame" is the name given to children born on a Saturday); pidgin slang popular amongst Ghanaian youth ("What dey happen" and "chale"[11]); the Rawlings military regime that controlled power in Ghana at the time, national holidays of June 4 (the commemoration of the day the Rawlings government took over Ghana) and March 6 (Ghana's Independence Day); and even popular and conventional images of African women ("Big behinds common like inflation in the economy"). By the end of the verse, though, the tone shifts to one of ambivalence and

[11] As pointed out by Steven Feld, "chale" (which means "man" in the sense of "hey man") is itself a reworking of "Charlie," the name for Americans that originated with the movies of Charlie Chaplin when they came to Ghana. Steve Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra*, 45.

ambiguity, as he realizes he's starting to forget life back home, told along with a reference to Ziggy Marley ("My memory gettin' more ziggy than a Marley"), and for the first time mentions that key feeling of homesickness, nostalgia.

Nostalgia I hold close like she wifey
Tightly, I'm afraid I can't take her lightly
Cuz when I lose my grip and she RIP
I ain't gon never know the man that I used to be

The chorus, comprised mostly of wordless vocals ("Ba bap bap bap ba day"), has a poignant phrase in its second half that simultaneously refers to both the sadness of leaving home but also the inability to remember what that home was like.

Got broken memories
Of how I used to be[12]

Figure 2-6

In the second verse, M.anifest is back in the present, and begins with his girlfriend asking him about life in Ghana, specifically "what does it look like and smell like in your country?" She also asks him, "How does it compare to your

[12]"Broken" could also be interpreted as in "scattered," which is the original meaning of "diaspora" in Greek.

travels?", with M.anifest responding "If she understood Twi this is what she would've heard." M.anifest then raps two stanzas in Twi.

Anigye ne ani suo, anibre dieh Agya koo,
Me de be yɛ den wo ha, Ma paki ma daka
Ahenema ne agbada, Kwame men pɛ ntokwa
Akwantuo yɛ ya, Reggie kaa yɛ ampa

Me mame se ofi me, awɔ no gyegye me,
Wo Ghana me yɛ hene, aha dieh me yɛ hwan
Immigration ma me kwan, Me baa be si daen
Me baa pɛ sika na me de kc me maen

Figure 2-7

Without knowing the meaning of the Twi lyrics, these two stanzas function more like a marker of pure sonic difference, a foreign language standing in for a foreign country as he tells his girlfriend about life "back home." Indeed, before M.anifest translated them for me, that's how they sounded to my ears. When translated, though, they actually continue in the same vein as the rest of the song, a reflective look backwards at the vagaries of memory and the life of someone traveling and living far away from home. Here is the rough translation that M.anifest provided me:

Happiness and bitterness, jealousy my friend,
what do I have the need for that, I have packed my suitcase

Slippers and agbada [traditional garment], I'm not looking for fights
Traveling is painful, Reggie said it and it is quite true

My mom says she misses me, the cold is killin' me
In Ghana I'm king, here I am who?
Immigration give me away, comin' to build a house
I'm comin' to look for money so I can take it back to my home

The first stanza is set while living in Ghana. The emotions he lists (happiness, bitterness, jealousy), he has no need for, because his bag is packed and he is getting ready to leave, and trying to avoid any heavy emotional displays. Yet he quickly shifts to the ambivalence—and sometimes pain—of migration. As part of his discussion of leaving home, he lyrically samples a song from one of the most famous Ghanaian hip-hop artists, Reggie Rockstone's "Ye Wo Bounce Visa."[13] In one line, then, he simultaneously references a song ostensibly from "back home," yet one which is also about traveling; furthermore, the music of the song lyrically sampled is also a product of cultural and musical circuits of travel, as is, of course, Fela's music which serves as the foundation of the beat.

Figure 2-8

[13] Rockstone's song, from his album *Me Na Me Kae* (released in 1999) is a tale of attempted and rejected visa applications by Ghanaians who seek to travel to Europe or America.

Figure 2-9

The second stanza is fully in the realm of looking-backward, as it details how his mother misses him and, for the first time, mentions Minnesota by the state's most famous characteristics: the cold winters and their harsh effects on him. The remainder of the stanza shifts towards life in Minnesota as well as the reasons for going there, including living life as a "nobody" in his new environment and the goal of making money to take back home to Ghana. Finally, in the last stanza of the verse, he grabs his "Ghana-must-go" bag, packed with warm clothes, and prepares to undertake the "travelin' blues."[14]

After another iteration of the chorus, M.anifest moves on to the song's third and final verse. It is here that M.anifest makes the ambivalence of migration most explicit. He transforms the initial lines of the first verse to the following:

Don't remember back in the days like it was a yesterday
Even though in the first verse I said contrary
Does it bother me? Yes, no, homie I can't say
Deejay, Replay, Let me do a double take

[14] This particular type of check-patterned bag, although prominent around the world, took on a specific association with the expulsion of thousands of Ghanaians from Nigeria in the early 1980s; many of these political refugees made their way back to Ghana with their belongings packed in a variety of "Ghana-Must-Go" bags.

The two lines not only share words, but also a similar vocal inflection and overdub in the background. The contradiction between Verse 1 and Verse 3 isn't something to be resolved; rather it bespeaks the musical and cultural space in between multiple homes that marks so many people (artists and non-artists) who find themselves far away from home. He's now in America ("home of the free, land of the slaves too") and on to "page two" in the story of his career, which could be interpreted as both a location (Minnesota as opposed to Ghana) and musical progression (second album after his debut, *M.anifestations*). In the third stanza, he mentions "Minneapolis" explicitly, and his transformation from wallflower to headliner:

> *Used to be the dude at shows seein' what's happenin'*
> *Now I do my own shows, I am what's happenin'*

In the last stanza, though, he tempers this bravado, overturns stereotypes of primitivized Africa, and makes the clearest statement about what he's doing now, and what he has become:

> *God keep me humble as I rumble on concrete*
> *In the jungle hustle to make ends meet*
> *Immigrant chronicles I'm peddlin' mostly*
> *Dear Mama, your son ain't the man I used to be*

He flips the image of the "jungle" to represent Minnesota rather than the stereotypical "jungle imagery" of primitivist conceptions of Africa. The last two lines of song's third and final verse speak not only of the type of music he now rights, "immigrant chronicles" that reflect his own background, but the acceptance of the changes that have occurred since he left home. There is some sense of triumph in overcoming the pain of migration and homesickness, and this

outweighs any sense of defeat or resignation. The tone in which he delivers this last line—containing a quotation of Tupac's "Dear Mama"—seems to provide a closure that only strengthens the ambivalence. It's more like a realization of the necessity—and unchangeability—of time moving forward, and the transformations that will result in having multiple homes, especially as one tries to keep a foot strongly planted in both.

Figure 2-10

The song "Black Star" (a collaboration between M.anifest and the UK producer Richy Pitch) expands upon many of the themes of "How I Used to Be." In it, M.anifest raps about the multiple registers of diaspora, including his own journey from Ghana to Minnesota (and elsewhere), the Ghanaian diaspora, and the African diaspora writ large.[15] They represent not only his own circulation, but also the circulation of hip-hop, the music he grew up with and his primary form of

[15] There are even shades of afro-futurism in the song. I base this on his use of the word "intergalactic" and the transformation of the "star" from the black star to the stars of outer space. Sun Ra is perhaps the best known musical artist of Afro-Futurism, but other artists include Parliament Funkadelic and, more recently, Janelle Monae have often been grouped as part of this aesthetic, but without necessarily claiming it themselves. For more on music and afro-futurism, see Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet Books, 1999).

musical education. There is a distinct contextual difference between the two songs, which helps to explain some of the differences in character. *The Birds and the Beats* was his own album, and while there certainly was an element that was directed towards Ghana and Africa,[16] it was more in the vein of an American hip-hop mixtape, with M.anifest positioned as an MC in Minnesota who's originally from Ghana. "Black Star," however, comes from *Ye Fre Mi Richy Pitch*, an album comprised solely of Ghanaian hip-hop and hiplife artists. Richy Pitch spent a number of years in Ghana, meeting and eventually collaborating with artists on what would become the album, released in 2010 by BBE Records; "Blackstar" was the album's first single.

What really differentiates "Black Star," however, is that he is much more *specific* in his references; they are not just Ghana, they are *home*. "Black Star" gets autobiographically and geographically specific, with numerous references not only to details of his childhood, but the places where M.anifest grew up. The verses are replete with types of food M.anifest grew up eating: tatale (golden plantain cakes) and kelewele (spiced and fried plantains). He also references "pilolo," a type of hide-and-seek game he played as a child with other children in his neighborhood and, of course, football.[17] Building outward from those childhood memories, in Verse Two he raps "I gotta rep Madina where I learned this talk," and then continues:

> *It's far from New York, but there's concrete blocks*
> *Uncompleted buildings where the weed heads talk*
> *Rawlings circle, Estate, to the Old Road*

---

[16] M.anifest asked that people who downloaded the free album make a donation to Young Entrepreneurs Africa, a development organization based in Ghana.

I.P.S. where the armed robbers lay low
New Road, Akosombo Junction, and Zongo
In the evening for strangers it's a no go

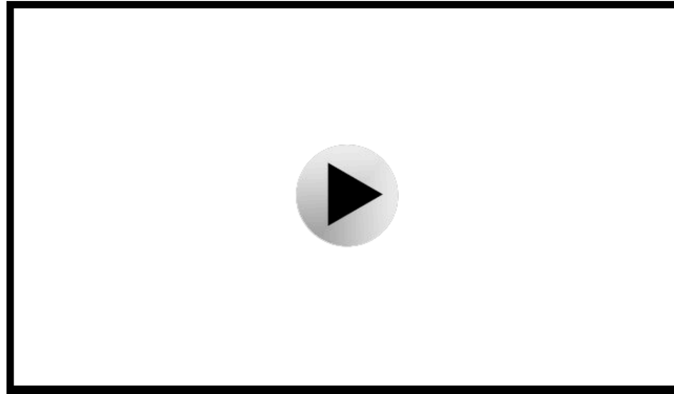

Figure 2-11

In these lines, M.anifest not only connects his own birthplace (Madina) to the birthplace of hip-hop (New York), but also lists off a number of landmarks and neighborhoods within and around Madina. These include Rawlings Circle and the uncompleted Madina Market, as well as Madina Estates, New Road, Old Road, and I.P.S. From this close detailing of home, even though he is "Many miles from home," as he says in the chorus, "my heart is in Accra."

Figure 2-12

Despite these strong geographically Ghanaian references, there is nothing identifiably "African" or "Ghanaian" about the music of "Blackstar." No drums, no highlife, no hiplife. Richy Pitch's beat is comprised of 8-bit synths for the main melody line (an oscillation between F and G), a more wide-ranging synth bass line, a syncopated, guitar-like line that stays on A-flat, and a drum machine kick, snare, and hi-hat that provides the rhythmic foundation in the classic "boom bap" pattern (bass – kick, bass-bass - kick). On the chorus, a slightly bent guitar line comes in, though it is hard to determine if this is a synthesized guitar or an actual guitar. Along the way, there are various 8-bit beeps and bloops that further enhance the "video game" quality of the music, as the tempo uncharacteristically speeds up and slows down over the course of the song's three verses.

Figure 2-13

Moving outward from the specific references to home and M.anifest's neighborhood of Madina, his lyrics evoke numerous historical and contemporary narratives with his choice of title, those that he explicitly states and those that resonate even without his mentioning them. In his mention of the Ghanaian flag, which is comprised of red, gold, and green stripes with a black star in the middle,

M.anifest transforms one of the most visible symbols of Ghanaian national identity to represent his own journey: "Travel the seas with the red, gold, green/I'm a black star caught in between." Not only is he the black star "caught between" the tri-color stripes of the flag, but he remarks on his celebrity status as a "star" (while still maintaining his lack of riches that often go along with celebrity status) caught in between multiple spaces and places of his own diasporic existence. The black star of the flag is closely related to Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, who was greatly influenced by the pan-Africanist ideas of Marcus Garvey, who established the "Black Star Line" to take diasporic Africans back to the continent.[18] As I noted earlier, "black stars" is also the popular name for the Ghanaian national football team, and M.anifest mentions one of the more recent stars of the team, Sulley Muntari ("Sulley Muntari of vocabulary") in the song.[19] Finally, there is the reference that goes unspoken, but will be familiar to any serious hip-hop fan, that of Black Star, the collaboration between Mos Def and Talib Kweli. Their album *Mos Def and Talib Kweli are Black Star*, released in 1998, has become a touchstone of underground hip-hop and surely gave the song appeal to many hip-hop fans inside and outside Ghana.

Continuing in the vein of hip-hop, like much of M.anifest's other music, quotes and citations of American hip-hop touchstones are throughout "Black Star." The song opens with a quotation from the opening of the Notorious B.I.G.'s

[18] For more on Marcus Garvey and his relationship to Ghana, see Colin Grant, *Negro With a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and R. L. Okonkwo, "The Garvey Movement in British West Africa," *Journal of African History* 21, no. 1 (1980): 105-117.

[19] In a moment of hip-hop poetics, he alters the pronunciation of "Muntari" to rhyme with "vocabulary."

"Juicy," one of the artist's most recognized songs, as well as one of his most recognizable lines ("It was all a dream"). He also writes that "Chris says knowledge reigns supreme," invoking the dual identities of Lawrence Krisna Parker, better known as KRS-One. ("KRS" stands for "Knowledge Reigns Supreme.") After announcing his hopes of being "that young bloke" to find success through hip-hop, M.anifest says how he "had a big stash of Tupac quotes." Tupac Shakur has become a worldwide figure for artists and fans of hip-hop and, like many other aspiring artists throughout the world, had great significance for M.anifest as a young man. The idea of quoting Tupac also resonates with a process for much of hip-hop's travels through the world, that it begins in a given country as an imitation of American hip-hop, before artists consciously infuse it with local musical styles and languages, as has happened throughout the world.[20] Hip-hop artists are the not the only poets that M.anifest quotes in the song, however. At the beginning of the second verse, he works in a passage of Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."[21]

> *Let's play a game of hide and seek*
> *Let's find emotions buried deep*
> *Just last week a song made me weep*
> *It reminded me I got promises to keep*
> *Before I sleep I got miles to walk*

[20] In a darker vein, see Jeremy Prestholdt, "The Afterlives of 2pac: Imagery and Alienation in Sierra Leone and Beyond," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2009): 197-218. Tupac was also an inspiration for Tou SaiKo Lee.
[21] I'm indebted to Melinda Russell for pointing this out to me.

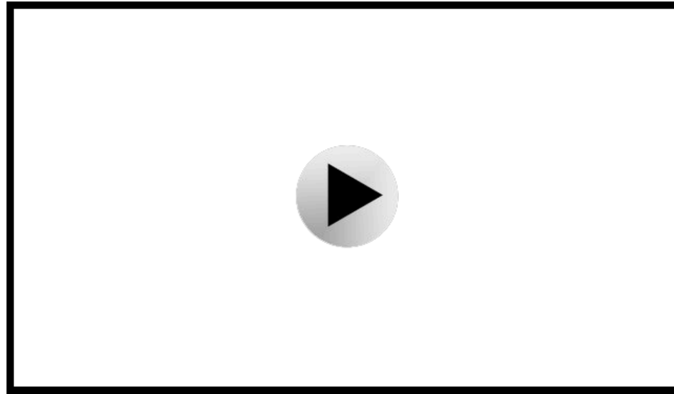

Figure 2-14

The original passage from Frost is:

> *The woods are lovely, dark and deep.*
> *But I have promises to keep,*
> *And miles to go before I sleep,*
> *And miles to go before I sleep.*

Figure 2-15

The intense heat and humidity in Accra is about as far as you get could from Frost's snowy evening. After arriving in Ghana, and specifically his neighborhood of Madina, the places that M.anifest mentions in "Blackstar" were no longer just lyrics. During that first walk through Madina after arriving, I noticed immediately how many places from the neighborhood M.anifest worked into

"Black Star." While there are many "uncompleted buildings" in Accra, either in the process of being built, or left unfinished, the one M.anifest's here is the half-built Madina market. All that was built of it was the large concrete frame. Now, it is covered with graffiti, though people still sell their wares in its numerous stalls. The rest of the references are to distinct areas in and around Madina. New Road and Old Road are the two main areas of Madina (M.anifest's family lives in New Road), while Madina Estates is a smaller section of the neighborhood. Rawlings Circle is a roundabout near M.anifest's house in Madina, and its name supposedly derives from the fact that Jerry Rawlings once gave a speech on that spot. Akosombo Junction is an area near M.anifest's house. Zongo is a Muslim neighborhood that is part of Madina. The I.P.S. road is named for the large school that is on one side of it, the Institute for Professional Studies. Both M.anifest and a number of taxi drivers I rode with warned me about driving down I.P.S. at night (much less walking!) because of the number of robberies and even murders that had occurred there. Most nights, we had to pass through a police checkpoint to get into the neighborhood.

Figure 2-16

Although I didn’t realize it at the time, I had one of the best representations of "home" the first day I arrived in Ghana, and one that had nothing to do with geographic markers. After coming home from the airport, and a quick walk around the neighborhood (where I ended up getting some of the best shots of the trip due to the extraordinarily warm cast of the light), we relaxed on the couch in the family house, the house M.anifest grew up in and that his grandfather had built.

Figure 2-17

M.anifest and I were on opposite sides of the room, allowing me to continue filming him as we chatted with his mother and Nketia. When looking at the footage later (much like the anecdote I began this dissertation with), I realized that how he is slouched on the couch is a symbol of his absolute comfort and familiarity in these surroundings. While my memory of this clearly influences my interpretation, excited as I was having just touched down in Ghana, much of it is visible in his body. It’s the way his shoulders are relaxed, the smile on his face. It

is clear from his body language that this is the house he grew up in and the furniture he grew up on.[22]

There was also something special about the particular time we went to Ghana, as it encompassed two birthdays, that of M.anifest’s mother, and M.anifest himself. It was the first time in the ten years he had lived in America that he was home for either of the birthdays. Unfortunately, I missed most of the celebrations for M.anifest’s birthday, because I was sick in bed with an extremely painful double ear infection, but he did get serenaded by the crowd at Citizen Kofi.

