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Modernity, Remixed:

Music as Memory in Rap Galsen

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Ethnomusicology

by

Catherine M. Appert

2012

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Modernity, Remixed:
Music as Memory in Rap Galsen

by

Catherine M. Appert

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Timothy D. Taylor, Chair

Drawing on 14 months of ethnographic research in Dakar, Senegal as well as an 18-month focused case study with Senegalese rappers in Los Angeles, this dissertation explores Senegalese hip hop production as the performative negotiation of postcolonial urban space. Engaging tradition as a discursive strategy, it considers hip hop tracks as aural palimpsest memories that are constructed through practices of lyrical, discursive, linguistic, and musical intertextuality, practices that strategically layer invented traditions of local performance and U.S. hip hop. Although scholarly and popular media accounts of Senegalese hip hop privilege internationally successful rappers' narratives of hip hop as stemming from local griot traditions, the "underground" majority of rappers rejects this narrative to instead ground their music in hip

hop's mythologized history of racialized socio-economic struggle. Through hip hop-mediated understandings of similitude between African American and Senegalese urban experience, they strategically and self-consciously position themselves within an alternative, globally articulating modernity and against a local, traditionally inflected one. In positing hip hop production as the (re)production of memory, I argue against hybridity as a potentially colonizing framework to insist instead on an analysis grounded in local narratives that erase hybridity's prerequisite difference. Depending on their positionality vis-à-vis local and international markets, Senegalese rappers position hip hop either as always already indigenous, or as necessarily and definitely black American. In the processes and products of hip hop production, they draw on multiple mythologized pasts, creating interlocking, performative narratives of sameness and historicity through which they negotiate situated experiences of modernity.

The dissertation of Catherine M. Appert is approved.

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Timothy D. Taylor, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

For Modou Konaté.

Dinaa la namm ba aduna tukki.

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INTRODUCTION

In the early eighties, hip hop journeyed from its birthplace in the postindustrial chaos of the South Bronx, traversing the continent to South Central Los Angeles and eventually crossing the Pacific. Flowing downwards to the cities of the Southern United States and further still to Latin America, it crossed the Atlantic to Europe and to Africa. There, still fresh despite its transatlantic wandering, it surged through the neighborhoods of Dakar's urban sprawl, reenergized, redefined, and re-claimed by Senegalese youth. "When hip hop came, it was already in us," says DJ Awadi of Senegal's preeminent hip hop duo, Positive Black Soul.¹ "People used to rap in Senegal, but it was just traditional," explains Smoka Seezy, an immigrant rapper in Los Angeles, making it clear that the history he references extends far beyond the South Bronx and the socio-historical, political, and musical trajectories that came together there on cardboard dance floors and street corners, as boomboxes blasted aural rounds into the unsuspecting neighborhoods of New York City.

At the crossroads of these two myths – one of the South Bronx and newly empowered minority youth, turning from gang violence and drug culture to express the realities of postindustrial urban existence through song and dance, the other of a triumphant musical homecoming to an imagined past, a cultural and sonic return to Africa – in the intersections, cross fadings, and disjunctures between these mythologized histories, Senegalese youth in Dakar and the diaspora strategically navigate between spatially and temporally distinct experiences of modernity.

This is a dissertation about myth. It is about hip hop practice as the performative remembering and re-creating of movement – the movement of people, ideas, cultures, narratives,

¹ Blaze. "One on One with Awadi." *African Hip Hop.com: The Foundation of African Hip Hop Culture Online*. <http://www.africanhiphop.com>. (2005).

and musics that traverse, re-connect, and re-imagine times and spaces. It is about how narratives of music making and musically made narratives create and sustain connections and the routes along which those connections move. It is therefore less about historicizing musics than about musicking histories. In short, it is a story about stories.

In 2011 I embarked on my final, extended stage of fieldwork in Senegal equipped with questions about the relationship between “traditional” and “modern” music there. Although, eager to produce something fresh and new, I had never intended to engage the often politically charged and divisive debate over the West African roots of African American musical forms such as hip hop, this is the narrative that had emerged from my preliminary fieldwork as well as secondary source research prior to moving to Senegal. And so I went to Senegal planning to explore the ways that young Senegalese rappers appropriate hip hop as a repatriated traditional bardic figure – the *griot* – in their negotiation of postcoloniality.² Instead, I encountered multiple and contradictory engagements with and re-constructions of tradition that were clearly aligned with varying degrees of privilege vis-à-vis local realities and global markets. For while it’s true that Senegal’s internationally successful rappers, a tiny but visible minority, locate the roots of hip hop in griot tradition, the majority of rappers there didn’t in any way see themselves as modern griots. Thus while in Senegal my questions changed dramatically. Recognizing my initial line of inquiry as one that risked prioritizing already privileged voices, I refocused my research in an effort to foreground as much as possible the marginalized narratives of this expansive hip hop underground.

Ultimately, the questions that I attempt to answer in this dissertation are these: How does hip hop production – the production of music, of community, of myth – function as the musical

² Throughout this dissertation, I use the terms “precolonial” and “postcolonial” not to define Senegal through its relationship to Europe/France but rather as useful designators of generally accepted defined periods in Senegalese history.

remembering and re-invention of traditions, of interconnections, and of spatially distinct experiences of modernities? How do Senegalese youth construct the local as a node in a global reality, and how do they situate themselves through and within strategic constructions of diaspora? What are the stories that differently situated people tell about hip hop in/and Africa, and why?

This dissertation claims that the production of hip hop in Senegal is also the production of and performative negotiation between globally situated localities, and that mythologies of hip hop origins situate actors in ways that are intrinsically constitutive of the local and equally engaged in the imagining of global place. I argue that to focus on local narratives of hip hop cultural production in Senegal destabilizes models of musical globalization that privilege a western center in their consistent recourse to hybridity. The intersections of musics and discourses that reflect and produce locally-grounded global interconnection in Senegalese hip hop can be read as performances of strategic intertextuality that, through an active engagement with musical genre and in dialogue with local and global markets, alternately blur or reinscribe the boundaries of indigenous and diasporic cultural production. In the musical production of myth, rather than in tired debates over “real” origins, we can begin to understand the ways in which postcolonial subjects make sense of their lived experiences of global modernities.

Discovering Senegalese Hip Hop: Research and Methods

This project began not in Senegal but in its contemporary diaspora, as an 18-month case study with Senegalese immigrant rappers in Los Angeles that formed the basis for my Master’s paper in Ethnomusicology. Working closely with rappers Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy from 2005-2007, I noted the way that hip hop production, not only the production of music but also

the situational performance of identities within hip hop-based social networks, enabled these men to negotiate the complexly racialized terrain of immigrant existence between a black American population and an African one. That primary study, and the questions it raised about hip hop, racial identity, and global interconnections, ultimately led me to pursue hip hop in Senegal as my dissertation topic. After pilot trips to Dakar in 2007 and 2008, I returned to the city in 2011 to conduct the ten months of extended ethnographic research on which this dissertation is based, with a two-month follow-up trip during the presidential elections of February 2012.

To the outside observer, Senegalese hip hop might comprise a few key internationally successful groups. Up close, however, Dakar's urban landscape is crosscut by a sprawling, multi-neighborhood network of rappers, beatmakers, and studios. Advances in home-production technologies and the resultant increase in recording opportunities, coupled with a high unemployment rate throughout the city, have contributed to the swelling ranks of rappers, who are estimated to number at least in the 5000s. In light of this, a project that attempts to go beyond the international face of Senegalese hip hop to its somewhat grittier reality as a widespread urban youth culture can be daunting. In 2008, I had the fortune to connect with Bourba Jolof, co-founder of the Medina-based group Sen Kumpë that has existed, in various forms, since the second wave of hip hop groups to emerge in Dakar in the late '90s. Bourba's close friendship and selfless efforts in setting up interviews and meetings played a central role in introducing me to Dakar's expansive web of hip hoppers. His untimely passing in 2010 was a massive blow not only to his family and friends but to the larger hip hop community, whose members continue to memorialize him with concerts, t-shirts, and graffiti images throughout the city.

When I returned to Dakar in 2011, Sen Kumpë (now Bourba's brother Books and manager Lamine) once again took me under its wing, and many hip hoppers first encountered me as part of the group's crew, as I accompanied them to concerts and posted their images to the international social networking website Facebook. The multi-group performances that are the norm in Dakar's hip hop scene enabled me to connect with increasing numbers of rappers in the makeshift backstage areas where we would often wait for hours during concerts. Filming these performances and providing my acquaintances with DVD copies initiated a certain reciprocity that, aligning with Senegalese cultural norms that value generosity and gift-giving, immensely enhanced my interpersonal relationships with various artists and facilitated my entrance into Senegal's hip hop community, creating further connections in the process. This project thus spread organically along the natural contours of Dakar's hip hop scene.

Beyond the informal filming of concerts, my possession of an amateur digital camera with decent high definition video capabilities also led to collaborative projects with rappers. Although I was careful to emphasize my lack of qualifications as a photographer/videographer, as more and more artists became aware that I would provide them with free images, I was called upon to help with photos and filming for album jackets and debut music videos. These collaborative endeavors were not only a way for me to make a small contribution to the people who provided me so willingly with interviews and invitations to concerts and studio sessions; they also strengthened my relationships within the hip hop community, provided insight into its creative processes, and made me an active part of the production of hip hop culture in Senegal.

A central part of my research consisted of extensive interviews, mostly with rappers but also with managers, producers, and fans. Increased international interest in Senegalese hip hop, particularly in anticipation of the recent presidential elections, has meant that the presence of

foreign researchers and journalists has become unremarkable within the hip hop community. In my own interviews, rapper after rapper was surprised and pleased to realize that, unlike many of the journalists looking for publishable tidbits and a quick trip in and out of the city, I had actually listened to their albums and watched their videos, and could also discuss U.S. hip hop with some degree of familiarity. Interviews often morphed into extended conversations about hip hop in Senegal and the United States, discussions (sometimes a bit heated) about the best rappers in both locations, or requests to translate lyrics from interviewee's favorite U.S. hip hop songs. These interviews were key in constructing an oral history of the development of hip hop in Senegal, the summary of which is presented in Chapter 2.

A crucial element of fieldwork was the informal "hanging out" that exposes the inner workings of such a sprawling music-based community. As concerts, interviews, and collaborative projects brought me into contact with more and more artists, my social circle expanded to mirror the branching nature of hip hop networks in Dakar. Hanging out with artists, I often became privy to the complexities of relationships and the role that hip hop played in people's daily lives. In general, however, my participation in all these arenas was hugely constrained by my positionality as a young, white, female researcher working in an almost entirely male music scene. Social restrictions on female mobility and a general disinterest in hip hop on the part of many young Senegalese women meant that I was often one of the few females present at any given concert, and when concerts took place in venues or neighborhoods that were seen as too rough, I simply was not invited. When I did attend, my racial difference made me stick out like a sore thumb and invited stereotypes of white female sexual opportunism that many were eager to exploit. In turn, I found myself toeing a delicate line with informants, where I would be the one cancelling and rescheduling encounters in order to dispel any delusions of

romantic/sexual interest even as I needed those encounters to carry out my research. As a result, I often found myself wondering what this project would have been like had I carried it out as a male researcher.

Although I came away from Senegal with valuable interviews, footage, and fieldnotes, there are gaps in this research that I am all too aware of, and there are levels of closeness that are arguably necessary for “good” ethnography that I deliberately (and necessarily) avoided over and over again. This is not an exercise in self-pity disguised as “reflexivity”; it is, however, meant to be a frank acknowledgement of the ways in which gender and sexuality continue to inform and often limit ethnographic fieldwork to an arguably even greater extent than race, which if anything helped me gain access to Senegalese artists who hoped to benefit from foreign interest in their music. If this dissertation is to be a narrative about narratives, then let it expose the pernicious myth that the only difference between female and heterosexual male fieldworkers is the fake wedding rings the former don as we go off into the “field,” a narrative that only serves to obfuscate the complex interpersonal dynamics of ethnographic research. When ethnographers conflate social acceptance as an “honorary man” with exemption as a western woman from the socio-cultural limitations imposed on local women, they are, from a position of extreme privilege and heteronormativity, ignoring both the implications of local patriarchy for local women and the psychological drain of the constant social denial of full personhood to the unmarried female researcher – or, for that matter, any male or female researcher who doesn’t embrace dichotomous definitions of gender or engage in normative heterosexuality. To ignore or deny the challenges of encountering locally-specific patriarchies is a potentially colonizing move that positions patriarchy as cultural difference rather than as a cross-cultural social phenomenon manifesting in different places in different ways at different times, and closes off avenues for dialogue and

understanding between “us” western researchers and the people we encounter and form relationships with abroad.

As I wrote the following chapters and attempted to foreground as much as possible the voices of my informants, I struggled to depict them as individual actors who might have a lot in common with each other but who are also individual people who engage hip hop for their own reasons and in their own ways, situated individually vis-à-vis social categories of class, religion, education, and ethnicity. While I highlight the general similarities within generations of Senegalese rappers and do my best to describe the actual and perceived socio-economic implications of life in the different neighborhoods from which each of these generations has emerged (and the attendant disparities in educational levels and social status), the specifics of each rapper’s social positionality are not always as clear as I would have wished; these were not, however, topics that were appropriately broached in what most rappers understood to be interviews for a project specifically about *hip hop*, and not about their religious practices, familial structures, or educational backgrounds. Cultural awareness of and sensitivity to western stereotypes and prejudices surrounding education/French language competency as well as Islamic practices such as polygamy complicated this all the more.³ While there are many rappers whose homes I visited and whose personal lives I *am* very familiar with, the practical issues of representation that I have just described go hand in hand with ethical ones. I was invited into these homes and lives in a showing of hospitality and friendship, and I know that these artists never imagined that the time I spent with their families or the details I observed about their

³ For example, the widespread practice of polygamy in Senegal, wherein – according to popular interpretations of the Koran – a Muslim man is entitled to up to 4 wives, provided that he can support each one equally (both economically and emotionally), complicates the issue of class immensely. How do you identify the economic class of someone who lives in a modest home that is one of 4 modest homes? Is this person of a higher or lower class than a man with one extremely expensive home? The re-evaluation of economic class in polygamous societies is outside the scope of this dissertation but is an interesting topic of inquiry.

personal lives were somehow included in the umbrella of the consent form “to participate on a project on hip hop culture in Senegal” that they had signed, often – in the case of a large body of illiterate rappers – based solely on their trust in my own description of what was contained in the French-language document that they painstakingly signed for me. The following chapters strive to situate their narratives as much as possible without betraying this confidence; and I gladly admit that when in doubt, I have erred on the side of the latter.⁴

Framing Senegalese Hip Hop

Globalization, Tradition, and the Musical Production of Place

Emerging as a distinct genre in the early 1980s, a period of intensifying globalizing forces and flows, hip hop was almost destined for a global future. Although, even before the current era of globalized neoliberal capitalism and its accelerated movement of culture, commodities, and ideologies, European colonialism played a central role in introducing newly expansive forms of global interconnection, the increased volume and size of globalizing flows and the attendant rise of transnational communities forged through networks of diaspora, migration, technology, electronic media, ideologies, and global capital have led to assertions of the newness of globalization in comparison to older forms of interconnection (Appadurai 1996). But despite the longstanding and disproportionate political, economic, and cultural influence of the West on the world, these interconnections are neither unprecedented nor uncontested, and historically specific explorations expose the varied manners and instances in which the periphery

⁴ Perhaps at the expense of a “thorough” ethnography, I asked myself when writing, would so-and-so want me to print this? Would I want this printed about myself? If, for example (one of all too many in Africanist ethnography) in her otherwise admirable work on the Nuer, Sharon Hutchinson had asked herself, “would I want someone to publish a picture of me naked, squatting in childbirth,” or “would I accept that someone publish a picture of my naked pubescent child,” I imagine the images included in her book would have been quite different. The fact that our informants probably won’t read what we write – almost certainly true in Hutchinson’s case, and less certain but probably true in mine – doesn’t exempt us from ethical responsibility and a basic respect for the individual that would go without saying were that individual a citizen of the West.

has “talked back” to its imperial center (Hannerz 1992). Moreover, movement and interconnection are not the exclusive purview of the West, and translocal “flows” of people, money, images, technology, and ideas are not new to Senegal. Taking into consideration centuries of internal and trans-Saharan trade and migration in West Africa, as well as the forced migration of the transatlantic slave trade that these predate, reveals that constant movements of people, currency, and ideas have long characterized the region. Europe thus was not a messianic agent that connected bounded African communities with the outside world; rather, it overlaid existing forms of interconnection with new ones that were in most cases infinitely more exploitative. The assumption of global newness ignores those forms of interconnection that predated “globalization” and that are not necessarily defined exclusively in terms of a relationship to the West; it also potentially resurrects the idea that there were isolated stagnant autonomous cultures in a “before” that is itself defined through a binary opposition to Western modernity and that becomes connected to other places only through western intervention (Tsing 2002).

Nevertheless, the intense spatial, political, and cultural upheaval that resulted from colonial domination and globalized neoliberal capitalism *have* intensely affected conceptions of place, in Africa and elsewhere. Music, and particularly popular music, played an important part in the production and distinction of place from the early years of the colonial encounter, as strategic syncretisms of local and imported musics served to ground African populations in newly constructed, increasingly urban localities even as they helped to produce those places. Whether negotiating the perceived divide (more accurately understood as a relationship of mutual contingency) between the rural and urban or the local and global, African actors in many

contexts have drawn on popular music to produce, comment on, and reflect social reality.⁵

Anthropologist Martin Stokes attributes the social significance of music in part to the ways in which it functions to identify and distinguish place-based identities. Through the use of particular musical signifiers, including instruments, melodies, rhythms and other formal or aesthetic elements perceived as belonging to a certain place, culture, or group of people, music produces a sense of place, both reflecting and constructing particular locales and understandings of and identifications with those locales (Stokes 1994; Negus 1996; Cohen 1994). Throughout Africa, the incorporation of indigenous instruments, languages, aesthetics and formal elements – often understood as “tradition” – has served alternately to ground musicians and their audiences in local place, to create a sense of a cohesive, bounded nation, and to represent them to global audiences in terms of global imaginings of Africa (see Erlmann 1999; Meintjes 2003; Natarangwi 2009 for specific examples).⁶

The dichotomous concepts of culture (modern/traditional, rural/urban, etc.) that were diffused throughout Africa by colonists, missionaries, and later nationalists became firmly rooted in local experiences, and continue to shape local perceptions of cultural production. Thus although the term “tradition” may be critiqued for its potential implication of cultural stagnancy in contrast with a “modern” West, without assuming homogeneity throughout the African continent or in the situated experiences of colonization by different European powers it is clear that, in emergent popular cultures as well as in other social arenas, conceptions of tradition have

⁵ For distinctive, locally-specific examples, see Askew’s 2003 work on nationalism in Tanzania; Coplan’s 1985 work and Erlmann’s 1991 and 1999 works on South African music; Waterman’s 1990 study of Nigerian jùjú; White’s 2008 work on rumba in Zaire).

⁶ It is important to note that the dichotomous conceptions of space/place (and corresponding cultural dichotomies) introduced by Europeans and absorbed by Africans were just that – conceptions. The divide between the rural and urban was in many instances more imagined than “real,” as in South African where a multi-directional relationship between town and country influenced cultural production in both localities (Erlmann 1991). Nevertheless, because popular music grows out of and informs people’s perceptions of realities, the spatial and cultural binaries of colonialism have been closely intertwined with the development of popular music.

generally been important in negotiating the displacements of colonialism, and particularly new forms of urban existence. Veit Erlmann describes tradition not as the persistence of “old” forms of cultural production, but rather as a process of change and negotiation in which forms and values are strategically linked in different ways. From this perspective, cultural traditions are understood not as timeless artifacts but as constituted in social practice and susceptible to reinterpretation and invention (1991:10-11). Through tradition understood thus, Africans in different urban contexts created and negotiated new social realities; discourses of tradition referenced their positionality within or perhaps between the binary extremes of colonized space. In this dissertation, I refer to certain traditions, in particular, griot tradition and hip hop tradition, as *invented* in the sense that they comprise discursively codified sets of cultural practices that are invoked as history and that are distinguished from the evolving, flexible manifestations of these same cultural practices in the present; this invention is enacted through local narrative as well as Western scholarship. I therefore engage “tradition” not only as colonially codified practice but rather as a locally invoked discursive strategy in which the present invokes the past (Apter 2007; Scott 1999); as something that is constantly (re)invented and (re)negotiated through human agency and intentionality (Yelvington 2006); and as a practice and/of memory that invokes the past in the construction of present selves (Young 2007).

Beyond Hybridity: Genre and Intertextuality

In the 20th century, the creative mixtures of imported and traditional elements that emerged from the musical dialogues between Africa and the West have often been framed as instances of syncretism and hybridity, as a growing body of scholarship attempts to illuminate how and why Africans in varied contexts have created new forms of musical culture through the

combination of precolonial musical practices with elements drawn from a fairly standard repertoire of western popular music (jazz, vaudeville, minstrelsy, country-western, blues, rock 'n' roll, and most recently soul and hip hop).⁷ But the use of syncretic and hybrid frameworks carries certain risks. Robert C. Young has critiqued the use of the word and concept of hybridity in postcolonial theory as reaffirming the racial vocabulary of colonialism even as it attempts to undermine that vocabulary and its material implications. The concept of hybridity, rooted as it is in Victorian racial theory that outlined the evolution of humanity in the living bodies of contemporary racialized Others, “shows that we are still locked into parts of the ideological network of a culture that we think and presume that we have surpassed”(Young 1995:27). J. Lorand Matory likewise cautions that syncretism and creolization as dominant concepts in African diaspora anthropology arose in the context of a theory dominated by ideas of integrated social systems and bounded cultural units (2006:164).

There are, of course, opposing views. Andrew Apter argues that syncretism is still a useful concept in diaspora studies if one does not start from the idea of an essentialized aboriginal unity, instead examining "syncretic practices as strategies of appropriation and empowerment" that at once unmake and remake hegemony (1991). And Homi K. Bhabha has reworked hybridity to signify an inherently resistant third space of enunciation (1994), although Timothy D. Taylor has critiqued his failure to consider the fact that hegemonic interpretations of cultural hybridity may undermine the very oppositional potential he attributes to it (2007:145). Christopher Waterman, in his work on Nigerian jùjú music, emphasizes the centrality of human agency in syncretic musical practices and highlights the importance of indigenous discourse for the study of syncretic musical forms, writing that “syncretism is fundamentally grounded in

⁷ For distinctive, locally-specific approaches to this issue, see Barber's 1997 volume on African popular culture; Erlmann's 1991 work on South African music; Turino's 2000 text on Zimbabwean music; Waterman's 1990 work on Nigerian jùjú.

human actors' interpretations of similarity and difference, and in their attempts to make sense of a changing world in terms of past experience”(1990:9). But in this instance, an analysis grounded in local narrative – one that takes to heart Waterman’s emphasis on human actors – reveals not a “hybrid” fusion of local and Western musics but rather a strategic mobilization of genre that functions through retaining, rather than altering, the formal characteristics of two modes of musical performance that are viewed either as fundamentally equivalent or as definitively separate, depending on the positionality of artists.

In his work on popular music in Zimbabwe, Thomas Turino makes a claim for “levels” of syncretism, arguing that ultimately, the meanings and values that people attach to musical practices are more important than formal characteristics of those practices. But in this dissertation I argue that at least in some instances, people attach meaning and value not just to vague conceptions of music making but to the formal features of musical practice themselves. Senegalese rappers insist on the generic purity of their hip hop practice, incorporating local elements through self-conscious practices of intertextuality that reinforce, rather than adapt and alter, musical genre.

At the level of everyday language use, intertextuality indicates a process through which two (or more) texts derive meaning from their interdependent relationship to each other. To describe the relationship between Senegalese and U.S. hip hop as intertextual is therefore to suggest that these musics take on meaning for Senegalese youth largely through how they are perceived to relate to each other, as I explore at length in Chapter 3. Intertextuality, however, is not only relational but performative, embedded in and enacted as practice. In examining Senegalese hip hop as instances of performed intertextuality, I draw largely on the work of Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, who describe verbal performance as a multi-staged

process in which performers remove texts from an original context and transform them through recontextualization. This process is transformational because the text is not exactly reproduced – it carries meaning from its earlier contexts but also acquires new meaning, form, and function in the process of recentering. The continuous decentering and recentering of texts illuminates processes of traditionalization, which create a discursive continuity with a past that is meaningful in some way (Baumann and Briggs 1990; Briggs and Bauman 1992).

The work of Bauman and Briggs is situated in a larger anthropology of texts that has centered primarily on speech acts and speech genres in its consideration of text not exclusively as written produce but “as any coherent complex of signs” that results from human effort (Bakhtin 1986:103). Karin Barber further refines this definition, writing that “text is created when instances of discourse, by being rendered detachable from their very context of emission, are made available for repetition or recreation in other contexts” (2007:22). Defined so broadly, “text” can also encompass configurations of visual images and sounds. Like any other act of discourse, music comments on social life, constructs relationships, and functions as dialogue.

Musical texts, like any other, are guided by the conventions of genre that give them form, and the *form* itself – the way something is set up as text – is often as significant as the “message” (Barber 2007). As a musical and speech genre, hip hop’s form is defined by intertextuality; its production depends on practices of sampling, quotation, and signifying that draw on distinct yet overlapping musics and histories in its characteristic dialogue with other artists, genres, and eras. The fact that hip hop’s very generic parameters center on the incorporation of other musical texts has significant implications for the question of musical hybridity, which I explore at length in Chapter 4. Framing Senegalese hip hop as performed intertextualities highlights the imbrication of musics, lyrical content, and the discourses surrounding cultural production. The idea of

intertextuality is thus particularly suited to hip hop studies because it can allow for a dynamic interrelatedness of lyrical and musical levels of performance, rather than the divorced or reflective relationship between music and "text" that characterizes so much of the scholarly work on hip hop music. Considering the ways in which traditional performance is self-consciously decentered from its original context and transformed in hip hop reveals multi-layered processes of global and local situation, as Senegalese rappers recontextualize traditional music in a performative dialogue between localized hip hop performance and African diasporic cultural production.

Producing the Black Atlantic

Beyond a question of terminology, what is the purpose, in this instance, of doing away with hybridity? If, as Young and Matory suggest, hybridity at its most basic level depends on a binary division between two fundamentally different things, then a focus on hybrid musical forms likewise runs the risk of being grounded in a foundational binarism of traditional music/Western music that mirrors and reinforces a spatial, racial, and temporal binary between Western and African music and music makers. In this model, Western music and African music figure as discrete, bounded entities belonging to a discrete, bounded "West" or "Africa," respectively. Despite the fact that the "Western" music that comes into play here – jazz, hip hop, soul – is almost invariably Afro-diasporic, the racial Otherness of the music is tempered by its geographical positionality in the West, which, particularly in an era of globalism and globalized neoliberal capitalism, is the constant in each of these instances of hybridity. But what happens to hybridity when we engage local understandings of musical practice to identify the "Western" music involved as *diasporic* music, the way Senegalese rappers do with hip hop? If hip hop is

understood as globalized diasporic music that moves between Africa and its diaspora as points along a common black Atlantic nexus, this suggests not a hybrid encounter between the local and global but rather, the constant motion of music circulating and acquiring meaning in its movements.

