

after the disappearance of the group of men called the Bepanda Nine. But even more than bringing to light a hidden and criminal tragedy, he and other interviewees stress the contemporary relevance of this piece of recent history, since the Cameroonian government continues to function by keeping its citizens in a state of fear. A member of the opposition political party tells Lewat that Cameroonians believe it is better to live on their knees than to die standing up: “We all live on our knees.”

Jean de Dieu Momo, a lawyer who represents the victims’ families, wonders who will be able to comprehend a country in which policemen can kill without ever appearing in court: “In Europe, do people understand what I am saying? . . . They can’t understand that I am accusing the government of complicity, or even of being the principal agent of injustice in this country. . . . As long as it’s black business, Negro business, people don’t care.” But Lewat ends her film by questioning not only Cameroon’s past and present, but also its political future. Tchounkeu fears that Cameroon will end up like the Ivory Coast, since neither country has established democratic institutions that are answerable to the public. “There is no tropical democracy and Western democracy,” he states; the laws of democracy are universal.

Lewat tells us in voiceover that Cameroonians today do not wish to be reminded that they welcomed the creation of the Commandement in 2000, the establishment of a free telephone number that could be called to denounce a neighbor, a brother, or a sister. She intersperses the closing credits with interviews of passers-by in the street who are asked if they would be for or against the reestablishment of the Commandement Opérationnel. Almost all of them answer that they would support it, shocking the spectator who has just watched *Black Business*. The very last interviewee, however, supplies the last words of the film, emphatically stating, “Never again.”

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**Michael Wanguhu, dir. *Hip Hop Colony*.** 2005. 96 mins. English (with some Swahili). Kenya. Emerge Media Films. \$14.99.

*Hip Hop Colony* provides a grassroots interpretation of hip hop culture in Kenya and the ways it has been embraced by youth as a space for empowerment and activism. Directed and produced by Michael Wanguhu, it traces the Kenyan hip hop explosion and development, arguing that hip hop is a new and welcome form of “colonization” that is shaping youth identity and unity across ethnicity, race, and geographical location.

The film places the viewer in the middle of conversations among youths who, through hip hop, are debating and commenting on topics that shape

their world like unemployment, crime, sex, and love. It provides a unique view of how they are using hip hop to communicate, and to energize, inspire, educate, and mobilize one another. Equally important, the producers show how hip hop illuminates a modern, urban Kenya that is closely aware of and linked to the global stage. Also highlighted are generational issues, such as the older generation's preference for traditional Kenyan music and its dislike of hip hop culture, dress, lyrical freedoms, and lifestyle. At the same time, hip hop and traditional Kenyan music have blended to create something new. Also portrayed in the film is how hip hop has been deployed in politics, as seen in the case of former President Kibaki's engagement of the duo Gidi Gidi Maji Maji to rally youth support and in the lyrics of musicians like Kalamashaka, who contests political injustices and inequality. The Kenyan hip hop surge makes it clear that the youth are a force that cannot be ignored.

The film also presents a very brief overview of Kenyan history, placing its analysis of the hip hop phenomenon in the context of the Mau Mau anticolonial resistance movement. It presents hip hop as a new form of commentary and youth opposition to current economic and political conditions in the country and also shows how hip hop has brought new ethnic energy to Kenya by allowing artists and communities to tailor and shape it based on local cultures. For example, artists from the Kikuyu ethnic group not only rap in Swahili and English, but also embed their own Kikuyu language and idioms in the music.

The plot of *Hip Hop Colony* centers on the musical performances of four artists: Harry Kimani from The Grass Company (TGC) Records, Bamboo K from South TGC records, Big Mike (Nanoma), and Kama from Kalamashaka. The artists appear throughout the film singing, rapping, and free-styling, showing through their lyrics, language, gestures, and dress how local artists have customized hip hop to connect with youth by rapping in ethnic languages about familiar places and conditions and sensitive issues like sex and AIDS. Interviews with artists reveal hip hop to be a mixture of many elements, including Swahili poetry, *Sheng* (a fusion of English and Swahili), ethnic dialects like Luo, Kikamba, and Kikuyu, world musical beats, local Kenyan music (*Nonini*), and crowd music (*Genge*). The film also touches on issues involving the music industry's exploitation of artists on matters such as copyright and royalty standards and compensation, as well as the influence of DJs and the media, which tend to encourage commercial hip hop as opposed to politically conscious hip hop. At the same time, hip hop has created new employment opportunities for both musicians and managers and has invigorated other fields such as the fashion industry.

One of the greatest strengths of the film is the layers of hip hop voices and interpreters that it presents, supporting the claim that hip hop has helped shape a new youth identity and a sense of unity across lines of ethnicity, race, and geography—creating, as the title announces, a new type of “colony.” The first-hand accounts and often impromptu performances of these local musicians at times give the film a particularly raw, unpolished

form, which some may view as a weakness but which is also one of the greatest strengths of the documentary as a genre: its inclusion of material and imagery that is often filtered out of scripted films. The best example is the free-style rapping episodes that take place among Kimani, Bamboo, Big Mike, and Kamua Ngigi in ordinary locations such as a domestic backyard. The film is valuable not only for the music it presents, but also for its portrayal of the artists in their own slum neighborhoods located outside of Nairobi and usually ignored by outsiders.

Despite this rich content, the film could perhaps have spent more time examining how the local *Benga* and ritual traditional musical forms blend with hip hop. This would have offered more insight into the important musical generation gap. The film also could have presented more information about the debates on the history of hip hop in Kenya and clarified the different views and accounts that exist. Finally, the film touches on, but does not consider in depth, the connections between hip hop in Kenya and the larger hip hop movements in East Africa, Africa, and the world. Some of these questions are addressed in Wanguhu's not yet released film *Ni Wakati* ("It is time"), which continues the conversation begun in *Hip Hop Colony* by exploring the worldwide hip hop phenomenon and its connections to African liberation and freedom movements.

*Hip Hop Colony*, then, is an excellent first installment of a story that is only beginning to be told about the development, dynamism, and vibrancy of hip hop. It is a revealing, fresh, and definitely entertaining film that would be very useful in the classroom. For both scholars and students, it offers an engaging vision of African urbanization, music, language, culture, youth politics, and globalization.

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**Rebecca Richman Cohen, dir. *War Don Don*.** 2010. 85 min. In English and Krio, with English subtitles. U.S. Racing Horse Productions and Naked Edge Films. \$29.95.

Freetown 2009. After five years of trial, Issa Hassan Sesay, the former RUF commander, is found guilty of sixteen of the eighteen counts for which he was indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Who is Issa Sesay? What crimes did he commit? What is the RUF? What is the Special Court for Sierra Leone, and what is its purpose? These are the main questions that Rebecca Richman Cohen's documentary *War Don Don* is attempting to answer.

In Krio, "war don don" means "the war is over." For Sierra Leoneans, it was the announcement that declared that the decade-long civil war between