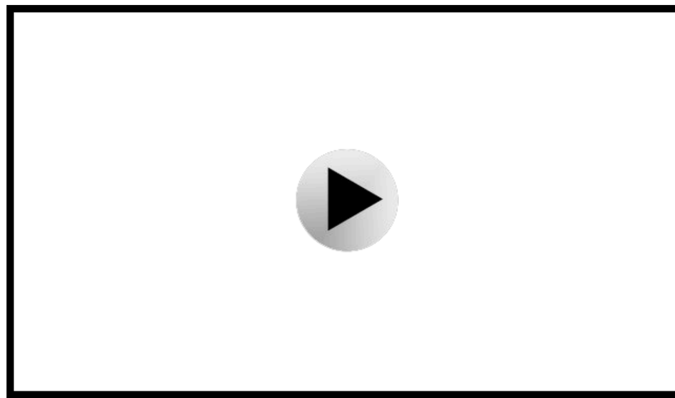

Figure 2-18

I was able to witness, however, the celebration of his mother's birthday.

[22] Other people close to M.anifest in Minnesota, including his manager, pointed out how relaxed he looked in the footage.

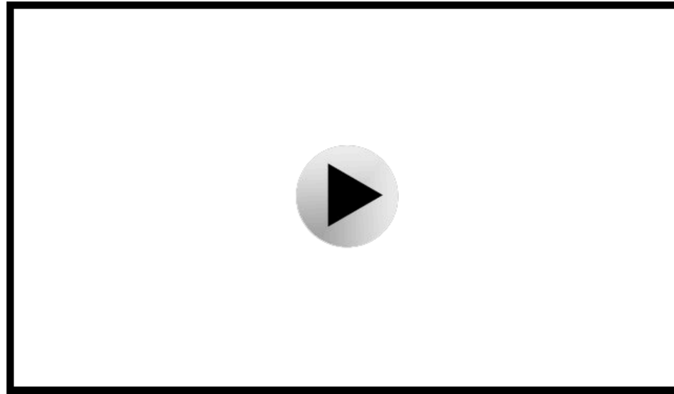

Figure 2-19

These elements, the details of a neighborhood, the physical building M.anifest grew up in, and the people of one's family, their celebrations of birthdays made all the more joyous after having been apart for so long, are highly affective, though conventional markers of home. Yet it was clear from the very first day of the trip that M.anifest still was a kind of outsider, continually asking questions and learning about what had changed. As we were driving back from the airport, I started filming him in the backseat of his Mom's SUV. Throughout the trip, he was getting "updates" about things in Madina, Accra, and Ghana itself, whether it be buildings come and gone, people come and gone, changes in the music and media scene, the best way to get people to a show, and the like. One of the few things that made him stand out was that he opted to wear shorts because of the heat; this got him into trouble with club bouncers a few times, who tried to enforce "no shorts" rules. (I also opted to wear shorts, and got in the same trouble.)

In a way, hip-hop itself marked him as an outsider. While it wasn't surprising to hear lots of American hip-hop and R&B in a variety of contexts (clubs, taxis, the Accra Mall, and elsewhere), given the kinds of circles we ran in,

there were a few moments that musically showed M.anifest's "American-ness" to a greater degree because he was in Ghana. At one point, while we were walking through his neighborhood, he said "On my block, on my block," a quote from the Houston rapper Scarface's song of the same name, though a very different "block" (Madina vs. Houston) than what inspired Scarface.

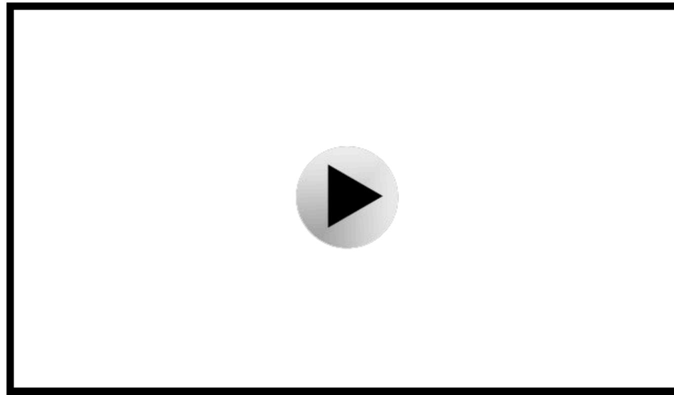

Figure 2-20

Figure 2-21

Right after this, M.anifest quoted another song for the same ends. After going through a number of areas within Madina, he quotes the song "Steve Biko (Stir It Up)" from A Tribe Called Quest, off their *Midnight Marauders* album. There are many layers of meaning with this quotation, though I'd argue that M.anifest

wasn't quoting it for its African diasporic connections (the song's title comes from one of Phife Dawg's lines, "I'm radical with this like the man this song is after"), but rather its announcement of where he comes from, though, again, a very different location than Linden Boulevard.

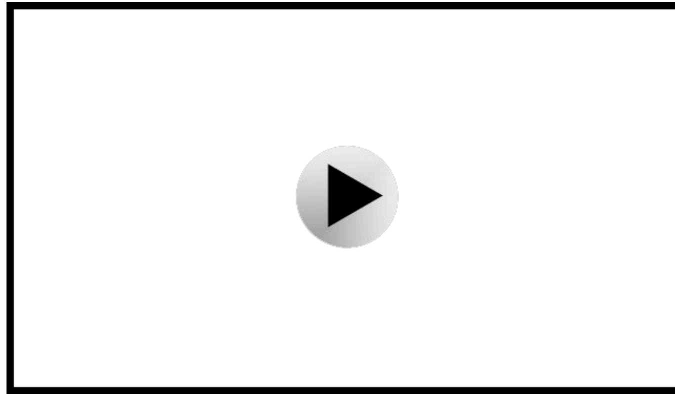

Figure 2-22

Figure 2-23

A final instance of this type of quotation happened during a rehearsal for the Citizen Kofi show. Collaborating with the artist DJ Juls (on a drum) and his cousin Jason (on guitar), M.anifest dropped into two hip-hop classics, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s "The Message" and, from a later generation,

Tupac’s "California Love." M.anifest's intent was, in his own words, to "tribalize these Yankee songs."

Figure 2-24

The songs of Scarface, Grandmaster Flash, Tupac, Notorious B.I.G. and others, of course, have become globally popular since their initial release and were well known by many of the hip-hop artists and fans we met while in Ghana. However, by being in Ghana, M.anifest's quotation of them gave them a different valence, simultaneously a citation of a shared musical background (albeit one from far away) with the musicians he worked with, but also flipping them to represent his own background, bringing the multiple worlds of his life together, insider and outsider, in the span of a few words.

Due to the extended period of time we had in Accra (even though a month is hardly any time at all), M.anifest greatly increased his presence in the hiplife (and wider music scene) of Accra and Ghana as a whole. He collaborated with a number of artists he already knew before the trip, and met many more whom he hadn't worked with previously. He recorded a collaboration track produced by EL,

which featured M.anifest, C-Real, and EL himself rapping. I was in the studio with them and filmed M.anifest recording the verse.

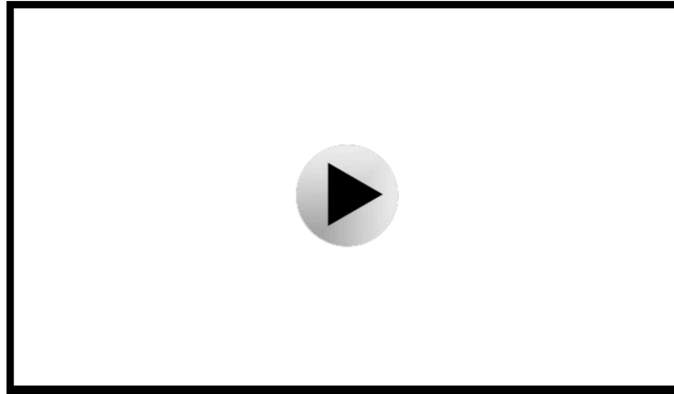

Figure 2-25

We also met a number of artists throughout the trip, including Reggie Rockstone, D-Black, Macho Rapper, DJ Juls, Kochoko, M-A (who produced one of the songs on *Manifestations*, "Swing Low"), and Yaa Pono, who opened the performance at Citizen Kofi.

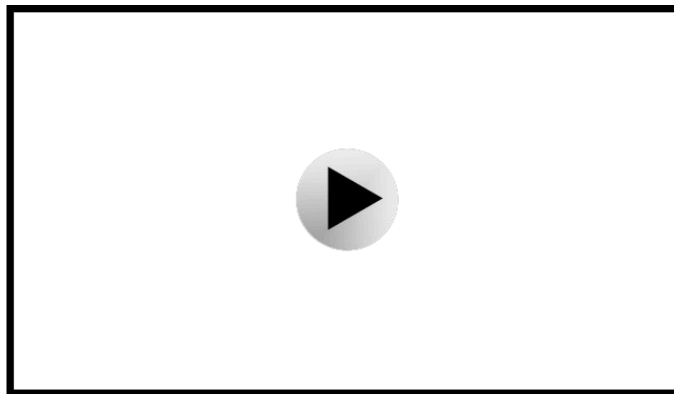

Figure 2-26

One of the best moments in this vein was after M.anifest's performance at the High Vibes festivals, which featured artists from throughout the West African pop music spectrum, from hiplife to legendary drummer Tony Allen. At the end of the night, after all the acts had gone on, including the legendary proto-rap singer

Gyedu Ambolley, all the performers got on stage for a freestyle cipher session, much of it built around the beat and lyrical snippets of M.anifest song "Life Dey Jom."

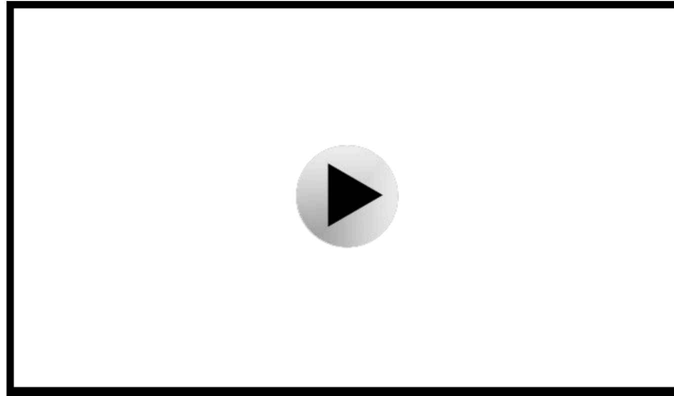

Figure 2-27

While the freestyle cipher at High Vibes was a musical highlight of the trip, the culmination of our month in Ghana was M.anifest's performance at Citizen Kofi. His rendition of "Black Star" at this concert showed some of the more subtle differences specifically in *performance*. Here is the full song:

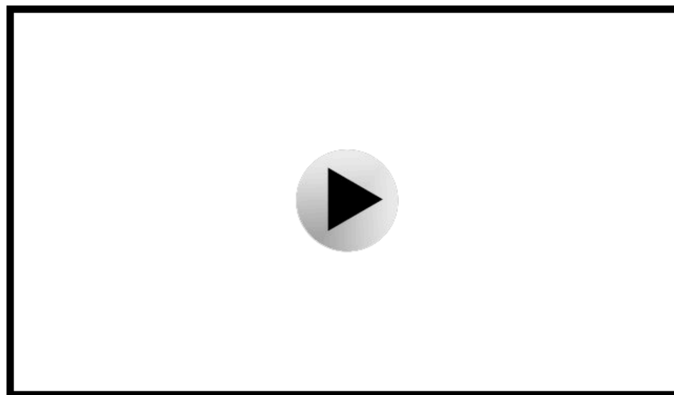

Figure 2-28

Whenever M.anifest performed this song in Minnesota, he introduced it by way of the Ghanaian football team, the Black Stars. There was a different reaction when

M.anifest introduced the song to the fans at Citizen Kofi. He started it by asking about one of the artists behind a hiplife song we heard everyday, regardless of where we were. While "African Girls" is ostensibly a remix of "Ghana Girls" by the Ghanaian artist Castro, the remix is much more well-known for its cameo from Baby Jet, the musical name of Ghanaian striker Asamoah Gyan (who missed the penalty kick in the 2010 World Cup). With this in mind, M.anifest asked the crowd "What team does Baby Jet play for?" The crowd, nearly in unison, shouted in response "Sunderland!", the English Premier League team he played for at the time. "No," M.anifest said, shaking his head, "the Black Stars!"

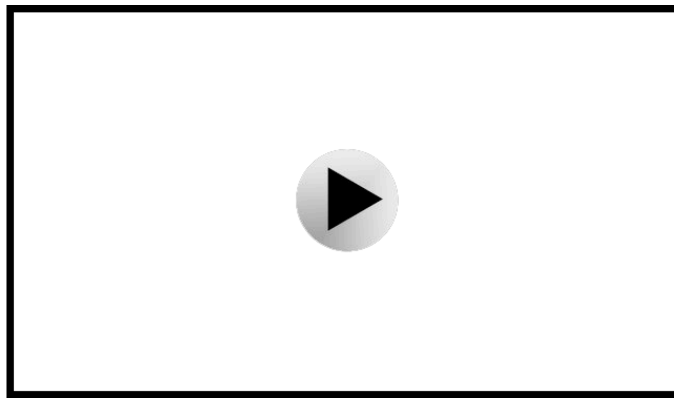

Figure 2-29

In America, where there is less of a sense of direct connection, M.anifest is able to make a more specific "Ghanaian" connection to his audience, while the Ghanaian audience itself makes a connection elsewhere, the massive global popularity of English football.

This was one of the few disconnects, however, between M.anifest and his audience that night. Instead, the performance of the song offered a very different kind of reaction and reception than M.anifest ever received in Minnesota. At the

point in the song where he mentions "New Road," a guy in the audience (off-camera) gets very excited and starts shouting "Madina New Road," and M.anifest gives him the equivalent of a high-five acknowledgement on stage.

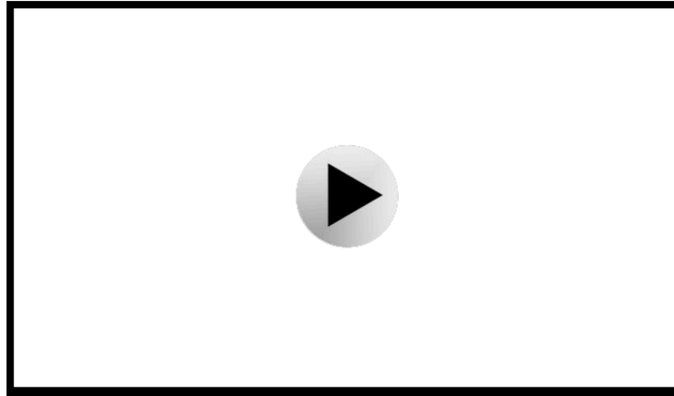

Figure 2-30

For those who aren't from or haven't traveled to Accra, and specifically Madina, these references are as opaque as M.anifest's usage of Twi in "How I Used to Be." But to those from this area of Accra, they mean much more, the equivalent, in Minnesota, of Brother Ali or Atmosphere shouting out "Minneapolis" or "Minnesota" during their live performances at First Avenue. Further, when M.anifest got to the end of the second verse, when he talks about Reggie Rockstone and his grandfather, he could do something he had never been able to do before: point to them in the crowd as he said their names. (This was the first time that Nketia, and indeed the majority of M.anifest's family, had seen him perform live.) M.anifest even changed some lyrics for the occasion. For instance, when he opened the show with "Africa Represent," he changed the line "Who woulda knew that this cat from Africa would come to America" into "Who woulda knew that this cat from Africa would *go* to America," changing *come* to *go* to identify more with those in his Accra audience rather than his Minnesota

audiences. Finally, when M.anifest arrived at the line "Many miles from home, still my heart is in Accra," he could actually point to the ground as he recited the chorus about traveling and living far from that particular ground.

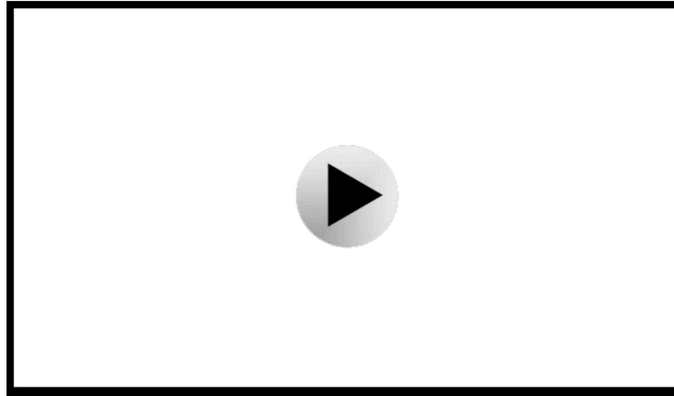

Figure 2-31

M.anifest even changed some lyrics for the occasion. For instance, when he opened the show with "Africa Represent," he changed the line "Who woulda knew that this cat from Africa would come to America" into "Who woulda knew that this cat from Africa would *go* to America," changing *come* to *go* to identify more with those in his Accra audience rather than his Minnesota audiences.

All of these moments from Citizen Kofi show that M.anifest was clearly "at home" on stage. And yet the anecdote I started this chapter with, the variety of problems and obstacles we encountered in preparation for the performance at Citizen Kofi, made me realize the particular duality M.anifest faces in his musical life when it comes to the idea of home. Until I traveled with him to Ghana, I only had his words to go on, such as the interview I opened this chapter with, that revealed how much he missed home and wanted to return there. When I saw him

in Ghana, it was clear just how strong the pull to home is, for family, friends, and fans where he's marked as "different" less for where he comes from, and more for what he's accomplished. However, what I also learned over the course of the month was the lack of a music industry infrastructure there is in Ghana, making it difficult, if not impossible to really "make it" as a hip-hop artist in Ghana as is possible in a place like Minnesota. While there are people in Ghana working on these issues, including the head of the Musicians Union, Obour,[23] when I was there, we had many discussions about the rampant payola that happens on Ghanaian music stations, the lack of a proper publishing and rights system that could fairly compensate artists for plays and usage of their songs, the difficulty in getting shows, and a severe lack of outlets for buying music.[24]

When I brought up these ideas to M.anifest, he agreed but articulated this "dilemma" in his own way, and with a slightly different viewpoint. He said that diasporic artists like himself and Blitz the Ambassador are incredibly envious of the success Ghanaian hiplife artists have found in Ghana, whether it be through recording, sponsorships, commercials, and other highly visible public exposure. These artists, however, view the success achieved by M.anifest and Blitz (performing in places as diverse as Minneapolis, Chicago, New York, Paris, and London) as a greater marker of success than they could ever hope to achieve in

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[23] See Jacquiline Afua Bondzi, "President Obour and Team Chalk 100 Days in Office," at http://www.modernghana.com/music/16910/3/president-obour-and-team-chalk-100-days-in-office.html (Accessed 17 October 2012).
[24] To this last point, I only bought one hiplife CD while in Ghana, and this was from Reggie Rockstone, who was selling them in purpose at the club he owns, Rockstone's Office. At the same time, however, the hiplife on my computer mostly comes from iTunes or mixtapes downloaded from various websites, meaning that artists, as best they can, are bypassing specifically local networks of music distribution and going online to sell their music.