Like Africa, the black Atlantic world – a theoretical construct itself often defined through tropes of movement and vessels – predates what is now understood as globalization by hundreds of years (see Gilroy 1993). While traditional understandings of the African diaspora center on displaced communities of African-descended peoples in the Americas and implied unidirectional flows of people from a past African homeland to an American present, emerging scholarship increasingly calls attention to the active role played by Africans and Africa in the production of the Black Atlantic world.⁸ Matory suggests the concept of dialogue as a metaphor for the lived, processual, organic relationship of interaction and influence between Africa and its diaspora, highlighting the mutual gaze and multidirectional travel that have simultaneously shaped African and Afro-American cultures over time and at the same time. Africa and its diaspora are mutually constitutive contemporaries of each other, and the diaspora has played a key role in defining Africa (Matory 2006:183; see also Zeleza 2009).

In this dissertation I adopt this dialogue metaphor to engage the Black Atlantic as a nexus of intersecting and multidirectional diasporic and transnational movements, both historic and contemporary, that implicate not only the Americas but also Africa and Europe. I thus consider diaspora not only as an historical event of traumatic displacement but as identification(s), as way(s) of belonging, and as positioning(s), while considering musical practices as performative dialogues between different nodes in the Black Atlantic world, dialogues that reflect, create,

⁸ For a few representative examples, see Kristin Mann's 2001 edited volume on the relationships between the Bight of Benin and Brazil; J. Lorand Matory's 2005 work on Brazilian candomblé; Charles Piot's 2001 critique of Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*; Toyin Falola and Matt D. Child's 2004 edited volume on the Yoruba diaspora.

sustain, and mediate diasporic connections, both “real” and “imagined.” For whether in the form of contemporary globalized neoliberal capitalism or past diasporas, global linkages don’t just entail people, culture, and things in movement (“flow”); people, things, and culture are also remade as they move, not through pre-existing pathways but through terrains that are forged through that very movement (picture the way running water wears a path for itself) (Tsing 2005).

I argue that hip hop practice in Senegal constitutes a musical dialogue that works through the conventions of genre to recontextualize Africa in the diaspora and the diaspora in Africa, grounding the local in a web of far-reaching interconnection on multiple temporal planes. Senegalese rappers make sense of the global not only through experiences of colonialism and globalized neoliberal capitalism but equally through understandings of diaspora as the terrain through which hip hop moves. The generic intertextuality of hip hop serves in the creation of performative aural memories – not only of historic diasporic connections but also of present, lived connections forged through musical dialogue and contingent on experiences of global racism, power, and privilege. By foregrounding multi-directional dialogic flows of music and culture between Africa and a diasporic West, it is possible to view Senegalese hip hop not as a hybrid consequence of globalization but rather as a strategic process of diasporic situation – the production of diaspora itself.

Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five main chapters and a concluding chapter. In Chapter 1, I situate globalized mythologies of indigenous and diasporic music within Senegal’s history of translocal and global interconnection and exchange, tracing the relationship between trans-Saharan trade, religious conversion, colonization, postcoloniality, and musical practice. As

part of the most recent stage of this historical outline, I detail the development of hip hop in Dakar and describe the city's contemporary hip hop scene, setting the stage for an analysis of Senegalese hip hop production as the production of aural palimpsest memories of global interconnection.

Chapter 2 functions as a bridge between the introductory material of the first two chapters and the primarily ethnography-based chapters that follow. It introduces the Senegalese individuals who contributed to this work and provides a reference for the voices that are cited at length in chapters 3 and 4, which rely heavily on the ethnographic component of my research to explore the practices through which hip hop production becomes the production of memory.

Chapter 3 focuses on contemporary myths of Senegalese hip hop as espoused by practitioners, focusing on the marginalized narratives of Dakar's "underground" rappers, for whom hip hop's definitive Americanness, rather than its mythologized African origins, provides an alternative to traditional cultural production and its contemporary popular recontextualizations that they understand as enmeshed with underdevelopment. I explore how the popular genre *mbalax*, and its frequent use as a medium for the "singing" of patrons, comes to stand as the musical marker of a traditional modernity that leaves little room for youth's agency or voice.

Expanding on Chapter 3's exploration of these discursive constructions of myth, Chapter 4 focuses on hip hop production in a broad sense, exploring the musical production of place-based myth through practices of performative intertextuality that enable the decontextualization and strategic relayering of musical and lyrical elements. I argue that in their self-conscious adherence to what they perceive as global hip hop production norms, local Dakar rappers distance themselves from *mbalax*'s locally-limited hybridity, making musical genre a vehicle for processes of global situation.

Chapter 5 follows hip hop's flows back to the United States to explore the hip hop production practices of two Senegalese immigrant rappers in Los Angeles. I interrogate how their positionality vis-à-vis the Black Atlantic world inflects the production of place in their music and informs their revisioning of hip hop myths. The intertextuality that characterizes hip hop in Senegal here functions as the strategic layering of differences that emerge from the interplay of new and historic African diasporas.

The sixth and final chapter returns to the question of hybridity in light of the narratives and myths explored in the previous chapters. It critically examines dominant popular and scholarly narratives about Senegalese hip hop and draws attention to the importance of sustained ethnographic engagement in representations of popular music and musicians.

A Note on Myth, Sampling, and Flow

I envision this dissertation as a site where stories interconnect – scholarly stories, historical stories, musical stories, my own story of fieldworking, and the stories told in lyrics and discourse. I am therefore arguing for an analysis of Senegalese hip hop based not solely in textually rendered histories but in oral and aural narratives of tradition, of globalization, and of local, global, and diasporic belonging. In doing so, I consider all knowledge production as narrative and call for critical inquiry into the ways we as scholars located in the global north tell stories about the global south, or the south within the north: not only the stories we tell about our “subjects” but also those we tell about ourselves.

When I refer to certain key narratives as “myths,” this is not to dismiss those stories as “untrue” in comparison to an objective historical record but rather to reflect understandings of these stories as relating or belonging to formative or transformative events or periods, and to

emphasize the weight that certain stories carry for different individuals and communities, at different times, in different places, and in different ways.⁹ Myth and lived experience are inextricable, equally unquantifiable, and equally significant avenues for research. In approaching all writing and knowledge production as narrative that often achieves the status of myth, I hope to avoid privileging certain types of narratives – the academic, the written, the western – over others – the local, the oral, the musical. The dismissal of certain myths can in many instances be read as a struggle for or assertion of power over representation. Thus when some scholars dismiss out of hand the “myth” of African origins in African American music, for example, this ignores the cultural significance of this narrative for the people who tell it; in the guise of scholarly objectivity, one myth trumps another that is deeply imbricated in the identity politics of a marginalized group. When we look at the *why* of saying that certain musics originated in Africa – instead of getting caught up in circular debates over the accuracy of the statement – this sheds light on other histories, narratives, and myths and their significance for situated human actors.

In producing this dissertation, I have drawn on a hip hop aesthetic of layering and sampling to create an intertextual re-telling of myth that samples musical, oral, and textual narratives from practitioners and scholars. I juxtapose quotes, analysis, situations, theories – cutting, looping, and layering narratives and mythologies to construct a new narrative that is intrinsically indebted to each of these sources. In this remix of narratives the rhythm of the writing itself shifts as different voices move to the foreground. At times smooth and linear, at times a staccato back and forth of direct quotes, ethnographic and musical description, literature review, and my own analytic narrative, the dissertation’s flow, like the *flow* (verbal cadence) of a

⁹ The word myth also inevitably evokes a Lévi-Straussian structuralism that could arguably be applied in this project centering on two opposing myths. Although I am partially indebted to this tradition for the understanding of myth that I employ here, such a structural analysis is not the aim of this dissertation.

rapper, is encompassed in the relationship of the foregrounded voice to the other layered elements that support it and that it riffs off.

Finally, although I have explicitly attempted to emphasize the voices of local practitioners, these voices are inevitably mediated through my own. This is, ultimately, my own narrative. In producing a layered, multi-referential work, I have made choices about what to sample and how to mix those elements. What follows, then, is one story about hip hop in Senegal, but it is one that, in true hip hop style, couldn't exist without the stories and storytellers that have come before it.

ONE

REMEMBERING MYTH:

MUSICAL GENEALOGIES OF THE GLOBAL

Working from the blurred lines between myth and history, this chapter examines griot practice and hip hop as aural invocations of histories that are connected at a “beginning” – the transatlantic slave trade – and an “end” – neoliberal capitalism and the global spread of western cultural products – and that are strategically invented and reinvented as tradition. It juxtaposes global myths of cultural production – myths that are produced through practitioner and scholarly discourse and media representation and, as this dissertation will argue, through musical production itself – with an historical overview of the relationship between musical practice and local and global interconnections in Senegal. Finally, it considers hip hop as a practice of remembering that produces aural memories of these layered, multi-sited histories and myths.

Mythologizing the Griot

Perched on the Cap Vert peninsula on the westernmost point of the African continent, Senegal’s capital Dakar is a bustling, sprawling urban center. Its highways, its city center, its billboards and advertisements and traffic jams all testify to its modernity. But in the cacophonous urban soundscape of cell phones, car horns, radios, televisions, amplified popular music and even more-amplified product endorsements and Muslim prayers, there emerges the ever present voice of the griot, ancient bardic figure and embodied repository of oral history whose presence has been remarked by successive generations of outsiders over centuries until the present day.

More than half a millennium ago, the earliest European travelers to West Africa “discovered” these griots among the villages and towns they visited, then raided, then colonized.

They documented the roles griots played in their societies – as historians, as genealogists, as social commentators and royal mouthpieces, self-accompanied on stringed instruments. The European element ignited processes of change that would play out over centuries: French colonial power was established, local chiefs undermined, and elusive citizenship offered to certain privileged Africans. Indigenous political parties formed and garnered support from local Muslim factions. Independence was attained under the socialist party that would remain in power for forty years until the groundbreaking presidential elections of 2000. And through it all, the griot survived, preserving the music and the memory of life before modernity.

Today, this is his burden – the oral preservation of the ancient histories that define locally-bound tradition against western cultural intrusions. Africa may wear a new mask of modernity but its true character remains. In the contemporary urban landscape, griots are here as they were here – in the baptisms, the naming ceremonies, and the marriages that spark traditional celebration amidst the concrete buildings and busy streets that define daily life for so many 21st century Africans. The griot speaks. He plays. He sings. He reaches through the trappings of Europe’s casually discarded modernizing project to connect his people with their past.

This is the griot’s story. Or at least it is *a* story about the griot, one that permeates popular and scholarly discourse. In the face of centuries of socio-cultural upheaval, the master of the word, accompanied by polyrhythmic melody, stands as a living source of ancient tradition, defined against change.

Mythologizing Hip Hop

Even before France put down roots in what would become the political center of its African colonial project, the hideous unspeakable that was the transatlantic slave trade ripped

millions of people from peaceful village lives, carrying them across the ocean to forcibly adopt an alien way of life. In the centuries that followed, the seeds of culture that survived this violent transplantation took root and grew in the plantations of the new world. In the United States, enslaved Africans working in fields revised their musical heritages into field hollers and shouts and spirituals. In the Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction South, new liberties with instruments and free time coupled with these slave songs to produce the blues, a music that alternately led or followed newly free black Americans as they migrated en masse away from the nouveau-slavery of the south and towards the burgeoning industrial cities of the north. The nascent music industry of the early 20th century spread the blues to a scattered audience even as the music made its first troubled forays into the Black Church. The rhythm and blues of urban black musicians was co-opted as rock 'n' roll by the next wave of white performers to recognize the value of black music. In the '60s, gospel and soul led black music away from the static catharsis of the blues, moving on up with the growing civil rights movement and the recognition that a change was coming. The disappointed soul of the movement turned to funk, its repetitive failure to ever go anywhere a musical reflection on the false promises of the decade, while on the other side of the spectrum disco danced its way into the mainstream.

Enter hip hop. Disillusioned minority youth in the burned-out neighborhoods of the 1970s postindustrial South Bronx take these musics and fixate on the break. Creative young minds repurpose turntables as musical instruments, street corners as stages, and flattened cardboard boxes become stages for a new kind of dancing. Struggling youth quickly recognize the economic potential of this innovative musical recycling, and at rent parties and nightclubs MCs join the new disc jockeys to urge on the crowd in a role that soon takes on a life of its own.

Born out of the musical remnants of the civil rights struggle, hip hop can't stay so party-oriented for long. Youth with stolen cans of spray paint invade public space, and hip hop's young godfather Afrika Bambaata christens graffiti into the family fold of the new musical culture. In the '90s, groups like Public Enemy adopt images of black nationalism in their anti-authoritarian raps, while across the country the gangsta rap of the West Coast lifts its head from drugs and bitches to make a clear national statement, fuck the police. Hip hop you don't stop gives way to a new political consciousness inextricably tied to these new ways of producing sound and movement and images. The Native Tongues movement emerges with a new group of artists producing jazz-based, socially-conscious music. Queen Latifah sings about U.N.I.T.Y. and respect for women, while groups like the Wu-Tang Clan espouse back Muslim ideology in their coded lyrics. Tupac and Biggie rise and fall as hip hop martyrs.

But by now, this is all a memory. Rapper Nas spoke for a lot of people when he proclaimed on the album cover of a national release that "hip hop is dead." A new generation raps its mindless gospel of blatant consumerism and misogyny over cookie cutter tracks. If real hip hop isn't dead, it has at least gone underground, where embattled MCs frequent local venues, taking a stance with hard hitting lyrics and live instrumentals against the hip hop imposter that has gone viral on a global scale.

This is hip hop's story. Or it is at least *a* story about hip hop, one that permeates popular and academic discourse. Scholars take up this mythology, reciting a checklist of "facts" about hip hop as they go through the paces of credible music research. Hip hop has four elements: rapping, writing, breaking, scratching. It was born in the South Bronx. It is political. It is resistant. It is Black (with a dash of Latino). Or it was – political, resistant, black, conscientious – back in the day when it was young.

Music as Memory, Music as Myth

These two stories of cultural practice on opposite sides of the Atlantic represent musical mythologies through which the historical trajectories of two distinct populations – one African, one African American – can be traced. Through hip hop practice, Senegalese youth bring these invented traditions together, producing musical tracks that can be read as aural palimpsest memories of diverse histories of colonialism, enslavement, and emancipation struggles on both sides of the Atlantic. In positing Senegalese hip hop as aural memory, I draw largely on the work of Rosalind Shaw and Paul Gilroy. In *Memories of the Slave Trade*, Shaw argues that the slave trade, though unspoken, is still remembered in Sierra Leone, where it is “forgotten” as discursive memory but remembered in everyday practices including divination and ritual. Thus a theory of practice is also a theory of memory, in which violent processes such as the Atlantic slave trade are internalized and incorporated into social practice. Focusing on these processes demands recognition that practical, nondiscursive forms of memory are at least as important as explicit discursive memories “about” the past, as historical events are incorporated and remembered in the practices and meanings that people produce. Shaw argues that these embodied memories of the slave trade are also memories about modernity. The capitalist world market associated with modernity is several centuries old, and thus the layered memories of earlier experiences of modernity serve as a filter for new experiences of modernity, linking past and present processes of modernization together. She coins the term “palimpsest memories” to describe these chronologically heterogeneous memories that layer experiences from different times.

In his seminal work *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy challenges the modernist privilege of writing and language as expressions of human consciousness, exploring black musical expression as embodied, nondiscursive memories of slavery that comment on relations of

domination through a grounded aesthetics not separate from lived reality. Gilroy argues that the unspeakably brutal conditions of slavery have been remembered in embodied historical memories expressed musically and kinetically by Afro-Atlantic populations. The extra-linguistic/antidiscursive consequences of the master/slave power differential determined and shaped communicative acts during the era of slavery to the point where the importance of music as a communicative act grew in inverse proportion to the increasingly limited utility of language as a communicative act. To focus on musical expression as a form of practical memory can displace a concern with textuality that doesn't resonate with cultures characterized by orality and a consequently distinctive relationship to the body that requires that we view music, gesture, and dance as equal to speech in communicative importance (Gilroy 1993).

This chapter explores the multilayered historical interconnections that have defined both griot practice and hip hop in Senegal, complicating dominant models of cultural globalization and positing musical production as a performative embodied remembering of histories both "true" and "untrue." Tracing Senegalese history through cultural production, I make an argument for hip hop musical products as aural palimpsest memories that work alongside discursive rememberings of distinct yet interconnected histories of colonialism and post- and neo-colonialism in Africa and its U.S. diaspora.

Globalizations and Cultural Production in Senegal

The contemporary global flows that carried hip hop to Senegal in the early 1980s marked the newest stage in a long history of translocal exchange in the region, whose social and cultural history is scored with pivotal moments of interconnection that define the country as it exists today. Cultural practices, and music specifically, were/are equally shaped by these overlapping

interconnections. Before Europeans ever came to the continent, the Senegambia region was populated by diverse ethnic-linguistic groups, who exerted differing levels of influence over the region as different empires alternately rose and fell. The latest of these, the Jolof empire, dominated by the same Wolof ethnic group that constitutes the ethnic majority in present day Senegal, collapsed around the mid-sixteenth century.

A unifying factor among many of the ethnic groups in this region was the prevalence of stratified social structures, which among the Wolof, as among other groups, took the form of a caste system of social differentiation wherein families, differentiated by surname, belonged to particular strata of society. Musicians, called *g ew l* in Wolof, were included in this system among the second to lowest class, that of people who work with their hands. These social strata were defined by relationships of patronage and clientage that were central to social organization; in the case of the *g ew l*, their connection to noble patrons rendered their social position somewhat ambiguous, as they came from one of the lowest strata of society but were deeply enmeshed with the highest.

Long before the European traders who would become the harbingers of colonialism and the Atlantic slave trade “discovered” the region’s rich natural resources, a vibrant trans-Saharan trade (in both goods and slaves) grounded an already ethnically interconnected Senegal in dynamic extra-local relationships based on the circulation of goods, people, and ideologies. Islam crossed the Sahara in the 11th century, spurring mass conversion and, in some cases jihads, throughout West Africa.¹⁰ While different ethnic groups adopted Islam more wholeheartedly than others (the Wolof, notably, continued to practice local animist religion alongside or in place

¹⁰ Jihads often had as much to do with conquest as with religious zeal, providing a sound reason for invading neighboring areas. The jihads of West Africa that continued into the 17th century took place during a somewhat stagnant period in Islam’s development in the Middle East, and thus cannot be read solely as the influence of an Arab Muslim core on a West African periphery (Curtin 1971).

of Islam until the 20th century, and the practice of Islam in present-day Senegal maintains traces of animist tradition), the spread of Islam throughout the larger region contributed to yet another form of interconnection independent of Western influence. Ethnomusicologists generally consider the presence of Islam in the region to have affected musical aesthetics, particularly in terms of the partial adoption of the nasalized vocal quality and ornamentation associated with Islamic cantillation (see Nketia 1974:12).

When European influence did arrive, it was not in the form of a unitary French presence; instead, Senegal was in contact at different times with the Portuguese, Dutch, English, and French. The Atlantic slave trade that ravaged Senegal's population caused massive demographic shifts that resulted in the alteration of existing patterns of marriage and gendered divisions of labor at the same time that the arrival of Europeans and the subsequent growth of commerce in gum arab and later peanuts (known as the legitimate trade after the end of the transatlantic slave trade) increased interconnection in the area, creating a new class of transient (usually Muslim) African traders (Klein 1972).

Colonial Inventions of Senegal

The French presence in Senegal centered on four “communes” – the original settlements of St. Louis (in the North) and Gorée Island (off the coast of Dakar, originally a Dutch settlement), and later Rufisque and Dakar. French colonialism in Senegal was marked by a policy of assimilation, where a small elite group of African residents (as well as the rapidly growing métis community) were “assimilated” into Catholicism and French-language competence, eventually assuming positions of authority under colonial administrators. While St. Louis in particular was home to a significant Muslim presence, assimilation generally implied

conversion to the Catholic faith, the practice of which was nevertheless marked by the still strong remnants of local animist religion and extensive interaction with Muslims. At the same time, the assimilés' acceptance of European standards and values carried with it the expectation of comparable rights to Europeans (Hargreaves 1965). Historian Mamadou Diouf argues that the claims of indigenous people on the French colonial administration, along with their plural religious practice, demonstrate histories of interactions and African agency in the production of a new community defined not by blind acceptance of Frenchness but by compromise and creolization (2000). The majority of Senegalese, however, cannot be said to have assimilated in any sense, as French language competence remained (and remains) minimal in rural areas (Idowu 1969).

At the same time, as a response to the imposition of colonial rule, increasing numbers of Senegalese people (the “unassimilated” majority) finally turned to Islam, which, in the face of the colonial destruction of local power structures, provided new models of social organization that were compatible with local practices of social differentiation and patronage-based social relationships. The systematic weakening of traditional power structures at the hands of French authorities served to destabilize existing social and religious systems. This was exacerbated by the introduction of the commercial peanut crop, which became the dominant export by the mid-19th century, further undermining the power of traditional chiefs to parcel out land for subsistence farming. It was in this moment of social crisis that the growing Sufi brotherhoods, who would soon come to define the practice of Islam in Senegal, finally found a foothold in the Wolof society that had marginalized them for so long. The *marabouts*, or Muslim leaders belonging to different brotherhoods, gradually replaced the unstable indigenous ruling classes, garnering communities of disciples who were attracted by the possibility of a degree of social

mobility unavailable in strictly stratified social systems that existed before colonization. The marabouts' new role as rural leaders and their involvement in the cultivation of the peanut crop made them an important asset to French colonial leaders, who, in their need for liaisons with their rural subjects, directly and consciously contributed to the spread of Islam in the area. The creation of the Murid brotherhood by Senegalese saint Cheikh Amadou Bamba in the early 20th century – a brotherhood centered on the marabout/disciple relationship and the importance of hard work – “completed the transformation of the old disintegrating regime into the new colonial order,” particularly in the context of the peanut economy (Robinson 2000).¹¹ While in precolonial society women wielded some degree of power derived from their relationships to male political leaders, the French undermining of these local power structures, along with the commercialization of agriculture and the introduction of the French educational system (both functioning as mediums of upward mobility from which women were excluded), significantly weakened women's positioning in society, as did the increasing influence of local interpretations of Islam (Creevy 1996). At the same time, the combined influence of French and Islamic patriarchies successfully shifted the traditional bilineal system of Wolof kinship to a patrilineal one.

Despite the minimally applied ideology of assimilation, as in other African colonies the French were invested in maintaining difference between themselves and their colonial subjects, a process that functioned through the invention of tradition. V.Y. Mudimbe describes a colonizing structure that comprises the spatial, economic, mental, and spiritual domination of “natives” and their integration into a Western perspective. This structure encompasses the physical and

¹¹ While the Muride brotherhood occupies a prominent place in Senegalese Muslim practice, three other brotherhoods have significant followings: the Qadiriyya, originating in Bagdad in the 12th century; the Tijaniyyah, which originated in Morocco in the 18th century and spread to Senegal via Mauritania; and the Layene, a small sect specific to the Lebou people and centered in the community of Yoff on the coast of Dakar.

spiritual aspects of colonialism largely in and through its creation of a system of dichotomies and binary oppositions, such as traditional/modern, oral/written, agrarian/urban, etc. (Mudimbe 1988:4). While Europe first invented Africa as an object of study and an Other to its Self, a central element of the colonial invention of Africa was the invention of African traditions as both a primitive counterpart to European modernity and a means of colonial control. As Terrence Ranger describes, the seemingly irreconcilable differences in the political and social organization of European and African societies fostered the need, on the part of colonial powers, to find some kind of common ground between themselves and their colonial subjects. This common ground was found, or rather, constructed, in “tradition,” both in the form of invented European institutional traditions (such as those in which the assimilated inhabitants of the French communes participated) and of colonially codified African traditions (Ranger 1983). Europeans busily socialized Africans into neo-traditional institutions – including, in the Senegalese case, schools for the sons of local chiefs and French citizenship for original habitants of the communes – that offered entry points into a colonial world in which the roles of master/subjugated were already clearly demarcated. But in the same moment, they were equally engaged in the invention of African tradition. Aspects of African life that had previously been flexible, allowing for continuity and change in response to the needs of the community, were heralded as timeless, fixed custom by colonial authorities, who codified these customs as static tradition, particularly through the act of writing them down (Ranger 1983).

Music and cultural practices fared no differently. In French West Africa, French colonialists dubbed the local bardic figures and hereditary musicians “griots,” a word as invented as the tradition it came to signify. While, as described above, many stratified West African societies include bardic figures and speech genres, the word “griot” lumped together disparate

performance traditions that, while tied to similar social functions, were and are aesthetically and culturally distinct from one local context to the next. These invented performance traditions were encapsulated in the figure of the griot, who, as an embodied repository of invented tradition, came to exemplify the dichotomies created by the colonizing structure, representing a past, a tradition, an orality that was and is juxtaposed with Western modernity and literacy. Like other invented traditions, the griot occupied an ambivalent position in colonial representations of Africa; he and his music to this day are constructed as unchanging, timeless tradition within and without the continent.¹²

In reality, in contemporary Senegal musicians from different ethnic groups continue to play different instruments and sing in different styles. The instruments most associated with griots today in the popular and scholarly imagination – the kora, balafon, and djembe – are all instruments associated with various Mande ethnic groups in West Africa (although it is actually unusual for the Mande griot to play the djembe). In contrast, Wolof griots (*gèwèls*), who share many features with griots of other ethnic groups, are skilled in sabar percussion or tama/talking drum, or the xalam (lute), and their verbal performance genres include various forms of chant or spoken recitation in addition to singing.¹³ Despite a tendency towards androcentricity in scholarly and popular references to the griot, among the Wolof (as among other ethnic groups) both women and men are griots. While women don't play instruments, aside from the calabash

¹² Because most griots who play instruments in addition to singing (in other words, the mythologized persona of the griot) are male, and because despite the fact that there are female griots, Senegalese rappers in the United States and Dakar tend to always refer to their male counterparts, I use the male pronoun to refer to griots throughout this dissertation. The erasure of female griots (“griottes”) from local narratives and Western scholarly and popular discourse is addressed in Chapter 7.

¹³ According to Eric Charry's extensive study of Mande music, Mande griots rarely play drums with the exception of the tama (pressure drum) and dundun (double headed drum) which are associated with griots in certain regions only. In general, however, the Wolof griot tradition's emphasis on drumming distinguishes it from the various Mande traditions (Charry 2000)

(gourd) and clapping, they fill important roles as verbal performers at life cycle events such as naming ceremonies and wedding celebrations.

