

La fusion de la culture hip-hop et du mouvement rastafari. Steve Gadet. Paris: L'Harmattan. 2010. 267 pp. (Paper € 26.00)

The relationship between the United States of America and the Caribbean region represents a complex field of enquiry, where history, economics, families, migrations, and cultures are intimately entangled over time and space. This is particularly true for issues related to black popular culture, represented here as a fluid and hybrid social construct characterized by interculturality and mediation (p. 27). With a sociological approach enriched by the concepts of “glocal cultures” and “creolization,” Steve Gadet’s book is an important contribution to the understanding and analysis of the entanglement of two cultural practices: the Rastafari movement from Jamaica and the hip-hop movement from the United States. Both locally rooted and relevant, each one has achieved international fame and significance. They serve simultaneously the identity construct of black youth and of multi-ethnic youth (pp. 66, 70, and 112), though the latter is an issue not addressed directly in this book. Gadet’s work seeks to track the points of convergence, divergence, and exchange between Rastafari and hip-hop cultures.

The book begins by exploring the diffusion of the hip-hop movement in Jamaica and the Rastafari movement in the United States, facilitated by medias and the music industry. While Gadet underlines that the practices of the two movements differ, he postulates that they have a similar objective: to claim the fullness of an identity in societies that deny their contribution and their creativity to black communities (p. 33). As examples of this process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (p. 61) of popular cultures between the United States and Jamaica, he introduces Jamaican male rappers who have traveled and/or lived abroad. Hip-hop in Jamaica seems clearly influenced by its production in the United States. Gadet then turns to the Rastafari movement in the United States, and notes that focusing on the issue of consumption of cannabis by Rastas has often been used to silence the significance of the social organization of the movement there. He stresses that reggae music has been the main vector of diffusion and transmission of symbols, behaviors, and practices attributed to Rastafari. However the limits as to who and what is Rastafari remain unclear, particularly when Rastafari is related to reggae production (p. 163) and cannabis dealing (pp. 67, 149).

In the second part of the book, Gadet sets out to define the causes of intercultural transfers between hip-hop and Rastafari. He identifies the migrations between the Caribbean and the United States as a cause of intercultural transfers. Not a new phenomenon, it is well established that these migrations have been influential on politics, culture, and society in both places since the abolition of slavery. Gadet examines the dynamics of Caribbean integration in New York, as well as the ambiguous relationship that Caribbean nationals have with African Americans, which forces them to choose between an ethnic identity (for example Jamaican) or an American identity (even though being African American could be labeled as ethnic identity). There Gadet tries to clarify what is being called a “black diaspora” through the discussion of references in French on the issue. His point is that black people in the United States and the Caribbean have lived a similar experience of slavery, oppression, and resistance. As a consequence, a “sociological and cultural bridge” (p. 83) between black people in the United States and in the Caribbean has facilitated the convergence of two cultural phenomena, the Rastafari movement and the hip-hop movement.

The third part opens with a methodological introduction which raises a number of questions concerning intercultural transfers, the reciprocity of exchanges between cultures, and the changing significance of travelling signs, symbols, discourses, and beliefs (p. 111). It is not quite clear why this discussion is situated here. Had it been placed at the beginning, it would have benefited the whole book. In order to study the “ideological transfers” between Rastafari and hip-hop, Gadet points to the similar role of these movements in the resurgence of black nationalism among the youth and to their divergent uses of drugs (cannabis sativa and cocaine). Regarding the “musical transfers” between rap and reggae, he reminds readers how soul and blues influenced reggae and how reggae influenced hip-hop and rap. He compares the themes approached in both reggae and rap lyrics, finding a number of commonalities.

The last chapter presents what Gadet calls the “Rastafari-Hip-Hop” movement, exemplifying the hybridity at work with Rastafari artists who express themselves through rap music. He studies two groups, InI Mighty Lockdown and Duo Live, made up of artists of Caribbean origins who live and work in New York. With interesting data from the field, Gadet eventually demonstrates that the appropriation and juxtaposition of both move-

ments by these artists is a way to define their identity, which is being crafted jointly by their Caribbean roots and their U.S. environment.

While the challenges of writing about the continuous relationship between different cultural spaces cannot be overlooked, the choice of a more chronological approach would have reinforced Gadet's thesis about the existence of a dynamic process of intercultural exchanges between Jamaica and the United States. Moreover, it would have left room for additional data about the "Rastafari-Hip-Hop" actors, their creative production, their audience, and their significance on the local stage. The main shortcoming of this book lies in its bibliographical apparatus. Footnotes are often incomplete and of disparate formatting, and some references do not appear in the bibliography, which is fragmented into twelve categories. Nevertheless, the book represents an important contribution to the analysis of contemporary hybrid urban popular cultures.

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