Ghana alone. Despite M.anifest's clear and emotionally powerful sense of home, the reality of life and economics, as well as all of the narratives I've described in this chapter that have shaped him and his music, make it much harder to argue that such an easy conception of home actually exists. It is rather something more akin to an intersection, one point on a map, albeit an emotionally privileged point, the "black star caught in between." If M.anifest needed to leave home in order to greater appreciate that home, it was returning for this long of a period *to* that home that made him realize how much he missed it.

Figure 2-32

Chapter 3:
Live From Ghana: The Production and Reception of Digital Diasporic Media

M.anifest and I are walking through the streets of Madina. It's the late afternoon, when the light is best, but the traffic is heaviest. Numerous cars drive by, their flow interrupted only by the occasional truck or motorbike. At one point, a truck with as many speakers as possible crammed into its bed blasts gospel music as two young men trail after it, selling CDs and distributing flyers. I have to step lightly. Not only am I trying to avoid getting hit by the traffic or bumping into others walking through the streets, but also trying not to trip on the numerous rocks, sewer gutters, or holes that line the uneven (and sometimes non-existent) sidewalks.

This isn't as easy as it sounds. Not only am I holding a camera, but an entire contraption: DSLR camera, microphone, sound recorder, and light, all screwed into a square aluminum frame, and bolted onto a shoulder mount.

Figure 3-1. Video by Fui Tsikata.

As we walk through the neighborhood, we meet people M.anifest grew up with, people who still recognize him even though he's been away. We stop at Verb's,

the biggest bar in the area and talk to a few "area boys," those local guys of a neighborhood who always just happen to be around. Just after we leave Verb's, heading down one of the main roads of the neighborhood that leads out towards the city of Accra proper, he turns around and says "I feel like I'm on *MTV Cribs*, walking backwards." He pauses, giving enough time for an enormous truck to screech its brakes as it comes to a stop. "My name is M.anifest, this is where I live."

Figure 3-2

As I made clear in the previous chapter, it's not as simple to say that M.anifest just lives in Accra. Or Minnesota, for that matter. I take as my departure for this chapter not just his statement about where he lives, but also the context in which he says it, his reference first to a show that purportedly gives viewers access to homes of the rich and famous audiences wouldn't have otherwise seen, and, secondly, the fact that I was there filming everything that happened on that street in Madina. In making this reference, M.anifest ironically marshals a distinctly American television reference for his return to Ghana. The world to which M.anifest directs the audience's attention is very different from the worlds

usually shown to *Cribs* audiences: palatial estates, immaculate bedrooms, overwhelming entertainment rooms. While the guests on *Cribs* have ranged throughout the cultural and entertainment spectrum, the show is perhaps most identified with hip-hop artists,[1] and none of the more than 100 episodes of the show traveled to Africa or featured an African artist. M.anifest’s Madina is that of open sewers, dusty roads, dogs and chickens running loose through the streets already choked with traffic; yet, most importantly, this is still home for him. Finally, M.anifest's invocation of *MTV Cribs* while addressing my camera (and the future audience) of my own documentary, *We Rock Long Distance*, is a convenient segue into questions about the stakes of making diasporic media while in Ghana.

While in the previous chapter I discussed the geographic distances in making music between Minnesota and Ghana, I begin this chapter by focusing on a different type of distance, one that is more methodological than literal. The act of shooting video, in any context, creates its own type of distance. On one level, there is a necessary practical distance while filming: I need to be focused on what’s happening in front of me, preparing for different types of shots as they present themselves (especially during a more dynamic, unplanned walk

[1] I say this for two reasons. The first is that the name of the show is derived from an African American (and more specifically hip-hop slang) term for "house." The second is that *Cribs* has gotten its most notoriety for the examples where rappers Ja Rule and 50 Cent showed viewers houses, cars, and other finery that was loaned or rented for their appearance. For another critical interpretation of *Cribs*, see Maureen Margaret Smith and Becky Beal, "'So You Can See How the Other Half Lives': *MTV Cribs*' 'Use of the Other' in Framing Successful Athletic Masculinities," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 31, no. 2 (May 2007): 103-127.

through a neighborhood), but not so much so that I lose track of things like audio levels, light levels, or battery life. Moreover, as I noted in the anecdote I opened with, I needed to be very careful with where and how I stepped, given the numerous ways I could have tripped and damaged—or ruined—my equipment.

Yet this physical apparatus also represents a more metaphoric and methodological distance, that of any relationship between the camera and the subject which it frames and records. At its most elemental, the camera frames something, captures it on film, tape, or a memory card, and thereby detaches it from its original context.

Figure 3-3. Photo by Fui Tsikata

My role as a filmmaker (in addition to being a fan, friend, and someone writing about M.anifest) moves me into another set of historical, intellectual, and ideological narratives, involving documentary film, ethnographic film, and

postcolonial media production: how I choose to represent things (in the final edit) but also what I choose to film, and perhaps more importantly not film, in the moment of shooting. In doing so, and using the words of David MacDougall, I look at the negotiation of "geographic distance" and "representational distance."[2]

I am adapting a methodology used by Melisa Rivière in her multi-site, multimedia project *Son Dos Alas* which she terms "ethnographic production." In her words, this refers to "the use of media as an agent in the field," much more than "solely a form of documentation, archiving, or disseminating ethnographic fieldwork." Instead, she argues, "media becomes an active agent in the field as a place for participants to act, interact, and meet."[3] These participants, it is important to point out, include both the person in front of and behind the camera, microphone, and laptop. For David MacDougall, the subject of a film is always much more than just a subject. "The subject is part of the filmmaker, the filmmaker part of the subject." He goes on to argue that

> The film subject has a multiple identity—as the person who exists outside the film, in his or her own being; as the person constructed through interaction with the filmmaker; and as the person constructed once again in the viewers' interactions with the film.[4]

MacDougall's words eloquently capture the spaces of both production and reception that go into any documentary film, ethnographic or otherwise. It is these spaces that organize my chapter. I will first discuss a number of aspects of production, reactions to the camera (and the person holding it) by those in Ghana

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[2] David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 256.
[3] Melisa Rivière, "Son Dos Alas: A Multimedia Ethnography of Hip-Hop Between Cuba and Puerto Rico," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2010).
[4] MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, 29.

as well as different types of filmmaking styles I undertook as I saw fit to capture a particular moment or scene: a more conventionally "ethnographic" production, an interview that greater revealed the arbitrary nature of the interview form, and, in the second part of the chapter, the shooting of a music video. I undertake a close examination of the entire life of this video, from production to reception and, in doing so, articulate the spaces of reception that reveal the digital diasporic networks of M.anifest and his music.

Before turning to these examples, however, it is important to unpack the "ethnographic" part of "ethnographic production." Projects such as *We Rock Long Distance* are ethically fraught when we consider it within the historically exploitative power dynamics of visual representations of those traditionally viewed as "Other" in genres like ethnographic film. Though more recent writers have argued for a more expansive definition of ethnographic film, the actual historical practice of ethnographic film is much more limited to the world of anthropology and distinct cultural differences, traditionally the travel of a white Euro-American man or woman to a distinctly different cultural group, with the purpose of making a film for scientific study, and where the distinctions between "here" and "there," "us" and "them" are never blurred.[5] These debates are sharply encompassed on the cover of Michael Chanan's *The Politics of*

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[5] For instance, Eliot Weinberger takes an etymological view of the term: "Ethnos, 'a people'; graphe, 'a writing, a drawing, a representation.' Ethnographic film, then: 'a representation on film of a people.' A definition without limit, a process with unlimited possibility, an artifact with unlimited variation." Eliot Weinberger, "The Camera People," *Transition* 55 (1992): 24-54. Closely related is one recently offered by Kevin Taylor Anderson, who argues that ethnographicness "is a quality inherent in film because it is a form of human expression." See his "Towards an Anarchy of Imagery: Questioning the Categorization of Films as 'Ethnographic,'" *Journal of Film and Video* 55, no. 2-3 (2003): 73-87.

Documentary. A young boy stares at the camera, a look of distrust, anger, resentment, or some mixture of all three on his face. "What do you get outta this, holding this thing in our face?"[6]

Critiques of ethnographic film often parallel attacks on the wider field of anthropology for its perpetuation of global dynamics of economic and representational inequality and exploitation of material and intellectual resources.[7] Faye Ginsburg terms this the "decolonization of ethnographic film," where postcolonial scholars engaged with the conventions, framing, and misframing of the subjects of ethnographic film and, simultaneously, the increase in the production of films by those who identify themselves as indigenous or diasporic, "people who until recently were only objects and never producers in the enterprise of cross-cultural representation."[8] As a result, according to Bill Nichols, "the voice of the traditional ethnographic filmmaker has become one voice among many."[9]

In his book *Transcultural Cinema*, David MacDougall eloquently writes that despite the many critiques of ethnographic film in perpetuating the rigid cultural boundaries established by anthropology, such films and filmmakers have also been widely understood as "transcultural." MacDougall argues that this is not only "in the familiar sense of crossing cultural boundaries—indeed the very term implies an awareness and mediation of the unfamiliar—but they are also

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[6] Michael Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary* (London: British Film Institute, 2008).
[7] See, for instance, James Clifford, *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
[8] Faye Ginsburg, "Institutionalizing the Unruly: Charting a Future for Visual Anthropology," *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 63, no. 2 (1998): 173-174.
[9] Bill Nichols, "The Ethnographer's Tale," *Visual Anthropology Review* 7, no. 2 (September 1991): 64.

transcultural in another sense: that of defying such boundaries."[10] A transcultural perspective, he goes on to argue, "accommodates cultural shift, movement, and interchange, which more adequately fits the experience of man Westerners as well as populations often as indigenous, migrant or diasporic."[11] MacDougall's ideas of transcultural cinema, even though I read them *after* I traveled to Ghana with M.anifest, have helped me reflect in hindsight not only about the stakes of filmmaking across and between such cultural differences—again, in somewhat of a reflection of M.anifest's own diasporic experience—but also what it is like to create media that attempts to cross these kinds of boundaries.

I begin this section of the chapter by talking about various reactions to my camera from different people at different points of the trip. Such reactions, of course, are inseparable from the person holding the camera. Because of my skin color, I'm read as an outsider in Ghana; at the risk of sounding coarse, I enter the role of the "white guy with a camera," or more accurately for Ghana, the "obruni with a camera."[12] Bill Nichols argues that "what the documentarist cannot fully control is his or her basic subject: history."[13] There were historical perspectives and viewpoints, most explicitly those of race, that shaped how I was seen even before I landed at Accra's Kotoka International Airport.

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[10] David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, 245.
[11] Ibid., 261.
[12] "Obruni" means "white man" in Twi, though now it is actually used for most Americans, including African Americans.
[13] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 14.

While I have written quite a bit in this dissertation about the circulation of M.anifest's music, it is these reactions that bring to mind a different type of circulation, that of images (whether photo or video) of conventional and stereotypical Africans in mainstream media, predominantly advertisements (print and television), as well as television shows and films, documentary and feature. Ruth Mayer refers to these types of images as "artificial Africans," continuing the fantasies of the exotic "Other" that were developed in the era of colonialism in order to both subjugate the colonized and make the project of colonialism seem like one of benevolence rather than violence.[14] Going hand-in-hand with the "decolonization of ethnographic film" mentioned above is the greater knowledge on the part of those who were usually only the *subjects* of films about what those particular images mean, where they circulate, and what kind of control (or lack thereof) they had over what they showed.

There were two ends to the spectrum of reaction I experienced in Ghana while taking on these various roles. The first would be those of kids who I met while I was filming M.anifest walking around the neighborhood. They would all rush to get in front of the camera, either to get on video or have me take their picture. It was always a fun moment, as everyone was laughing and smiling, but it all felt very familiar. Not that I had experienced it before, but that I had seen so many news reports and documentaries in Africa that *always* featured a shot like this. I had to tell myself by taking this photo I wasn't perpetuating the stereotype

[14] Ruth Mayer, *Artificial Africas: Colonial Images in the Times of Globalization*. (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2002). See also Samuel K. Bonsu, "Colonial Images in Global Times: Consumer Interpretations of Africa and Africans in Advertising," *Consumption Markets & Culture* 12, no. 1 (2009): 1-25.

of the "smiling African child" so prevalent on things like charity asks and travel advertisements.

Figure 3-4

From this very positive reaction, I encountered its exact opposite near the end of the trip. M.anifest and I drove to the Arts Center in downtown Accra to pick up a few last minute gifts for people in Minnesota. We drove down the main road into town from Madina, Liberation Road, and, as usual, were met with people selling all manner of wares to drivers on the road. Taking their life in their hands as they dodged traffic, they would try to sell mobile phone minutes, candy, fruits, water, toys, flags, and most anything else you could think of to people stopped at red lights or in traffic jams. M.anifest urged me to get some footage of the hawkers. I didn't feel right about it; it felt more like I was taking pictures or videos of an animal at a zoo (inside the car, windows rolled up). Eventually, I put the

camera up for a few seconds to get a little bit of video. Within just a few seconds, one of the hawkers flipped me off.

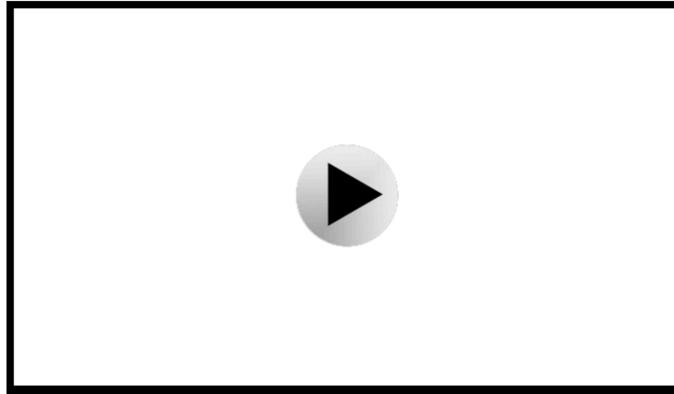

Figure 3-5

The other reactions fell somewhere in between. One such example was when M.anifest and I visited JoyFM, one of the main radio stations in Accra. We went there to visit a well-known radio personality and force in current Ghanaian popular music, DJ Black. We wanted to discuss getting a show, which eventually turned out to be the performance at Citizen Kofi I have discussed throughout the preceding chapters. When we walked in, a number of guys who worked at the station started crowding around me, speaking Twi and pointing very excitedly. I thought I was in trouble, that I couldn't film there, or something like that. As M.anifest caught up to me, he explained that they were all interested in the camera set-up I had, since they hadn't seen one like that before. We all had a good laugh and we were on our way upstairs to see DJ Black.

On another walk through Madina, different than the one that I started the chapter with, we walked toward Old Road, another section of the neighborhood. Although M.anifest was very familiar with the area, and pointed to places he hung

out at as a kid, there were far less people who recognized him. Soon, we were stopped by residents on three different occasions, very upset and accusing M.anifest of being "hired" by me for a few Ghana cedis to take me around so I could get footage of the neighborhood. Each necessitated some explanation and negotiation from M.anifest that the filming was part of an academic project and a documentary, that he was working closely on it with me, and that it was not just getting shots of the neighborhood and then running away to Europe or America and never be seen again (either me or the footage).

The last encounter of the three I happened to record, but only inadvertently and on audio. This person explicitly brought up the subject of Ghanaian law for foreigners to film. As soon as he shouted "Herh madamfo" ("My friends!"), we stopped and M.anifest answered him. I didn’t understand what he was saying, but M.anifest hung his head down, slightly exasperated, and said "Let me talk to him." I put the camera down, though because I have a separate audio recorder that I leave running, this continued even after I shut off the camera. Here is the video, with the audio portion that was captured after I put the camera down, and before I turned off the audio recorder.

Figure 3-6

The man asks if we have received the proper permits to film there, and helpfully offers to take us to the police station now if we haven't, saying that to film without the correct permit is against the law.[15] After M.anifest begins to explain that we've turned the camera off (which I have by this point), he attempts to smooth things over by saying that we're going to head back to New Road ("Ye saa ko new road"). Later, he asks M.anifest "Wu ye Ghanaian?" ("Are you Ghanaian?"). Not only does he not recognize M.anifest as a hip-hop artist from America (as many of those in New Road did), he doesn't even think he is Ghanaian. The man continues, in English, "And you're allowing a foreigner to take pictures of our environment to send it to Europe just to go and disgrace our country?" Finally, M.anifest responds "Me ne ni ne nam," which roughly means "I'm rolling with him," vouching for my status as not just someone to take footage and run off to someplace else. After M.anifest had placated the man, we walked back to New Road, the camera and audio recorder turned off. Just before reaching M.anifest's neighborhood, we passed a woman who threatened, but perhaps only half-jokingly, that if we shot her picture by the sewer, she would sue us.[16]

[15] This is partially true. While one does not need a permit to film in Ghana, members of non-Ghanaian international media do need a special visa to enter the country. Another example of this self-protection of Ghana and Ghanaians' image(s), the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park is substantially more expensive for members of the international media, than it is for Ghanaian or non-Ghanaian tourists.
[16] Thanks to Fui Tsikata and M.anifest for providing me with the translation.

These interactions, though revealing many of the ethical dilemmas involved in transcultural media production, were mostly spontaneous interactions. I turn now to examples of more planned production during the course of the trip, where there was a greater amount of familiarity between those in front of and behind the camera.

My roles as a filmmaker and camera operator ran the gamut in terms of documentary and filming style. Sometimes, I was more of an observer, yet any hope of a completely distanced, act-as-if-I'm-not-here objectivity was never a reality. This was the case, for instance, on the walks with M.anifest through Madina. As much as M.anifest would lead the way, talking about things, at times during these walks, I would have M.anifest stop if there was a nice shot, because I knew I could use it *somewhere* when it came time for editing, or I would ask him questions about something that I noticed. Similarly, as M.anifest's mother was opening birthday presents, I was mostly just filming it and not asking questions or directing things; however, I did need to adjust to holding my rig with one hand—knowing that this was an important aspect of M.anifest's life at home—so I could properly toast in celebration.