The invention of the griot as an unchanging (masculine) repository of tradition has played a prominent role in scholarship on African American music, from spirituals, to the blues, to jazz, funk, and finally hip hop, as rappers are framed as contemporary griots, manifestations of an authentic African past (see, for example, Coolen 1991; Holloway 1990; Jackson 1981; Keyes 2002¹⁴).¹⁵ But while the obstacles to tracing aesthetic and musical change in a musical practices that have existed for centuries without notation are obvious, the assumption that people are making the same music now that they made one, two, three, or even four centuries ago – in other words, the idea that the musical practice of contemporary griots can stand in for the musical practices of their distant ancestors – implies an assumption of stagnancy in African culture that has been well-critiqued in Africanist anthropology. Griot modes of performance, like modes of performance in the West (and, for that matter, everywhere else in the world) surely do change. Take, for example, a family of Wolof *gèwèl*s in Los Angeles, California, where I witnessed a struggle between father and sons over new ways of attaching animal skin heads to sabar drums: the father wanted to continue stringing his drums in what he referred to as the “traditional” way, while the sons were excited about the volume they could achieve with the new stringing system. While I was studying with this family, a standard prayer that we played at the end of every class

¹⁴ Keyes’s discussion of the relationship between griots and rappers stems from her interviews with African American hip hop practitioners Afrika Bambaataa and Lumumba Carson, who themselves drew this connection, in part influenced by Alex’s Haley’s popular television miniseries *Roots: The Next Generations* (2002: 17-18)

¹⁵ Despite the problematic nature of the word griot, I use it throughout this chapter mostly for lack of a better term. Although ethnically specific terms are certainly available (e. g. *jeli*, for the Mandinke groups in Senegal, *gèwèl* for the Wolof), to use an ethnically specific term in the context of an ethnically diverse environment would be to equally conflate diverse performance practices under a single name. In using the word griot, I therefore attempt to communicate the very inefficacy of an ethnically specific term to describe a diverse collection of performance practices. At the same time, however, I replicate the day-to-day language use of Senegalese hip hop artists that communicate local perceptions, influenced by colonial discourse, of griot performance as a unified, interethnic phenomenon.

was also significantly altered after the sons returned to Senegal for a visit and came back with the newest version of the purportedly ancient Muslim invocation. If two adjacent generations can experience this level of change in traditional music production, than surely we can no longer discuss traditional music from colonial and precolonial periods as though it is the same as the traditional music recorded in studios today.

Urbanization and the Birth of Popular Music

The center of French operations shifted from St. Louis to Dakar in 1902. Previously a fairly sparse settlement, Dakar's new identity as the center of French West Africa created an influx of rural migrants and traders as well as French employees. Colonial urban planning increasingly pushed indigenous residents into racially segregated neighborhoods, often under the pretense of concern for health and sanitation issues. For example the Medina, Dakar's "native quarter" formed in 1914 when an outbreak of plague (brought to Africa on European ships) gave French administrators an excuse to destroy the ideally-located huts of indigenous inhabitants, who, unable or unwilling to rebuild concrete European homes, were pushed into the newly constructed, African-only quarter separated from the European area by a "sanitary cordon" of uninhabited space. The Medina, constructed on land susceptible to flooding in the rainy season and referred to as Tilene (or area of jackals) by Africans, was never fully developed, standing in stark contrast to the sparkling European city being constructed. The French displacement of indigenous populations was neither uncontested nor entirely successful, as some Africans, particularly the Lebou ethnic group who lived where the new city was to be constructed, resisted the French incursion onto their land in multiple ways (including market strikes and physical resistance). In addition to these efforts at physically segregating the city, the language used in

colonists' descriptions of Dakar (in terms of the European "urban zone" and the African "non-urban zone") served to discursively exclude Africans from the modernizing process that was going on, as the African residents and residences were considered to be outside of the urban landscape, a rural sphere in contrast to the more truly "urban" white areas (Bigon 2009:226).

It was during this same period of urbanization that popular music began developing in Dakar, as local musicians began to learn western instruments and music to play at nightclubs for French, métis, and elite African audiences. The intersections of colonial center-periphery relationships with other transnational forms of interconnection are evident in the popularity of Afro-Cuban music, which was introduced by the French colonial elite due to the music's popularity in Paris but was also brought directly from Cuba by sailors, who interacted with Senegalese workers in Dakar's port. While the introduction of Afro-Cuban music to African audiences is generally attributed to the British HMV label's GV series of recordings (later redistributed by Columbia Records), in Senegal, at least, this music was also introduced by these sailors in the transatlantic trade between Senegal and Cuba (Shain 2002).

The racialized organization of the colonial city, in conjunction with the sparsely-applied assimilation policies of the French, resulted in largely segregated urban audiences, and meant that the newly developing popular music scene in Dakar for the most part continued to faithfully study and reproduce musical genres from Europe and Latin America. The ballroom, jazz, and Afro-Cuban music played by popular dance bands thus remained fairly unaltered during the colonial period (in contrast with other cities throughout Africa, where these musics were indigenized much earlier).¹⁶

¹⁶ For example, Thomas Turino (2000) describes how indigenized urban popular music emerged in Zimbabwe as early as the 1930s; Christopher Waterman (1991) locates the development of specific genres of "modernized African" and "Africanized Western" popular music in Lagos in the 1920s and '30s; several authors have written

African Socialism and the New Sufi Order

Senegal achieved independence from colonial rule in 1960, with acclaimed intellectual Leopold Senghor taking office as president and introducing a new “African” socialism as the ideal model for the newly emerging Senegalese state.¹⁷ While Senegal officially changed to a multi-party system in 1978, Senghor’s Parti Socialiste remained in power until 2000. The reliance on the Muslim brotherhoods that characterized colonial rule did not diminish with Senegal’s birth as an independent country; if anything, the new African administrators, lacking the support of a major backing power on which their colonial predecessors relied, depended even more on the marabouts for political support, particularly in the form of public statements serving as voting guides for disciples. The state reliance on maraboutic authority, particularly in the interior, was accompanied by state protection of their material interests; today, the marabouts constitute one of the richest sectors of Senegalese society (Behrman 1970; Van Hoven 2000). Since Abdou Diouf’s ascension to presidency in 1983, Senegalese nationalist rhetoric has increasingly incorporated themes and models of relationships (such as an emphasis on hard work and master-disciple bonds) drawn directly from the maraboutic disciplines in an effort to forge national identity among a population that is by nature factional in its devotion to particular Muslim leaders.

Within this context, the griot is doubly repositioned to serve the new “patrons” of the postcolonial Senegalese state, on the one hand serving as an important asset to political candidates and factions, and on the other, as a mouthpiece for the marabouts. Griots are typically

about the early indigenization of imported Western music in South Africa, including Coplan (1985) and Erlman (1991).

¹⁷ Senghor wished to avoid the Soviet model’s rejection of the individual through a focus on African cultural practices and cooperation between high and low factions of society (rather than economically defined “classes”). Although Senghor also explicitly rejected French Socialism in favor of an African socialism based not only on traditional community but on his belief in an African way of reasoning that is intuitive and participatory rather than analytical, his distinctively humanistic bent belies the influence of French modes of thinking (Hazard 1965).

attached to political parties, something that that was reinforced by president Abdou Diouf's strategic revalorization of pre-colonial cultural values as a more authentic representation of lived Africanity than Senghor's intellectualized negritude (Panzacchi 1994). At the same time, griots have been refigured in postcolonial Islamic practices, often serving as muezzins (those who give the call to prayer) and as mouthpieces for powerful marabouts, who address crowds of disciples via griot intermediaries who repeat loudly and with embellishments their murmured teachings (McLaughlin 1997). Islam's influence on performance practice extends beyond the verbal performance of praise singing and interlocution to instrumental music as well. The Wolof converted en masse to Islam around the turn of the 20th century, and traditional music and Islam from that point on quickly became intertwined, as evidenced in the contemporary performance of prayers and religious invocations in the traditional form of *bakks*, or composed rhythms mirroring speech patterns, on Wolof drums. This is most notable in the drumming of the Baay Fall sub-sect of Muridism, the "Muslim Rastas" who wear dreadlocks and patchwork and whose religious practice, centering on drumming, chanting, and costuming typical of a precolonial warrior slave caste known as *ceddo*, clearly reflects the influence of indigenous animist practice on Islam in Senegal.¹⁸

Postcolonial Rhythms: Mbalax and the Indigenization of Popular Music

It was only after Senegal's independence from French colonialism in 1960 that popular music really took off, as the imported jazz and salsa popular in urban nightclubs were finally mixed with indigenous elements in response to the postcolonial shift towards a general (rather than exclusively elite) urban African audience. The mbalax music that developed in the years

¹⁸ Savishinsky (1994) and O'Brien (1971) have documented the similarities between the costuming of the Baye Fall and the *ceddo* class, members of which constituted the core of Ibra Fall's immediate followers. Fall himself is said to have been a *ceddo*.

immediately following independence represents an aural history of these interconnections, combining Islamic praise singing and vocal styles with interethnic “traditional” musics as well as the jazz and Afro-Cuban music so popular during the colonial period.

While maintaining the instruments and sonorities of international popular musics, mbalax takes the rhythms of the sabar drum ensemble, in particular the “mbalax” or foundational accompaniment rhythm for which the popular genre is named, and transposes them to electrified western instruments to produce a *truly* hybrid musical form, combining disparate imported and indigenous musics to create a music that is markedly different from the genres on which it draws and that is understood by practitioners to be something new and unique. Mbalax bands also often include actual sabar drums as well as the tama, or Wolof talking drum. In addition, many mbalax singers, although certainly not all of them, are from griot lineages; this is particularly true for female artists. This perhaps explains why women, more so than men, are more likely to include traditional genealogical genres in their popular music (Panazacchi 1994; McLaughlin 1997).

The intertwining political and religious power structures that have replaced (while not completely erasing) traditional social organization have gone hand in hand with these developments in popular music production to create uniquely urban reworkings of the patron-client relationship that characterized so much of traditional society. Fiona McLaughlin characterizes mbalax as Islamic popular music that constitutes a “new tradition” of praise singing specifically adapted to a newly modern social order, in which popular musicians sing the praises of the marabouts. In McLaughlin’s analysis, the géwël-noble relationship of patronage is dependent on a third entity, the audience, who ultimately determines the reputation of the noble based on the performance of the géwël. In Senegalese Sufism, this is reconfigured so that the popular music audience takes on the role of patron, expressing its appreciation for particular

marabout by rewarding that marabout's praise singer (a popular musician) with money and gifts. Singing the praise of religious masters and political figures in nightclubs, on the radio, and on cassettes has significant economic ramifications, as it can lead to surges in a singer's popularity and the sale of albums. It's not surprising then that even mbalaxmen who are not griots have adopted the lucrative practice of praising politicians and marabouts in their music (McLaughlin).

Following the advent of "World Music" marketing in the 1980s, mbalax musicians, most prominently Youssou Ndour (who is generally credited with creating the genre), have adapted their styles to appeal to an international World Music audience, simplifying the indigenous-based rhythms of the music, emphasizing a clear 4/4 beat structure, and thinning out the texture from the dense instrumental overlays (based on indigenous drum-ensemble music) that characterize the music in its local setting. The mbalax that has been reworked for a World Music market thus bears little resemblance to actual popular music in Senegal. Instead, in Senegalese nightclubs, the grittier, more rhythmically complex version of mbalax that developed in the years immediately following independence coexists in popular venues with the Afro-Cuban and Latin jazz bands that continue to perform music inspired by or even directly copied from Afro-Cuban *son*, as well as Muslim-influenced traditional lute music that is often performed as an opening act for mbalax bands.

Fronted by the social and aesthetic revision of localized Islamic praise singing, over the accompaniment of indigenous rhythms simultaneously attached to traditional drums and transposed to the electrified instruments that still retain elements of the jazz and salsa that brought them to Senegal in the first place, mbalax constitutes a truly hybrid musical form that layers musical markers of multiple times, events, places, and peoples to express the contemporary *mélange* that is modern Senegalese society. Equally present in nightclubs and

traditional life-cycle ceremonies, it musically encapsulates the historic trajectory of the postcolonial city – a hybrid cacophony of indigenous and globalized languages, architectures, religions, fashions, and lifestyles.

Hip Hop Galsen

As I began my fieldwork in Senegal, the situation was somewhat bleak. I wrote this chapter amid the escalation of the deep-seated unrest of a population tired of daily power outages and the escalating price of living in the face of rampant abuse of national funds by government officials. President Abdoulaye Wade, who was removed from office in a two-round democratic election in February and March 2012, spent most of 2011 insisting that he would serve an arguably unconstitutional third term, bringing Senegal to the brink of potential internal violence and nearly destroying the image of peaceful democracy that has set the country apart from its West African neighbors for so long. Although the situation, after months of rioting and demonstrations, finally came to a peaceful resolution, it remains to be seen if the new administration under president Macky Sall will in reality usher in more than superficial change.

One response to the hardships of contemporary urban existence has been the increase in Senegalese migration to the United States and Europe, as (mostly male) Muride disciples from humble backgrounds (known as modou-modou) send money back to their marabouts and to their families, creating Senegal-based networks of global interconnection. Alongside Senegal's continued economic crisis, religious and social factors continue to limit the options of women in society, as men continue to receive more formal education and to enjoy the benefits of a religiously and traditionally-influenced (although allegedly secular and modern) legal system that both actively and passively affords them more rights than women.

In present-day Dakar, mbalax, a product of urbanization, globalization, and ethnic mixing, comes to signify “traditional music” for contemporary urban youth disconnected from the social systems that defined life before and during colonialism for most Senegalese. But while mbalax remains the most popular form of music in Senegal, dominating music television, radio, and dance clubs, new forms of global interconnection over the last thirty years or so have also introduced reggae and hip hop to West African audiences. In a society characterized by rampant unemployment, poverty, a lack of adequate social services, and consequent rural-to-urban as well as international migrations, generations of young men, without the means or education to contribute financially to the extended families that support their existence and with little to no responsibilities within that domestic sphere, find themselves with plenty of free time and a multitude of social wrongs to comment upon. These factors have contributed to the massive growth of hip hop culture in Senegal and its continued dominance by male actors.

Hip hop followed multiple paths on its way to Senegal, moving through globalized media channels directly from the United States and also by way of a localized hip hop scene in France. But beyond the obvious role of global capitalism, hip hop also came to Senegal via networks of migrants moving between Senegal and Europe or Senegal and North America. In addition to early television exposure to American hip hop music videos, many rappers credit older brothers, cousins, or neighbors with first exposing them to rap music upon returning to Senegal from abroad. The centrality of globally-broadcasted music videos in bringing hip hop to Senegal led to an almost exclusive emphasis on dance (often referred to as “Smurf”) in Senegalese youth’s early efforts to create hip hop culture. Without exception, the entirety of Senegal’s “oldschool” of rappers began as dancers, transitioning to rapping in the ’90s as frontmen for their dance crews. The reggae influence introduced to Senegal in the ’80s, which had a deep impact on urban

culture¹⁹ also played a role in early rap groups, which consistently emphasized a singer-rapper-toaster format. The earliest hip hop in Senegal was therefore really a hybrid blend of globalized diasporic genres including rap, reggae-dancehall, and rhythm and blues. For some time now, the phrase “Rap Galsen” has been used to describe hip hop in Senegal, a moniker developed, in the style of North African French rappers, by inverting the syllables in Sene-gal to create Gal-sen.

Most Senegalese rappers, particularly those belonging to the first generation of hip hoppers in Dakar that emerged in the '80s and into the early '90s, describe their initiation into hip hop as guided by the music of groups like the Wu Tang Clan, Public Enemy, and later Tupac and Biggie Smalls. Youth began by rapping phonetically-memorized lyrics to English-language raps, eventually beginning to write their own lyrics which they would self-record over the instrumental B-sides of hip hop records purchased in local markets. While rapper Backa Dium is generally credited with being the first to professionally record a hip hop song in Senegal, it was the group Positive Black Soul, made of up DJ Awadi and Duggy Tee, who really put Senegalese hip hop on the map, and hip hop on the Senegalese map. A combination of two different competitive dance crews from the 1980s, Positive Black Soul (PBS) was the first group to bring rap music into the public sphere in Senegal as well as to international audiences, largely thanks to a fortuitous encounter with popular Senegalese-French rapper MC Solaar, for whom the group opened at a concert at the French Cultural Center in downtown Dakar in 1992. The concert with MC Solaar led directly to international recording opportunities for the group at a time when Senegalese rappers (few and far between as they were), had hardly any recording opportunities at all, and certainly not international ones. Not long after PBS, the groups Peefrois and Daara J emerged, also enjoying international success, followed by the group Yatfu. These groups benefited from international connections and the resultant opportunities to create new beats for

¹⁹ See for example, Shavishinsky, 1994 on the influence of reggae-borne Rastafarianism on the Baay Fall sect.

the first time in professional Dakar studios as well as studios abroad. Early in their careers, they rapped and sang almost exclusively in French, thereby implicitly aiming their music at the urban, educated segment of Senegalese society in which they grew up as well as an international Francophone audience. Membership in these founding groups, as well as a fifth oldschool group Rap'Adio, fluctuated throughout the '90s, as members shifted between different groups. A sixth founding group popped up in Pikine, with the members of Waa BMG 44 bringing hip hop out of Dakar proper and into the surrounding neighborhoods. Awadi (of PBS), Daara J, Xuman (of Pee Froiss), and Matador of Waa BMG, all continue to enjoy successful international careers.

While Rap'Adio was already in existence at the time that these other groups were developing local and international careers, the group was slow to realize the same success. But when Rap'Adio finally released a long-awaited debut album, *Ku Weet Xam sa Bop* ("s/he who is alone knows her/himself") in 1998, it marked a crucial turning point in hip hop's trajectory. While earlier rap groups did at times address social issues and politics in their music, the general sentiment among younger rappers is that early Senegalese hip hop, due to its emphasis on singing and its lack of socially conscious lyrics, was somehow inauthentic. In contrast, Rap'Adio's unique style and emphasis on hard hitting, Wolof language lyrics, which had failed to shine through an internationally-oriented scene like the music of PBS or Daara J, struck a chord with Senegalese youth, who found in this music something that they could identify with – not just a globalized music but a localized one. While a second generation of Senegalese rappers credits not only oldschool U.S. artists and local TV and radio programming but also the founding fathers of PBS and other groups with their entrance into hip hop, they all reference 1998 as a definitive moment in hip hop's evolution in Senegal. Gone were the crooning singers and toasters of the 3-man rap group format. Gone were themes of love and harmless, inoffensive

lyrics. Instead, Rap‘Adio turned the tide of Senegalese hip hop towards the underground,²⁰ transforming rap from catchy globalized music-making into an edgy mouthpiece for social justice, spoken in a language that all local youth, and not just the elite, could understand.

Hip Hop Social Networks

As Dakar’s population continued to expand exponentially through the 20th century, the creation of the *banlieue*, populous and often impoverished neighborhoods surrounding Dakar proper, led to a distinction between the “town” (Dakar and its early satellite neighborhoods such as the Medina and Grand Dakar that have long since been absorbed by the city’s insatiable spread), and the surrounding banlieue that house millions of people.²¹ With the exception of Rap‘Adio, who hailed from Medina, and Waa BMG 44, from the Pikine banlieue, Dakar’s early rap crews (Daara J, Positive Black Soul, Pee Froiss, and Yatfu) all came from S.I.C.A.P. (Société Immobilière du Cap-Vert), a collection of relatively spacious and calm neighborhoods on the fringes of Dakar proper, generally populated by financially stable families whose children had good educational opportunities and speak elegant French. After the initial success of the S.I.C.A.P. groups, the influence of Rap‘Adio and Waa BMG 44 spread outwards in concentric circles, as more and more youth became interested in the genre through the Wolof lyrics of these groups and a sense of shared lived experience. Senegal’s second wave of rappers thus drew

²⁰ The word “underground” in the U.S. context has been used to describe artists who remain outside of mainstream markets in order to prioritize socially conscious lyrics. In Senegal, a lack of financial return and general marginalization of hip hop in the media (in comparison to the dominant popular music, mbalax) keeps the majority of hip hop artists “underground.” This forced “underground” status in terms of commercial success is discursively conflated with the social facet of the “underground” as understood in the United States, and becomes a measure of authenticity for most Dakar rappers.

²¹ Although “banlieue” is generally translated as “suburb,” in Senegal there is an implication of ghettoization that accompanies the word, making it very different from common understandings of the American suburb. For these reason, throughout the dissertation I retain the French banlieue to describe these neighborhoods.

largely on Medina as well as the surrounding banlieue (all neighborhoods often likened to U.S. “ghettos”).

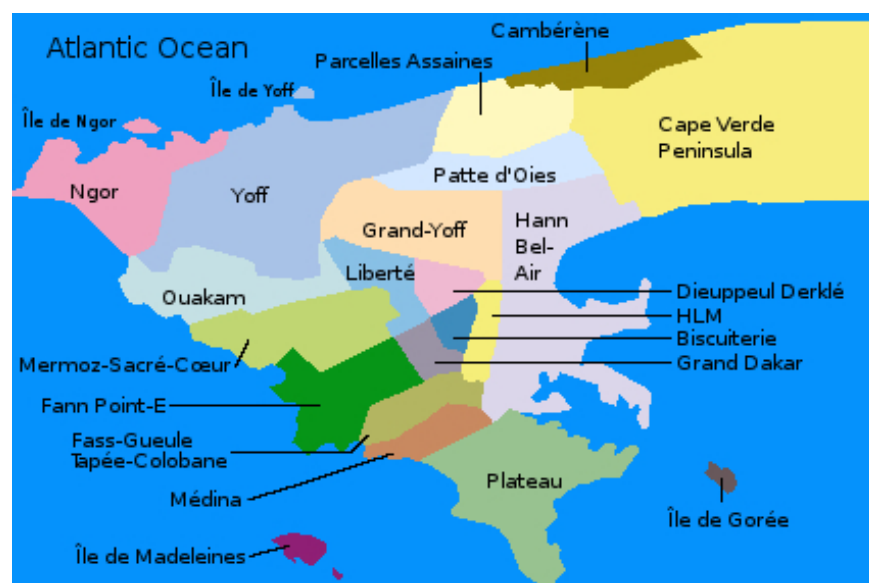


Figure 1 – Map of Dakar’s quarters.^{22 23}

Hip hop social networks in Dakar both reinforce and transcend the interpersonal neighborhood-based relationships that distinguish social interactions in urban Senegal from what existed in stratified village societies. Central to Senegalese hip hop geography, the Medina stands as one of many examples of the ways in which these urban interconnections shape the hip hop community. The group Sen Kumpë was formed in 1996 by two young men growing up next door to the inspirational members of Rap‘Adio in Medina. When Sen Kumpë split, founding member Bourba called on his younger brother Books, who at the time was part of a rap group with neighbor Almamy, to join the group. After Bourba passed away in 2010, Books continued performing as Sen Kumpë; currently his close friend Madou, who lives three blocks away, performs backup for him at major concerts. Madou, in the meantime, has his own rap duo, KTD, with another lifelong friend Allou, who grew up on a neighboring street. Almamy, who used to

²² Created by Brian Szymanski, 2007.

²³ The Guidewaay and Pikine banlieue are not marked here but are furthest out from the main city of Dakar, centered at the bottommost point on the map: Pikine along the south of the peninsula and Guidewaay along the north.

perform with Books, has since partnered with rapper Falsower, who hails not from Medina but from Grand Yoff. Almamy and Falsower, who would probably not have known each other otherwise, met through hip hop circles and eventually formed the group 23.3. In the meantime Gaston, the second founding member of Sen Kumpë, established Def Dara recording studio in Parcelles Assainies, serving as a hub for new circles of connection.

The studio and the stage constitute key arenas for the reinforcing and transforming of socio-spatial relationships within Senegal's hip hop scene. Sen Kumpë had an early relationship with the group 5kiem Underground, who live about five minutes away in Medina. The two groups, who lived far enough away from each other in the crowded Medina that they could easily have never met, both frequented hip hop events at the neighborhood's Miami Club in the mid-'90s. When rapper Simon returned from France in 2000 determined to start his own Senegalese branch of the French 99-Records label, his first recruits were his friends from his Medina neighborhood: Sen Kumpë, followed by 5kiem and a third Medina-based group, Zair ak Batine, who had been part of Simon's original group Bis Bi Clan. The fourth of the label's founding groups was Tigrim Bi, who originated not in Medina but in Pikine, and who Simon knew by reputation and through shared participation in hip hop events.

CD compilations, hip hop collectives, and featuring are standards of recording practice and play an important role in inter- and supra-neighborhood hip hop networking. Hip hop collectives are usually neighborhood-based (23.3's Falsower is also connected to a collective of Grand Yoff-based rappers) but also can surpass geographical distinctions, as in the case of all-female rap collective Gotale, whose members also belong to neighborhood collectives in Ouakam and Guidewaay, respectively. Hip hop compilations sometimes feature a neighborhood

collective, thus bolstering neighborhood ties, but can just as easily bring together rappers from different areas to record songs on a common theme.

The practice of featuring other rappers on tracks, while again often reinforcing neighborhood connections, also brings together artists from all different neighborhoods, as does the norm of group performance that characterizes hip hop concerts in Senegal. In live performance, multiple groups usually perform on the same night, and while these are often all from the same neighborhood, there are also often invited performers from the town (for a banlieue concert) or from the banlieue (for a town concert). Featuring, along with group performance and the use of a less-experienced rapper to do backup, are all also ways in which more established rappers help the younger talent come up. In addition, the third and newest generation of rappers in Senegal achieved celebrity largely through participation in *Concours*, competitions run by corporate sponsors, TV stations, or established rappers or popular musicians. These young rappers have grown up on Senegalese hip hop and are less likely to be as strongly invested in oldschool U.S. artists.

Hip Hop's Public Persona

Despite its popularity, with an estimated 5000 performing groups, hip hop remains marginalized in Senegalese media and performance venues. While video and audio production have improved drastically in Senegal in the last few years, the production of albums and video clips remains challenging for financial reasons. Once an album is produced, it doesn't sell, thanks to advances in home reproduction technologies like CD burning. And while an outsider interested in hip hop might be pleasantly surprised by the fact that almost every Senegalese channel seems to have at least one hip hop show, local rappers for the most part still see hip hop

as marginalized in the media when compared with mbalax. Although rappers can register their music with the B.S.D.A. (Bureau Sénégalais du Droit d'Auteur – the Senegalese copyright office), efforts to retrieve royalties, even when their music and videos are widespread in popular media outlets, are usually thwarted by corrupt relationships between the B.S.D.A. and television stations, where royalty “settlements,” are paid in lump sums that line the pockets of B.S.D.A. workers rather than the artists themselves. A rapper can therefore watch his video play all year on major television stations and yet still collect minimal funds from the B.S.D.A. In fact in general, beyond the occasional sponsored concert and minimal funds for transportation, rappers don't make money off their music, turning instead to other side businesses to generate income. For example, rapper Reskape has his own line of Tshirts (Banc Lieux Arts/Reskp Wear) that he sells at streetwear shops in Senegal (one of which is run by the group Yatfu) as well as in boutiques in Paris and Spain. Rapper Mame Xa runs a barber shop called named Dor War Coiffure, after his first album.

