

Underground HIP HOP: Immortal Technique

Hip Hop Pantsula (aka HHP) tragically committed suicide in October. He was a pioneer of the Motswako hip hop genre, performed in several African languages, predominantly Setswana. Sadly, HHP had been suffering with depression for several years – an illness worsened and aggravated by the brutality of capitalist society. In commemoration and recognition of this, *Phemelo Motseokae*, Tshwane WASP, looks at hip hop's radical anti-capitalist tradition by examining the work of US hip hop artist Immortal Technique.

The hip hop music that emerged in the 1970s in the US amongst the African-American youth of the inner cities was often political and radical. It reflected the racism and poverty suffered in black and immigrant communities. But starting in the 1980s there was a change. Recognising that there was money to be made from the popularity of hip hop culture, but uncomfortable with its subversive criticism of the capitalist status quo, record executives decided to give hip hop a commercial make-over. Its content began to centre on “rags-to-riches”, crime and the sexualisation of women.

Radio stations and record labels began to act as music filters. Rap that predominately spoke on social issues, racism, exposing government's lies etc. was swept under the carpet and “removed” from the commercial canon. But hip hop's original traditions have survived in a movement known as underground rap. Immortal Technique is of the most famous underground rappers. In his song *Open Your Eyes* he draws the parallel between how major record labels treat underground rappers and how the imperialist countries treat neo-colonial countries.

We are here because of you

We are here because you were there

We arrived from every corner of the planet to this nation

To seek the fulfilment of a promise of America

We were promised a better life in our home countries, where we were told that privatizing water and electricity will make things run more efficiently

Instead the quality remained almost the same and the price was increased until it became an unaffordable luxury

Here he refers to immigration to the USA of people from South and Central America after their countries have been subjected to “structural adjustment programmes” by the IMF and World Bank. These programmes leave third world economies under immense stress and the people living there sink ever deeper into poverty.

Some corporations are more efficient than government, but their motivation is not the health or the well-being of the people, it's only about profit...

Once upon a time, we were told that nationalisation would prevent growth by limiting competition, that our countries were nothing without the companies that invested in us and so

they privatized everything, everything in our country was owned by people that had no connection to our culture, by those who never had our interests at heart...

Here Immortal Technique shows us how state owned companies were sold to multinational companies – to those who had no interests whatsoever in the people but in profiting from resources and basic services.

our governments told us that socialism was the real enemy and that we would have freedom, but the foreign powers and corporations were the ones with real freedom

This statement reveals how corporations under capitalism have more power than the people themselves, they are free to do as they please. Whether it adversely affects the environment, or the people, generating money it is all that matters.

...the major label super powers treat the underground like the 3rd world, when they need new assets, new honest to prostitute a side and put on a shelf to use their songs

When they needed new concepts, music and publishing to steal from the producers, they came to the underground, to the 3rd world...

The record executives' efforts to commercialise hip hop – how to exploit the new product, capture, package and sell it is compared to how the imperialist countries sit on the necks of neo-colonial countries, exploiting the resources, the land and the workers of those countries.

Build your defences my independent brothers and sisters, they'll stop at nothing to get what they want, they paint the 3rd world, underground, as savage and backward, but the super powers are no less corrupt, they've just learned to disguise it better...

This phrase is calling for people to protect themselves because it is evident that the global capitalist system does not function for the people. The capitalist media would not give exposure to underground rappers that speak on socio-political issues because they are a threat. It is a struggle to keep producing “conscious” content calling on the masses to fight back. The only hope left for the working class of the world for a better free society is to overthrow the capitalist system and build a socialist society run in the interests of the working class, and by the working class, including the development of free artistic expression in music and all aspects of culture.