At other times in the trip, I was much more of a "director," setting up shots for specific purposes and meanings, or, more informally, telling people where to stand to get better light or audio, or if there was a particular background that I wanted or looked good. An example of this was with the drummer Kofi Dondo, who asked me to film him performing.[17] After entering his house, and figuring out

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[17] Kofi Dondo's last name is a kind of "stage name" taken from the type of drum he plays, the *dondo*.

the best place for to take advantage of the natural light coming through the window, he asked if we could go outside. I obliged, but I knew, however, that a large sound system was set up nearby and would make for bad audio quality on the recording; more importantly, even if the DJ turned the system down, the green of his shirt matched wonderfully with the green of his wall, so for both visual and sonic reasons, I had him move back inside.

Figure 3-7

At one point in the trip, though, I did what could be considered "ethnographic" filming, when we went to the Ewuku Dai festival in Mampong, filming for specific anthropological and ethnographic ends, and with a style defined, according to Karl Heider, by an emphasis on holism, whole bodies, whole people, whole acts, and with a minimum of what he calls "reality-distorting techniques," shooting and editing strategies that detract from the ethnographic character of the film and place it more in a Western cinematic style.[18] A professor at the University of Ghana (who was born in Mampong) had arranged for us to come to the festival, and also for me to film the parts featuring the chief's

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[18] Karl Heider, *Ethnographic Film* (Austin: University of Texas, 2006), 5-6.

fontomfrom drum ensemble. This footage was primarily for the University of Ghana's Institute of African Studies to use as a way of greater understanding the intricacies of the drum ensemble. Instead of *me* doing the directing, I was directed by the University of Ghana faculty member and, more often, members of the court as to what to film and what I could not film. Over the course of a few hours, I filmed the procession into the hall of the chief and his court, an opening performance by the court drummers and then, afterwards, a special performance just for us. We were instructed not to film anything during the non-musical parts of the festival, which was a kind of town hall meeting where people could bring concerns to the chief. After the festival had ended (and I had two good belts of palm wine), the court drummers outlined for us some of the rhythms that make up the music they play.

Figure 3-8

After this, they played for almost 25 minutes. I wasn't telling anybody what to play or not play, and I just roamed around getting as interesting of shots that I could, from wide shots of the entire ensemble, to close ups of specific drummers on the

atumpan, or talking drum, or the large, incredibly loud fontomfrom drums. I also filmed some people dancing to the drum ensemble's music.

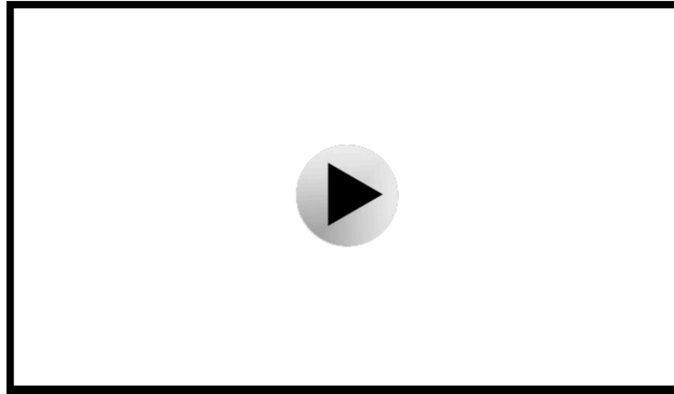

Figure 3-9

After the performance was complete, I took some photos of some of the drummers (which they asked to have taken) and we then went to visit the chief and give him an offering of schnapps and express our gratitude for letting us film the musical components of the festival.

There are multiple layers going on here. First, there is the more traditional ethnographic film project of the white filmmaker/academic going to a ritual and filming it. But this is just on the surface and doesn't reveal anything about the types of negotiation that went on, as well as the uses it was put to. The footage was given to the Institute for African Studies at the University of Ghana, rather than a European or American university. On my second trip to Ghana, where I filmed a different festival at the same place, a professor was going to use the footage in a class that very next week to talk about the dancing that goes on in honor of the chief while the fontomfrom ensemble plays. The members of the faculty, and the many of the people organizing the festival, wanted these events

documented and preserved, and often told me where to stand in order to get the best angle. Furthermore, any photos I took of the drummers afterwards I printed out in Minnesota and brought back with me on my return visit, which they were very happy to receive.

Beyond the immediate relationships and negotiations I formed in Mampong, there is the question of the reception and interpretation of the footage in other contexts. Footage like this is something that very few people would get to see otherwise, and it is some of my favorite footage of the entire trip. When I use it in the documentary component of *We Rock Long Distance*—not a question of if, but when—I will inevitably be faced with the question of how much information to give about these events, and how much viewers may need to understand it as more than just exotic otherness, a visual equivalent to the Twi M.anifest used in "How I Used to Be." There are subtle elements that help to make it not just some sort of "timeless" practice. For instance, as the chief and his court were lining up to enter the hall, there was a visual juxtaposition between the umbrella that is used to shield the chief from the sun, and is one of the symbols of chieftaincy in Ghana. Behind it, however, is an umbrella for a Vodafone unit-selling kiosk.

Figure 3-10

There are also visual cues of this in the clothes of the drummers themselves. While some of them are wearing "traditional" dress, others are wearing t-shirts, one with a very visible "ESPN" logo on it. While I can't control all interpretations of the footage, elements like these, even without me placing titles or doing a voiceover for the footage, move it out of the world of what I would consider to be conventional "ethnographic film."

The space of the interview offered a very different dynamic than the filming at Mampong. Due to the fact that I had only one camera and a fixed (non-zooming) lens, my framing choices were severely limited: static two-shots of both M.anifest and Nketia. I would not only be running camera and sound, but also asking questions over the course of an interview conversation.

Figure 3-11

While I explore the content of those conversations more in the next chapter, there was a fascinating moment after the second interview with the two of them. We conducted the interview in Nketia's study, which is one corner of the house, just off the living room. Over the course of the interview, Nketia said that he wanted to play an audio recording for us to hear; the CD player was in the living room, so we went out there. I took the camera off the tripod and hand-held it as Nketia talked about the piece.

Figure 3-12

Whereas the first interview ended with a distinct sense of finality (we needed to end it to go to a meeting at a radio station), it was a different case with the second interview. As I continued to roll on grandfather and grandson listening to the recording, I witnessed a kind of spatial change, from an interview space to just a kind of "hanging out" space. This was completed by M.anifest getting on his phone, texting and tweeting, and then working on the set list for the show at Citizen Kofi.

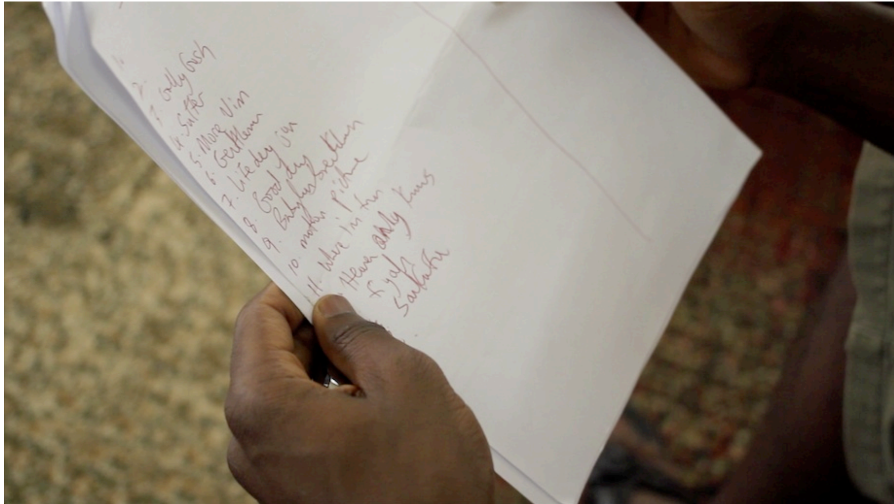

Figure 3-13

Witnessing this transition brought a different light to the well-known artificiality of the interview space in documentary film. For Bill Nichols, interviews looked at from the side of production, are an "overdetermined structure," a form of "hierarchical discourse deriving from the unequal distribution of power, as in the confessional and the interrogation."[19] Be it in the authority of the "talking head" or the authority of the editor who can, in some cases, make a person say whatever the editor would like, the interview performs a kind of knowledge production that places it outside of normal conversation and can highlight the uneven power distribution in documentary film production. While in some ways these conceptions are at work in my interview with M.anifest and Nketia (they are privileged figures in the landscape of the documentary, and I have the editorial choice of what to take from their words in the editing room), there are key differences when looked at from the production side of things.[20]

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[19] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 50, 47.
[20] Furthermore, all interviews are not created equal. As Jonathan Kahana notes, *Interviews with My Lai Veterans* was a powerful way for those who participated in the My

I traveled with minimal gear to Ghana, meaning no lights or light stands, only a short boom pole, camera, tripod, and audio recorder for interviews. Due to this, there was none of the overwhelming sense of an interview "space" as is common in many conventional documentaries, with the hot lights blazing down, the darkened room beyond set lights, keys in the refrigerator, and the like.[21] Rather, it was the space of interaction between M.anifest and Nketia that made it an interview, as well as the fact that we agreed, consciously and unconsciously, to consider this an "interview space" for my documentary. Secondly, M.anifest was the one doing the interviewing, and though he and I discussed questions and topics beforehand, it was he who asked questions before I did, as the conversation seemed to come to a close. Finally, given the lack of time and busy schedules of all three of us, the creation of this space was necessary to have the kind of conversations and interactions we hoped would occur during our trip. Nketia, who was 89 at the time of the trip, kept just as busy of a schedule, and was making a substantial number of media appearances in conjunction with an event held in his honor at the National Theatre. These reasons all contributed to making the interviews of *We Rock Long Distance* feel different than conventional

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Lai Massacre to share a different narrative than the one being put forth by the American government. Similarly, in *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*, the words of a number of women who worked in the factories during World War II are juxtaposed with American propaganda, revealing very different narratives about women in America, both during but especially after the war. See Joseph Strick, *Interviews with My Lai* Veterans (Chicago: Films, Inc., 1970) and Connie Field and Lola Weixel, *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (New York: Clarity Films, 1980). See also Jonathan Kahana, *Intelligence Work: The Politics of American Documentary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). For more on the actual practice of the interview, see Leger Grindon, "Q&A: Poetics of the Documentary Film Interview," *The Velvet Light Trap* 60 (Fall 2007): 4-12.

[21] Placing the director's keys in the interviewee's refrigerator, which has been turned off to make the room quieter, is a way to make sure that the refrigerator gets turned back on after the shoot is complete.

interviews in documentary films. While not attempting to sidestep questions of hierarchy and power, experiences with interviews such as these expand their role and meaning in the actual production of a documentary film.

These examples show the range filmmaking styles necessary for the production of *We Rock Long* Distance, yet there are still elements in the overall life of a the project. In the next section of the chapter, I look at the music video for "Suffer," from pre-production (different ideas for the video) all the way to reception, and this will first necessitate some discussion about a contemporary facet of making media, that of the "digital diasporas" that much of M.anifest's music and videos travel upon. After discussing the relationship between new media and diasporas generally, as well as M.anifest's own participation in social networks like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, I detail the multiple and uneven thread of production, post-production, and reception for "Suffer."

“New media” is a notoriously broad term, both an idea that helps to temporally define pieces of cultural expression (all media are “new” when they are first brought about), but at the same time also a specific, historically located category of expression that has to do with digitally-based creation that constitute the most recent media form, be it digital images, videos, music, or text that are accessed on a computer-based interface, be it in desktop, laptop, tablet, or smartphone form. As part of a larger transformation of media itself through the web, new media is also related to the idea of “Web 2.0,” which has changed, in Mark B. N. Hansen’s words, “the function of computational media from storage to

production," resulting in the ubiquity of videos on YouTube and photos on Flickr, among many other sites. Further, Hansen argues, media has assumed a new vocation, mediating "the situation of the user in the regime of networked computation," or, in other words, facilitating interactions with other people on computer networks.[22] I draw on all of these aspects of new media in discussing the digital networks of M.anifest's diasporic hip-hop: the shift from storage to production in new media (as represented by various YouTube videos) and how they help to connect not only members of a diaspora, but beyond it to a possibly worldwide network of fans that he has built up—and continues to build—since he released his first album in 2007.

In discussing the relationship between digital media (or new media) and diaspora, Olga Bailey writes that such digital networks are "important in the process of articulating diasporic groups as these media facilitate connectivity across boundaries in an 'individualized networking.'[23] While those living in diaspora have utilized different forms of media to stay in touch with each other, it is the idea of "individualized networking," how these multifaceted and divergent networks can coalesce around a single figure that seems especially apt to describe M.anifest's own relationship to new media and social networking. Before I turn to that, however, I should first articulate the different networks that M.anifest's music and other media (especially music videos) travel along.

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[22] Mark B. N. Hansen, "New Media," *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, edited by W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 181.
[23] Olga G. Bailey, "Reconfiguring Diasporic-Ethnic Identities: The Web as Technology of Representation and Resistance," *Online Territories: Globalization, Mediated Practice, and Social Space*, edited by Miyase Christensen, André Jansson, and Christian Christensen (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 260.

There are a number of easily identified "nodes" in M.anifest's diasporic network. First of all would be the key sites in M.anifest's own life, that being Minnesota and Ghana itself. Secondly would be the other key nodes of the Ghanaian Diaspora, including Chicago, New York, Washington D.C., Cincinnati, and Toronto. There is a third layer, however, the nodes crated by M.anifest's touring, which has taken him to places like France and Spain, outside of the normative Ghanaian diaspora. This could be considered the "real" network of diaspora, the circuits of physical travel and belonging that are centers of both the Ghanaian diaspora and M.anifest's own network of family, friends, and fans. "Virtual" networks would be those that create spaces of connection online; for M.anifest these would be social networking sites Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. These virtual networks build upon and expand these physical networks, however. Of course, online, M.anifest can connect with many more people in different locations his music travels to, whether it is just the music (in CD or mp3 form) or through a tour, without being in the conventional "circuit" of the Ghanaian (or wider African) diaspora.

The rise of new media, however, has blurred the lines between "real" and "virtual" networks. First, the virtual networks that M.anifest operates on, those of web sites and services like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and the like, do not supplant the previous "real" or "physical" networks are a means of connection by members of a diaspora. Rather, they build on them, traveling through established paths while at the same time branching out in new directions. Secondly, "virtual" networks are in themselves physical networks, albeit of a different nature. All of

the data that M.anifest posts on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, or other sites both requires hardware and the physical infrastructure (wiring, servers, and the like) to get online into the "virtual" network. Not only this, but all of the data gets stored *somewhere*, be it on Google's servers (in the case of YouTube), Facebook's servers (as was evidenced by the controversy over their introduction of the TimeLine feature, which revealed that Facebook had kept nearly *all* of the data users had posted), and the servers of Twitter, which are being archived by the Library of Congress. Finally, the supposedly "virtual" networks of the internet have become so integrated into so-called "real life" that it almost seems impossible to conceive of one without the other.

These multiple strands of knowledge and experience come together in the idea of a "digital diaspora," which Michael S. Laguerre broadly defines as

> an immigrant group or descendant of an immigrant population that uses IT [internet technology] connectivity to participate in virtual networks of contacts for a variety of political, economic, social, religious, and communicational purposes that, for the most part, may concern either the homeland, the host land, or both, including its own trajectory abroad.[24]

M.anifest's digital diaspora, comprised of both new media and social networking sites, is absolutely crucial to his musical career and are used on a daily basis. These include the most popular platforms, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as well as SoundCloud, a service for sharing (and downloading) music directly from artists. He has also reflected trends in social networking sites over the past five

[24] Michael Laguerre, "Digital Diaspora: Definition and Models," *Diasporas in the New Media Age: Identity, Politics, and Community*, edited by Andoni Alonson and Pedro J. Olarzabal (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2010), 50.

years, beginning with MySpace and then moving on to Twitter and Facebook.[25] A key to M.anifest's extensive use of these technologies is that it provides greater *interaction* with his fans, spread out around the world. While M.anifest does have a website, it is not interactive like Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube.

M.anifest has nearly 20,000 "Fans" on his Facebook page, shown here.

Figure 3-14

He posts things every one to two days, and these usually consist of questions for fans, photos and videos, and announcements that songs and albums are available for download or purchase. Like his music, they often mix the languages of English, Twi, and Ghanaian pidgin. As opposed to Facebook, M.anifest is *very* active on Twitter.

[25] These concepts have been vital to *We Rock Long Distance* ever since the project began in 2007. I found each of the three artists through MySpace to schedule a first interview, when it was still the most active social networking site, and the most crucial site for connecting artist to audience.

Figure 3-15

He has nearly 19000 followers, and has tweeted more than 19,500 times since he opened his account a few years ago. In fact, he was named by the *City Pages* as someone music fans in Twin Cities should follow on Twitter.[26] His tweets are about a range of subjects, including posting photos of things, Retweets of other things on Twitter (or what people have said about him), announcements, links to videos or music to view or download, and general observations on what's happening around him. Much like Facebook, he can also participate in conversations with other people through Twitter.

While these are important platforms for M.anifest to connect through his digital diasporas, I want to focus on the more explicitly visual element of YouTube and how it both articulates, and circulates through M.anifest's digital diaspora. At the time of this writing, M.anifest has nearly 40 videos on his YouTube channel. There are a number of different types of videos, including

[26] Andrea Swensson, "Top 10 local music nerds to follow on Twitter Aug. 18 2010 http://blogs.citypages.com/gimmenoise/2010/08/top_10_local_mu.php (Accessed 24 March 2012).

music videos, live performances, album announcements, and “behind the scenes” clips of pre- or post-performance moments. Collectively these videos have had over 280,000 views. Some of the videos I’ve shot and edited of M.anifest are on his channel, while some of them, especially the ones directly pertaining to *We Rock Long Distance*, are on my channel.

One of the few videos on *both* our channels is “Visualize Close,” the performance from the Fine Line that is the source for the “Nigga from Ghana” quotation. A comparison of the viewing statistics from each video articulates the different networks we operate in. The video on my channel has been viewed just over 50 times, and the geographic distribution is mostly concentrated in the United States.