Live hip hop performances in Senegal are usually relegated to open air spaces (with obvious complications arising during the rainy season), and a lack of quality materials leads most rappers to perform “playback” (rapping into an open mic over the instrumental and vocal track) the majority of the time, while expressing a preference for live performance. The often massive number of groups desiring to perform at any given concert creates a situation in which rappers are limited to performing one or two songs, and are often cut even shorter due to “technical difficulties” where at the prompting of concert organizers, CDs mysteriously stop playing or microphones are inexplicably shut off. The norm of group performance means that most hip hop concerts go at least until 4:00 in the morning unless they are organized by a large corporate sponsor or take place at the French Cultural Center. With the exception of concerts held in

nightclubs, performances are mostly attended by young men, and concerts that are not free are not well attended, even when the entry fee is minimal. Rappers tend to have a large fan base in their own neighborhoods, and sometimes express some difficulty in holding the loyalty of fans from other neighborhoods. Increasingly, fandom plays out on the internet, where Facebook pages like Rap Djolof post daily videos and information and often have competitions for things like “best flow” or “best featuring” that Facebook friends can vote on.

In December 2010 the Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres was held in Senegal for the first time in 30 years. While the festival raised controversy regarding the wasteful expenditure of money and lack of organization, for the rappers who had the opportunity to play there, a select few of them opening for A-list U.S. rappers like Busta Rhymes and Rick Ross, the experience was unforgettable. For many rappers, it was the first time performing truly live, as what they termed the “international” quality of the materials permitted them to abandon playback (although apparently not all their American counterparts had the courtesy to do the same).

The same factors that lead to the spatial and media marginalization of hip hop, which is still often perceived as a music of hooligans and gangsters, have also become a deterrent to female participation in the scene, both as fans and artists. An emphasis on “hardness” in the hip hop crowds of the late ’90s (part of the shift towards a “hardcore” rap identity instigated by Rap‘Adio) led young women to stop coming to hip hop shows, which were considered to be neither safe nor reputable. In contrast, young women do attend hip hop concerts at nightclubs by more commercially successful artists like Nix, whose music is less self-consciously hardcore. And despite social constraints that continue to limit women to domestic roles and male direction, young women have made and are continuing to make hip hop. Although these women are ostensibly accepted by the hip hop community, my friendship with female rappers led more than

one male friend to caution me about their reputations for sexual looseness with white men. (Interestingly, no one ever seemed to feel that it tarnished the reputations of young men to aggressively pursue white women in hopes of easy sex and a visa; I spent a lot of time in Dakar with my head loosely wrapped in a scarf to cover my dreadlocks – an extra magnet for attention that always provoked cries of “Rasta!” or “Yaay Fall” – after realizing from the resultant lull in harassment that men must interpret this as a North African “ibaru” or veiled style, an opinion confirmed by several friends). The time I spent in the studio with women was marked by a certain lack of focus and seriousness on the part of producers that I never witnessed in male recording sessions. When asked why so few women participate in hip hop, many male rappers couldn’t think of a reason, while some accused women of being too easily pleased with popular television and mbalax, or of simply not working as hard as men (sometimes with a generous “yet” at the end). As many, however, reflected thoughtfully on the cultural norms that prevent women from having extended careers in hip hop, among them a certain stigma attached to musical professionalism, an emphasis on women’s place in the domestic sphere as wives and mothers, and the right of a husband to determine his wife’s/wives’ actions and mobility outside that sphere.

Senegalese hip hop inched into the international media spotlight as rappers mobilized for change in the recent presidential elections under the banner of Y’en A Marre (We’ve had enough), a political movement initiated in January 2011 by rappers Thiat and Kilifeu of the group Keur Gui with rapper Foumalade. Y’en A Marre aimed to effect political and social change through protest and encouraging youth to vote, and its leaders have faced imprisonment and harassment at the hands of the state. Y’en a Marre (and other hip hop-based political commentary outside the movement) is only the latest stage in a hip hop movement that has for

years been marked by political engagement, most notably in the presidential elections of 2000. There, Senegalese society recognized the role that rappers played, as their efforts are generally credited with bringing about the first change in political party since Independence in 1960 with the election of Abdoulaye Wade. In 2012, rappers found themselves faced with ousting the same president they had helped put into place in 2000.

The hip hop that exists in Senegal today is as much a product of colonialism, religious conversion, urbanization, and transmigration as it is one of western cultural imperialism under the moniker “globalization”. Hip hop practice in Dakar not only reflects but also negotiates and transforms the social environments of the postcolonial city, creating new networks of collaboration and exchange that combine older types of social connection with new ones rooted in musical practice.

Hip Hop’s Roots and Routes

The hip hop that came to Senegal via multi-layered flows of global interconnection to exist alongside the traditional and popular Senegalese musics described above comes out of its own complex history of upheaval and social change. Hip hop emerged in the Bronx as a new form of expression for disillusioned minority youth coping with U.S. postindustrial urbanity in the 1970s and into the 1980s. It drew from cultural streams that flowed over the Atlantic, not only through the Southern United States and up into northern urban centers, but also through the Caribbean and then directly to New York. Hip hop was crafted from its own multilayered histories; of different kinds of slaveries in the Caribbean and the southern and northern United States, in rebellions and in underground resistance, in migrations of diasporic communities into U.S. urban centers, in the blues and its grandchildren of rock n roll, soul, funk, and disco and the

social change and movements these witnessed and inflected. The earliest hip hop music was created by African American and West Indian immigrant youth with turntables who kept spinning funk records back to play the break over and over again. With the advent of samplers in the late '80s, hip hop's sound changed forever. Still built on musical excerpts of earlier music, hip hop's possibilities were now endless. Groups like Public Enemy in the late '80s and early '90s created hip hop tracks with multilayered sampling techniques coupled with rhythms composed on drum machines, pushing extant sampling technologies well beyond their intended limitations, while producers like Dr. Dre incorporated original music into the mix of keyboard beats. As technology continues to advance, hip hop production has become more and more accessible, allowing anyone with a computer to produce hip hop beats and contributing to the expansion of hip hop scenes within and outside the United States.

Like griot practice, hip hop is thus in reality a changing body of cultural practices that show some consistency but also remarkable change over time in relation to changing socio-cultural and political contexts as well as advances in music production technologies. And like griot practice, there has developed an invented tradition of hip hop that codifies hip hop as "Culture," with its own canon of important dates, recordings, and figures, foremost among them early New York rapper Afrika Bambaataa, who is credited with first framing hip hop as a culture comprising four elements of breakdancing, graffiti, turntablism, and rapping (despite the fact that graffiti in particular could be argued to have developed on its own separate trajectory from hip hop music). Afrika Bambaataa's construction of hip hop culture has been adopted by scholars and practitioners alike, who reify early hip hop practices as "culture" and maintain them as an ancestral, unchanging standard of real hip hop. Hip Hop Culture, in all its elements, is held up as a tool of resistance and the voice of marginalized youth, and is embraced in local hip hop

movements outside of the U.S., who draw on its potential for affecting social change.²⁴ The invention of hip hop as “Culture” comes with its own codified terminology – for example, the long debate about what constitutes a “rapper” (someone who produces “commercial” hip hop) and who is an “MC” (someone making “real” hip hop).

One version of hip hop’s mythologized history that has been enthusiastically embraced by ethnomusicologists and popular media alike emphasizes a historical connection between griot practice and hip hop, where the griot is said to be the precursor of contemporary hip hop. It’s hard to say who should be credited with this myth – Western scholars, African American practitioners, African practitioners, or maybe a combination of all three. But what is sure is that this narrative depends on the previously invented tradition of the griot as unchanging African musical ancestor. Oddly enough, the griot tradition that is usually invoked in this discourse is not the rhythmic, drum-based *gëwël* performance of the Wolof but rather the string-based performance of Mande griots, probably due to its cultural caché in global representations of West African music.²⁵ The invented tradition of hip hop reified through scholarly and practitioner discourse is positioned as a counterculture to the commercialized, technologically evolved contemporary U.S. hip hop spread through the globe via capitalist networks.

Producing Memory

In all its phases of development, hip hop’s central production techniques have revolved around the repurposing of music from earlier epochs. Hip hop musical tracks can thus be read as multireferential aural histories/mythologies which are constructed musically via practices of

²⁴ Hip hop has been drawn upon as a tool of social commentary and sometimes resistance in contexts as diverse as Cuba (see Baker 2005), Germany (see Caglar’s 1998 article on Turkish immigrants), and Palestine (see Maira 2008).

²⁵ Hip hop isn’t the only African American music that scholars connect to Africa, of course; a notable example would be the blues, which numerous scholars of African American music have traced back to stringed instrumental traditions of West Africa (for some examples see Coolen 1991; Kubik 1999; Oliver 1970).

sampling and lyrically via signifying practices. Perhaps *the* iconic instance of this layered sampling of musical memory, Public Enemy's national hit "Fight the Power" from their 1990 album *Fear of a Black Planet* (the single was released a year earlier as part of the soundtrack for Spike Lee's film, *Do the Right Thing*), layers samples from no fewer than 17 classic songs by soul, funk, and reggae artists as well as early hip hop artists Afrika Bambaataa and Kurtis Blow. These sampled fragments of earlier musics function as the instruments in a musical track constructed almost completely from musical quotations, and each sample functions as a musical memory of a particular place and era. While many of these samples are cut down into such small increments that they aren't readily identifiable, as many stand out in the track's dense texture. The track opens with the voice of Chicago attorney Thomas "TNT" Todd, whose words "Yet our best trained, best educated, best equipped, best prepared troops refuse to fight. Matter of fact, it's safe to say that they would rather *switch* than fight," spoken in reference to the Vietnam war (and parodying a national cigarette ad), are repurposed by Public Enemy as an indictment of complacency in the African American community. Todd's words usher in the busy, rhythmic cacophony of the musical track, where the sounds of James Brown's "Funky Drummer," a title explicitly referenced in the opening lines of the song and punctuated by samples of Brown's signature grunts, overlap with audible samples of Bob Marley's "I shot the Sheriff," Trouble Funk's gogo hit "Pump it Up," funk group Sly and the Family Stone's "Sing a Simple Song," the Dramatic's, a soul group on Stax records, "Whatcha See is Watcha Get," and many others. Buried in the sampled segments of the rhythmic track is the Isley Brothers' 1975 hit single "Fight the Power," and Public Enemy's track centers on the lyrical quotation of this earlier anthem: "fight the power, fight the power that be," musically driving home the realization that 15 years later, things haven't really changed that much. This musical and lyrical call and response with the past

is exemplified in the sample of the line “people people, we gotta get over before we go under” from James Brown’s “Funky President.” Chuck D raps in unison with the sample “people people;” as the sample continues underneath he speaks above it “we are the same, no we’re not the same,” putting his voice and his message in dialogue with Brown’s. The musical quotations and lyrical signifying in the track thus function as aural invocations of earlier, socially significant moments at the crossroads of black music and American history.

Although not long after Public Enemy’s sampling masterpiece, increased copyright restrictions drastically reduced the practice of sampling in hip hop, they did not eradicate those practices, and sampling (along with lyrical signifying) remains a central element of hip hop production, although it has in many cases been supplanted by new compositions which are less complicated and less costly in terms of copyright. In Senegal (where copyright is seldom a concern), the process of constructing hip hop musical tracks is no different than in the United States, and the same practices of layering invoke histories on both sides of the Atlantic. Take, for example, “Buess bi Guem,” from rapper Gaston’s 2011 album, *Tuuti Wakh Job lu Beuri*. The song opens with two male voices – one Gaston, one a traditional singer – carried by a thin instrumental in which the sound of a drummer hitting the side of his sabar drum in the long-short-short, pattern that Wolof géwëls use to keep time is accented with the occasional tambourine hit and overlaid with the descending salsa melody of an acoustic guitar. These isolated fragments of sound continue to cycle as Gaston begins to rap. A new layer – a hand drum – pairs with a programmed snare hit on the second and fourth beats, the acoustic and the electronically simulated percussions lining up at crucial moments to produce a classically hip hop rhythm that falls into the final beat of each measure, hesitates, and drops into the next bar.

The track is simple; these are the only musical elements. But taken together, they communicate a history of interconnection that incorporates traditional géwël practice, imported (and then indigenized) salsa, and the more recently adopted hip hop, which becomes the identifying genre not only because of the rapping or the constructed rhythm but because of the very process of production. U.S. hip hop musical tracks encapsulate, explicitly through practices of sampling and signifying and implicitly as performative memories of earlier black experiences in the new world, a history of the black American experience as historically expressed through musical practice. When Senegalese rappers combine hip hop with elements of Senegalese music, whether “traditional” drumming and singing, Islamic prayer singing, or the imported Afro Cuban music that has won a place in the city, they combine two spatially-separated musical memories to create one intense palimpsest of musical meaning.

Conclusions: Senegalese Hip Hop as Aural Palimpsest

Carried not only through technology-propelled American cultural imperialism but also through networks of Senegalese migrants moving between Senegal and the West, hip hop as a globalized form is taken up and localized by Senegalese youth in socially strategic ways. While this adaptation of commercialized U.S. music could be theorized alternately in terms of multiple western centers (the United States and France) or, in Appadurai’s terms, as the localization of “instruments of homogenization,” that move through globalizing flows, if, as Anna Tsing advocates, we consider local understandings of the global, then the analysis changes drastically. Some, although not all, Senegalese rappers understand hip hop as a continuation of local, precolonial forms of performance practice that survived the middle passage to the Americas and have returned hundreds of years later via global flows of commodified culture. Relating hip hop

to local griot performance, they position this music as something that is characteristically and definitively African, despite its clear historical development in the United States. Others, in contrast, reject this alignment of griot practice and hip hop, instead emphasizing the very Americanness of hip hop in order to draw on its perceived potential as a tool of social and political resistance.

In Senegal, different forms of global interconnection are overlaid, so that center-periphery relationships established by colonialism as well as global flows exist alongside local understandings of the global. Despite Appadurai's arguments to the contrary, it seems evident that sometimes center-periphery relations not only *did* but *do* exist; sometimes, there is a center: a disproportionately influential site or sites that are overlaid on other forms of interconnection in which the parties involved are also differentially influential (1996). In Senegal, this played out as a French cultural influence that was alternately accepted and contested in different ways. Colonialism does create a center-periphery relationship, but, as Ulf Hannerz remarks, it is one in which the periphery talks back (1992). This is overlaid on other, prior forms of interconnection that continue to exist (such as trans-Saharan and interethnic contact); neoliberal capital's transnational flows of goods, media, and ideologies are in turn overlaid on these and are also characterized by different asymmetries than the other, also asymmetrical, forms of interconnection with which they coexist.

Dominant center-periphery and flow models of globalization run the risk of, in the one case, exaggerating, and in the other, ignoring, asymmetrical power relations in processes of global interconnection. Too often focusing on the West or the relationship of supposedly bounded, local communities to the West, these theoretical models ignore or downplay forms of interconnection that existed prior to or in tandem with "globalization" as mobilized through

colonialism and neoliberal capitalism. On the other hand, to focus on historically specific collaborations and trace historically specific movements of people, goods, and ideas highlights, as Tsing suggests, the heterogeneity of sedimented relationships of interconnectedness in particular places, at particular times, for particular agents (2005). In the case of Senegal, a close, historically particular analysis reveals that colonialism and neoliberal capitalism in Senegal did produce different types of asymmetrical relationships of cultural flow between Senegal and the West (and the “East”); however, it also reveals that “globalization” in terms of a relationship to the West overlaid and continues to coexist with other, equally formational relationships of interconnection. In some cases, earlier forms of interconnection provide the means with which people resist later forms, such as the recourse to Islam in the face of Christian colonialism.

Emerging from the historic specificity of these multiple relationships of interconnection, Senegalese popular music provides an aural guide to the country’s encounters with “globalization” over the last several hundred years, highlighting the local particularity of the global. Internationally and locally successful Senegalese rappers, while differentially motivated in doing so, create musical tracks that incorporate traditional music into hip hop structures while maintaining a clearly hip hop framework. Combining musical elements of U.S. hip hop, local indigenous performance (itself a testament to centuries of multi-layered interconnections), and Afro-Cuban music, hip hop artists in Senegal produce aural records of the multiple and sedimented forms that local and global interconnection have taken there. While the construction of these tracks, and the positionally-informed motivations for using traditional music, is dealt with in the following chapter, here I argue that these musical tracks can be read as performative, nonverbal bringing together of these two invented traditions, these two mythologized performance practices, these two palimpsest aural memories of trans-Saharan and transatlantic

contact, of colonization and slavery, of urbanization and migration on both sides of the Atlantic, of contemporary poverty and racially motivated exploitation.

TWO

VOICING MYTH

(BRIDGE)

These are some of the local voices that are sampled in this dissertation. While, in the following chapters, many of these voices stand out in the form of extensive quotes, some are hidden among layers of sampled narrative; I have included here the voices that are not directly quoted but who nevertheless were important and generous contributors to this project.²⁶



Figure 2 - Keyti

Keyti was one of the members of Senegal’s first “underground,” “hardcore” group, **Rap‘Adio**. As a teenager in the early ’90s, excited by a translation of Public Enemy’s “Don’t Believe the Hype,” Keyti closed himself in his bedroom and began writing Wolof lyrics at a time when Senegalese hip hop was generally in French and English. His conviction of the importance of hip hop encouraged him to stay in school and continue his studies. Rap‘Adio’s emphasis on Wolof lyrics delayed their success in a early hip hop market that was overly determined by connections

²⁶ I am indebted to Richard Price for this idea, which was inspired by his inclusion of a similar section in his seminal 1983 work *First Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People*.

to France, but the release of their first album in 1998 was a turning point in Senegalese rap, and Keyti remains a role model for subsequent generations of rappers coming primarily from less privileged sections of Dakar.



Figure 3 – Simon, in front of Sen Kumpë’s home in Medina

Simon starting rapping as a teenager in the mid-’90s with the group Bisbi Clan before moving to Bordeaux, France, where he became involved with 99 Records, an independent hip hop label named for the numeric prefix on an immigrant’s identity card. In 2005 he returned to Senegal ready to start his own branch of the label: Jolof4Life. The name invokes the precolonial Jolof empire that also stands a common referent for Senegalese immigrants, who refer to their homeland as Jolof. Simon’s first recruits were his friends from the Medina neighborhood where he spent part of his childhood: Sen Kumpë, 5kiem Underground, and Zaire ak Batine. Simon is immensely popular in Senegal; the first time I saw him perform, at a poorly lit street concert in 2008, he was greeted “backstage” by a cluster of crying teenage girls. In recent years the now well established label has participated in major school tours organized by commercial sponsors including the coffee company Nescafé and the phone/internet company Orange (Sonatel).



Figure 4 – Djily Bagdad



Figure 5 – Baye Ndiagne

Djily Bagdad is one of the founding members of the Medina duo **5kiem Underground**, one of the first groups signed to Simon’s Jolof4Life label in the early 2000s. As a child, he accessed French and U.S. hip hop through a neighborhood friend whose family frequently moved between France and Senegal, and his love for the music soon led him to start composing his own rhymes over bootlegged U.S. hip hop instrumentals. He and two friends who grew up on the same street started 5kiem Underground in the late ’90s, recording a single for the 1999 compilation *DK Rap*. When Djily Bagdad left to go to college in Atlanta, Georgia, **Baye Ndiagne**, a neighbor and loyal fan of the group since he first saw them perform at Miami nightclub, stepped in to fill in for what had been Djily’s verse on a remix of that first single, “Pharmacope”. Despite the group’s long history, they released their first album, *Yagg Bawul Dara*, in 2009.

Zaire ak Batine – Maestro DiDi, Imam Assane, and Kilifa Gary – were part of Simon’s group Bisbi Clan before he went to France; all of them grew up in Medina not far from the other artists on the Jolof4Life label. During my pilot fieldwork in 2008, the group was performing with Jolof4Life at concerts around Dakar and had already released an album together; by 2011, each member had moved to Europe independently of the others.



Figure 6 – Bourba Jolof



Figure 7 – Books

Growing up just next door to Rap‘Adio, **Bourba Jolof** founded the Medina group **Sen Kumpë** in 1996 with rapper Gaston/Baye Sen (see below). His younger brother, Books, spent part of his childhood in Mali before returning to Dakar in his early teens. Exposed to U.S. hip hop through television and radio programming, Books was truly hooked by Positive Black Soul’s “African” hip hop, and he became a devout fan; when Rap‘Adio came on the scene, his conversion was complete. When Gaston left to pursue a solo career, Books left his group of aspiring young neighborhood rappers to continue Sen Kumpë with his brother. Now in his early 30s, he has performed alone as Sen Kumpë since his brother’s death in 2010.



Figure 8 – Graffiti memorializing Bourba Jolof next to the highway in Dakar

A few years younger than Books, **Lamine Ndao** grew up a couple blocks away from Sen Kumpë and attended Lamine Gueye Highschool in downtown Dakar, alongside 23.3.'s Almamy and several older rappers (including members of Wagëble, now based in New York and Switzerland, and Meta Crazy of Bisbi Clan, now working as a reggae artist in New York). Lamine was one of Sen Kumpë's most enthusiastic fans before becoming the manager of the reconstituted group. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in American civilization (with an emphasis on African American literature and the civil rights movement) at Dakar's Cheikh Anta Diop University.



Figure 9 – Lamine Ndao



Figure 10 – KTD Crew: Madou (l) and Allou (r)

Allou (r) and **Madou** (l), of Medina's **KTD Crew**, have yet to put out an album, but are working on a mixtape project. The two have been friends since they were children, and grew up listening to hip hop together. Allou credits his older brother with exposing him to hip hop, and Madou's family has known he would be a musician since he first made play-guitars as a toddler. Since Sen Kumpë's Bourba – Madou's close friend – passed away, Madou frequently performs backup for Books. We both had to force ourselves and each other not to rely on Allou's fluent French to communicate.



Figure 11 – Alamy at the Jolof4Life studio in Medina

Alamy/Nigga Me, lives just around the corner from Sen Kumpë. In his bedroom hangs a picture of Mbacke Dium, the official “first” Senegalese rapper, and he describes himself as having been lucky to have brothers who traveled overseas and exposed him to “real” hip hop from America. Alamy is the (younger) uncle of one of the original members of Rap‘Adio, Deug Iba, who brought him to his first rap concert as a teenager. He started rapping as a youngster with a group of neighborhood boys including Books; after finishing his bachelor’s degree, he formed the duo **23.3** with **Falsower** from Grand Yoff. Falsower was first exposed to hip hop through Senegalese artists like Positive Black Soul and Pee Froiss, but it was Rap‘Adio’s “true” hip hop modeled off of U.S. groups like Public Enemy that inspired him to become a rapper. In 2010, he and Alamy put out their first album together, *Sunu Thiono Seen No Flaye*; Falsower is currently working on a solo album inspired by his Christian faith. His artist name combines his last name, Fall, with the English “sower,” to communicate that he spreads truth with his music.



Figure 12 – Falsower on the rooftop of his family home in Grand Yoff

It was at Falsower's house that I met his close friend **Don Zap**, who has been rapping since the mid-'90s. He expresses himself comfortably in French, and we had many long conversations about hip hop. Don Zap was inspired to begin rapping by Senegalese artists, and he wrote his first rhymes over a Positive Black Soul instrumental. He performs solo and with a collective of Grand Yoff rappers and, although he has been rapping for years and participated in numerous compilations alongside major artists, he is now working towards putting out his first solo album.



Figure 13 – Don Zap



Figure 14 – YDee

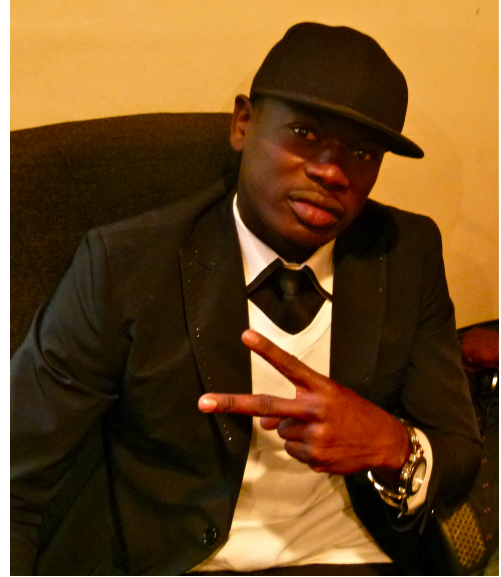


Figure 15 – N-Jah

YDee is a TV/radio personality who hosts the Sunu-TV show, *Da Joint*, dedicated to U.S. hip hop videos. YDee has been an enthusiastic fan of U.S. hip hop since his teenage years, when he spent a lot of time hanging out next to Lamine Gueye High School while he himself was studying English at the British Consulate in downtown Dakar. For years he has been the head of Senegal’s Tupac Fan Club, and his mastery of the English language, with a distinctly African American/hip hop flavor, has made him a popular master of ceremonies for hip hop events; he is even featured on several hip hop recordings.

N-Jah joined the Pikine-based group Tigrim Bi in 2000. Although he was a longtime friend of the group’s, his entrance onto the hip hop stage came in 1999 at an open mic sponsored by Daara J. After he performed, Fada Freddy pulled him back onstage, amazed by his fluent English (N-Jah has never been to the States but started teaching himself English as a child, his interested piqued by the U.S. hip hop recordings his immigrant family members sent home). When Simon started his Jolof4Life label in 2001, Tigrim Bi, an already respected underground group, was the fourth and final group he signed.



Figure 16 – Coalition Niamu Mbaam members (from left to right) Lamine, Tapha, and Latif

From the same Pikine neighborhood as N-Jah but part of the newest generation of Dakar rappers, the members of **Coalition Niamu Mbaam** (now in their late 20s) were childhood friends who all belonged to different fledging hip hop groups. In 2000 they left formed Niamu Mbaam, releasing their first album in 2005 and their second in 2011. The five rappers in the group communicate primarily in Wolof, and their carefully choreographed performances and lyrics about daily life have won them a significant following among youth from Pikine and the surrounding banlieue.



Figure 17 – A deejaying workshop at Pikine’s Africulturbain center

Amadou Fall Ba, a life-long hip hop fan in his early 30s, is the director of Africulturbain, a cultural center in the Pikine banlieue organized in 2006 by rapper Matador of the oldschool group Waa BMG. Thanks largely to Amadou's efforts, the center recently received a large grant from the U.S. Department of State to develop facilities for the new Hip Hop Akademy, a program that instructs local youth in deejaying, video-editing, grafitti, sound editing, and English. The center also hosts slam nights and hip hop concerts, as well as Dakar's only annual international Hip Hop Festival, Festa2H, which Amadou organizes. Amadou's work at the center has led him to pursue advanced degrees in business and arts management in Dakar and Germany.



Figure 18 – Amadou Fall Ba



Figure 19 – Anta

Just around the corner from Africulturbain, **Anta** started rapping after she was inspired by a hip hop show put on at her highschool. In 2010 at 72 Hours of Hip Hop, an annual festival featuring local groups, Anta was struck by the absence of women on stage. She combed the audience collecting the phone numbers of the women she found there, and organized a meeting where the idea of Gotale, a female hip hop collective, was born. A budding artist who communicates primarily in Wolof, Anta has recently started recording with Gotale and by herself.



Figure 20 – Sister Dia outside her family home in Pikine

Young rapper **Sister Dia**, who just turned 20, grew up in Pikine not far from Africulturbain and shares a manger with Niamu Mbaam. Influenced by older boys in her neighborhood, she began rapping as a teenager and participated in a compilation spearheaded by Daara J. She is part of Gotale and has recorded a single, which she hopes to turn into a music video when means allow.



Figure 21 – Gaston on the roof of Def Dara Studio in Parcelles Assainies

Gaston (alias Baye Sen) spent his early childhood in Lyon, France, and his first exposure to hip hop, unlike the majority of his peers, came through French hip hop groups like IAM. When he moved back to Dakar as a teenager in the mid-'90s, he founded Sen Kumpë with his neighbor and friend Bourba Jolof; like the other young men growing up in this part of the sprawling Medina, he was strongly influenced by the time he spent with the members of Rap'Adio. Now in his mid-30s, Gaston records as a solo artist, and owns and manages Def Dara studio in Parcelles Assainies, which caters to established rappers and new talent. Although not known on a World Music stage, Gaston has performed extensively in France, and he has written music for mbalax superstars like Viviane and Youssou N'Dour.



Figure 22 – Reskape



Figure 23 – Profete

One of Parcelles' better known artists, **Reskape** first became involved with hip hop through his older brothers, who charged him with preparing tea while their group rehearsed. Soon after he was finally allowed into the group, the other members gave up hip hop to pursue education or family life, and Reskape (from “rescapé” – “survivor” in French) embarked on a solo career,

which quickly took off due to his success in several nationally-televised rap competitions. Although he speaks flawless French, he performs mostly in Wolof for his target local audience. He is also the designer of a popular brand of streetwear, Banc Lieux Arts – a phrase inspired by the communal sitting areas of the banlieue as a site of creative inspiration for hip hop artists. When pronounced aloud, the phrase takes on a double meaning, designating the denizens of the banlieue (*banlieusards*).

Profete is a rapper in his early 20s from Grand Dakar (not far from Medina) whose advancing career has greatly benefited from his growing friendship with Reskape (for whom he often performs backup at concerts) and Books. Like many young rappers in Dakar’s third and newest hip hop generation, he first encountered hip hop in the music of Senegalese artists like Daara J. He is currently recording his first album.



Figure 24 – Baïdy

Also from Parcelles, **Baïdy** and his brothers – **Bidew bu Bes** – started rapping in the mid-’90s, dodging their studies to work on their music and participating in cultural shows in school. Their father was a teacher with wide-reaching tastes in music, and from early on the group was

exposed to music from all over the world. When in the late '90s they won second place in a competition in honor of Senegalese intellectual Cheikh Anta Diop, mbalax star Youssou Ndur's management called them to offer a recording contract. Bidew bu Bes increasingly tours internationally, their eclectic and polished mixtures of hip hop and traditional African musics a selling point with Western audiences but also highly appreciated by local rappers, whom I have seen backstage clapping high in the air to the triple meter of the group's indigenized sound.



3

Figure 25 –Krazy Kool (l), Kab2seus (m), and Freeloader (r) with neighborhood children by flooding in the street
In the Dalifort banlieue - known as “DAF Ghetto” – the members of **FuknKuk (Freeloader, Kab2Seus, and Luzli Xum)** started rapping as teenagers. Often accompanied by their neighbor and fellow rapper **Krazy Kool**, they are becoming known on the Senegalese stage, particularly in the neighboring banlieue such as Pikine and Guidewaay; they have been instrumental in introducing new, banlieue-inspired slang to the hip hop community, particularly the phrase “kanaroo,” that is used as a greeting. Freeloader works as an English teacher in Zinguinchor in the south of the country and now only performs with the group during vacations.



Figure 26 – Kronic (l) and Kalif (r)

Now in their mid-30s, **Kronic** and **Kalif** are members of **Undershifaay**, the leading group from the Guidewaay banlieue who came on the scene in the early 2000s. Both started out as dancers before they began writing hip hop texts at the encouragement of their friends. Both were highly influenced by East Coast U.S. rappers as well as local artists; Kalif in particular describes being a big fan of oldschool Senegalese group Pee Froiss, and now, years later, he co-hosts a weekly reggae sound system in Dakar with one of Pee Froiss’ original members, Xuman. Inspired by large U.S. hip hop groups like the Wu-Tang clan, Undershifaay started as a collective of groups from Guidewaay but eventually became its own group of seven members. The word “under” is from the English “underground” and represents the U.S. roots of hip hop, the lack of mainstream visibility of the music, and also the idea of groundedness in their neighborhood, while “shifaay” is Arabic for medicine; they describe hip hop as a hidden remedy for the trials of daily life for youth in Senegal.

Toussa is a young rapper in her early 20s who has grown up in Guidewaay strongly influenced by older rappers like Undershifaay and Gaston, whose Def Dara studio is not far from her home.

She became a hip hop enthusiastic early on, delving into the lives and music of U.S. rappers like Tupac. In the early 2000s at about 12 years old, she started rapping with friends, first repeating the texts of established rappers and finally writing her own lyrics. She began her solo career in 2006 and is a part of the Gotale collective. Toussa was just featured in a hip hop television series that will air in summer 2012, and she is currently working on her first music video.



Figure 27 – Toussa



Figure 28 – Sister Coumbis (l) and manager Hawa (r)

Growing up in Ouakam, **Sister Coumbis** would skip out on school to go hear her older brothers perform in hip hop shows. She started rapping herself in 2006, and met her manager and close friend Hawa through Hawa's older brother, a musician who influenced Coumbis to incorporate traditional instruments in her own music. Now in her mid-20s, Coumbis also participates in Gotale, and Hawa acts as the manager for the collective, organizing their performances, photo shoots, and studio sessions.



Figure 29 – Big Fa

Not far from where Coumbis lives, **Big Fa** is another of Dakar's young new rappers. He was recently signed to Simon's Jolof4Life label, and often performs backup with Simon at concerts, where he sometimes also has the opportunity to perform his own tracks. Unlike Simon, Big Fa raps and communicates exclusively in Wolof, and prides himself on his lightening-fast rhymes.

Mame Xa started rapping with friends for fun in the city of Kaolack, where he grew up listening to Senegalese groups like Daara J. In 2006 he embarked on his solo career, winning a competition for new talent that, along with a nationally-televised award for best hip hop album in 2008, earned him a place in the national hip hop scene. He now lives in Dakar to facilitate his rap career, and has just released his second album. I learned some of my best vocabulary from Mame Xa, who doesn't speak French but whose Wolof is "deeper" than that of a lot of Dakarois and who is insistent on the importance of correct Wolof grammar in hip hop lyrics.



Figure 30 – Mame Xa outside his barber shop, named after his first album, *Dor War* (hard work).

Thiat (alongside his rapper Kilifa) is a member of **Keur Gui** – a group also originally from Kaolack that has received international attention for their role in the development and leadership of the 2011 Y'en A Marre movement. Comprising childhood friends, the group formed in 1997 with a blood pact inspired by an imported Ninja film. During a series of school strikes in 1996, the group of teenagers set themselves to bothering the government as much as possible and found a way in the American hip hop that they listened to. They were imprisoned for the first time in 1997, becoming the first censored rap group in Senegal. In 1999 they won first place in a

competition sponsored by the National Assembly of Youth, and their 2002 and 2004 albums were even more successful; they have toured in Europe and Asia and were recently brought to the United States to speak with an organization of Senegalese immigrants prior to the 2012 presidential elections.



Figure 31 – Thiat on his balcony in Parcelles



Figure 32 – Da Brains: Jiby (l) and Bakhaw (r)

Brothers **Jiby** and **Bakhaw**, like many first and second generation rappers in Senegal, started out as hip hop dancers in the early '90s. As local groups like Positive Black Soul and Daara J, from the same cluster of S.I.C.A.P. neighborhoods as the two brothers, emerged and succeeded, Jiby and Bakhaw also shifted to rapping, and formed the group **Da Brains** in the mid-'90s with a few friends. Now comprising only Bakhaw and Jiby (who produces their beats), Da Brains' dynamic personalities on and off stage, coupled with choreographed dance moves and easily remembered lyrics, have made them immensely popular in Senegal, and they have performed in Europe as well.



Figure 33 - Nix

Nix, a Christian rapper from the affluent Point E neighborhood, started rapping in the early '90s with his friends; they would watch American music videos and try to copy the sound and choreographies. He has released three albums, primarily in French, and is respected by the hip hop community in general while maintaining a large mainstream fanbase in Dakar. He often performs at venues like the French Cultural Center in downtown Dakar with his live band.



Figure 34 - Xuman

Although still active in the local hip hop scene, **Xuman** (originally from Pee Froiss) belongs to Dakar’s small oldschool of rappers alongside PBS, Daara J, and Yatfu. He grew up in Côte d’Ivoire and it was there that he describes almost exactly the same exposure to hip hop as Keyti – a transformative experience with a translation of Public Enemy’s “Don’t Believe the Hype.” After moving to the S.I.C.A.P. area of Dakar in 1990, he began rapping behind his cousin’s hip hop dance group, eventually becoming the front man rather than a background novelty. Now in his 40s, Xuman has moved more into reggae, and although he continues to rap his music is more reggae-influenced and he runs and attends reggae events throughout Dakar.

Drygun has been a member of oldschool group Yatfu since it formed in 1995, beginning as a dancer and transitioning to rapping in 2000. The group’s members all lived in the S.I.C.A.P. area and knew each other from hip hop events. They are currently recording their fourth album.

Drygun runs Galsen Shop, where he sells U.S. sneakers and fitted baseball caps; the inventory, however, consists primarily of local streetwear brands including Banc Lieux Arts, Trust Yourself Designs, and Mbeddu Jolof. The shop also sells local hip hop albums.



Figure 35 – Drygun at Galsen Shop



Figure 36 – Ndongo (l) and Fada Freddy (r)

Ndongo and **Fada Freddy** met in highschool and formed what would become one of the most successful Senegalese rap groups ever – **Daara J Family**. The group works out of their own studio, Boit Sacré, and has released numerous albums internationally. They have toured all over the world but also continue to sponsor compilations and concerts in Dakar and to mentor

younger artists. In 2012, for example, they invited the members of Gotale to open for them on International Women's Day.

DJ Awadi formed **Positive Black Soul** with Duggy T in 1989 when they combined two pre-existing competitive dance crews that knew each other from school in S.I.C.A.P. Sacré Coeur. The group enjoyed a successful international/world music career, touring extensively in and outside of Africa, although they since split to pursue solo careers. Awadi built his Studio Sankara in 2000 and continues to expand his materials and business endeavors, branching out into documentary film as well. Now in his 40s, he performs with a live band at upper-level venues in Dakar for slightly older audiences than the general hip hop crowd, and still tours extensively internationally.

THREE

LOCATING MYTH:

TRADITIONS, MODERNITIES, AND URBAN MUSICS

On a Friday night in September I arrive at Theater Awa in the Pikine banlieue, where young artist Sister Dia has asked me to film her performance as one of the opening acts for Daara J Family. We square off for several minutes with the doorman, who is rudely skeptical of a young girl claiming to be a rapper, until finally one of the men involved in organizing the concert intervenes and we enter, making our way to a wooden bench in the front row of the repurposed movie theater. The concrete floor slopes up towards the back of the room, wooden benches giving way to rows of flip up seats about halfway up. Faded wallpaper wraps the theater in partial fleurs-de-lis. A large concrete stage butts against the blank front wall, where a projector plays American hip hop music videos that don't sync up with the mix of American and Senegalese hip hop tracks coming through the sound system.

After Dia and several other local Pikine groups perform, Daara J Family takes the stage with a large band and the room, not nearly full despite the minimal \$1000 franc entry fee (about \$2 USD), swells with excitement. They open with the drummed bakk of the prayer "yaa ñu moom, xadim" (we are yours, saint), which quickly gives way to the busy mélange of traditional and electronic instruments and local and global music that characterize the rest of the performance. As I listen, a young man from Pikine's Africulturbain cultural center leans over to ask if I like the show. My affirmative response is met with cynicism and a second, critical question, "Do you feel like this is even really hip hop?"

The group plays old songs as well as new hits, and the crowd of young men and women dances ecstatically in front of the stage. Between songs, rapper Fada Freddy takes the mic and

announces, “When we say rap comes from taasu, they are the same history. Rap went from Africa to America to Europe to Senegal.” The concert, which opened with a drummed rendition of Islam-inflected traditional speech genres, ends with the hit single from the group’s latest album, a pan-African sound collage that mixes French and Wolof in its rapped exhortations for African youth to know themselves.

* * *

Perched on massive rocks jutting out from windy beach in the upscale neighborhood of Almadies, a setting rapper Coumbis and her manager Awa have chosen for our filmed interview, the two women discuss the origins of hip hop:

Sister Coumbis: For me, hip hop wasn’t born here. Because hip hop was born thanks to the demonstrations of black Americans when they were tortured and hurt, all to revolt and to say we don’t want this anymore. So I don’t really know because I am very young and I haven’t been in hip hop a long time, but according to what I know hip hop wasn’t born in Senegal.

Awa: It’s not a question of being born, but people say hip hop comes from Africa. That it was slaves who brought it there [to the United States]. There are people who see it like that. Because there are people who do taasu, which resembles hip hop a little.

Coumbis: And that’s traditional, too.

Awa: Maybe that’s why people say hip hop comes from Africa.

Coumbis: Yeah, I don’t see it. Maybe from Africa but it can’t come from Senegal, because in Senegal we started getting into hip hop in like 1992.

* * *

The eighth track on Positive Black Soul’s 1996 album *Salam*, “Return of Da Djelly (Return of the Griot)”²⁷ opens with a shouting voice and the response, in Wolof, “who is that?” A pensive flute and a single melodic guitar phrase enter in call and response, alternating back and forth until Duggy T’s voice begins his reggae-influenced, sing-song English lyrics :

Flashback, it’s time to check out history

²⁷ “Jeli” is the Mandinka word for griot.

lemme tell you this story, a bit of mystery
The way I say it is musical
As they used to bust it back in the days in Africa typical
Soul people, now you feel I've got skills
my shit is real and my style kills . . .
I'm the symbol of knowledge, call me djelly
one who transmits history, I'm holy like Koli²⁸
More knowledgeable than a bible
My wisdom is my weapon
Reminisce the recital of the musical poetry
Lyrical wizardry . . .
Yes, it's the return of the djelly
[Awadi - Come with the djelly to the land of meditation] . . .
I will take you places you've never been
A ride back to the roots, show you things you've never seen
Cause I'm the storyteller, the teacher, the preacher
Come into my heart I wanna meet you

Duggy T positions himself as a modern griot, speaking to an international audience of “soul people” whose history he will explain if they will just follow him back to Africa.

* * *

In a quiet apartment in Yoff, Kalif and Kronic, two of the members of the collective Undershifaay from the Guidewaay banlieue, lounge on a large mattress as they chat animatedly with me and a friend about the interview we've just completed. Although I haven't asked about taasu in the interview, the topic comes up, and as the conversation turns to a playful yet somewhat heated discussion of scholars writing about hip hop as taasu (Liars! – shouts Kalif), I half-jokingly pull back out my video camera. As the guys banter back and forth, Kronic turns to stare directly into the lens and raises his voice over the others as he begins to speak in an almost lecturing tone:

In regards to the resemblance between taasu and rap, for me these are false histories. Because taasu certainly resembles hip hop and is older than it. But because it resembles hip hop is not to say that it is the true ancestor of hip hop. It is one thing that our ancestors did here, but hip hop is *another* thing that resembles taasu and that Americans

²⁸ Koli Tengala is memorialized in griot epic poetry as the mythical ancestor of the Fulbe ethnic group to which Duggy T belongs.

created. But that's not to say that taasu is the mother or father of hip hop. It's something that looks like hip hop –

Kalif, who has stopped talking to listen to what Kronic is saying, tries to interject: “Hip hop is hip hop – ,” while Kronic continues his thought without pausing: “– but it's not really hip hop.”

Kalif raises his voice: “– taasu is taasu. Hip hop is hip hop, taasu is taasu” (Kronic: “Yeah!”)

“I'm a hip hopper, not a taasu-er. I don't do taasu! Not at all!” As Kalif finishes his outburst and leans back casually on his elbows, Kronic resumes his careful exposition unphased by the interruption,

Because they say that hip hop comes from someone who organized reggae parties and spoke between songs. And afterwards he started to speak over the instrumentals, and through speaking that became a style and took on a form. And then he began to join words together that ended similarly. And according to what I've heard that's how hip hop was born. So if it was born like that, it doesn't come from taasu.

* * *

Here there are two dramatically contrasting narratives of hip hop origins, narratives that rely in strategic ways on the mythologized musical histories described in Chapter 1. They correspond to a distinct break between Senegal's small group of internationally successful rappers and its large majority of struggling underground artists. Senegalese rappers' positionality vis-à-vis local and international audiences, itself imbricated with geographically-delineated class differentiation in Dakar, informs the interplay of hip hop and traditional music and inspires two contradictory mythologies of Senegalese hip hop, one spatially grounded in a mythologized Africa, one in a mythologized United States. While a handful of internationally successful rappers define their own hip hop performance through narratives of mythologized griot traditions that position hip hop as musical returnee rather than as a product of global capitalism, Dakar's young underground privileges a mythologized U.S. hip hop, emerging from Afro-diasporic

cultural convergences in New York and maturing in the musical struggle against institutionalized racism.

This chapter focuses on the narratives that hip hop actors tell about hip hop and traditional practice in Senegal, narratives that work to both reflect and renegotiate their experiences of a globally-situated local modernity. After first recounting international rappers' griot origin myth (the one usually privileged in scholarship and media outlets), the remainder of this chapter largely focuses on the truly "underground" narratives of the vast majority of Senegalese rappers. I argue that through hip hop-mediated understandings of similitude between African American and Senegalese urban experience, underground rappers strategically and self-consciously position themselves within a global modernity and against a local one that is musically encapsulated in mbalax, Senegal's own modern tradition.

International Rappers and Griot Origin Myths

Sabar is pure traditional music with lots of percussion and the griot's singing. The griot should talk about history . . . The history of our ancestors, our parents, wars . . . Every family has its griot, there are the religious families and each fought against oppression, and the griot has to guard their history. When you get married, the griot will know the history of your family. He explains tradition.

- Xuman, Pee Frois

Now, when for example you see the fight, and you see the rhythms of the wrestlers, the bakk, the taas, this is traditional music and was here before mbalax. It is old. And the speaking over the djembe really reminds you of hip hop because it's an egotrip. It's a strong rhythm that makes you trip, and we had that since way before, and that's traditional. And that's why when you see that the youth love rap, it's because it's something that we knew before, but it's a new form.

- Nix

When Daara J fills the stage with an orchestra that juxtaposes electrified western instruments with local drums; when they incorporate local instrumental styles with rhythm and blues, salsa, and hip hop; when they open their concert with a drummed Islamic bakk, they

performatively reference multi-layered musical histories to create what I have called aural palimpsest memories. In the case of international rappers like Daara J, these layering practices couple with discursive constructions of hip hop as rooted in traditional music to performatively align traditional music with hip hop, and traditional musicians – the mythologized griot – with rappers.

The alignment of hip hop with griot performance centers largely on the traditional speech genre *taasu*, which most international rappers describe as an aesthetic predecessor of contemporary rap music. According to Fada Freddy, “Rap was born in Africa and grew up in the United States – we have our own styles of rap like kebetu and taasu that we consider the ancestors of rap.” DJ Awadi of Positive Black Soul, the group commonly referred to as the first real Senegalese hip hop group, sees this stylistic continuity between taasu and hip hop as crucial to the development of Dakar’s burgeoning hip hop scene, commenting that “we have a traditional connection with hip hop. If you ever come down to Senegal, you’ll find traditional music called, Tasu [*sic*] or Kebetu very similar to hip hop – you play the drum and talk on the beat. It’s an old tradition so when hip hop came, it was already in us” (Blaze 2005).

Taasu, a prominent style of verbal performance among Wolof griots, is generally described as the rhythmic chanting of topical rhymes or social commentary over the steady beat of a large, multi-layered sabar drum ensemble; although if terms were to be used exactly, taasu should in fact refer to the often lewd a capella chanting of female *gëwël* over clapped accompaniment (drum-accompanied male genres have several other names depending on content and context). Here, however, I use the word taasu in accordance with the common terminology that emerged from interviews. Many rappers describe a relationship of descent and even equivalence between taasu and hip hop, the latter understood as the rapping (or rhythmic

chanting) of socially conscious lyrics over a digitally produced multi-layered beat. Nix, a local Dakar rapper who raps primarily in French and is increasingly moving towards an international presence, describes taasu as “a way of talking over djembe rhythms. Yes, it’s the early form of hip hop. It’s what they did before. Because it is not singing, it is talking over rhythm. And rap is lyrics over rhythm, with flow. So, voila.” And Xuman, of the early, internationally successful group Pee Froiss, comments that “Taasu is like hip hop. It’s like rap. It is exactly like rap. There is someone with percussion who is going to talk really, really fast – not rap but talk really fast to amuse people.” Interestingly, not only rappers make this connection to taasu; in a sabar drumming lesson in Los Angeles, a Senegalese *gëwël* described the verbal element of the music to me as being “like hip hop, you know?”²⁹

While in the first chapter I traced the trajectory of the griot to his contemporary incarnation in the popular genre mbalax, international rappers recreate the griot’s history, bypassing mbalax to find the modern griot in hip hop as a musical returnee. This insistence on hip hop as rooted in African cultural practice, exemplified in the concept behind Daara J’s *Boomerang* album, whose title is meant to invoke hip hop’s trajectory from Africa to the United States and back to Africa, does not necessarily preclude an awareness of hip hop’s U.S. roots. DJ Awadi describes the relation between taasu and rap as

The grandpa and the son . . . There is a real lineage. I can’t speak for others but for me I can’t cut this link between my roots and what I am – I can’t do it. What’s in rap is the reprise of George Clinton and James Brown because those are also the roots.

For Awadi, hip hop is doubly rooted in the the traditions of his ancestors and the musical traditions of black America. Similarly Baïdy, of Bidew bu Bes, a group of brothers whose career was launched by internationally-renowned Senegalese popular musician Youssou Ndour and who enjoy increasing international success, explains,

²⁹ Pape Diouf. Personal conversation at Motherland Music. Culver City, CA. 2008.

Yes. I tell myself it's true. The Americans who are in the United States are African Americans, because slavery brought them there, and the music that brought them to soul, to gospel – this came from Africa. In Africa there are a lot of rhythms that are like rap, so I can say that Africa is the source and that slavery brought young people to the United States and they brought music with them. That's my idea. There are a lot of people who don't agree with that, who say that rap is American. But I'm not talking about the music, I'm talking about the birth, before. Clearly there's a moment where there was a break. But the people stayed. And that's why Africans love American music because they recognize themselves in it. The music became something else but the base is African.

The seemingly inarguable aural likeness between these two performance genres becomes an important aesthetic link that enables rappers to position taasu as the musical root of hip hop, a construction that depends on invented griot tradition as an unchanging body of precolonial practices. In doing so, they convert hip hop from a globalized U.S. music into an historically local one, creating a performative connectivity with traditional music production as embodied in the mythologized figure of the griot. Local performance isn't just incorporated into hip hop, it is conflated with it, and these rappers position themselves as modernized bearers of ancient tradition.

This “modernizing” of traditional music depends on taasu's recontextualization in the United States. Xuman describes the journey of taasu as one that necessarily transformative:

I want to say, it wasn't the original taasu that was imported to the United States to directly become rap. The fact that they are both spoken is the similarity. It's like coffee. It is grown here in Africa and exported to the United States and Europe where it is processed and it comes back here called Nescafé and it is more expensive. Rap is the same thing. It's certain that our ancestors, upon leaving, knew our traditions. The slaves had celebrations and they had it in their skin and their blood. But it was there a long time, and when it came back here it wasn't taasu anymore. It had become something else. And the first difference is in the construction, how we construct phrases, the content we put in these phrases.

Xuman highlights a crucial point. Since hip hop's beginning in Senegal, rappers have indeed been active in encouraging youth to vote and critiquing colonial and post-colonial inequities.

When international rappers position themselves as modern griots, there is an emphasis on the updated social role that they take upon themselves, as they draw on U.S. hip hop's mythological

revolutionary character to engage issues of political corruption in their country and on a global scale. Many of these rappers refer to *taasu* as a thing of the past despite its continued practice, highlighting the fact that for urban Senegalese youth the griot is not always a socially relevant figure in his traditional context but also demonstrating the extent to which colonial inventions of tradition and discourses of modernity continue to inform local perceptions of cultural practice. Depictions of griots as “traditional” historians are thus contrasted with rappers’ self-depictions of themselves as social and political commentators, a role seen as an updated, modernized version of traditional griot practice.

The conflation of *taasu* and hip hop thus not only operates on an aesthetic level; it also creates an important social continuity that positions rappers as the contemporary counterparts of traditional griots. But even this “updating” of griot performance can be more accurately understood as a process of aligning hip hop and *taasu*; when rappers take it upon themselves to provide relevant social commentary and critique in their lyrics, they draw on what they understand as integral historic features of both griot and hip hop performance, appropriating and repurposing *taasu* (“pure” traditional music) via a musical medium whose U.S. history has been marked by its relationship to racialized social and economic struggle. In rerouting the griot’s history through this mythologized U.S. hip hop, international rappers appropriate a performance tradition and social role to which they have no actual genealogical claim; at the same time, through this redefined griot, they position themselves as the authentic, living roots of hip hop.

Dakar’s Underground and Hip Hop Origin Myths

People say that rap is *kebetu*, because rap is *tak tak tak tak* and *kebutu* is a little like this. The griot can do *kebetu* but this isn’t the same thing as rap. And *taasu* isn’t the same thing. Sometimes people say they are the same and they aren’t.

- Baye Ndiagne, *5kiem Underground*

[Taasu] is something that comes directly from Senegal, there are girls who do it. I could do it. . . . There are a lot of mbalaxmen who do it . . . But I want to clarify something. Too many people say rap comes from taasu. I would say no. Even if taasu comes from Africa, rap was born in the United States and there, people don't know taasu. It's not true.

- Almamy, 23.3 Medina

Traditional music? In any case rap comes from the United States. Maybe it was Africans who left Africa to go to the United States and brought their music to modernize it and become hip hop. But it comes from the United States. Rap is American first, and then other countries took it and adjusted it to their own realities.

- Niamu Mbaam

I think we need to be honest and say that rap comes from the United States. We should never say that rap comes from us. But, what should be said is that rap comes from ancient Africans who were thrown out to the United States. That is something you should recognize. . . . So we can't reclaim the paternity of rap when the people who have carried it throughout the world are Americans. But, it was African Americans. And that's the only thing that gives rap its African particularity, its African touch . . . Yes they were African but over how many centuries did they lose their African traces? You have to recognize that rap comes from the United States, but that it was made by the little brothers of Africans there. That's all.

- Thiat, Keur Gui

I understand them. They want to just say that people who make hip hop in America were descended from slaves who came from Africa. Everyone knows that. But the first rapper wasn't Awadi. There was Tupac before that, Chuck D, Public Enemy. So rap can't have been born here. If it were born here, Awadi or Daara J would have been the first rappers. Maybe there's a history that their grandparents came from Africa. Everyone knows that. But is that a scientific consideration to prove that rap is born in Africa?