Figure 3-16

However, when looking at the statistics for the video on M.anifest’s channel, there is a different picture. While the video has received more views on M.anifest’s channel (over 700 times), the real difference is in the geographic distribution, with the vast majority of views (the dark green shaded area) is in Ghana.

Figure 3-17

These two maps show the different articulations of our respective backgrounds, but also the simultaneously separate, yet overlapping networks each of us circulate our media through. But how does the meaning of this circulation shift when M.anifest and I physically cross the distances between the sites of his diasporic networks, digital or otherwise? Not just making phone calls, tweeting, or sending Facebook messages, but getting on a plane and flying to Ghana and making media there to circulate throughout his digital diasporic networks.

Just after our first week in Ghana, M.anifest decided to write and record a song to send out to his digital diasporic network of fans, friends, family, and other followers. The song, “Live From Ghana,” is remarkable less for its musical or lyrical content and more for the place where it was recorded: the living room of the house in which M.anifest grew up in Madina. M.anifest wrote the chorus and verses to the song in just a couple of days. The beat came from Ghanaian

producer DJ Juls, who has worked with a number of hip-hop and hiplife artists, and has since remixed a number of M.anifest's songs.

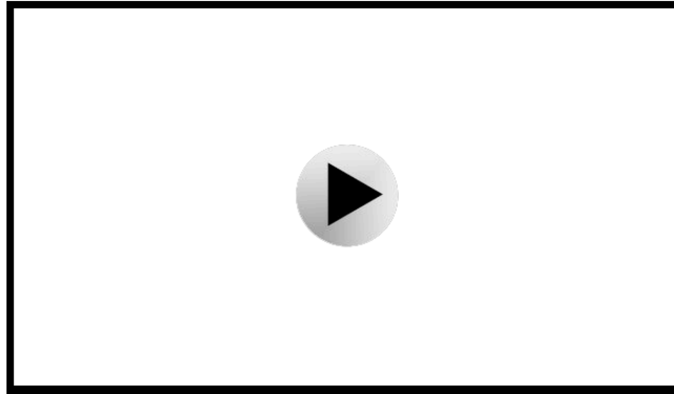


Figure 3-18

Like most other things we tried to do in Ghana, it required some inventiveness and some patience. We clamped a vocal microphone onto my tripod, and M.anifest balanced my laptop (from which he read the lyrics) on his knee. Before we could record, we had to ask a little girl down the road to stop drumming on a sign, because with all the open windows, it would surely make it onto the track itself. And then, just as we both were ready to hit record—M.anifest on the computer, me on my camera—a large water truck pulled up to refill the reservoir that supplied the house with water. (Madina does not have running water from the city of Accra, so houses must individually install running-water systems.) We quickly turned the fan back on—another thing that had to be quieted for the recording—to give us some relief from the heat, and waited for the chugging of the hoses to finish. Finally, when they had left, we turned the fan off and got to work.

It took about an hour and a half to record the two verses, a chorus (which was recorded once and repeated after each verse), double-tracking (M.anifest echoed certain words in each verse), and then the "adlibs," the collection of additional verbal material that rounds out most hip-hop songs, like sound effects and shout-outs. M.anifest prominently shouts out his "bredren" in Ghana at the end of the song, including DJ Juls, PY, Senam, DJ Black, DJ Bootie Brown, MA (all friends or fixtures in the hip-hop/hiplife scene in Ghana), and myself, along with a "big up to all my Madina boys" and the sound of the rooster that we heard all day, every day.

A few days earlier, I created a "recap" video from footage of our first week in Ghana, and we uploaded them together at an internet café. Here's the minute-long video, which consisted mostly of clips of various places and people we met, including some well-known hip-hop and hiplife artists (Reggie Rockstone, Kochoko, MA, and others). The name of the beat Juls sent M.anifest was named "Akwaaba," which in Twi means "welcome," and it seemed too good of an opportunity not to use it for the video, especially since it's the same beat used in "Live From Ghana."

Figure 3-19

We posted the video and song to both of our respective Twitter feeds and Facebook pages, as well as sending it out to our respective media lists. In the matter of a few days, a number of sites based around the world posted the video and song, which M.anifest made available as a free download. Some of these included Museke and Natty Shocks (both based in Ghana); GhanaMixtapes.com (run by a Ghanaian living in Toronto); Global Grind and Rock the Dub (New York and New Jersey, respectively); and the Twin Cities' own *City Pages* music blog, "Gimme Noise." Neither the video nor the song has had much of a life beyond our trip to Ghana. The video received just under 300 views and, like "Visualize Close," it was predominantly viewed in Ghana. It's been a very different story for another piece of media created while we were in Ghana, the music video for M.anifest's song "Suffer," which has received many, many more views and precipitated a much wider variety of reactions.

Both M.anifest and I were excited to shoot at least one music video during our month in Ghana. Regardless of which song would be chosen, I knew there was a shot that I wanted to be the centerpiece of the video: a tracking shot following M.anifest through the New Road section of Madina. The camera would move backward at approximately the same rate M.anifest moves forward. While still keeping M.anifest in the center of the frame, it would allow the viewer to see the neighborhood he grew up in. There were, of course, many logistical obstacles to overcome. First, we needed a way to pull the camera that was stable enough not to generate camera movement. Second, we needed a *surface* smooth

enough to not generate camera movement. Finally, we needed a sound source to play the song for M.anifest to lip-sync to.

Overcoming these obstacles was not easy. There was a boombox in the house, but we had trouble finding D-batteries so we wouldn't need to plug it in (and severely restrict our mobility). There are very few paved roads in Madina. Three, to be precise. One is a main street of New Road, which was paved when a neighborhood resident became a Ghanaian MP; the paved road ends at the MP's house. The other two are partial roads that are less paved than smoothed down enough in sections to create the necessary stability for a tracking shot. One night, as we were driving back with M.anifest's mother, I learned that the following Tuesday was a national holiday in celebration of the Islamic holiday Eid al-Adha, meaning that M.anifest's mother would not have to go to work, meaning her SUV would be free. After getting her agreement, I figured out the shooting plan. We chose the three paved roads in the neighborhood, which happily coincided with the three verses of the songs, shooting one verse per road. We roughly did 3-5 takes of each verse per road. The sound system, of course, came from the SUV. M.anifest's friend PY drove, while I clambered into the back, camera on a tripod. M.anifest took a picture of me on his Blackberry, and I appropriately titled it "Scrunched Obruni."

Figure 3-20. Photo by M.anifest

It was important that things were not staged beyond the initial set up of the tracking shot. We did not ask or hire any locals to be in the background. Anything that happened was just daily life in the neighborhood. People came out to watch, and many of them knew and conversed with M.anifest as we reset for another take.

Once we got the pacing of both the SUV and M.anifest established, the first two verses went off basically without a hitch,

Figure 3-21

The third verse was the hardest to get, because of the heavy traffic on the road. We kept having to duck out of the way numerous times as cars went by, some not even slowing down. Much like the impromptu and unsolicited bike riding by in the first verse, a car proceeded to honk loudly right at the end of the third verse, exactly on beat to the word "suffer," on what turned out to be the final take of the shoot.

Figure 3-22

There was no time to edit the video for "Suffer" while in Ghana. I enlisted Six-Ton Productions, the video production crew run by M.anifest's manager, to help edit and finish the video. Given my lack of experience with music video (I had only done one to this point), and the fact that Six-Ton had done numerous videos, including one for M.anifest, I was hoping we could strike a balance between my own editing ideas and the types of cutting and effects that would fall in line with a more music video-based aesthetic.

The plan for the video came from my understanding and analysis of both the lyrics and music of the song. Unsurprisingly, given what I've discussed in this

dissertation, the lyrics of “Suffer” reflect M.anifest’s fluidity between multiple worlds (Ghana, Minnesota/America, and beyond) and fluency in multiple languages that go along with that (Twi, English, and Ghanaian pidgin).

The Ghanaian references include “gari soakings for breakfast,” a reference to cassava-based breakfast food; “kayoyos they suffer,” *kayoyos* being those whose job it is to serve as porters for those of higher economic standing in Ghana; and “Nananom Saman foc, Asase Yaa,” which is a reference to ancestors who have come before him. (In the video, he symbolically pours libation for them.) Also mentioned in pidgin, although not in name, are the Black Stars, Ghana’s national football team: “Tension dey my inside like Ghana dey play soccer,” roughly “I feel tension inside me like when Ghana plays soccer.” Of course, no one in Ghana calls football soccer, unless they’re speaking to an American, but his choice could be chalked up to the alliteration that “soccer” shares with “success,” which begins the next line of the verse, just as he did “Ghost of Kwame Nkrumah.”

While there aren’t any specific Minnesota references (as are common in many of M.anifest’s other songs), there are certainly numerous signifiers of American-ness. Whether it be using *The Vagina Monologues* to talk about relationship problems (pairing it with “chronicles of the penis”) or, perhaps even more surprisingly, a reference to the character Benjamin Linus on the television show *LOST*, a character who not only inflicts suffering on others, but also is the victim of Job-like trials throughout the later seasons of the show. Finally, there are numerous hip-hop references in the song, whether it be the often-

indecipherable Atlanta rapper Waka Flocka or, more indirectly, a reference to the Wu-Tang Clan's song "C.R.E.A.M.," which stands for "Cash Rules Everything Around Me." In a typical convention of so-called "conscious hip-hop," M.anifest uses it to announce his own motivations for doing hip-hop. "Give up my dreams for comfort and cream?/Thanks for the offer, but I'd rather (suffer)." Finally there are the more universal references that most pop songs, American or otherwise, traffic in: love and relationships, for starters, but also concerns for many people today, like getting a job or being stuck in traffic. The overall message of the song, announced not only in its title but in the final bar of the chorus, the duality that one cannot have joy without pain or, as M.anifest says, "what is the sun without rain."

Budo's instrumental for "Suffer" only bolsters the joyous feel of the song. The beat is built around a 4-bar intro, and then three repetitions of a 16-bar verse and an 8-bar chorus. The best way to describe the beat is "sunny," a mixture of the most upbeat soul and gospel music you can think of. Any instrumental lines not sampled were newly played by Budo for the beat. The musical bed Budo created is up-tempo, but still laid back, with a simple snare on 1 and 2 and a wide-ranging, yet still relaxed bass line moving through the verses and chorus to give it more variety. Harmonically, the song is in D-flat major, and the basic chord structure consists only of a movement between the I and IV chords (D-flat major and G-flat major), the famous "plagal cadence" (often known as the "Amen" cadence) that is used as a conclusion for much Christian music. This choice of chordal movement and the prominence of a Hammond B3-sounding organ

noodling slightly behind the beat only adds to the song's "gospel" feel. Above it all are so-called "chipmunk soul"[27] samples of "yeah" and "suffer," marking not only the 3rd and 4th bars of each four-bar pattern, but also the final word of the chorus. A synth line rises above the chorus, its somewhat jagged entrance eventually melding into the background chordal movements as M.anifest reaches the end of the chorus :"you'll never know joy unless you've had to suffer."

My vision for the "Suffer" video was very much in line with my analysis of the song: it should illustrate the multiple worlds in which M.anifest lives and his lyrics evoke, as well as the duality of emotions that form the song's emotional core. After agreeing to collaborate on the video with Six-Ton, I wrote up my ideas in an email and sent it around. Here are a few excerpts from that page-long description.

> *What's struck not only me about "Suffer," but also people here in Minnesota, in Ghana, and I'm sure elsewhere in the world, is how it connects on an everyday and emotional level. There are references that you need to be Ghanaian or familiar with Ghanaian life to get, there's things that resonate greater with those living in Minnesota/America, and then there's more universal concerns with love and relationships that most people, wherever they are from, can relate to on some level.*

I basically had two types of shots for the video: the first was the tracking shot through Madina, and a secondary list of shots serving as b-roll to illustrate the lyrics. I listed off a number of these in my email, whether it be pouring libations, Asamoah Gyan missing the penalty shot in the World Cup, gavels, Accra traffic and taxis, and many others. After sending this document around, I received a response from M.anifest. Short and sweet, he said "i want to keep the video

[27] This facet of hip-hop sampling, in which older soul recordings are digitally sped up like an Alvin and the Chipmunks record, was first started by the RZA, of the Wu-Tang Clan, though it achieved its greatest prominence in the beats of Kanye West.

Ghana. instead of trying to make it a juxtaposition piece." After further discussions, it became clear that what was motivating M.anifest's desire for the piece to only feature Ghana (just one of the worlds represented in the song), was that it could capitalize on (and further build) his presence in Ghana, which really began to happen for the first time during our trip.

Here is the final video:

Figure 3-23

While I disagreed with some of the choices the editors made (things like placing the shot of the children with the word "villagers"), I want to focus here instead on the video's reception at various points within M.anifest's digital diasporic network, reception of a video shot in Ghana, targeted to Ghana, but circulating to places far beyond Ghana.

As of this writing, "Suffer" has been viewed more than 50,000 times on YouTube and, just like the much less viewed video with which I started this dissertation, the country shaded darkest green on the YouTube Insight map in Ghana.

This video is most popular in:

Figure 3-24

It has received about 90 comments, many of them congratulations on the video, some advertising upcoming performances. Even though this is a relatively small number of comments, they represent the range of his global audience. A number of comments seem to originate in America (shouting out Rhymesayers, the Minnesota hip-hop label, even though M.anifest is not on their roster), as well as compliments from Germany and France. The latter comment says he/she saw him two days previously in Marseille, and that “I don’t usually like rap music but i found him really good!” There were a few comments pertaining directly to Ghana. One user said “This video couldn’t be more reminiscend [sic] of Ghana. So so nice.” Another wrote “sick tune mehn...i know where this video was shot!” Finally, another user wrote “M.anifest, Madina we dey 4 u . . .” an answer to the last message seen on the video, “Madina, I dey for U.”

I saw him 2 days ago in Marseille. I don't usually like rap music but i found him really good!

wevegotafileonyou 2 months ago

M.anifest MADINA we dey 4 u ..
thugliving4life 8 months ago

Figure 3-25

"Suffer" was nominated for two awards, in both places M.anifest lives. First, it received a nomination for "Best Video" at the 4Syte Music Video Awards, held annually in Ghana. While neither of us could be in Ghana for the awards, M.anifest held an online "contest" to pick someone to represent him at the Awards were he to win. Unfortunately, it didn't win that person didn't have the chance to get up there and represent. The other place "Suffer" was nominated was for "Best Video" at the Twin Cities Hip-Hop Awards. Like the 4Syte Awards, "Suffer" didn't win, losing out to Absent's song "Money Can't Buy Time."

Not only was it watched on YouTube in Ghana, but it also reached audiences beyond a computer. From the 4Syte TV awards, I turn to other receptions of people in Accra, and specifically those I met while I was there. M.anifest's mother loved the video because, in her son's words, "she knew every place it was shot." There was a much more complicated, and somewhat troubling reaction, that I encountered when I returned to Ghana in 2011. There is a brief shot of a woman named Ama and her children in "Suffer." More specifically, Ama appears once, while her children are seen numerous times dancing in the video. I met all three of them during my first walk with M.anifest through Madina. When I met them, they asked me to take a picture of them, and I obliged, as I always did when asked.

In preparation for the trip in 2011, I had a number of these photos

professionally printed on materials that could better withstand the intense heat and humidity of Ghana. One of these photos was of Ama and her children. I went to her shop in Madina every day to give her the picture, and each day she wasn't there. Finally, near the end of the trip, I met her and gave her the photo. She took it with a smile, but I could tell there was some ambivalence in her face.

"My friend called me one night and said I was on TV," she said.

Immediately, I knew she was referring to the "Suffer" video.

"I didn't know that was going to happen," she continued.

I felt at somewhat of a loss to explain. While she was fine with me filming her back on that specific evening, and I told her that it would be for a documentary about M.anifest, neither she nor I knew at that point that she'd find herself in a music video on Ghanaian television. I'm confident that she wasn't too strongly upset with me, but I couldn't help but feel that in some way I perpetuated something I've based much of my own artistic practice against, the exploitation of so-called "third world" subjects by European and American media.

Not every video, of course, will be received in as complicated and uneven ways as "Suffer." But the production, post-production, and reception of "Suffer" not only reveal the different "worlds" M.anifest and I operate in (a more consent-focused documentary film world vs. the looser world of music video) even as we collaborate on a project, but also our own goals and expectations for the media we create, sometimes in alignment, and sometimes not. More generally, examining the dynamics of diasporic media circulation, viewed as one type of transcultural cinema," through its entire creative process allows for greater insight

into the lived experience both of that media itself, but also the people involved in making and viewing it, and, especially, the very different circumstances around the world in which it’s received.

Chapter 4:
"Listen To My Rap": M.anifest and the Creative Legacy of J. H. Kwabena Nketia

But this is destiny, definitely passed on by my grandpa.
M.anifest – "Black Star"

"My granddad is an ethnomusicologist."

That's how M.anifest introduced his relationship to J.H. Kwabena Nketia when I first met him in Minneapolis back in the summer of 2007. Here is an audio clip of that moment:

Figure 4-1

Since then, this "story to tell my ethnomusicology friends" has evolved into its own dimension of *We Rock Long Distance*, as I explore the similarities and differences between these two men from very different generations of Ghana's music and history.