- Amadou Fall Ba, Africulturbain

There are a lot of people who say rap comes from taasu, but don't worry. Senegal is like that. We know that soccer doesn't come from Senegal. But if Senegal wins the World Cup one day, there are Senegalese who will say, doesn't soccer come from Senegal? That's why a lot of people say rap comes from Senegal or from Africa. But me personally, I'm not against the people who say it but I don't believe it. Even if I don't know the whole history of rap, I know where it comes from . . . It doesn't come from Africa . . . There are a lot of people who say, rap comes from Gorée.³⁰ The island! You know the island? How would rap come from there? Every history comes from somewhere. But if someone comes to say taasu comes from the United States or from Europe, what are you going to say? Wait! If someone says mbalax comes from the United States or France, what would you say? Until the end of the world you would never

³⁰ A UNESCO cultural heritage site, Gorée is an island off the coast of Dakar that was first settled by the Portuguese, changing hands several times before ending up as one of the original four communes of French-colonized Senegal. Although the degree to which Gorée served as a central hub in the transatlantic slave trade is debated, the island has become a site of pilgrimage for African Americans traveling to Africa in search of tangible memories of their past.

believe this because you know the history. You know the history of Gorée. You know a little of hip hop's history. It comes from the United States. There are books that we already studied and we know very well where it comes from . . . it doesn't come from here. We are influenced by Americans and this comes from American ghettos.

- Books, Sen Kumpë

In a striking contrast to Senegal's international artists, Dakar's local underground (some 4,990 of the country's purported 5000 rappers) vehemently protests the conflation of hip hop and traditional production to insist instead on the U.S. roots and identity of the genre. Dismissing traditional music, in particular taasu and its contemporary incarnation, mbalax, as well as the traditional social relationships constructed and sustained through these, they also make a claim to hip hop's mythologized history of racialized socio-economic struggle. But unlike the first, internationally successful wave of Senegalese rappers, most of whom grew up in the more affluent neighborhoods in Dakar, the majority of underground rappers (a second and now third wave) hail from the populous quarters (the Medina and the neighborhoods that grew out from it such as Grand Dakar, Fass, Koloban) and the banlieue (Pikine, Parcelles Assainies, Guidewaay, Thiaroye), where their experiences of the failures of colonial and postcolonial modernizing projects are all the more immediate. Unlike their upper middle class counterparts, many underground rappers are not fluent or even conversant in French, the official national language and one more accessible to international audiences. And while international rappers embrace their western audience's enthusiasm for an idealized African past, the underground is much more critical of traditional culture as something that potentially limits development. Their claim to a mythologized hip hop therefore is based not on some sense of historic racial connectivity but rather on a keenly experiential awareness of the kinds of socio-economic struggle from which this hip hop myth emerged.

“We are born in Mbalax”: Finding Tradition in Dakar

[Mbalax] is just our national music. We are born into it; I hope that I won't die in it. It's the music that the average Senegalese loves, but you should say they love it because it's what they see on TV. Sometimes you love something not because you really love it but because you see it everyday . . . Maybe if they saw something else on TV they'd love something else, but unfortunately this comes back to the problem of the cultural education of our population . . . And that's what the average Senegalese is missing – he only listens to mbalax. All time all day. 24/7, that's what they see on TV and the radios.
- Kronic, Undershifaay

At once modern and traditional, mbalax serves as the soundtrack to urban Senegal. It is heard in taxis and buses, through loudspeakers and cell phones, from house windows and in the tiny boutiques that line the streets selling daily necessities like butter, eggs, soap, and matches. It is the primary music in nightclubs, and at weddings and other life cycle events. In Dakar households, small children dance in front of television sets, eyes glued to mbalax stars wearing the most expensive of traditional and Western accoutrements, with complicated coiffures and colorful makeup for female performers. Young boys in the street show off their dance moves to foreign ladies walking by, their a capella motion invoking the rhythmic accents of the music's underlying sabar drums. In short, mbalax is everywhere. And it has been for a very long time. As Gaston, founding member of the original Sen Kumpë in Medina and owner of Def Dara studio in Parcelles Assainies, explains,

Mbalax is part of us. A music can't come to the United States and be more popular than hip hop because that is part of their patrimony. It's the same with mbalax. It was there before we were born, while rap came after . . . Even old people listened to mbalax when they were little. But you can't find someone who listened to hip hop as a child and is middle aged.

Mbalax's prevalence in Dakar's urban soundscape embeds it in the upbringing of Senegalese youth, whose parents have indeed grown up with the music, popularized in the 1970s. As Drygun, member of Yatfu, one of Senegal's founding groups from the S.I.C.A.P. neighborhoods, says,

We are born in mbalax. You can't say - I'm a rapper so I don't know mbalax. It's not true. If you are born in Senegal, you know mbalax. It's obligatory. Because it plays 24/7 on the radio and TV . . . You can detest it. But you can't not know it. You know it because you are Senegalese; it is in your blood.

When Drygun remarks “we are born in mbalax,” he makes a very literal reference to the naming ceremonies that would have been (and, in fact, often are still) marked by traditional drumming and are now (also) infused with mbalax. Mbalax is thus present from infancy, as N-Jah from Pikine's Tigrim Bi crew describes:

It's our tradition. We're born with it. When you're born, there is some part of the ceremony where they concentrate on the mbalax show. There are some mbalaxmen who come and perform. That's why I say you're born with it; it's not something you took from somewhere else. Mbalax you're born with, but rap you borrowed.

These rappers position mbalax as a distinctly local, historically present music, in contrast to hip hop's “borrowed” globality. But an understanding of mbalax as something that has been in Senegal for a long time extends beyond the music's nearly 50-year lifespan, reaching back before Independence to draw on pre-colonial traditional cultural practice. For example, when asked to describe traditional music in Senegal, Drygun responds,

Besides mbalax, I'd say the traditional music we had in Senegal was around the fire, and an old person would sit there and give stories. That's not even Senegalese; it's African. They played the traditional guitar called the xalam and they told stories melodically . . . That's traditional music, which the griot made.

Baye Ndiagne of Medina's 5kiem Underground echoes this depiction of traditional music as a mythologized practice of the past rather than a contemporary reality:

What they did was, it was the griots who did it. They were historians. He was a messenger. He carried a drum. You had to pay attention to him. It was the griot who brought traditional music with the xalam, calabash, things like that. That became mbalax.

Born and raised in an urban environment marked by contradictions between co-existing traditional and “modern” social structures – for example, the persistence of traditional client-patron relationships alongside and within intertwined modern religious practice and political

systems – many Dakar rappers feel distanced from traditional cultural production. When asked to describe traditional music in Senegal, rapper Profete replies, “I haven’t really studied it well. I haven’t really listened to it a lot. There’s Souleymane Faye and Idrissa Dioup . . . But I can’t say anything about traditional music because I haven’t studied it.” Like Profete, who lists two famous popular musicians (who often perform mbalax), many young rappers have a sense of disassociation from traditional music, which is vaguely understood as a music that pertained, in the past, to the various ethnic groups that are now partially subsumed into Wolof-dominated urbanity. As Nix responds,

I can try even though I haven’t really learned about it. But I know that we have a traditional music, that’s to say, with instruments like the djembe, the xalam – these are all traditional instruments. And this traditional music was here before mbalax, because mbalax is a recent music, from the late ’70s. It has a bit of salsa that Senegalese musicians played and modified again and again until it became mbalax. So I’m not an expert but I know that these instruments were part of the base of traditional music. And you also have ethnic music – for example Serer music, the Jola in Casamance.

This idea surfaced over and over again: that traditional music doesn’t quite exist anymore, but if it does, it’s in the distinct traditions of pre-modern ethnic groups. Lamine Ndao, a graduate student at Dakar’s Cheikh Anta Diop University and manager of the Medina group Sen Kumpë, describes traditional music as

Just the presentation of ethnicities . . . Traditional musicians explain the trajectories and biographies of different groups, their laws, their history, how things were before we were a state . . . It was the griots who usually did it, just to explain things that belong to an ethnic group, to explain their culture, what they lived, to record this type of thing. It belongs to the ethnic groups.

Likewise, Lamine’s neighbor Allou of the Medina duo KTD Crew hesitantly responds:

[Traditional music] is varied. Because the most mediatized music in Senegal is mbalax, even though there are other traditional forms of music. I personally am not familiar with many but I think that there are a lot. It’s like, there are how many ethnic groups in Senegal? There are just as many kinds of traditional music, I think.

For many rappers, traditional music no longer exists at all in its “original” form(s). Rather, many, like Gaston, understand traditional music as something that simply forms the foundation for newer styles of musical expression. Gaston comments,

I think you are talking about – I think the traditional side, we can’t say *traditional* traditional music. Sometimes you find traditional things in mbalax and sometimes it is sampled in hip hop. Traditional music is the base in Africa. Before the guitar you had the xalam. It is always there and it is in every music.

Like Gaston, Mame Xa, who grew up outside of Dakar in Kaolack but moved to the city a few years ago to facilitate his rap career, sees traditional music as something that is easily discovered in popular styles like mbalax. He explains,

Taasu is traditional music. It’s been here for a long time. And now it’s come into modern music. If you look at mbalax, they put a lot of traditional music in it. Traditional music depends on what mbalaxmen are doing. There are a lot of traditional styles in mbalax.

Mame Xa, Gaston, and Baye Ndiagne all describe traditional music as something that is now recontextualized in mbalax. Notably, Mame Xa doesn’t describe mbalax as dependent on traditional music; instead, he views mbalax performance practice as defining traditional music. Likewise, the other rappers cited above – Profete, Allou, Drygun – explicitly identify mbalax as traditional music, an identification so commonplace that in conducting my interviews I had to adjust my question from “Could you describe traditional music in Senegal?” to “Besides mbalax, could you describe traditional music in Senegal?” in an effort to probe for the ethnically-specific musics that rappers largely understand as predating, rather than co-existing with, mbalax’s modern tradition.

In the contemporary context where ethnic identity is partially subsumed under an all-encompassing Dakarois/Senegalese identity, mbalax comes to stand as the modern-day urban conglomeration of what was previously a diverse body of ethnically-inflected musical

practices.³¹ Books, of Medina's Sen Kumpë, summarizes traditional music's metamorphosis from ethnic plurality into mbalax's aural monolith: "And now mbalax is the traditional music. Because if you say traditional music, there are people who don't know Serer or Jola or Fula music. Now there is a melting pot. There is all that music but we don't even know it. We only know mbalax." Likewise, Simon, rapper and founder of Jolof4Life records, which produces Medina artists Sen Kumpë and 5kiem Underground as well as the Pikine-based group Tigrim Bi, describes mbalax as having taken the place of traditional music in Senegalese society, positing mbalax as an almost sinister musical force that destroys other cultural expressions:

It's traditional. It's what they know. It's really difficult to describe – percussion, tama, the piano playing marimba, it's a festive music to make you dance . . . For a lot of people [traditional music] is mbalax. [Traditional music] is not really represented. You don't see it on TV. It's like mbalax killed everything in its wake, like there used to be salsa, but mbalax diminished that and it's the same with traditional music.

While Simon illustrates specific ways in which mbalax incorporates local percussion elements, both in the form of actual sabar and tama drums as well as the "marimba," or transposition of sabar rhythms to the piano, the positioning of mbalax as traditional music doesn't just have to do with the music's foundation in the sabar ensemble or the aesthetic adaptation of speech genres like taas. More than anything, it has to do with singing, which in this case refers both to the literal singing styles that mbalaxmen adapted from traditional singing as well as the practice of praise singing illustrious patrons. Djily Bagdad, of Medina's 5kiem Underground, describes the practice of "singing" traditional music:

There was no message. They were just talking about old rich people, they were singing your father did this and that, you come from a great family. Traditional music was

³¹ People in Dakar still strongly identify with specific ethnic groups, particularly people whose immediate ancestry is from other West African countries (Peul from Guinea, Bambara from Mali, etc.). But increasingly, second and third generation non-Wolof Dakarais, while often maintaining a sense of ethnic identity, speak Wolof as a first language and French as a second. Wolof language and cultural practices, the latter of which already had a lot in common with other local ethnic groups, thus dominate Dakar society.

basically that. They sing about the religious people; if not the religious people, the rich people.

For N-Jah, it is this practice of singing, as much as any musical characteristic, that categorizes mbalax as traditional music. He explains,

Mbalax is like a tradition. Most of the time when they sing on it they are trying to sing your grandmother and your great-grandmother. They sing history, where history came from. They try to give value to your traditions so you can give them money.

Present from the very beginning of life in the city, mbalax functions as the new traditional music, an acoustic element of Senegalese patrimony. Understood by rappers as a modernized practice of singing people for personal financial gain, mbalax is deeply imbricated with the patron-client relationships that defined traditional social structures and continue to influence social relationships in Senegal. In contrast, what Gaston refers to as “*traditional traditional music*” – acoustic expressions of ethnically specific cultural identities – is relegated to a pre-colonial past where griots gathered around fire to impart information. Thus for Dakar youth, mbalax becomes the modern tradition of Senegal, coming to signify traditional cultural production for young people who live somewhat distanced from the social structures in which traditional music functioned. And over and over, its local rootedness and longevity are placed in opposition with the borrowed-ness of hip hop as a musical genre. But what leads Senegalese youth to turn away from mbalax as traditional cultural production and towards this musical outsider? Why do they “borrow” hip hop?

Voicing Dissent

June 23, 2011. A presidential mandate has forbidden all public demonstrations. In the deserted Place d’Independence in downtown Dakar, a handful of young men sit with their hands behind their heads as police with helmets and plastic shields approach at a run, drawing up short

in a moment of hesitation as the rappers ignore orders to vacate the plaza but then forcibly dragging them off.

In 2011, Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade's controversial announcement that he will run for an unconstitutional third term is closely followed by his proposal of a bill that would enable a presidential candidate to win in the first round of elections with only 25 percent of the vote, rather than the current constitutionally-mandated 50 percent. As the incumbent against a fractured, multi-candidate opposition, Wade can be confident of his 25 percent, and the bill is sure to pass in the parliament dominated by his political party. Parliament meets on June 23rd to vote on the bill, and the youth pour into the streets in protest. From the kindling of the newly conceived Y'en a Marre movement, the M23 (Mouvement du 23 Juin) is born.

Earlier in the year, rappers Thiat and Kilifeu of the group Keur Gui, along with rapper Foumalade, brainstormed the Y'en a Marre movement during a particularly tortuous power outage lasting several days. The movement, inspired by youth who have "had enough" (y'en a marre) aimed to raise awareness among the Senegalese population of the role it must play in improving the country, urging the development of a NTS (nouvelle type de Senegalais) who doesn't litter or urinate in the street and who is registered to vote. Wade's declaration of presidential candidacy acted as lighter fluid to the movement, which in a striking revision of hip hop's 2000 efforts to effect political change (resulting in Wade's election and the first change in political party in the 40 years since Independence), took to the streets to remind the population of its power to vote for change.

On June 23 I arrive home from a day at the Africulturbain center in Pikine (where I was asked to film workshops in breakdancing, graffiti, beat boxing, and deejaying) and turn on the news. The footage is gruesome – fire, teargas, crowds, police in swat gear with guns. The city

swarms with Y'en A Marre t-shirts, many handmade. A giant poster reads, "Wade da fa doye." (Enough of Wade). As the same violent images play over and over, I watch stunned as buildings burn and rocks fly at cars and police. The cycling footage is suddenly interrupted, as rapper Simon hobbles into the newsroom, hopping on one foot, his pants ripped, his face swollen, eyes blinking without his glasses, wearing a Y'en a Marre t-shirt. He explains, first in French and then again, when asked to, in Wolof, that he and his friends have gone to peaceably demand that the police liberate Fournalade, arrested earlier today at the Place d'Independence. He lifts his shirt to reveal the marks on his back where the police's nightsticks have struck again and again. It's clear Simon hasn't even gone to the doctor; he's come straight here to the news station, and he's carefully told his story in French on a primarily Wolof-language newscast to ensure it will be understood beyond a local audience. The image cuts to a montage of footage from today's demonstrations. Youth throw stones at trucks full of police with guns. Fires fill the streets in Medina and smoke pours from windows. Fancy cars are destroyed. Six police beat a non-resisting male to the ground in front of a massive homemade banner that reads, "Wade assassin de la constitution."

Hip hop's success in Senegal goes far beyond a simple youthful eagerness to participate in a global economy through the consumption of U.S. cultural products. Instead, in present-day Dakar, hip hop serves as a medium for youth disempowered by a combination of traditional and postcolonial power structures that leave them voiceless in domestic, economic, and political forums. In turning to hip hop, youth embrace a mythology of American origins that positions hip hop as a music of revolution and social change. Through hip hop performance and hip hop-based social networks, they actively negotiate and contest the complex workings of traditionally-inflected, postcolonial urbanity.



Figure 37 – On July 20th, a group of Y'en a Marists met at Books' house in Medina and then took to the streets to encourage local citizens to register to vote. Here, Simon and Almamy talk to local Medina market vendors.



Figure 38 – Books' sister Umi takes up the megaphone as she marches with Y'en a Marre in Medina

The practices of “singing” that lead youth to understand mbalax as traditional urban music deeply imbricate the music in a system of patronage that is a part of a larger set of social

norms that tend to limit personal expression, particularly along the lines of age, gender, and social caste. Keyti, one of the founding members of Dakar's first underground group Rap'Adio and arguably one of the most important figures in Senegalese hip hop's development, explains,

Someone might spend all night with things on his mind and in the morning you will ask, Noo Fanane? How did you spend your night? And he will say "jamm [in peace]." So it's like, from the beginning we are really taught not to talk about ourselves and our feelings. And the whole time we were in the underground that's what we were fighting for – this anger we had inside, this frustration we had inside, we had to find words to put it on paper . . .

Certain parts of society, they are not heard. They don't got the right to talk. The way Senegalese society is built is . . . younger people, they don't talk, they just listen to the elders. And what the elders decide, that's what everybody's doing . . . From Independence to the '90s, the standard of living kept going down, you know . . . I think back then, Senegalese people were ready to hear such a message, a message of revolution, that we need to change this country. They felt oppressed and couldn't say it. The musicians in other genres that were here weren't talking about that. And that is why when hip hop came and was addressing these issues, people were like yeah this is what we've been waiting for.

For Keyti, traditional cultural norms left Senegalese citizens, and particularly the youth, voiceless in the face of postcolonial corruption and underdevelopment. Music genres like mbalax, rooted in these very cultural norms, did nothing to create a space for voicing dissent. But hip hop came and it *was* dissent. Like Keyti, Thiat of Keur Gui believes this element of truthfulness – of outspokenness – accounts for why Senegalese youth were so eager to adopt hip hop:

There is a generation that finds itself within it. Because it is a music that speaks truth . . . it's the emancipation of this new generation, and it's the particularity of a society that has always excluded these youth. Leave talking to the elders, to the old, it's the middle aged that should speak, so this new generation has taken the mic thanks to rap . . .

For a young generation of Senegalese struggling to reconcile traditional social norms with the hypocritical modernity of underdevelopment, hip hop becomes a medium for the personal expression necessitated by modern urban existence but silenced by the traditional norms that continue to inflect that existence. Increasingly, rappers view hip hop as helping to carve a space

of legitimacy for themselves in Senegalese society, although to do so they have had to struggle against stereotypes based on globalized images of U.S. hip hop. As DJ Awadi explains,

[Hip hop] gives you a sort of street credibility in your neighborhood; you can become somebody respected, you're not an outlaw anymore but you're respected because you are making it, bringing some money home from concerts and cassette sales, and so people respect you because you represent something. We gave credibility to the movement. We weren't using drugs or alcohol and the parents started to respect us because what we said in our music was something that other musics and politicians didn't touch.

Although Awadi (probably accurately) understands Senegalese society's acceptance of hip hop music as beginning with his group Positive Black Soul, younger artists have still struggled for acceptance in a society dominated by mbalax, as Reskape describes,

Since hip hop came after mbalax, it's not easy, and since our parents discovered hip hop via television it was gangsta rap from the United States . . . it wasn't well regarded . . . It was around 2000 that hip hop started to take its place, and there it was because hip hop had contributed to bringing in the new president with compilations, and then people started to say this new young generation is very aware. And now they do forums in the universities to try to impose hip hop texts in colleges and highschools. Instead of reading Jean de la Fontaine, they propose a text by Foumalade. They started a campaign two or three years ago trying to get the schools to use rap texts because the youth are much more interested by rap than by French or English literature. The youth don't really take the time to learn texts that don't directly concern them. They identify with rap texts much more.

Thiat of Keur Gui is enthusiastic about the advances in Senegalese hip hop, lauding both the place it has won in society as well as the steady increase in the quality and quantity of hip hop practice:

I think rap will gain even more ground. Those who work in rap are the ones making the best images and photos in Senegal. Grafitti is gaining ground. There is breakdance. There are festivals. It's not nothing. There is an enormous amount of movement and support. Rap has entered into the schools with the work of Foumalade and it has entered into politics with the movement Y'en a Marre. Today rap has become an unstoppable medium.

Rappers' confidence in the place they are winning for themselves in society is not baseless.

Throughout Dakar, shopkeepers, taximen, even marabouts discuss the hip hop-based movement Y'en a Marre, and its leaders are household names. In mobilizing for political and social causes,

rappers earn begrudging respect from elders who are skeptical of hip hop as a globalized U.S. cultural product but who can't deny the value of their children's efforts to improve their country.

But while hip hop is seen as creating freedom of expression for youth, even within hip hop, there are limits. When, at a Y'en a Marre rally in 2011, Thiat of Keur Gui openly called the president a liar (a serious insult in Wolof, regardless of whether the statement is accurate), he was criticized all over the city for his lack of respect towards an elder. The criticism came not only from older adults but even from young members of the hip hop community, who held long discussions on the international social networking website Facebook about the importance of maintaining respect for elders. The freedom of speech that hip hop brings is thus still constrained by intergenerational relationships. Jiby of Da Brains explains,

We can't show really sexy images in our videos because everyone follows us and we respect our elders. There are mothers and fathers, so we are obliged to be correct and speak correctly whereas Americans have the freedom to make "adult only" clips.

Rappers, most of whom are devout or at least practicing Muslims, react somewhat ambiguously to these religious and cultural constraints on their music. Religious restrictions on the kinds of images and language that can be used are at once seen as authenticating Senegalese hip hop as a conscious music (like the mythologized U.S. oldschool – a connection that I explore at length below) even as they are also seen as somewhat limiting. Djily Bagdad explains

95% of the population is Muslim, and when you are Muslim you aren't supposed to use obscenities. When you rap you have to respect the people who are listening: you might think, my parents are listening to me . . . when you're putting out a record you can't curse in the record or people won't respect you. You have to respect Senegalese values. When you put out a video with girls in swimsuits you are going to be criticized even though they do worse than that in the national mbalax music, but when a hip hop person does it they're gonna be like, oh you're copying America, those people with no morals. The religion and the society don't allow you to say whatever you want.

For Drygun, a Christian rapper in an interreligious rap group, these same religio-cultural constraints limit hip hop's capacities as a medium of free speech to the male population. He comments,

For women, I'd say that we are in a 95% Muslim country . . . it's true that the youth now evolve, they are very western, but at the base we have a tradition, a culture, that brings women – to be obligated to – not to veil herself, but to respect her body, to not go to certain places, to not do certain things . . . But this is evolving . . . But there are still conservative families, and we have that in our minds because we are African and there are certain cultures that don't leave. And that is why some women are ashamed to go on stage and do hip hop because that is more given to men. And so they prefer to play the traditional music here, mbalax.

Although not completely absent from Dakar's hip hop scene, women are overwhelming relegated to traditional music production (in the form of mbalax), which safely constrains them within traditional social relationships. Sister Dia, a nineteen year-old divorcée with a toddler in tow, explains the challenges that face women in Senegal.

It's uncomfortable being a woman alone in hip hop. In every job. You can be a woman in a business and have problems. You can work as a maid in someone's house, where they pay you every month, and you'll have problems. Women are the ones who have little power, and here there are people you know are trying to diminish women's power . . . Our battle is: how to give woman a voice in Senegal, make people respect her in rap, as a maid, in an office, everywhere? If you're a woman, what do we do for you to know that wherever you go you have a voice, that you're as respected as a man?

Dia is part of the female rap collective Gotale, which aims to carve a space for women in rap and work against dominant stereotypes of women. Sister Coumbis, another member, explains,

In fact the concept of Gotale is to show another facet of women. Because here in Senegal, in Africa in general I would say, there is a tendency to put women off to the side, they are here to get married, to have children, or to be home watching the children. Gotale is here to show another facet, to show that a women has the right to go on stage, to do her music, to work in an office, and other things. We also want to show guys in hip hop that women are here and what's more, we can do what they do, better than they do it.

Young women's efforts to make a place for themselves in hip hop – and to reap the same benefits of agency, articulation, and acceptance that their male counterparts enjoy – are doubly constrained by the same traditional norms male rappers seek to circumvent via hip hop practice

and by the very masculine overtones of (Senegalese) hip hop itself. In terms of lyrical content, imagery, and gendered participation, the freedom of expression that hip hop provides youth is thus one that is still largely limited by local cultural and religious norms. Hip hop may give youth a voice, but it does so selectively and conditionally.

Inventing Hip Hop

Denied a voice within traditional social structures and yet eager to effect change, Dakar youth turn to hip hop as a modern music that comes from outside of those structures. The effective power that these youth identify in hip hop derives from its mythologized history of resistance. Hip hop's invented tradition revolves around the cultural production of early 1990s hip hop groups in the United States, whose music represents a (relatively brief) moment of explicit political consciousness in U.S. hip hop's now almost 40-year trajectory. These were the major influences for early hip hoppers in Senegal. As Lamine of Coalition Niamu Mbaam explains,

Our elders followed American hip hop, listened to American texts that engaged reality and that spoke to their people, to racism, etc. Our elders adapted hip hop like this. But as the years have passed we've studied hip hop really well in terms of our reality. Because everything starts somewhere but that doesn't mean it belongs there. Like soccer, it started in England. But they aren't the best soccer players.

A mythologized, "oldschool" U.S. hip hop is thus seen as the starting point for Senegal's own oldschool. Keyti, one of the Senegalese hip hop "elders" that Niamu Mbaam references, explains his own early experiences with U.S. hip hop:

The first hip hop video I saw with translation and everything was "Don't Believe the Hype" of Public Enemy, and that's when I really had an idea of what these people were talking about . . . That night I saw the video I couldn't sleep, I just kept thinking about the translation and how it was really strong. Because the music we were used to here was mbalax, which is more about, you're coming from a good family, you're a good person, you've been well educated, and for me as a youngster at that time, to see a video where

they say don't believe the hype, don't believe the system, this and that this is how the world is, that was amazing and I felt like I want to do that.

For most young rappers in Dakar, Keyti's group Rap'Adio served as rap prophets, bringing hip hop truth to a young Senegalese hip hop culture that, with its reggae toasting, R&B singers, and love songs, had yet to find its way. As Falsower explains,

Rap'Adio showed us what hip hop was. They showed us the true face of the street, that hip hop is truth. They were more edified, they showed that hip hop was a weapon to show our discontent and defend the people of the street without a voice.

Like Falsower, most underground Dakar rappers cling to this mythologized oldschool of U.S. hip hop and its Senegalese incarnation in Rap'Adio, championing the music as an instrument of truth and revindication. As Baye Ndiagne describes,

This type of music wakes up the mind. It puts you on a good path. It's truly reflective, where you can obtain what you want to find. It's a little revolutionary . . . we say what's happening in the ghetto. We're obligated to do what Americans are doing because we live the same problems, the same difficulties. Underground rap there talks about how life is hard, daily problems. It's like here in Dakar, in a populous quarter. We're blessed, but life is hard. We are rappers to say what's going on in life. This is what rap did to me. American rap influenced me in terms of truth.

For Dakar rappers, the invented tradition of U.S. hip hop, one centered on figures like Public Enemy with their Black Nationalist rhetoric and images, speaks to their own daily struggles in a way that mbalax, firmly rooted in muffling social norms, cannot. But the valorization of early U.S. hip hop is juxtaposed with the increasing belief that hip hop in the United States has lost its way. For example, Almamy of 23.3 explains:

We try to make engaging music like LL Cool J, Wycleff and the Fugees – we loved their ideas. There were people that gave us a lot of positive ideas, like Tupac. I appreciated these texts a lot. Biggie, his texts were really well written. But the new generation – “I've got my swagger on” – seriously I don't have time to listen to that.

Like Almamy, Lamine Ndao laments the condition of U.S. hip hop, saying,

There are a lot of rappers who have changed and now they only talk about material things – yeah, I have nice cars, a nice house, bling bling, a chick, hoes . . . The oldschool had truth – they defended the American people, the ghetto, their own neighborhood, they

always situated themselves in a neighborhood – there was a philosophy, they taught you something. But modern hip hop, there's a huge change.

Kronic of Undershifaay no longer even listens to U.S. hip hop releases, preferring to stay with the tried and true recordings that introduced him to hip hop in the 1990s. He explains,

I really don't like to listen to the new American hip hop. It's been probably 10 years since I've listened to the new talent. There's a style of music I don't like listening to – what I listen to is more the oldschool, what is pure, roots, natural.

When I ask what he doesn't like about the new rappers, he responds,

Lil Wayne, Rick Ross, Wiz Xalifa . . . I just don't like it! Because like I told you, I think that hip hop, rap music, should take care of souls and minds. And I think that those rappers are lost in their souls and their minds. Life is not just all about having fun, spending money, talking about bitches and so on . . .

U.S. hip hop is thus understood as having deserted its original commitment to socially conscious performance in favor of celebrity and financial gain, a perspective that N-Jah sums up when he explains,

In the beginning people were more committed, but now things change . . . American hip hop today is one hundred percent commercial. There are some guys still representing the real hip hop, what hip hop used to be in the beginning. But it's not so many rappers.

Amadou Fall Ba, director of the youth cultural center Africulturbain, echoes N-Jah's insistence that contemporary U.S. hip hop is nothing more than the washed out product of consumerism and as such, not particularly relevant to Senegalese youth:

Maybe before it was something else but now American rap is purely the result of capitalism . . . and that's a little dangerous and a shame. Because for me [hip hop] is a social and political weapon that we should use to achieve our objectives. For certain Americans it's still that but for most, its not. I don't criticize; maybe they are right. I don't live there; if I lived there maybe I would think the same way. But we are in Senegal where we have a president who is trying to serve a third term when he isn't allowed to, there is too much malaria and AIDS, the economic situation is so hard, we can't have the same reality as Americans.

For these men, oldschool U.S. hip hop speaks to the contemporary existence of Dakar hip hoppers – one marked by political, economic, and health crisis – in a way that a new,

commercially driven U.S. hip hop does not. This decisive temporal divide that Dakar rappers identify in U.S. hip hop corresponds to an equally pronounced spatial divide, as they locate this invented hip hop tradition in a valorized East Coast, the birthplace of hip hop. For example, Djily Bagdad, who completed some college in Atlanta, Georgia, describes U.S. hip hop as comprising two main schools – the East Coast, and everywhere else (the Midwest, South, and West Coast):

There are stronger messages in the East Coast . . . But when you go the West . . . it's like more women, drugs, money, bling bling . . . Like I've been down south in the States, like Ludacris, Lil Jon, it was like bling bling, money – I'm not into that hip hop. East Coast hip hop has better rhymes, better metaphors. What Lil Jon is doing I could do it and my English isn't that good. It's very easy. There's no message; they are just talking. To me there are two different types – the lyrical, the conscious, in the East, and in the West they're just bullshitting. Right now it's changing. Even the East coast rappers tend to be more commercial. It's like the essence is not there anymore. It's too commercial, it's only entertainment, fun, there's no more message.

Overwhelmingly, Dakar rappers align their hip hop production with this idealized, East Coast-centric U.S. oldschool, privileging New York as the mythical cradle of hip hop truth. As Thiat explains,

The difference between American and Senegalese rap is that today, in Senegal, the people who do conscious rap are more respected than those who do other things. While in the United States, those who do other things have more media exposure . . . I had the chance to go [to the United States] and I saw you don't see a lot of New York rappers [in the media] but those from Atlanta. That's deplorable.

The spatial and temporary divides between conscious East Coast oldschool and commercial Southern contemporary music are understood as corresponding to spatial and temporal divides between Senegalese present and American past, so that perceived differences between contemporary life in Senegal and in the United States are understood as a temporal as much as spatial distinction. As Lamine of Niamu Mbaam explains,

We are at the same place where American hip hop started. If American hip hop isn't conscious anymore it's because they've fixed their problems – their social problems, their economic problems. Before in the United States there was racism and slavery and they spent all their time clashing with whites to have liberty and now they have their blow. Everyone should write what he lives and they live this: they live luxury, they are

millionaires. In Senegal this doesn't exist . . . You should tell people the real life that you live. Americans, I get it. They've achieved that liberty. But we aren't there yet.

Likewise, Kronic of Undershifaay explains:

What a young American lives is different than what a young Senegalese lives. It's not the same lived reality; it's not the same reference. An American rapper – because of the American dream, you can wake up one day and sell one million albums and have a lot of money. But here in Senegal, that's impossible . . . What an American lives is not what a Senegalese lives. What they live – and I haven't been there, but this is what I see on TV and in music videos, and music videos are very expressive – is drinking, money, drugs, bitches, nice cars. In general that's what it is. Us? Nice cars, we don't have them yet . . . I want people to buy my CD but if you spend your 5 dollars on a CD when there isn't enough to eat in your house that's stupid . . . if we talk about hip hop it's because it comes from the United States, so there's the music, the flow, there are always similarities in terms of that but in terms of the reality, really it's different . . . we need to express our own realities, not show dreams and gold. Life in Senegal is not dreams and gold.

The differences between African American and Senegalese realities are largely understood through globalized U.S. hip hop videos. Contemporary U.S. hip hop's globally mediated images of conspicuous consumption reinforce Senegalese rappers' belief that U.S. hip hop has truly left behind not only its messages of truth but also the very realities of racialized urban poverty that provoked those messages to begin with. Contemporary U.S. hip hop is thus positioned in opposition to a mythologized, New York based oldschool born from social realities that Dakar youth identify with their own contemporary reality. The difference between U.S. and Senegalese hip hop is therefore constructed on two planes, the obvious spatial one as well as a temporal one that holds more weight for Senegalese hip hop practitioners. In a way, Dakar rappers therefore understand their own hip hop practice, in its adherence to an invented hip hop tradition, as actually being more authentic than contemporary American hip hop.

Schooling the Street

*Ni am lekk desal bay tuur
Nañu gëstu gni lekkagul ba suur
Xiif mar raflek tumuranke*

*[Those who have eaten and have leftovers
Should look for those who haven't eaten enough
Hungry, thirsty, lacking, destitute*

Woop ak raag ñak angi sanke

Tear of the Ghetto

Xar metti ba daa yeem

Ñipp aangi toog sëg sangem

Du dund du ndox

te du leen lu ñu leen jox

Ñoongi fi ci gox

Dem nañu sax ba dañoo xoox

Xoolal fi ci ghetto

metti ñipp a koy yëgando

Tear of the ghetto

rangoñ yipp a toqaando.

Disease and malnourishment, poverty takes its victims

Tear of the Ghetto

Difficult waiting until it's unimaginable

All sitting with bent heads, hopeless

They don't give them food

or water or anything

We are here in the quarter

We've gone until we can't go anymore

Look here in the ghetto,

we all feel the same hardship

Tear of the ghetto,

we are all crying together]

Perceptions of Senegalese hip hop's exemplary authenticity are particularly grounded in understandings of Senegalese urban space – marked by clear spatialized distinctions between a affluent minority and an impoverished majority – as congruous with the “ghettos” of early U.S. hip hop. For local rappers, Dakar's disjunct spatiality, result of colonial urban planning and the failures of a corrupt postcolonial socialism, invokes images of parallel realities with African American urban youth in the postindustrial United States. In ““Rongognou Guetto [Tears of the Ghetto]” the members of Tigrim Bi, one of the earliest rap groups to emerge from Pikine, a notorious Dakar banlieue, draw on the language of U.S. hip hop to describe the distinct issues they face daily in their neighborhood: blackouts, malnutrition, poverty, lack of access to medical care. In the neighboring banlieue, Guidewaay, rapper Kalif of the quarter's premier group, Undershiffay, draws an even more explicit connection between hip hop and experiences of urban poverty, saying

Hip hop is a music of the street. The quarters where the street doesn't live, hip hop can't live. I had the luck to grow up in Guidewaay, a quarter where you have Senegalese reality . . . You have life, violence, everything. And we don't regret this, because what you live shapes you, it gives you things . . . Dakar is a big banlieue. Even downtown it's the banlieue . . . We have the same reality, the same struggle to put out albums. Maybe besides for like, Fann Residence, which is a bit different from what we've lived.

Kalif identifies the banlieue, symbol of urban poverty, and the popular quarters of Dakar as areas that produce a “street” mentality that defines authentic hip hop production. At the same time, he singles out an affluent neighborhood in Dakar proper, Fann Residence, home to western supermarkets, spacious villas, and numerous embassies and non-governmental organization headquarters, as an example of a neighborhood that doesn’t really express the reality of life for the majority of Senegalese urban youth. Toussa, also from Guidewaay and someone who looks up to Kalif and his group Undershiffaay as the first major rappers to emerge from her neighborhood, echoes this distinction between poor and rich quarters:

Those who live in Dakar Plateau are the nobles. They are the ones who have a lot of means. So they do the maximum Durty South. And here the underground artists live things that are very hard. And they tend to show this. Someone from a difficult place isn’t going to be the same as someone who grew up in comfort . . . We are from the hood, and so we only revindicate. The others who are comfortable there can’t talk about what we’ve experienced.

In describing the residents of Dakar’s more affluent quarters as the rappers who make “Durty South” music, Toussa associates them with the U.S. hip hop substyle that has come to stand as an exemplar of contemporary U.S. hip hop for many Dakar rappers. The emphasis placed on life in the “ghetto” or “hood” therefore depends on a focus on the oldschool, authentic U.S. hip hop situated in New York. Rappers become “truly” hip hop by talking about what they live, which is similar to black American struggle in the past, and not by copying contemporary U.S. hip hop, which is now seen as irrelevant to their lived experiences.

While certainly not every Dakar hip hop text imparts a heavy social message, the majority of texts, like “Tears of the Ghetto,” are topical and deal with social or political issues, as rappers narrate their lived experiences of local and global hardship. Take, for example, Skiem Underground’s song “Jooyu Askan (The Tears of the People)”:

*Dafa mel ni yëguleen
li nuy daj bes bu nekk.*

*[It seems you aren’t aware
of our struggles everyday.*

<i>Deggluleen. Askan baangi jooy.</i>	<i>Listen: the people are crying.</i>
<i>Xanaa yeen yëguleen</i>	<i>Aren't you aware</i>
<i>li ñuy jankonteel.</i>	<i>of what we face everyday?</i>
<i>Seetluleen. Askan baangi jooy</i>	<i>Look closely: the people are crying.]</i>

This song expresses the group's perception of life in Senegal, as member Baye Ndiagne describes:

We live without electricity and without water. There is no development, no economy, there are even millionaires who waste things. We need someone who can fix our problems, It's a small country so the problems aren't that serious – they can be fixed. And the Senegalese need to be conscious. Like NTS with Y'en a marre. People need to stop pissing and littering in the street. In France and in the United States people don't do that. We're trying to show Senegal it's not just the government, it's the people. We are citizens . . . Now rap is part of the development of the country. Rap plays a role in development.

The lived experiences of underdevelopment and the widespread consequences of political corruption that Baay Ndiagne details led the group to record “Jooyu Askan,” as his partner Djily Bagdad explains:

[“Jooyu Askan”] is about the masses, people in the ghetto, how they are living and the hardship and everything . . . In the chorus we are talking to the people leading the country, telling them it seems like you don't hear [the] people crying every day. In the beginning of the song it's a very critical view about our society, we say that since Independence things have gotten worse and worse. Things were better when colonization was here. The farmer sold his product and the white people bought it and paid them in due time. But since Independence people are doing whatever they want. Our own leaders who should care about the people, it seems like the white people cared more about us than our own leaders. It talks about what people are living on a daily basis, while they are building monuments people are dying of hunger, begging for money in the street, and while the situation is getting worse the rich are getting rich and richer and the poor are getting poorer and poorer.

Like “Jooyu Askan,” Nia mu Mbaam's “Menuu Happy (“We Can't be Happy”)” (“because of the condition we live in” rapper Lamine explains) exposes daily struggles, here focused on the impoverished Pikine banlieue. Verses describing specific hardships of life in Pikine – flooding, poverty – alternate with a simple refrain:

<i>Li bët yi gis neexu si xol</i>	<i>[What the eyes see is hard on the heart</i>
<i>Munuñu happy</i>	<i>We can't be happy</i>

*nu bëgg nañu happy
xol si, xel free . . .
faw ñu happy*

*We want to be happy
To look with a free mind . . .
We should be happy]*

For most, the difficulties of daily life – unemployment, flooding, power outages, rising prices of food and gas – are clearly the consequence of corrupt administration. Simon’s song “Abdoulaye” indicts the government, and especially former president Abdoulaye Wade, whose promises of “change” that inspired young rappers to help bring him in to power in 2000 since rang hollow, as he engaged in projects that seemingly did nothing more than place a shiny, transparent veneer of development over Dakar’s struggle to survive.

*Oto yu bes, taali yu bes,
mbedd yu bes, lamp yu bes
Askan ba gnuy dee ak xiif
Loolu lagnu xees Laye*

*[New cars, new streets,
new roads, new lights
while the people are dying of hunger
That is what they bleach Laye]*

Simon critiques the governmental construction of outward signs of development – new roads that improve circulation for the minority of the population that actually has cars, a massive monument constructed in Ouakam with the equivalent of millions of American dollars in state resources – while too many Senegalese citizens can’t even afford to feed their families.³² “Xees,” a truncated version of “xeesal” – to bleach one’s skin – can be understood here as a metaphor for falsifying the true identity of Senegal as an underdeveloped country, bleaching its skin to more closely resemble its western counterparts but not fundamentally changing anything.

As the 2012 presidential elections approached, more and more songs emerged directly criticizing the president. Books (Sen Kumpë) released his single “Waxal sa Baye” in late 2011 to an enthusiastic reception from Galsen fans. The song urges president Abdoulaye Wade’s son

³² “Le Monument de la Renaissance Africaine,” which depicts a man, woman, and child in a heroic pose, was finished in 2010 under the direction of then-president Abdoulaye Wade. Overlooking the city of Dakar, the towering, remarkably Stalinist statue has been a topic of controversy, as many Senegalese citizens protest not only the gross financial expenditure but also the short garment that the bare-breasted woman wears, an affront to Muslim religious beliefs.

Karim to “waxal sa baye” (“tell your father”) that the people are tired of injustice, of corruption, and of poverty:

<i>Degg naa sa baay a moom dëkk bi</i>	<i>[I heard that your father owns the country</i>
<i>Ba fu la neex nga dey ci biir ët bi</i>	<i>To the point where you can defecate</i>
	<i>wherever it pleases you</i>
<i>Ku la jaay nga fey may ko oto bi . . .</i>	<i>You give a car to anyone who sells himself</i>
	<i>to you . . .</i>
<i>Dawal wax sa baay</i>	<i>Run and tell your father</i>
<i>Askan bi cry nañu na ñu na bayyi</i>	<i>The people are crying, let him leave us</i>
	<i>alone]</i>

The lack of opportunities and pressing need for financial assistance that define life for so many young Senegalese lead many to attempt to immigrate to Europe or North America, and many hip hop songs such as Reskape’s “Waliyane” (“to leave in search of somewhere better”) warn against the dangers of illegal immigration to Europe in canoes as well as the difficulties of legal immigration and the burdens that this places on an individual. In his refrain, Reskape says,

<i>Li ñuy dundu dafa tar</i>	<i>[What they are living is so hard</i>
<i>moo tax ñu bëgga dem</i>	<i>that’s why they want to go</i>
<i>waliyane</i>	<i>go somewhere with more hope</i>
<i>daa ni seeni doole</i>	<i>working the sweat of their brow</i>
<i>Li ñuy dundu dafa tar</i>	<i>What they are living is so hard</i>
<i>moo tax ñu bëgga dem</i>	<i>that’s why they want to go</i>
<i>waliyane</i>	<i>somewhere with more hope</i>
<i>Waaye gënlu leen</i>	<i>Even though it’s not what they would prefer]</i>

While “Wayilane” focuses on the dangers of illegal migration, Nix’s “Le Reve Africain” talks about the pressures to go abroad in order to study or to work and share remittances with your family, despite the danger that once your documentation lapses you won’t be able to return.

Nix explains the song’s lyrics, which take the form of a continuous narrative uninterrupted by a refrain:

I describe how when we were in school we had a dream to create a large society enveloping everything. That we would all stay together and succeed together. But once everyone gets his bachelor’s degree, it’s the parents who decide what you are going to do, if you’ll go abroad to study. So in fact the common denominator becomes the voyage. There is something we should go search for abroad because it doesn’t exist here. To find

a dream we needed to go abroad. But at the risk of not coming back. So the big question is, does the African dream exist and can you realize it by staying here or do you have to go away to do it, and if you come back, is it actually the African dream or someone else's dream?

While these are just a few representative examples, Dakar rappers overwhelmingly focus on social and political issues in their lyrics, identifying their music as an educative tool in a conscious effort to reproduce hip hop as a music of "truth". As Thiat explains,

If I had to define our hip hop I would say it's conscious, it's not entertainment but edutainment in regards to our context. Because I think I show society what hip hop should do . . . To wake consciousness, contest the politic and the power, carry your social responsibility, share with people.

This emphasis on education dominates the discourse of Dakar rappers. In postcolonial Senegal, the shift to modern urbanity has destabilized familial structures while failing to provide effective alternatives for education, as Lamine of Niamu Mbaam explains

We aim to raise consciousness, to let people know that they are the ones who have power, they are the ones who can run their own country. Currently there are no longer parents who can stay at home to educate their children, because they need to go work, and no one is left to educate children except music.

This lack of education extends beyond the family and into the schools and universities. Although French is the official language in Senegal, most children, with the exception of the minority upper class, don't speak it at home. A poor socialized educational system means a small economic elite send their children to private Catholic schools (a vestige of colonial assimilation) while the majority struggle through in public schools, where they are supposed to learn to read and write in a language they don't even speak. Illiteracy leaves them ill equipped for formal employment and for understanding their rights in an ostensibly democratic system. Consistent strikes on the part of schoolteachers, whom the government often fails to pay, further destabilize the educational system, an issue that extends all the way to the universities, where the students themselves often strike when their government stipends are late in arriving. Lamine Ndao

complains about the lack of education for youth who are expected to contribute to the development of their own country, saying

When I studied English, and American civilization, the professor gave us documents, and I told myself, I am in Senegal and they furnish the American constitution even though no one has *ever* given me this kind of document, and it's a question of advising. Every new regime, we should have all the documents necessary to warn the population, you should do this and that, your rights are this and that, you should act like this and do this, your rights are limited here and here. If you can educate a population, you should give them the documents to know how the current regime works.

The need for hip hop as an educative medium emerges from the failures of a modern system of which mbalax is the dominant musical expression. Like many rappers, 23.3's Falsower believes that hip hop can act as a substitute for familial or formal education:

Here there are lots of people who don't do hip hop but have the opportunity to listen to music. Even if they didn't get an education they could get an education from hip hop. So it's important that it be edifying. This is what music should be. Before dancing you should listen.

For Dakar rappers, hip hop educates the population in multiple ways, addressing social inequalities and political corruption. Through this emphasis on hip hop as education, and through insisting on the similarities between postindustrial U.S. urbanity and postcolonial Senegalese urbanity, Dakar rappers construct their musical practice as an authentic expression of an invented hip hop tradition.

Against Tradition: Engaging Global Music

Mbalax . . . is the national music, the traditional music. You have traditional instruments like sabar. And the girls love it . . . And mbalax is so easy. I used to tell people, this mbalax music ain't shit. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to do it. You have the same rhythm, you beat the drums the same way, and you can say anything you want. You can look at a car and say, this is a car, this is a car, and as long as people can open their legs to it and dance, it's good. So it's very easy.

- Djily Bagdad

You can't be in an underdeveloped country where people just sing people and don't say anything useful, and rappers should attack this. But there are mbalaxmen who say other things . . . But what's a shame is that people prefer that music to hip hop

- Amadou Fall Ba, Africulturbain

When people need to talk about something important they never call mbalaxman, they call rappers . . . And that's a strong message: when they need to amuse people they call someone else, but when they want to raise consciousness they call me.

- Reskape

Dakar youth's turn to hip hop's invented tradition entails a simultaneous rejection of mbalax as a modern tradition that reflects and actively reinforces the same social structures that youth increasingly view as anti-development. It's not just that hip hop *can* express the current reality, it's that mbalax, whose praise singing implicates it too deeply with traditional social norms, *can't*. Keyti explains,

To understand the music here I think you also got to understand how Senegalese society is. There is a different understanding of the human being in Senegal. There is this idea of, and it's related to everything Senegalese people do . . . you really can't expose the human being no matter what he's doing, what he's saying, how he is . . . and that's how the whole Senegalese society is functioning throughout history. Traditional music is related to that. You'll never hear traditional music here trying to be revolutionary or change society – it's mainly entertaining, period.

The involvement of mbalax in traditional social organization (marked by life cycle events like baptisms) and political campaigning limits its expressive capacity, as Lamine Ndao explains,

For parties, religious events like baptisms, weddings, you're going to pretty much only hear mbalax. But if there is a problem with the government, something serious, it's hip hop that is there . . . People might ask, where are the mbalax men? Are they drunk or what? They can't speak. I think they can't speak because they are always busy singing the government to have money. So if there's a problem they're going to hide – they're silent. You'll only hear hip hop.

In taking up an invented tradition of oldschool or “underground” U.S. hip hop, Dakar rappers therefore simultaneously reject mbalax, which can be read as the modern incarnation of an invented griot tradition. While Senegal's international rappers tend to valorize the griot as a traditional font of knowledge, local rappers are critical of traditional cultural production and its

contemporary revisions in mbalax. Any romanticized idea of the griot is truly confined to a past that is temporary and spatially distinct from the present reality. Instead, for Dakar rappers, a mythologized oldschool U.S. hip hop, which has gone “underground” in the face of contemporary U.S. hip hop’s blatant consumerist bent, inspired and continues to inspire their own engagement with music making. In borrowing hip hop (and leaving mbalax behind), they attempt to re-define contemporary Senegalese musical production by a search for truth and truthful representation of the daily life of urban youth in Senegal.

Rapper Don Zap describes hip hop as, “the translation of the daily life of the individual. You can’t live hungry and in filth and talk about beautiful things.” It is this emphasis on hip hop as the expression of lived experience that defines hip hop production in Dakar, and explicitly defines it *against* traditional cultural production. Allou, of KTD Crew, explains

Most Senegalese rappers say [taasu] is the ancestor of rap. But it’s not scientifically proven . . . It’s a little close to the way we rap, but I wouldn’t say it’s similar. It’s far from being similar. When someone does taasu, he pays homage to someone or talks about things that don’t have any sense, while when we do rap we make efforts that it be logical, that it has a certain form . . . and that there is content . . . even originally, when black Americans did rap it was for their revindication. Here they don’t do taasu for revindication, I’ve never heard of that. It’s just for fun, to pay homage or give history, but I’ve never heard a *taasukat* [person who performs taasu] talk about a politician or denigrate the regime via his taasu. Never.

Not only is hip hop understood as more useful than mbalax, but what is perceived as the inherent lack of truthfulness of taasu/mbalax is the very reason why mythologized hip hop can’t possibly come from taasu. As Gaston explains, “It’s true there is a nuance between taasu and rap but that has nothing to do with anything. Taasu is giving homage to someone while rap denounces, is revolutionary, informs and educates.” For Rap‘Adio’s Keyti, the contrast between hip hop’s “truth” and taasu’s “easiness” not only belies an ancient connectivity between the two genres; it explains why hip hop was so popular among struggling urban youth to begin with.

Usually Senegalese traditional music is just praising people. Your grandfather was a king, your grandfather was a good man, your mother was a nice person – usually that’s the subject matter. Or it’s sexual. You’ve got a lot of this taasu for example, which people are saying rap comes from taasu, blah, blah, blah . . . I think hip hop was really the first genre in Senegal coming with real, real, real subjects people could relate to in their daily life, people could relate to in terms of politics, economy . . .

As the modern context for taasu and as a practice of singing patrons, mbalax is rendered useless for affecting change in the eyes of young Dakar rappers. As Allou’s KTD Crew partner Madou explains,

If you see mbalax now it’s about nothing. Music should give direction, it should be significant. But if you look at what rappers are saying and what mbalaxmen are saying, they’re not the same. If you look well, what rappers are saying is much more conscious in regards to what mbalaxmen are saying. Mbalax, people just go to it for nothing, for me it is useless in comparison to hip hop.

Beyond the complete rejection of social connections between griots and hip hop, even the aesthetic connections that oldschool Senegalese rappers make between rap and taasu don’t carry much weight with the underground majority. Thiat explains, “Taasu isn’t rap. It’s a flow, when you hear that flow you think immediately of mbalax. Rap isn’t mbalax. It’s a different time than mbalax. Mbalax is cacophony, it’s a not a correct, normal time.” For Thiat, the structural rhythmic differences between traditional music (whether drummed taasu accompaniment or polyphonic mbalax tracks that serve as the new musical medium for traditional speech genres) and hip hop belies any generic connectivity between the two. Likewise, Lamine Ndao explains,

The oldschool will say that hip hop is like taasu. But how? No! This can’t be. I need to say that can’t be. If you take someone who does taasu and you give him a hip hop beat, he’s going to pass to the side . . . Taasu is easy! You wake up and say you’re a griot, or a guy who walks in the road you can tell him to do taasu and he can do it. It’s too easy. But can everyone do hip hop all the time? That’s the problem. For me there is a big difference. If you listen to taasu you’re going to say, that’s taasu that people talk about as being like hip hop? They aren’t the same. With taasu, people just talk and talk, maybe without stopping. With hip hop there are norms, there is a refrain that comes, when the music changes your flow should change, you are going to use certain techniques just to try to have the same feeling as the beat. I don’t know what to say about taasu.