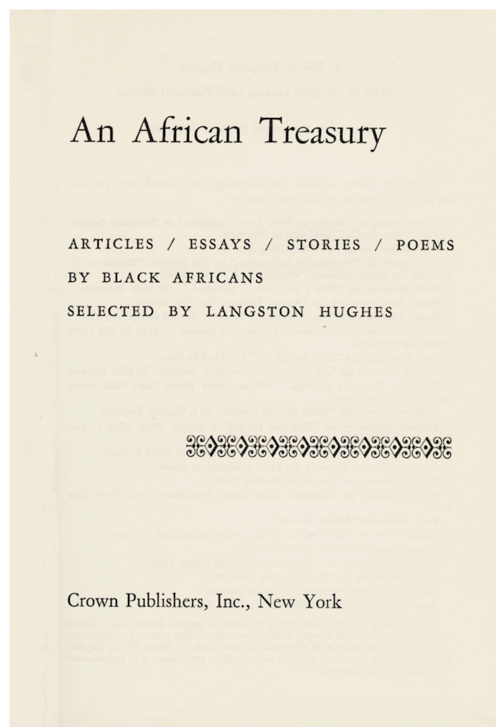
The life of J. H. Kwabena Nketia could fill multiple dissertations, so I will only be able to give a cursory biography.[1] He was born in 1921 in Mampong, in

[1] This biographical sketch is drawn from a number of sources about Nketia's life, but primarily Eric Akrofi, *Sharing Knowledge and Experience: A Profile of Kwabena Nketia* (Accra: Afram Publications, 2003) and J. H. Kwabena Nketia and Jacqueline Cogdell

the Ashanti region of Ghana to non-literate parents. He learned music as a child at Mampong Asante Presbyterian Junior School, and then trained in music and as a teacher at the Presbyterian Training College in Akropong. His first scholarly work, *Akanfɔ Nnwom Bi*, was a collection of Adowa songs he transcribed from his grandmother; this drew the attention of the linguistics scholar Ida Ward, who arranged for him to receive a Commonwealth Scholarship to study in England, during the midst of World War II. He studied at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and the Trinity College of Music, receiving a number of degrees in the process. He then went back to Ghana to teach at the University of the Gold Coast (which would become the University of Ghana at Legon) in the Sociology department. A few years later, in 1958, Nketia met Robert July, a representative at the Rockefeller Foundation, who arranged a tour of the United States for Nketia. He traveled to the US and studied composition with Henry Cowell at Columbia University, with other composers at Julliard, met Melville Herskovits in Chicago (where he was also interviewed on Studs Terkel's radio show), and met Mantle Hood at UCLA's Ethnomusicology department. He would eventually split his time teaching between UCLA and the University of Ghana, where he founded not only the Institute of African Studies, but also the International Center for African Music and Dance (ICAMD). He would then teach at the University of Pittsburgh, with visiting professor positions at the University of Kansas and Harvard, before retiring.

DjeDje, *Oral History with J. H. Kwabena Nketia* (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles, 2002).

Nketia has composed poetry, plays, and music for a variety of instrumental ensembles, and has published numerous books and essays, most notably his textbook the *Music of Africa*, which is the first textbook many students of African music read, and an explication on Akan poetry in Langston Hughes' collection *An African Treasury*.[2] He also has an important place in the development of Maya Angelou's life and career: it was Nketia who gave Angelou her first job when she traveled to Ghana in 1961. As Angelou recounts in *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, she was introduced to Nketia by the important playwright and dramatist Efua Sutherland.



An African Treasury

ARTICLES / ESSAYS / STORIES / POEMS
BY BLACK AFRICANS
SELECTED BY LANGSTON HUGHES

Crown Publishers, Inc., New York

Figure 4-2

[2] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974) and J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "Akan Poetry," in Langston Hughes, *An African Treasury: Articles, Essays, Stories, Poems by Black Africans* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1960), 102-109.

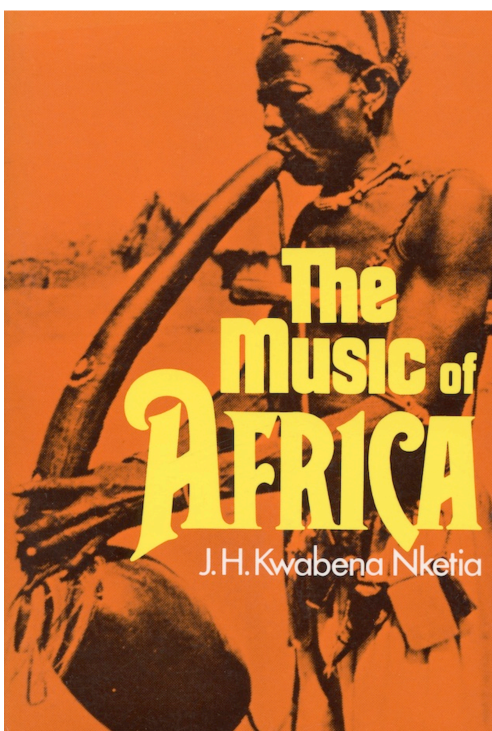


Figure 4-3

> Professor J.H. Nketia, one of Ghana's leading scholars, was so unpretentious as to be unsettling. He listened with patience to Efua, then asked me "Can you type?" When I said only a little, but that I could file and write, he gathered his chin in a stubby brown hand and smiled. "Can you start on Monday?" He told me I would be paid on the Ghanaian scale and he would arrange for me to get a small car. I knew that the proferred job spoke more of his own compassion and his affection for Efua than of a need for my services."[3]

When M.anifest and I were in Ghana in 2010, it was clear that Nketia's personality and warmth had not changed since he met Angelou more than a half century earlier. I was surprised, though, that Nketia kept as busy of a schedule as we did, which included giving and attending lectures, consulting on younger scholars' projects, and continuing to write and compose. Nketia turned 91 in 2012, and was the focus of a great many celebrations, not only in Ghana but

[3] Maya Angelou, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (New York: Vintage, 1986), 17.

around the world. His international travel schedule would make someone half his age tired: in 2011 alone he traveled to Uruguay, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and numerous places in the United States.

It was one of these trips that gave me the opportunity to first explore the relationship between grandfather and grandson, albeit in a highly unlikely place: Leavenworth, Washington, a faux-Bavarian town nestled in the Cascade Mountains. Nketia was there for the Sankusem African Music and Dance Festival, so M.anifest and I flew out to Washington to join him. He had a surprise waiting for us, however.

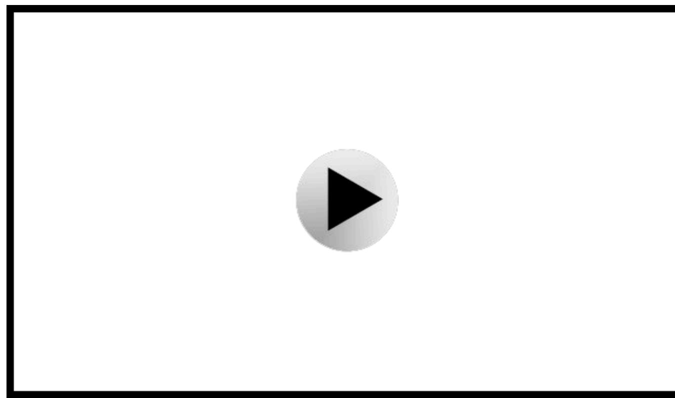


Figure 4-4

What Nketia wanted us to listen to was his reading of a strikingly rap-like excerpt from a set of three narrative poems entitled *Akwansosem Bi*, or *Stories from the Journey*, written while he was a student in London in the 1940s.[4] He modeled these poems on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and, as he says, they were his "African version," written in his native language of Twi. The excerpt he read is from the book's first poem, "Nipa ne Nipa," or "Human is Human," about a

[4] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Akwansosem Bi* (Legon: Institute of African Studies, 1967). Nketia wrote the poems in the 1940s, though they were published later.

man whose "numerous roamings" have landed him into trouble. Multiple times during the first poem, the protagonist is the victim of horrendous beatings at the hands of people suspicious of this outsider in their midst. The section that Nketia read in Leavenworth is just one of those moments.

Metɛn m'aso mente hweehwee
Sɛ asoamfoɔ no nan ase, ne
Nnomaannomaa su nko ara.
Me ho mmoa firii aseɛ sɔree.
Meto bɔtɔ mu, Asekammoa Kofi,
Sɛɛ ɔne me na ɛretu kwan yi.
Brɛbrɛ meyii no firii bɔtɔ mu
De suanee boa no ho hɔ ara.

Asoamfoɔ se: ɛhe ne ha?
Wopɛ wo ti anaa wopɛ wo ba?
Na wɔwae sotorɔ m'asom, bam!
Na mema no gyegye fua yam, bim!
Na ɛtutu no tutu no, ɛfam, birim!
Na mema no keka fua asom, hoa!
Na ɔdane ne ho m'akyiri, tɛm!
Ofua reto me kɛsɛ: kua,
Na ofua rehu m'akyi gya: hua!
Wanya akranteɛ na ɔnhu n'akyi:
Manya duwuiɛ, mɛbu mu gyen!

Wontee da a, bisa ma yɛmmɔ wo.
Bɔfoɔ kɔyɛ ha ma ha yɛ no.
Kikirikikiri-bra-ma-yɛnsa,
Ɛdɔm firi he firi he o, wora!
Sibire Yaw, mawie ne sa.
Ɛnneɛ fufuo mu hɔ wɔto gu me so,
Di me mpammorɔ sɛdeɛ wɔpɛ:
Nnɔmanneɛ, ɔse: me nsa aka wo—
Wɔresekyere me, wɔrewɔbere me,
Wɔresebere me, wɔrekyekyere me,
Wɔreyeyere me, wɔrehɔtere me,
Wɔretwetwe me, wɔretiti me,
Onipa dasani nni amia sa!
Me tiri na ɛyɛ—wɔammɔ me fɛ.

8

Figure 4-5

A rough translation reads:

> *I actually suffered in their hands.*
> *They beat me up, some strangled me, and some tied me;*
> *Some stretched me, some tickled me, and some pulled me here and there.*

So, this is really what it means to be human![5]

Neither M.anifest nor I knew about *Akwansosem Bi* or any of Nketia's other poetic works, such as his collection *Anwonsem* or "woven words," (a word he invented in order to describe the work) or the poetry he wrote as part of his musical compositions, like the *Sankudwom*, or solo songs. This realization of such an incredible sonic similarity led us to not only further explore the musical and historical significance of the relationship between these two men. I filmed two conversations between them in Washington, and during one of these, M.anifest did some of his own rap for his grandfather.

Figure 4-6

The next step, then, was to answer the question, "What does it mean to listen to *Nketia's* rap?"

[5] My thanks to DeRoy Andrews for the translation. At the time this video was edited, part of a fundraising trailer for the trip to Ghana, we did not have the translation, and made the decision to have the visual element of the language as subtitles. Later, when we understood what Nketia's poem actually meant, I realized how much of an emotional contrast there was between Nketia's words and the moment he read them in Leavenworth. My sense is that Nketia chose to read this section not for its content, but rather its form, its rhyming pattern, that strongly resonates with M.anifest's own hip-hop. I made the choice to keep the subtitles as they were, given the difficult process of contextualization necessary to resolve the dissonance between the moment of joyous discovery pictured, and the much darker words that inspired the moment.

Four months after our trip to Leavenworth, M.anifest and I were in Accra to start answering this question. Over the course of four conversations, two between grandfather and grandson, and two between Nketia and myself, I discovered not only striking parallels, but also very real differences between the two men in terms of language, poetic and compositional style, subject matter, and creative process.

Both men traveled abroad for college (Nketia to London, M.anifest to Macalester College in St. Paul) at around the same time in their lives, their mid-20s. Further, both wrote poems and/or music about being away from home, while they *were* away from home, giving their work not only a characteristic of nostalgia and longing, but also a more cosmopolitan stance from which to write. It should be noted, of course, that M.anifest's music is much more overtly cosmopolitan, given the inherently diasporic character of his, and all, hip-hop.

Another biographical similarity is that both learned about music and poetry from their grandparents. As I mentioned earlier, Nketia went to his grandmother in Asante Mampong to transcribe *adowa* songs, songs that would become the basis of his first book. At an even younger age, however, Nketia learned about poetry from the *obrafour*, the executioner, in the Asantehene's court. Not only did he show the young Nketia his "tools of the trade," as it were, but also showed him the highly complex poetry the obrafour is charged with memorizing and reciting.

M.anifest, of course, is now learning from his own grandfather, but people may find it surprising that it has taken him this long, given that they grew up in the same house. As M.anifest told his grandfather in Leavenworth, "you were more grandpa than Professor," that while he knew the importance of his grandfather, his proximity actually *lessened* the musical influence his grandfather might have had. Secondly, M.anifest was very candid that given his grandfather's status, it was important for him to build his own musical identity, so as not to be seen as riding the coattails of his grandfather. M.anifest had no musical training and, as he told me in an interview, "my education of music came through hip-hop," whether it be listening to cassettes of Naughty By Nature as a kid in Madina or his informal, yet still in-depth study of hip-hop as a student and concert organizer at Macalester.

M.anifest might not have gleaned musical knowledge from his grandfather, but there certainly were advantages to living in close proximity to an African music scholar. One such advantage was that there were numerous tapes in Nketia's study, which the burgeoning rapper, in his early teens, would listen through to find blank spaces to record his own raps. Of course, since he would have to listen to the music to search for those blank spaces, there was bound to be some exposure, if unintended, to many different types of music from throughout the world. Blitz the Ambassador, another diasporic Ghanaian MC, grew up with M.anifest in Madina, and they both have expressed fond memories

of digging through Nketia's records as they learned more about hip-hop and began to hone their skills.[6]

While learning more about these biographical parallels, an even greater number of stylistic parallels emerged. These become especially apparent when M.anifest and Nketia decided to focus their work on Nketia's *Sankudwom*, or solo songs, more than 20 songs composed between 1942 and 1971. Here's an example of one of those songs, perhaps his most famous one, "Yaanom Montie," which was used as the theme for a literary program on the Ghana Broadcasting Company, titled "The Singing Net."[7]

Figure 4-7

[6] Blitz, who grew up in the Madina Estates neighborhood, made an appearance at Citizen Kofi before M.anifest took the stage, and told the story of digging through Nketia's records in Madina.
[7] Photo and audio courtesy of Audio Visual Archive, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana.

Figure 4-8

On a general stylistic level, each works in music and poetry, and the relationship between the two. In terms of subject matter, each takes personal experiences of either themselves or those close to them, and transforms them into something that resonates with wider audiences. For instance, in Nketia's song "Maforo Patahunu," he bases it around a story of a colleague who went to ask a father for his daughter's hand in marriage, only to be rejected with the phrase "you are not the right bait." Nketia turns this experience into a song that features proverbs of love and rejection of love, which will resonate well beyond just this particular failed engagement. In M.anifest's song "Get Away" (from *The Birds and the Beats*), he talks about a fellow friend and immigrant (unnamed) locked up in the Hennepin County Jail, one of the main jails in Minneapolis, and facing deportation. While shout outs to friends locked up are common in hip-hop, this instance of a close friend on the wrong side of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement is something many listeners could relate to.

Despite these parallels, there are of course, plenty of divergences between the two men, both musical and generational. Even though each writes

from personal experience, M.anifest is much more openly autobiographical, keeping in line with hip-hop's conventions of representing where you come from, as I've discussed throughout this dissertation. In terms of language, Nketia's poem are written in a highly dense and sophisticated form of poetic Twi, while M.anifest raps in a mixture of English, Twi, and Ghanaian pidgin, often all in the same song. Further, there is a much closer *musical* relationship between the words and music in Nketia's songs. Given that Twi is a tonal language, much of the melody line for a particular song is derived from the tonal line of the language itself. While many scholars and fans of hip-hop place great emphasis on the interplay between the beat and an MC's lyrics, often they aren't written together. In M.anifest's case, he could have a beat for months, even years, before writing something to it. Finally, there is the music itself. In the solo songs, Nketia uses a piano for his music (albeit one that is imitating a variety of ritual and ceremonial drums), while M.anifest doesn't create his own music, but works in conjunction with producers who mostly use laptops, samplers, drum machines, and various live instruments as the tools of *their* trade. Furthermore, one of Nketia's critiques of hip-hop (and hiplife, the Ghanaian adaptation of hip-hop) is its reliance on a strict, 4/4 regular pattern, which contrasts sharply with the metrical fluidity of Nketia's own works.

The relationship between these two men, however, has much greater importance than simply recognizing their similarities and differences. Each man's use of the present in the past, through the lens of tradition and compositional processes of inspiration, imitation, quotation, sampling, and transformation, both

reflect and contribute to the circulation of multiple generations of music through the African Diaspora.

Tradition, as Thomas Spear writes, is "one of the most contentious words in African historiography, widely condemned for conveying a timeless, unchanging past and the evil twin of modernity." Despite this, he argues that "it remains critically important in understanding historical processes of social change and representation," specifically the ways in which people "assert present interests in terms of the past."[8] This relationship between past and present, as well as the usage of conceptions of the past in the present through music and poetry is the overarching theme of this chapter. After starting from a discussion of Nketia's own views of tradition, and how they are linked in his scholarly and creative work, I will contextualize these views in terms of two influential discourses of tradition, the invention of tradition, associated with Hobsbawm and Ranger, and the articulation of tradition, associated with James Clifford, before turning to the music of M.anifest and Nketia.

Nketia has engaged with ideas of tradition and practices deemed traditional throughout his entire career, be it as a scholar, a composer, an educator, or a shaper of cultural policy. When I interviewed him, alongside M.anifest, at the Sankusem festival in Leavenworth, the conversation eventually came around to ideas of tradition. Nketia's thoughts on the subject clearly show that he is not of the belief that tradition is timeless and unchanging.

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[8] Thomas Spear, "Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa," *Journal of African History* 44 (2003): 5-6.

> I look at tradition not as something that is complete, but as something that goes on. It is always there for renewal and continuation. So you evolve a new style, a new way of doing something and it has its roots in something done previously before. But it comes out new because of new things, new ways of expression. So I see these not as abrupt changes but as something that has some continuity because if you know the tradition, then you can see the link.

This viewpoint is not something that came to him later in his life and career. As far back as 1959, in the early stages of his scholarly career, Nketia wrote an article called "Changing Traditions of Folk Music in Ghana." The article focuses on the types of changes happening to what was considered "traditional" music and culture at that time of decolonization and independence in Ghana. "A study of our folk music traditions shows," he writes, "that what is happening now is not an entirely new phenomenon. It is but a continuation, though in an accentuated form, of an old process of change."[9] This "accentuation" is caused by the changes and new forms of music and culture brought about not only by colonialism, but also as Ghanaians worked for their independence and, as part of this, put forth alternative forms of cultural expression, based on pre-colonial ideas and practices, in the place of colonialism.

In addition to these two aspects of Nketia's view of tradition, the always evolving character of tradition as well as the proximity of the traditional and the contemporary, there is one final aspect of Nketia's idea of tradition, that of the recontextualization of traditional material. While this applies more immediately to his creative works, including poems and musical compositions, it can also be viewed as the *means* by which the evolution of tradition occurs. Again, this is

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[9] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "Changing Traditions of Folk Music in Ghana," *International Folk Music Journal* (1959): 31.

something that Nketia has expressed throughout his career, as he did in a speech in 1965 at the University of Ghana to welcome the Minister of Art and Culture to the Institute of African Studies.[10]

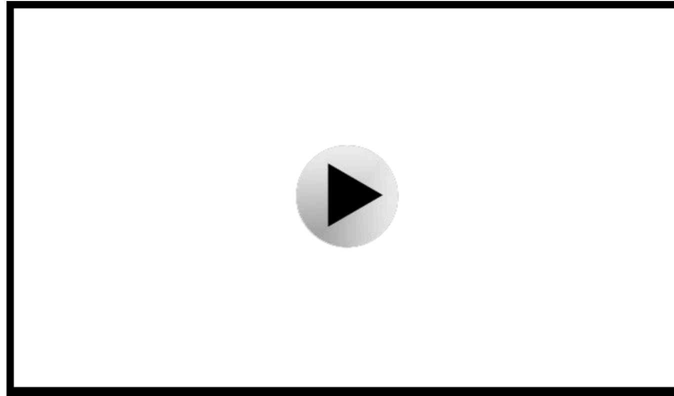

Figure 4-9

As he says, "We believe that African traditional arts should be recorded, they should be preserved, they should be studied. But we believe also that they should not merely be studied, recorded, preserved, but talked to as living arts." It is this "talking to" the living arts of tradition that brings Nketia closest to his grandson in terms of creativity and musical and poetic expression, as well as the discourses of the invention and articulation of tradition.

Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger, in their well-known volume about the "invention of tradition," define this idea as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which

[10] This recording is housed in, and used courtesy of, the Audio Visual Archive of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana.

automatically implies continuity with the past."[11] Conceived of in this way, the invention of tradition is very much about *ideology* and the power or powers that tradition holds over people, especially when the two authors tie it to the 19th century invention of the nation, and its "associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest. All these rest on exercises in social engineering which are often deliberate and always innovative, if only because historical novelty implies innovation."[12]

Here again is one of the main characteristics of tradition I've discussed: historical novelty, its contemporary character and effect on the present, rooted in a conception of the past. While I will discuss less specifically nationalistic and ideological conceptions of tradition in relation to the *creative* work of Nketia and M.anifest, it's important to point out that Nketia had a profoundly important role that very much fits this idea of an invented tradition.

[11] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
[12] Hobsbawm, "Introduction," 13.

Figure 4-10. Photo courtesy of Audio Visual Archive, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana.

Both leading up to and after Ghana's indepdenence from Great Britain in 1957, it was vital for Nkrumah to create a different type of nationalism, one that could give citizens of the new nation of Ghana greater value in their identity apart from their colonizers. Ideas of culture were vital to this endeavor. Nketia was instrumental in helping Nkrumah organize these elements of culture that represented "tradition" in post-independence Ghana. The two men are shown in the above photo. Reflecting on this period of his life in 1991, Nketia writes that "those who were actively involved in the cultural movement of this period embraced the arts as avenues for expressing the African cultural identity in a dramatic way." They did this in Ghana by bringing activities usually only practiced in rural domains, and consequently thought of as "traditional," into specifically urban independence celebrations. For instance, as Nketia writes, military

fanfares were replaced with traditional trumpets (like you heard earlier in the excerpt of the Obrafour), traditional drum ensembles while crowds awaited a head of state, and okyeame, or "linguists" of chiefs received the head of state and poured libation.[13]

While Nketia here writes generally about how arts and culture were utilized by the new government to create a new sense of nationalism around traditional rituals and practices, he himself played an active role in a key event in this process, the installation of Nkrumah as president in 1965. During a lecture in Washington, Nketia spoke of his work with the State Function Secretariat in planning this ceremony. The secretariat, "wanted a public announcement of Nkrumah as president when he was coming to the state house. So somewhere on the balcony, it was arranged that I have a crier's announcement, which I performed myself." After this, there were drum ensembles, trumpets, okyeames, and others (as Nketia lists above), as they ushered Nkrumah into the presidency as well as a new form of contemporary tradition.[14]

While this aspect of Nketia's relationship to tradition is important, I'm more interested in the ways Nketia used tradition in his own creative works, rather than

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[13] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "Music and Cultural Policy in Contemporary Africa," in *Music in the Dialogue of Cultures—Traditional Music and Cultural* Policy, edited by Max Peter Baumann (Wilhelmshaven: Florian Noetzels Verlag, 1991), 82.

[14] Lecture by Nketia, June 2010. There is much more research to be done in this area, and so these observations about Nketia and the "invention of tradition" in post-independence Ghana, and especially his relationship with Nkrumah and, indeed all of the heads of state following him, are just starting points. I'm sure that the whole story of this could fill an entire dissertation on his own. For more on Nkrumah and his shaping of nationalism through tradition, see, among others, Janet Hess, "Imagining Architecture: The Structure of Nationalism in Accra, Ghana," *Africa Today* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 35-58.

as an instrument of cultural policy and nationalism, and how that compares to his grandson. As I mentioned before, Nketia has a guiding principle of the "recontextualization of traditional material" for his works. Unlike many discourses of the "invention of tradition," this is much more individualistic and less wedded to ideas of nationalism and ideology. It meshes nicely with James Clifford's conception of the *articulation*, rather than *invention* of tradition. Building and expanding on the work of Stuart Hall, Clifford's view is that what constitutes tradition are "specific linkages of old and new, ours and theirs, secret and public, partial connections between complex socio-cultural wholes."[15] Conceived of in this way, "there is no eternal or natural shape" to the configuration of these linkages.[16] For Clifford, thinking of tradition this way does greater justice to the "messiness, the shifting power relations, the dialogical and historical open-endedness" of cultural change.[17] Both M.anifest and Nketia create these linkages of "old and new" in their art, though from a very different musical and compositional lineage. By looking at a number of examples from each man's work, I show how they use compositional practices, quotations, sampling, and other tools to shape the ideas, words, and sounds of the past into something contemporary, thereby bridging the generations of music that shaped them.

As I noted earlier, Nketia based his set of three narrative poems, *Akwansosem Bi* on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, yet this is not the only model

[15] James Clifford, *On the Edges of Anthropology (Interviews)*, (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 37.
[16] Clifford, *On the Edges*, 88.
[17] Ibid., 46.

that Nketia used for his poetry. In his collection *Anwonsem*, a term Nketia himself coined to represent "poetry" in the Twi language—it translates as "woven words"—Nketia uses a poetic meter from one of Horace’s Odes for one of the poems, as he told me in an interview after quoting lines from Ode 20 and 21 from the Horace’s First Book. These two Odes are in the Sapphicus Minor and Asclepiadean I (Minor) meters. While the tales of *Akwansosem Bi* are modeled on the more general form of the narrative poem of Chaucer, this poem takes a specific formal element of organization from a piece of poetry that, like Chaucer, stems from a very *different* conception of tradition, one rooted not only in Ancient Rome, but also in the halls of the University of London.[18]

Moving from poetry to music, another example of Nketia’s use of traditional material is in his *Bolga Sonata* for piano and violin, which he wrote in 1958. In the third movement of the *Sonata*, Nketia writes a violin line in imitation of the one-string fiddle, or *gonje*, of Northern Ghana, before he has the violin sweep through the entire range of the instrument, and the harmony moves through a more complex progression.[19]

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[18] I'm indebted to George Sheets for assisting me in helping to understand the Latin meters Nketia used in constructing his own poetry.

[19] The first audio example is from a recording held at the Institute of African Studies. The second audio clip is from a performance of Rachel Barton Pine I recorded during the Sankusem Festival in Leavenworth, WA.

Figure 4-11

In this recontextualization of tradition, he is *imitating*, or perhaps better, taking inspiration from the "traditional" instrument of the *gonje* and transforming the sound and technique of that instrument into something for the Western violin.

One of the most comprehensive examples of this technique in Nketia's body of creative work is his piano piece, *Volta Fantasy.* Nketia transforms different drum ensemble instruments, as well as specific *rhythmic patterns*, into the two hands of the piano. The *Volta Fantasy* is part of a collection of *Twelve Pedagogical Pieces*, examples of "African Pianism." Akin Euba writes that "African pianism" refers to

> a style of piano music which derives its characteristic idioms from the procedures of African percussion music as exemplified in bell patterns, drumming, xylophone, and mbira music. It may use simple or extended rhythmic motifs or the lyricism of traditional songs, and those of African popular music as the basis of its rhythmic phrases."[20]

These works are specifically meant to exhibit an "intercultural" compositional practice, simultaneously drawing upon African musical aspects for their rhythmic (and sometimes harmonic) bases, while setting them within Western instruments

[20] Quoted in J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *African Pianism: Twelve Pedagogical Pieces*, (Accra: Afram Publications, 1994), iii.

and common practice harmony. As I noted earlier, Nketia also used a similar compositional method for his *Sankudwom*, or solo songs.

Even in the title of the *Volta Fantasy* there is the "intercultural" combination, that of the Volta, the name of the largest lake in Ghana and the source of the country's electricity through hydropower dams, and the fantasy, a genre of music with roots in the Baroque and Classical eras, but perhaps best-known in the piano works of Chopin and Schumann. For these composers, the *Fantasy* offered a chance for creative exploration outside the conventional formal structures used in the 19th century.

A number of scholars, including George Dor and Laura Schmitz, have studied this piece and how Nketia quotes and transforms different elements of "traditional" music. The musical basis for the *Volta Fantasy* comes from the Anlo-Ewe group in the Volta region of Ghana, and specifically the Atsiagbekor war dance. Nketia utilizes both rhythmic and melodic quotations from the different instruments of the ensemble, as well as the dance's overall structure. The dance is in three parts, which Nketia mirrors in the structure of the *Fantasy*. One of the more obvious examples comes in measure 28, with an explicit quotation of the bell pattern, played on the double bell *gankogui*, from the second section of the dance, the *Adzo*. The bell pattern is the main organizing instrument for the rest of the ensemble, its metal timbre cutting through the rest of the drums.[21]

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[21] Loop from a field recording by Laura Schmitz.

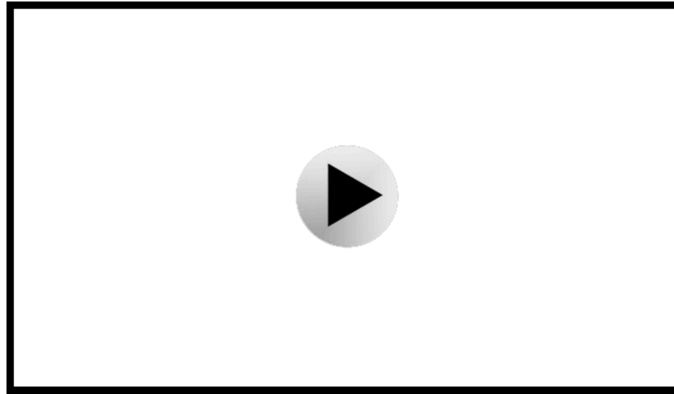

Figure 4-12

Throughout the rest of the piece, this rhythmic figure is transformed between different registers in the two hands, sometimes in counterpoint with a separate melodic line.

Figure 4-13

While this bell pattern is the most audibly obvious to the listener, given its placement at the start of the piece's second section, it's important to note that this is not the only quotation that Nketia uses and transforms in the piece, as he builds other instruments and their rhythms into *Volta Fantasy*'s overall melodic and rhythmic texture.[22]

[22] Piano performance by Solange Guillaume.

As I've shown in these three examples, Nketia has used a variety of practices and resources viewed as "traditional" in the composition of his own creative works. This recontextualization of traditional material, be it Horace or the *atsiagbekor* dance and drum ensemble, is an example of the past being transformed through its use in the present. I'll now turn to Nketia's grandson, and show how M.anifest does a very similar practice, yet one arrived at from a very different historical trajectory.

The use of digital sampling, the taking of a piece of pre-recorded music, be it long or short, and using it in a new song, has long been a fundamental element of hip-hop.[23] As I noted earlier, the actual creation of the instrumental portions are not from M.anifest himself, but rather the various producers he works with. So while M.anifest does not "sample" or quote in the exact same musical way that his grandfather does, he does practice this type of quotation and transformation in the *lyrical* domain. By lyrically sampling other artists, building upon the musical dimension of the delivery of his lyrics, M.anifest builds elements of his music in much the same way as that of his grandfather, taking

[23] For more on the aesthetics of sampling within hip-hop, see Joseph Schloss, *Making Beats;* Joanna Demers, "Sampling the 1970s in Hip-Hop," *Popular Music* 22, no. 1 (2003): 41-56; Robert Walser, "Rhythm, Rhyme, and Rhetoric in the Music of Public Enemy," *Ethnomusicology* 39, no. 2 (Spring – Summer 1995): 193-217; and Andrew Bartlett, "Airshafts, Loudspeakers, and the Hip-Hop Sample: Context and African American Musical Aesthetics," *African American Review* 28, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 639-652. For a cogent discussion of some of the responses and responsibilities of both artists and scholars in response to the hyper-litigious environment of digital sampling, see Wayne Marshall, "Giving up Hip-Hop's Firstborn: A Quest for the Real after the Death of Sampling," *Callaloo* 29, no. 3 (2006): 868-892.

the music of both his generation and previous generations, and re-working them into his own newly-created work.

I'll discuss a few of the *many* examples I could cite from M.anifest's work here, but I should stress that this technique of what I call "lyrical sampling" has long been part of hip-hop's history and is used by many artists. Yaasin Bey (Mos Def) might be its best-known practitioner, but artists as diverse as Lil' Wayne, Pharoahe Monch, and the best known MC from Minnesota, Slug from Atmosphere, have all used it.[24] For these artists and M.anifest himself, sometimes the quotation is literal, other times it's transformed. Regardless, the meaning of the quotation is changed because of the new context in which it is placed, and it serves as a connection across a generation as M.anifest, in these instances, speaks with audible quotation marks.

A relatively straightforward example of this comes from the song "Hubris," from *The Birds and the Beats.* M.anifest makes a number of references to other hip-hop artists and songs, one from Drake's song "Successful," which is a literal quotation, while the other is a transformation of a lyric from Jay-Z's "Can I Live."

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[24] Sometimes an MC will reference just a particular line, as in the Atmosphere song "Give Me," where Slug raps "I got my mind on my tummy and my tummy on my mind," a transformation of Snoop Dogg's "I got my mind on my money and my money on my mind," from "Gin and Juice." Slug flips the meaning of the words (while using the same intonation), from amassing and protecting wealth to finding enough food to eat. Other times, however, an artist can model an entire *song* after an earlier song, as Yaasin Bey (Mos Def) does in his re-telling of Slick Rick's "Children Story," on *Black Star*. In Bey's version, Slick Rick's tale of a young black teen sticking up people for money turns into a critique of hip-hop artists uncritically using hip-hop's past, told through one of the most recognizable *voices* of the past. For another discussion of lyrical sampling, see Wayne Marshall, "Follow Me Now: The Zigzagging Zunguzung Meme," online at http://wayneandwax.com/?p=137 [Accessed 17 October 2012].

Figure 4-14

In the case of the Drake sample, the overall theme of "Hubris," that of dealing with success and remaining humble, meshes nicely with the sentiments behind Drake's song about his own yearning for success. As for Jay-Z, the original lyric, "So I keep my open like CBS," is a creative invocation of the one eye of the CBS logo, though used to relate aspects of the life of a powerful drug dealer who has to sleep with one eye open. M.anifest, after announcing the album from which Jay-Z's song comes from (*Reasonable Doubt*), criticizes cable and chooses instead the greater knowledge to be found on public television, whose logo is a face with one eye showing.

Another lyrical sample is from "Public Service Announcement," a song from Jay-Z's *The Black Album*.[25] After a speech at the beginning of the track, Jay-Z enters with "Allow me to re-introduce myself, my name is Hov!" as the introduction to the first verse. M.anifest hasn't recorded this on any of his songs, but he has used it in live performances, though only "Allow me to re-introduce myself." While I often filmed him opening performances with this line in

[25] Of course, Just Blaze, the producer for "Public Service Announcement," sampled a number of songs to create the song for Jay-Z.

Minnesota, it took on a special resonance at the Citizen Kofi performance in Accra, as I noted earlier.

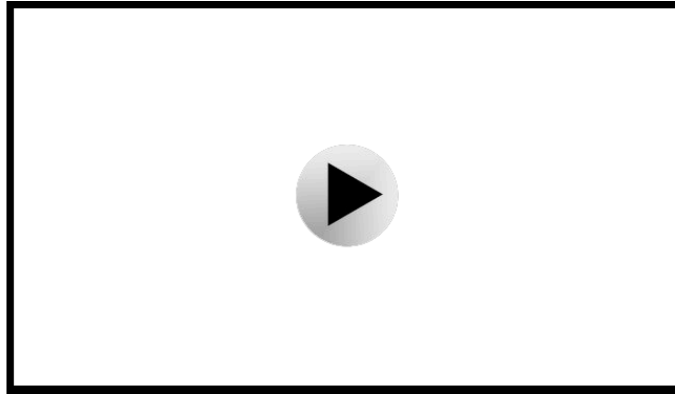

Figure 4-15

In a way, the performance *was* a reintroduction of himself to those in Accra, as many of his fans—and his family—in Ghana had never seen him perform live.

The other person on-stage with M.anifest at Citizen Kofi was Reggie Rockstone. In a number of songs, M.anifest lyrically samples the words of Rockstone such as "Tsoo Boi" for his song "Motherland." While the quotation appears in the recorded version of "Motherland," this sample also took on greater resonance in the performance at Citizen Kofi. After one of the song's choruses, he asks the audience, "Remember the first hiplife track you heard? Reggie Rockstone, he said something like," before engaging in a call and response with the audience based on "Tsoo Boi," which was one of the first hiplife hits.

Figure 4-16

Through these and other references, M.anifest not only draws on the previous generation of hip-hop and hiplife in Ghana, it also relates to the Ghanaian part of his multifaceted and cosmopolitan identity, as it draws upon music shaped by diasporic and global musical influences.

The one instrumental sample I'll talk about is one that M.anifest chose for an interlude on his first album, *Manifestations*. It is a conventionally "traditional" recording of musicians from Northern Ghana, from the collection *Ghana: Ancient Ceremonies*: *Songs & Dance Music*, recorded by composer-bassist Stephen Jay in the 1970s and released by Elektra. When I asked M.anifest about this, he said that, at the end of the recording and mastering process of the album, this recording came up randomly on his iTunes collection. "It just felt right," he told me. The sample comes at the end of his most explicitly "African" song on the record, "Africa Represent," the chorus of which includes what became his signature line for a time: "represent Africa with a spectacular street vernacular." The song also includes a lyrical sample from Eric B. and Rakim ("I came in the door," from "Eric B. is President"), as well as references to both African

musicians and political figures (Mandela, Makeba, Masakela) and well-known African American figures, including hip-hop artists (Master P, AZ, as well as Danny Glover, Don Cheadle). It is "African," however, more in the lyrics than in the music, until the sample at the end of the song. The point of discussing this instrumental sample (even though it is only transformed by the context it is placed in), is that it represents the differences in the historical moments that Nketia and M.anifest have written their musics in. Field recordings of "traditional" music like *Ancient Ceremonies* and many, many others, now exist digitally and can be heard, and sampled at will. This is very different from the time when someone like Jay—or, in an even earlier generation Nketia—had to physically travel to the North of Ghana to record music like this and use it as inspiration for new compositions.

Figure 4-17

All of these examples so far have been relatively straightforward, in line with conventional hip-hop practices of sampling the music of previous generations, if only one generation removed as in the case of Jay-Z or Reggie Rockstone. For my last example, I'll return once again to M.anifest's revision of

Fela Kuti's "Gentleman," and look at its status as quotation, and articulation, of a different kind of tradition, and how it opens up a much more complex view of the relationship between M.anifest’s music and previous generations of music and family, as well as the wider intersections of generation and geography in the African Diaspora.

Figure 4-18

In the original song, Fela skewers those "gentlemen" who have adopted the attitudes and look of the colonizers. Tejumola Olanyian summarizes Fela’s invective towards the "Gentleman" of Lagos: "Clad in a three-piece suit with hat to match in steaming tropical Lagos, and displaying excessive and sham civilitiy at the highest pretext, this African man can only be of dubious pedegree, a white

man in black skin."[26] "Gentleman," much like the rest of Fela's work, had a tight, impossible-not-to-dance groove, and at just under 15 minutes, was certainly long enough for his audiences to "dance long distance."

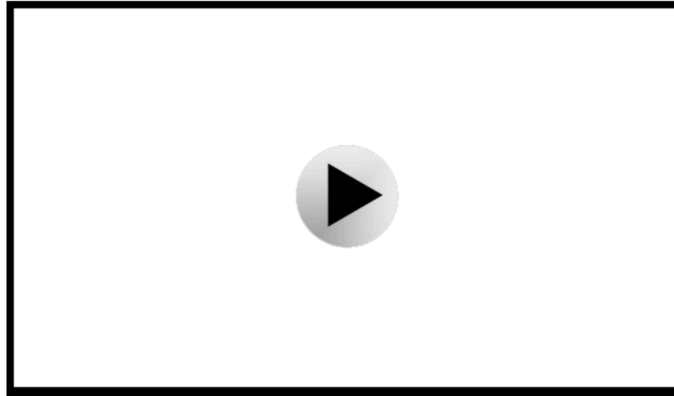

Figure 4-19

M.anifest's version was released on his debut album *Manifestations,* though the song does not take any musical samples from the song, he adopts Fela's sung chorus for the hook of his own song.

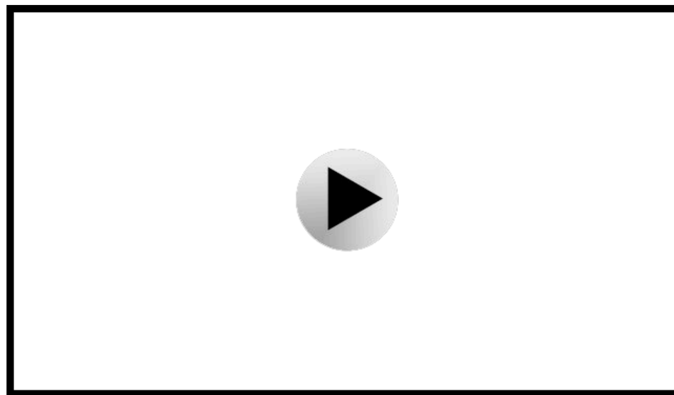

Figure 4-20

In fact, M.anifest has quoted a line from the song throughout his career, and the phrase "African man original" has become something of a motto for him.

[26] Tejumola Olanyani, "The Cosmopolitan Nativist: Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and the Antinomies of Postcolonial Modernity," *Research in African Literature* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 79.

Much like the Jay-Z reference at Citizen Kofi, in the context of an African audience, his use of Fela takes on a much greater significance. The first time I saw this was at an African Diaspora event in the suburbs of Minneapolis, and *everyone* in the audience, from throughout both America and Africa, knew it and sang along. While the same thing happened at his performance of at Citizen Kofi, the song presented an opportunity not only to cite a musical influence from an earlier generation, but make a closer and more personal generational connection.

Figure 4-21

Taking a view beyond M.anifest’s individual appropriation of "Gentleman," and Fela more generally, we quickly are confronted with the complex and uneven diasporic identity of Fela’s life and music. Numerous scholars have analyzed Fela’s complicated and controversial embrace, adaptation, and transformation of both cosmopolitan ideas derived from his experiences in London and the United States (where he famously met members of the Black Panther Party), as well as notions of "traditional’ and "native" life in Nigeria. Olanyani attempts to summarize Fela’s outlook around the time he wrote and recorded "Gentleman":

> He arrived at what he called his ideology of "Blackism," a "new Africanism" characterized by a valorization of Africa's ancient heritage, a critical juxtaposition of that heritage with the iniquities of the present as caused largely by the continent's historical unequal encounter with the West, a inchoate mix of knee-jerk and selective suspicion of Western modernity, and a presentation of a theatrical, idiosyncratic mix of magic and face-masking as "African spirituality" or "religion."[27]

While Fela's philosophy represented this uneven, and often controversial selective mixture of past and present, traditional and contemporary, his music is anything but "traditional" in the conventional sense. For M.anifest, we can think of Fela as a "new" tradition, one that he can draw on to shape his own work, while not having to adopt *all* of the elements of Fela's life and work. Finally, Fela has in a way become an even more *explicit* part of M.anifest's present musical life: he has performed and toured with Tony Allen, Fela's legendary drummer, and the only person who could claim co-creation of Afrobeat, thereby bringing another element of this history of African diasporic music into his own music, and continuing the process of circulation. These two points, the musical appropriation of Fela by M.anifest and his current music-making with Tony Allen, lead me towards the wider meanings of M.anifest's relationship to the past, musical or otherwise, and his present use of it in shaping his own musical identity, and the relevance it has for the wider circulation of music in the African Diaspora.

Over the course of both the trips to Washington and Ghana, the idea of a collaboration between grandfather and grandson began to take shape, with M.anifest interested in "re-telling" some of his grandfather's solo songs for a new

[27] Olanyani, "Cosmopolitan Nativist," 79.

generation, inspired by the biographical, artistic, and stylistic parallels he had discovered. When M.anifest asked his grandfather what kinds of things younger artists like him should think about when re-telling the solo songs, Nketia answered "tell the story the song tells you." That story, however, is still being written. While nothing exists yet from the collaboration, as both are in their early stages, I do have a hint of where it might go. I'll end by playing a clip from "Asa," a song of M.anifest's most recent album, *Coming to America: Immigrant Chronicles.* The song's producer, Budo, sent this to M.anifest and I when we put out a call for beats for the collaboration, with the guidelines that they shouldn't be in 4/4 time (per Nketia's critique of the repetitiveness of hip-hop). M.anifest sees this song not only as incorporating more of his "Ghanaian-ness," through the predominant use of Twi, but also a possible musical direction for the collaboration.

Figure 4-22

Chapter 5:
Waves and .Wavs

Three kinds of waves played a vital role in this project: water waves, sound waves, and the .wav files that ProTools and other digital audio editing programs record in. I made it a priority to go to Labadi Beach, perhaps the most famous beach in Accra, to hang out by—and in—the ocean. I made sure to grab my camera and audio recorder, too.

Figure 5-1

As I stood there, water up to the middle of my shins (surely drawing some stares from passersby as I stuck my audio recorder and camera near the water), I realized how much waves are a part of this project. It was the waves of the Atlantic on which the circuits of travel—some forced, some voluntary—were established, the same ones M.anifest and I travel upon. These waves are part of the Black Atlantic that carried Africans by choice and by force to America. These were the waves that carried Nketia to London and the start of his more than

seven-decade career as a composer and scholar. And beneath these waves run the series of cables that circuitously connect Minnesota to Ghana to all points in between online as part of M.anifest's digital diaspora.

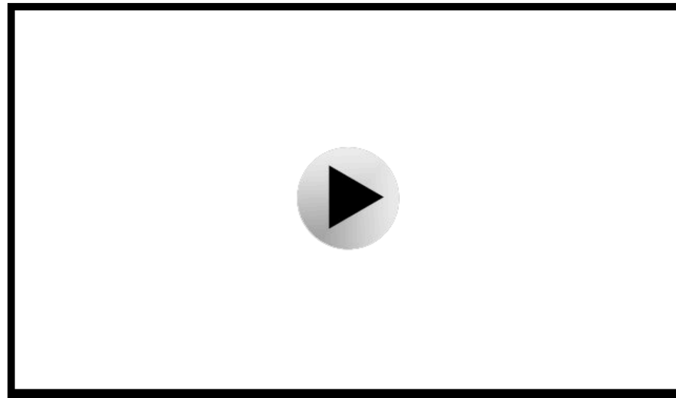

Figure 5-2

As I've shown in the previous chapters, what it means to "represent Africa with a spectacular street vernacular" is a complex process of negotiation, both in lyrics and music, but also in the relationship between M.anifest and I myself as I work to take his words, his music, his image and shape it into my own story. Now it's time for a conclusion, but I want to resist that urge to tie things up nicely, to artificially close things off, while recognizing the necessity of ending this dissertation and, more importantly perhaps, this stage of the project. M.anifest's hip-hop, and all diasporic hip-hop really, are always emergent, always in formation, not only because M.anifest is still making music today, but that his (and many other diasporic hip-hop artists) will continually draw upon their multiple backgrounds (and often their cosmopolitan present) to articulate new ideas of home and family, geography and generation.

In articulating these ideas, I've realized that doing so has been equal parts coincidence and planning, from both ourselves and the media we create traveling well-established diasporic circuits established hundreds of years ago, to the amazing coincidence of an impulse to quote a video seen on YouTube more than six thousand miles away from its origin. My favorite parts of the project are things I experienced with M.anifest, his family, and sometimes with complete strangers in both Minnesota and Ghana, most of them unexpected and unplanned, and the resultant stories I get to share. I'll end this dissertation, then, with a few more stories that have the ring of coming "full-circle," in an attempt to weave an ending out of the intellectual and emotional threads I've laid out so far.

Almost a year after I went to Ghana with M.anifest, I'm there again, this time by myself. I was joined by scholars from around the world to present a paper at the University of Ghana for a conference which celebrated Nketia's life and work as he reached the age of 90. The reason I'm by myself was that on the same day I presented my paper in Ghana (a preliminary version of the previous chapter), M.anifest held a release party in Minneapolis for his sophomore album, *Immigrant Chronicles: Coming to America*. Further, this release party was held at the Fine Line Café, the same venue that he and Muja Messiah performed at in 2008 and was the source for the "nigga from Ghana" moment, out of which much of this dissertation has been spun.

Figure 5-3

By the time M.anifest takes the stage at the Fine Line, though, I'm fast asleep. (Ghana is six hours ahead of Minneapolis). However, a few hours earlier, just after the sun had set, I was sharing a back seat with Nketia as we went home to Madina after the end of the conference. Dela, Nketia's driver, is flipping through the radio stations. Suddenly, "Suffer" comes on as the dial hits JoyFM, one of the most popular radio stations in Accra. As the song plays, we drive into Madina and over the very same streets on which much of the video for "Suffer" was shot.

Immigrant Chronicles: Coming to America extends and amplifies the main theme I've discussed in this dissertation: the musical elaboration and enunciation of a life lived between multiple places around the world. However, and very much as a result of the trip M.anifest and I took to Ghana together, there is a greater emphasis on songs that could "hit" in the Ghanaian market, not only stylistically, but also in the use of language and collaborations with Ghanaian artists, including producers and singers. There are even more multi-language rhymes, more music that crosses oceans, and subjects that can appeal to people in Minnesota, Ghana, and everywhere in between.

The album's title comes from Eddie Murphy's 1988 comedy *Coming to America*.[1] Murphy plays the African Prince Akeem Joffer, who hails from the imagined land of Zamunda, replete with every facet of colonial romanticism and imperialist nostalgia.[2] Akeem flees to America after his parents attempt to arrange his marriage, and upon arrival, falls in love with the daughter of the owner of the fast food restaurant he works at, and has the usual cultural missteps of someone new to a foreign land. (These are comedically amplified by the fact that he is immensely wealthy, despite his efforts to hide this facet of himself.)

The story of M.anifest's own journey to America is very different than Akeem's, of course, and he doesn't talk about the film, or use any audio samples of it, over the course of the his *Coming to America*. The title is both ironic and

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[1] Jon Landis, *Coming to America* (Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 1988).
[2] Here I'm referencing Renato Rosaldo's term, which he uses to describe the phenomenon of colonizers "mourning for what one has destroyed," i.e. the "traditional" culture that they existed before their arrival, yet was supplanted, and sometimes extinguished, through colonialism itself. See "Imperialist Nostalgia," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), 107-122 and *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Books, 1989).

sincere: the idea of “immigrant chronicles” certainly resonates with the stories he told on his first two albums (*Manifestations* and *The Birds and the Beats*), though it doesn’t quite encompass the circulation of his music (and himself) as part of his diasporic life. The title seems mono-directional, where so much of his music are anything but. Yet in a strategic use of the foreign and the familiar, he draws potential audiences in with a title they would recognize (especially those of his own generation), and then expanding, and perhaps subverting, what it means to come to America. He still mixes the two worlds together, as he does in an interlude on the album’s title track:

> *So when I touch down ridin’ KLM*
> *America say in unison*
> *Akwaaba Akwaaba Akwaaba Akwaaba* ["Welcome"]
> *Gotta get a job and pay the bills*
> *Send money home, my life is real*
> *Akwaaba Akwaaba Akwaaba Akwaaba*

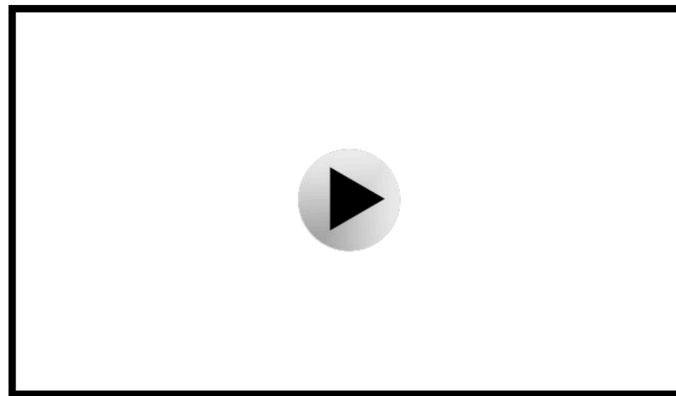

Figure 5-4

M.anifest played me an early version of the album a few weeks before it came out, and there were many moments of familiarity. *Coming to America* (the shorthand we used when discussing the album), contains songs that I’d heard for nearly the entire length of my friendship with M.anifest, including “Motherland,”

which I filmed him performing back in 2007. Other songs, however, were written much closer to the final mixing and mastering of the album, in the summer of 2011. The first song on the album, “Ghana Must Go,” opens with a rooster crow as M.anifest discusses the pull of his home in Accra through the image of the ever-present checkered bag I discussed earlier. And the verse that M.anifest rapped for his grandfather in Leavenworth became verse two.

“It finally found a home,” he told me, chuckling.

Figure 5-5

A couple of weeks before I went to Ghana for the Nketia Conference, I met with M.anifest to catch up. In preparation for the paper, I had found the audio of our very first interview from the summer of 2007; for our meeting, I extracted the moment I discovered just who his grandfather was. I played it for him, and he became very excited and asked me to send him that clip. Soon after, he asked for the entire audio of the interview, and the written transcript. I got a text message from him later in the day where he expressed his surprise at how many good moments there were in our first interview. A couple days later, I received an

urgent email seeking confirmation of correct spellings and credits for four "samples" to be used on the album, three from that first interview, and one from a recording I digitized during out trip to Ghana in 2010. (More on the last sample in a moment.) M.anifest used these three samples as spoken interludes between a number of songs on the record. In them, they talk about the musical quality of Ghanaian social life, his home in Madina, and, after "Asa," a discussion about his infamous "tape-stealing" escapades as a budding MC, where he would steal tapes from his grandfather's collection, listen to them for blank space, and record raps over them.

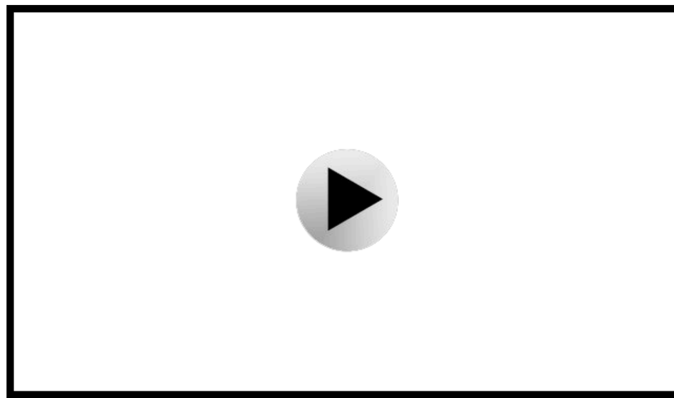

Figure 5-6

To my knowledge, this is the first time that M.anifest acknowledged publicly his "borrowing" of his grandfather's tapes; he had always told me his grandfather didn't know about it, and asked that I not tell Nketia. After I got over the initial excitement of having this dimension of the project make it onto the record (and how it nicely tied together the conclusion of this dissertation), I realized that he doesn't specifically *name* Nketia as the ethnomusicologist from whom those tapes came from. Even when he acknowledges that closeness to his

grandfather, there still exists a distance, one of musical identity and self-definition.

The last sample, one that ends the album as a whole, is from the Archives at the University of Ghana's Institute of African Studies, and was given to me by the archivist Judith Nketia-Gyimah after I showed her how to digitize cassette tapes with the Archives' existing set up. After going there the morning the day before we left, she excitedly told me to come back in the afternoon as she would have something special for me. When I returned, she played me a short clip of M.anifest, age 5, reading a story to his grandfather. This story was recorded on to a cassette and sent to Nketia while he was teaching at the University of Pittsburgh, an earlier form of media circulating amongst a diaspora. The story, a variation on the old woman who lived in a shoe, concerns a large pot of soup that the woman is making for all of her children:

Figure 5-7

He ends with "and that is the end of my story," and the album ends with his mother saying "Good night."

Both of our stories, however, are far from over.

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