Thiat and Lamine reject the idea that hip hop and taasou even sound alike, insisting on the generic integrity of taasou and hip hop as distinct speech/music genres. For Keyti, the aesthetic and topical contrasts between mbalax and rap directly contribute to the former's continued popularity in Senegal:

The idea of mbalax is talking directly to Senegalese people because the rhythm is local, not international, so people recognize themselves more in that rhythm. Let's not forget that hip hop still functions under the European or Western pattern of rhythm, while mbalax is 100 percent Senegalese in terms of BPM or bars – the way of counting the bars is different. So first, it's local rhythm. Then, hip hop here is usually talking about serious subjects. I think it's so hard here, people go through some shit everyday, so at the end of the day I think they just want to listen to something that is not putting them again into thinking about this and that, being angry at this one or that one. They just want to listen to something they can have fun with. I mean if you listen to the mbalax tracks, they really talk about some stupid stuff. But it's entertaining, and that's what people want.

Bouks sums up this widely held disbelief in the idea that taasou and hip hop are generically similar when he explains that

Taasou can change, but if it changes it's not taasou anymore. Rap, if it changes, it's not rap anymore. If mbalax changes it's not mbalax anymore. If jazz changes it's not jazz anymore. Jazz is jazz. Rap is rap. And taasou is taasou. Each has its place. And you can't mix them or say this comes from this or this comes from that. We can say that basketball comes from soccer or that soccer comes from basketball. Because one you play down here and one you play up here. But why don't we say it? Because everything has its own history. Admittedly, I said it and I'll say it again. I don't believe this, that rap comes from Africa. Taasou comes from Africa but rap comes from America.

In insisting on a generic distinction between taasou and hip hop, Books brings us back full circle, aligning a historically-based rejection of the griot origin myth with an aesthetically-based one in an exact reversal of international artists' affirmative alignment of hip hop and griot practice.

While international rappers draw on an invented griot tradition to authenticate their hip hop as something that is as locally-grounded as mbalax, local rappers draw on an invented hip hop tradition to position their music firmly against mbalax and the singing modern day griots who perform it. In doing so, they position themselves globally, as mbalax's definitive locality is juxtaposed with hip hop as a global genre. Reskape says,

Mbalax only exists in Senegal and it's not music that is sold outside of Senegal. If there's a concert in Paris it's because it's Youssou Ndour, but there aren't Parisians doing it. It's a music they don't even understand. There's percussion, there's everything. But mbalax doesn't succeed internationally except for world music. When Youssou Ndour puts out an international album it's not mbalax.

Likewise, KTD Crew's Allou explains,

Mbalax remains popular because it is the identity of Senegalese people. But we haven't succeeded in exporting it. You only hear mbalax in Senegal. Even if you hear people talk about Youssou Ndour, who has traveled a lot, and who is known through the whole world, when he goes to Europe or to the United States it's another music that he does, he does acoustic music or something else different. Because mbalax is hard to listen to.

Mbalax's rootedness in sabar rhythms and traditional social relationships, along with its relative absence from a world market, contrasts with hip hop's global spread. As Kalif says

It's not normal that music we call national music has never won an international prize since our Independence. So that shows that there's a problem. It's not to denigrate but to say that they move too much in what is easy, while hip hoppers work a lot . . . But I'm sorry, mbalax is just for dancing, for partying. And we are in 2011. We are really behind the world, we shouldn't waste our time with this.

In choosing hip hop over mbalax, local rappers position themselves in a larger global modernity defined through Afro-diasporic cultural production.

Conclusions

In America, when they started rapping, it was just to defend society. I heard Louis Farrakhan said one day that the rappers of nowadays have the same responsibilities as Malcolm X or Martin Luther King. Those things they were defending, rappers nowadays have to defend the same thing. That is why I can say that rap is more important than taasu, because it represents society. We have the habit of saying we represent the people who don't have the opportunity to face the microphone and say what hurts. You have to be in the body of the people and know what's wrong and then translate those things that are wrong into your music. You have to represent those people who don't have a mouth. This is our rap in Senegal.

- N-Jah

At the end of the day on June 23, the parliamentary meeting is dissolved and the proposed bill to revise the constitutional guidelines for presidential elections is dropped. In

taking to the streets, Dakar's youth – led by hip hoppers – have successfully effected change in a forum where their voices should have been as silent as the voices of traditional cultural producers, who were nowhere to be found that day.

Deeply imbricated with the dislocated traditional systems that continue to inform daily life in urban Dakar, mbalax is seen as a music that rarely, if ever, contributes to society or development. Its deep reliance on the patron-client relationships that defined traditional social structures and, although not otherwise particularly relevant to youth's daily experiences, now contribute to political corruption in Dakar, make it unattractive to youth who are tired of the combined disenfranchisement of (post)colonialism and traditional social norms that limit the agency of youth vis-à-vis their elders, a category that includes political leaders (in a country with a median age of 18.7 years, the recently ousted president was 85). The generic distinctions drawn between traditional "singers" (griots/mbalaxmen) and modern rappers thus functions on a very practical level to let hip hop serve as a vehicle of political activism and social education. For these rappers, mbalax fails to reflect – or to successfully negotiate – the global situatedness of contemporary urban identity. Viewing mbalax as a music whose social and musical characteristics limit it to locally constrained modernity, rappers instead use hip hop to locate themselves in a larger global existence in which a Senegalese urban postcoloniality resonates with African American urbanity.

In Senegalese hip hop we find two different origin myths, two authenticating strategies that rely on rappers' positionality vis-à-vis markets and local class distinction, two constructions of "real" hip hop that overlap in certain ways. Local rappers position their music as more authentic than U.S. hip hop because of their lived urban reality, while international rappers claim their music as authentic because of its roots in local practice. For underground rappers, an

insistence on “hip hop is hip hop” (rather than “hip hop is taas”) lets them put it in opposition with traditional cultural production that they see as sycophant. They reject mbalax in favor of an alternate modernity that, coming from without rather than from within, is free from traditional vocal music’s inherent reliance on patronage and “singing” people. Mbalax becomes a musical metonym for Senegalese modernity – but for youth this is a modernity mired in social relationships that limit their own choices. They look to the struggle of African Americans in the global north for music of an alternative modernity with the potential for affecting social change, thus grounding local experiences in a global web of similitude expressed musically through hip hop.

For these youth, mbalax therefore isn’t so much a modern musical tradition as a music of a traditional modernity. While mbalax operates within traditional cultural norms that don’t give youth a voice, the language of hip hop gives youth a way to come to terms with their living situations and the trials of daily life in the banlieue and populous quarters of Dakar. The hip hop social networks described in Chapter 1 are well suited to the spatial reorganization that heightens a sense of disconnection from traditional social networks and relationships and the music that reflects and sustains them. Hip hop practice thus becomes a lens through which life in the city is performatively re-imagined and made sense of, largely through a sense of connectivity with African Americans. In the “hoods” of (early) U.S. hip hop, Dakar rappers find parallels to their own experiences of spatially defined poverty.

In their own mythology of hip hop origins, Senegal’s international rappers also narrate connectivity with African Americans; but this is a connectivity stemming from the transatlantic slave trade and the transplantation of griot practice in the New World. In Chapter 1, I outlined the griot’s history, tracing his trajectory to the mbalaxman as the modern griot. International

rappers subvert this narrative by claiming hip hop as an equally legitimate form of modern griot practice, but an updated one that matured in the United States before returning to Africa. At the beginning of this chapter, rapper Xuman describes sabar as “pure” traditional music. Unlike local rappers, who highlight the griot/mbalax continuum in order to reject both, international rappers bypass mbalax’s very literal connection to griot practice to position themselves as the real griots, who reach past mbalax to pure, authentic tradition. Through a mythologized griot transformed in the United States, they position their music as the newer, truer form of traditional music and the older, truer form of hip hop.

FOUR

PRODUCING MYTH:

GENRE AND THE PERFORMANCE OF INTERTEXTUALITY

Echoing outwards from my speakers, a lone balafon plays its rhythmic ostinato, its tightly compressed sound belying its origins in the sound bank of a computer. Low, synthesized strings enter, sustaining a single chord underneath. Rapper Nix's voice pronounces – *sama guy*. The strings move, sweeping downward to usher in the high, tight snare rhythm and syncopated synthesized chords that force a “Durdy South” bounce into the listener's shoulders. The driving chords, the elongated strings, the hyper snare drum articulate against the balafon's steady pattern, locking into a rhythmic counterpoint that juxtaposes aural signs of tradition and globality.

Whattup – yes – DK - Galsen – Africa – That's your boy Nix. As everything clicks into place, the hook begins:

Ñoo far, Ñoo far

Homie dina baax

Haters aangiy dingaat no doubt

Ne leen man ak Nix ñoo far

[We're together, we're together

Homie it'll all be good

Haters are talking shit no doubt

Tell them me and Nix are together]

Nix's spoken invocations of place in the seconds leading up to the opening refrain expand outwards from Dakar, to Senegal (Galsen), to the African continent. But the skillful manipulation of both the traditional balafon and the locally-specific Durty-South style of U.S. hip hop continue the invocation of place even further, across the Atlantic to a U.S. hip hop tradition indirectly spoken in the African American Vernacular English that bookends the concentric litany of place – *Whattup – yes – DK – Galsen – Africa – That's your boy Nix*. Drawing on local instruments, languages, and place names in the context of a locally derived, yet internationally popular, contemporary U.S. production aesthetic, Nix overlays musical and linguistic markers of local and diasporic histories to create an aural narrative of globally situated locality.

This chapter examines musical production practices, and discourses about those practices, as situated, performed narratives that work to produce globally situated local place. Senegalese hip hop production practice diverges fundamentally from the popular musical genre mbalax, which the previous chapter explored as the aural sign of a traditionally-constrained modernity. In place of mbalax's hybrid fusing of indigenous and Western musics, Senegalese hip hop practice strategically mobilizes distinct performance genres in a way that draws on and emphasizes, rather than altering, the generic characteristics of each. By constructing – musically, lyrically, and discursively – an intertextual relationship linking U.S. hip hop and traditional performance, Senegalese rappers situate themselves vis-à-vis local practice and global cultural flows. This chapter explores the musical processes of articulation that work in tandem with the discursive engagements of myth described in the previous chapter, arguing that the very processes of hip hop production work to position rappers within a globally articulating locality and against a bounded, traditionally inflected one.

Defining Production

In this chapter, I engage production as a multifaceted analytical framework encompassing the musical and linguistic construction of hip hop tracks as well as the ways in which these work to produce place and place-based identities. Imbricated with local realities and global markets, musical practices in Senegal go hand-in-hand with a diverse repertoire of linguistic practices to simultaneously internationalize and localize hip hop production. As a musical genre intrinsically tied to the production of place, hip hop provides a fitting medium for these processes of musical situation. In U.S. urban centers, rappers construct place-based identities that are expressed lyrically and in the development and popularization of distinctive regional musical styles

(encompassing not only the musical track but also regional accents and lyrical flow and cadence) (Forman 2002).³³ The combinations of regional styles of rapping, verbal signifiers of place, and locale-specific musical sub-styles create distinct senses of local place that have long characterized the genre. Dakar rappers appropriate both these practices and traditional Senegalese music to create a music that is grounded in local experience but that remains in constant, conscious dialogue with globalized hip hop performance practice.

My use of “production” in this chapter draws on multiple, interconnected significances of the word. Production refers first to the production of culture, not exclusively in the sense of the creation of cultural “products” within a capitalist world market (although this comes into play when albums and music videos are in question) but also in terms of cultural *practices* – the playing of instruments, singing of music, choosing of venues, the interaction between audience and performance, and the discursive and practical transmission of knowledge and norms about these practices – that create the dynamic cultural products such as performances that alternately forge, negotiate, and reinforce social bonds. It is these dynamic performance practices that result in the concrete products of culture such as recorded songs, albums, album artwork, and music videos. While musical tracks fall under the umbrella of cultural production, I also use the term production more specifically to indicate the technical aspects of digitally constructing hip hop beats, both by sampling pre-existing music and through the computer-based creation of new compositions.

Second, this chapter discusses the production of place and place-based identifications through the cultural production practices described above. Incorporating local musical elements

³³ This marked localization of U.S. hip hop is evidenced in sub-genres such as West Coast gangsta rap (which in the '90s was easily identifiable by its combination of laid back beats, George Clinton samples, and synthesized melodic lines), “dirty south” beats, and Oakland hyphy music, to name a few, in addition to the longstanding East Coast/West Coast opposition embodied most famously by rappers Tupac Shakur and Notorious B. I. G.

and language through practices of intertextuality that emphasize an adherence to what are perceived as internationally operative hip hop production norms, Senegalese rappers musically produce local place that articulates within and against a globally resonating Black Atlantic cultural sphere. The daily trials facing youth in urban Senegal – unemployment, subpar education, power and water outages, flooding – inform the production of hip hop-based identities through the transatlantic imaginings of similarly ghettoized experiences of urban space between Senegalese and African American youth. Here, I argue that these understandings of shared racialized experiences of urban poverty (as described at length in the previous chapter) are performatively enacted through hip hop production.

Producing the Local in Dakar Hip Hop

Discussions of hip hop musical production are complicated by fairly consistent specialized divisions of labor in the genre, where (with some notable exceptions such as U.S. hip hop artist Kanye West) rappers usually perform over beats created by beatmakers. Rappers are therefore not often considered musicians in the sense of playing an instrument or even digitally programming music, and discussions of aesthetics that focus on rappers most often deal with rap lyrics and verbal flow as poetic practices.³⁴ While these are legitimate paths of analysis, rappers in Senegal demonstrate a keen awareness of and selectivity in aesthetic choices, and are active participants in hip hop musical production. The process of choosing beats varies, with rappers often citing “feeling” and musicality or creativity as key factors. Rapper Falsower of 23.3, for example, chooses beats based on “the feeling above all. You can’t force something on me I don’t feel. There is creativity. Sometimes there’s music you don’t feel but you feel that it’s creative

³⁴ See, for example, Adam Bradley’s 2008 work and Imami Perry’s 2004 work on hip hop poetics, as well as Christian Béthune’s 2004 and Julian Barrett’s 2008 French-language work on the same topic.

and you will try to use it because you see that it's different and you want to create something that goes with it." While many rappers often use pre-made beats proposed to them by producers, they also actively contribute to the creative process. Reskape describes choosing beats,

There are certain people that buy beats that are already made, but I'm usually pretty picky. Even if someone gives me a beat there will always be something that needs to be changed. That's why I don't work with a lot of beatmakers, because the things that I prefer you can't find with every beatmaker. For example with my first album, when [the producer] would propose a beat I would say, can we do this, add this, less of this, more of that, like that, you see? I think that in the whole album only one person proposed a beat where I didn't change anything, and that's normal because we spent a lot of time together at the studio and he was familiar with my feeling and he composed a beat that was really my feeling.

Many rappers, like Kalif, charged with selecting beats for his group Undershifaay, describe a process in which they conceptualize beats before ever going to the studio, where they describe what they want to the beamaker; Kalif usually sings ideas into his cellphone, recording them there to use as a guide when he goes to record. Similarly, Baye Ndiagne of 5kiem Underground explains:

If I write a text, I'll see a kind of beat, drums, bass – this is the first thing. Afterwards I go to the studio and I tell the technician to program what I tell him. It's not up to him to make my beat, I do it in my head. If I do *tum tum tak*, that's what he does . . . this is how I work on beats. But also you can give me a beat that I like.

Rapper Almamy of 23.3 describes much the same process,

Sometimes you write a song and then you want to write a beat for it. You go to the studio, you find the beatmaker, you say I want a beat like [sings a bit], and after he tries to play this, adds the bass, then it comes along. The second song on the album we did like this – I played it with my mouth and then the guy did it.

And rapper Mame Xa explains, "In general I work with beatmakers that I respect. I will bring my song and my refrain and present it. Then you will listen to the song and start programming under the refrain that I've given you. Then I will give my ideas for what you should put into it to make it a nice song." These rappers play an important role in the beatmaking process, often aurally dictating exactly how a beat should sound, and some go beyond verbal suggestions to create

beats themselves. Falsower himself dabbles in beat making, although he tends to focus his efforts on drums and bass lines, leaving the melodies to someone else. Xuman (of Pee Froiss), produces many of his own beats, while Jiby, of Da Brains, programs all their beats himself.

Sampling Locality

In the case of local Dakar rappers, a phrase I use here to distinguish rappers who have not yet achieved significant international market success (the vast majority of Senegalese rappers), usually somewhere between 1-3 tracks on each album involve the sampling or incorporation of ethnically diverse traditional music and instruments, including local singing styles as well as instruments such as the *kora* (harp-lute), the *balafon* (wooden xylophone with gourd resonators), the *djembe* (goblet-shaped hand drum), and the *tama* (small pressure drum played under the arm). There is a general enthusiasm for sampling as a distinctly hip hop way of localizing music. Rapper Books of Sen Kumpë says, “I love [sampling] too much even. Things that represent a little bit of scratch – *I represent the real hip hop chicka-chicka chicka*”(Books). And rapper Djily Bagdad of 5kiem Underground explains,

I hear Kanye [West] using a lot of samples and it's very nice . . . We took some stuff that was on the radio like 20 years ago that people forgot about and mixed it in our beat, and people really liked it. Even sometimes mbalax, old traditional music. Sometimes also samples from the States. I like doing that a lot.

In addition to sampling, rappers also often employ live musicians to augment an already conceptualized beat, while some recreate the sound of traditional instruments synthetically via digital sound banks. For example, Medina-based rap trio Zair ak Batine's song, "Doundou Ndakara" is based heavily on traditional music, recreated through the combination of sampled djembes and traditional vocals with synthesized piano lines that imitate the melodic runs of the *kora*. Local instruments and musical traditions often constitute prominent stylistic elements of

hip hop songs in this way. 23.3's song, "Guem sa Bop," ("believe in yourself"), is built around a repetitive kora phrase that gently rises and falls over a simple synthesized hand drum rhythm with faint strings and flutes to fill out the texture. And the musical track for Reskape's "Dafa Jot," comprises kora, djembe drums, balafon, and traditional singing. Rapper and Jolof4Life founder Simon's "Borom Xél," foregoes a typical refrain in favor of a circumcision song from Southern Senegal, sung over djembe accompaniment and overlaid with a piercing male voice singing in traditional style. The song that Simon samples here has been used by numerous hip hop artists, including Positive Black Soul on their *Run Cool* album, and more recently, Reskape on his *Dafa Jot* album, where it appears as an interlude in a track based on subtly embedded tama rhythms and punctuated with kora and traditional singing. This song aurally invokes the Casamance, an area in Southern Senegal populated largely by the Jola ethnic group and often hailed as a sort of cradle of traditional culture, not only by musicians but also by Dakarois more generally.³⁵

The presence of local musical elements is not always emphasized to such an extent. Instead, in some cases indigenous instruments become a semi-prominent layer of a musical track, foregrounded during a musical break but mixed with synthesized Western instruments and drum machines. For example, in Medina hip hop duo Sen Kumpë's song "Aythia Gnu Dem," short, escalating bursts of tama rhythms punctuate a beat that is otherwise indistinguishable from hip hop produced in the United States. Similarly, Def Dara studio owner Gaston's "Khikeuma" opens with a hand drum rhythm quickly subsumed under a string-heavy hip hop beat. Later a kora enters, only to fade back into the beat after several bars, reappearing in the final verse. At

³⁵ More than one cab driver, in my travels throughout the city, advised me to travel to Casamance for precisely this reason: to find culture. One taximan raved to me about the wonderful cultural performances he saw there, in particular the Conchoran, a mask who makes his appearance at circumcision rituals accompanied by drums and dancing.

the very end of the song, Baay Fall praise singing juts up against electric guitar melodies, finally giving way to the same kora from the beginning, which continues alongside the strident guitar lines. Embedded this way in the multi-layered production of hip hop beats, sometimes indigenous musical elements are not necessarily readily recognizable to a non-local ear.

The traditional music that is incorporated isn't always Senegalese, and what rappers refer to as traditional music often encompasses other forms of popular music that are themselves heavily influenced by traditional music. Rappers cite musicians ranging from Malian Salif Keita to Senegalese mbalaxman Omar Pene as sources for sampling traditional music. For example, the 5kiem Underground song "Karavan" that Djily Bagdad describes above involves a sample of a popular musician from the 1970s. Despite this, Djily's partner Baye Ndiagne states, "the hook is a sample from a traditional song from a guy who passed away." In this case, the "traditional" popular music sample is overlaid with a drum and tambourine beat subtly invocative of an Arabic influence that has come to be synonymous with nationalist Muslim identity in Senegal.³⁶

The more obvious the incorporation of traditional instruments, the more likely that the song will have topical lyrics dealing directly with social issues and contexts specific to Senegal (the opposite is not necessarily true: topical lyrics don't always inspire traditionally-inflected musical tracks). Zair ak Batine's "Doundou Ndakaru" ("To live in Dakar"), described above, comments on aspects of daily life in the city. And 5kiem Underground's "Karavan" is alternately titled, "Tuuru Senegal" (Woloficized French for "the tour of Senegal"). The song opens with the two rappers calling out for people to board their bus as they prepare to aurally transport the listener through the country's topography. In the previous chapter, I described 5kiem Underground's "Jooyu Askan" as a lyrical critique of the governmental corruption that

³⁶ The use of Arabic music in Senegalese popular music mirrors the prevalence of North African architecture in Senegalese mosques, which Mamadou Diouf has argued reflects a growing Arabic tendency in Muslim nationalist identity in Senegal (2000).

exacerbates the daily hardships of many Senegalese people. Baye Ndiagne describes “Jooyu Askan’s” musical track,

You hear the notes of the kora; we had a professional come in and play over the beat . . . with the theme, it has to do with the suffering of the people. It’s a revolt. It’s the population crying. And if they are crying you should feel it, the music should have a sensual form that lets you feel what’s in the song. We said to ourselves that we should have a traditional instrumental because that would give something.

The correlation between localized topical lyrics and localized music speaks to the fact that hip hop practitioners’ use of indigenous instruments and musics often marks a self-conscious effort to indigenize hip hop, to mark it as Senegalese/African. As Baye Ndiagne comments, “rap comes from the United States, but to make a rap beat, we can make a sample that will describe the identity of that rapper.” Likewise, Simon describes the use of traditional instruments as a way of differentiating Senegalese hip hop from hip hop created in the United States and France. “We come from here, and so we should bring difference and rap over instruments that come from our country.” Rapper Iman Assane of the group Zair ak Batine explains, “I often use traditional instruments. It’s normal. We’re in Africa, and we have something that is our own. So of course we’re going to exploit that.” The incorporation of local instruments is thus an explicitly indigenizing strategy that recognizes the diasporic nature of hip hop while aurally marking the “Senegaleseness” of these particular recordings by drawing on locally – and often globally – recognizable musical signifiers of place in the context of what is understood as an international musical form. Reskape explains that the use of traditional instruments, “allows me to create a little identity when I present myself. It’s true that hip hop is something universal, but to distinguish yourself it’s good to put something that belongs to you.”

Senegalese youth’s incorporation of indigenizing elements localizes hip hop in a manner consistent with U.S. hip hop’s longstanding history of aesthetically unique sub-styles grounded in particular urban locales. As Djily Bagdad comments, “We use [traditional music] just to show

your identity. To show that this is where I'm from. For example when you go back to the States, if you hear a beat with kora or sabar you might know it's from Senegal." But while traditional music is seen as something that establishes local identity, there is also a resistance to fundamentally changing hip hop in the process of localization. Rapper Don Zap describes the localization of hip hop as something that operates within hip hop norms:

There should be a difference in color. If you hear salsa on the radio you should know it's salsa because there is a tempo to respect. The same is true of reggae and jazz. We have all the same tempo to be able to define hip hop. But after that there are cultural connotations. But this happens in the US too. Every region has shown their own kind of hip hop with their own identity. Like the West side with Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, they do certain things in their music to show where it comes from. But first you should hear the tempo to know it's rap, but hear little touches that let you know what sector it comes from. You should have a cultural connotation to show where the music comes from, but we all have the same limits.

Don Zap's reference to rappers Dr. Dre and Ice Cube, central figures in developing a distinctly West Coast musical aesthetic in U.S. hip hop, emphasizes the extent to which Senegalese rappers self-consciously participate in a global hip hop practice of place-based identifications. But beyond this, Don Zap's comment reveals an attitude prevalent among Senegalese rappers, whose discursive and artistic claims on traditional music are tempered by a firm adherence to an implicit code of generic integrity that permeates discourse about production. Books of Sen Kumpë explains:

There are a lot of rappers here that want to do it but are afraid to take African instruments and put them into hip hop. But they should try to really understand what they should do. If you understand what you should do, you're never going to be afraid to use sabar or kora. But you have to know how you should use these instruments in hip hop so that this doesn't bother people or give another musical sonority that isn't hip hop . . . These instruments aren't made for the mbalaxman only, or the reggaeman. They are for music in general. We can put drums in our music and it will have nothing to do with mbalax. You can make something hip hop with these instruments. But if you don't know how to do it, leave it alone.

Overwhelmingly, local Dakar rappers echo Books' insistence on maintaining what they perceive as the norms of hip hop production and express concern that the incorporation of traditional

music, when not carried out by someone sufficiently skilled in hip hop production, runs the risk of resulting in a musical product that shouldn't be considered hip hop at all. Toussa states, "There's a way of using the drum in the hip hop instrumental that will become an mbalax rhythm, and you shouldn't do that. I'm not strong in this, but sometimes I hear a song and I hear that it doesn't have a hip hop rhythm." According to Kalif, the incorporation of traditional instruments

Takes a lot of work and a lot of precision. You can't just have a drummer come and say, "go ahead, play." Because he's learned a music that is different than ours. So what we do is compose the beat and then call the musician to play accompaniments; this isn't using African rhythms but it's like a mix. I prefer to take a sound engineer who has researched traditional music and will compose with the instruments, not just add them in afterwards.

Similarly, Books/Sen Kumpë's manager Lamine Ndao explains,

At the base it's hip hop, and there are norms within hip hop that you should follow. When you want to sample an instrument there are norms to follow . . . Even if there is traditional music that used other time [signatures], because between hip hop and traditional music the time is different, you have to modify traditional music to make it hip hop and that takes a certain work and reflection. Because if it doesn't sound like hip hop, people will hate it. So it's the way you use the instruments, within a hip hop norm. If you don't use them well, you offend the norms, and you've committed an error. And errors aren't forgiven onstage, and once you're on stage it's too late. So it's better that you respect the norm, whether its traditional or not it needs to be hip hop.

Although Lamine and Kalif both suggest that traditional music can be altered to better accommodate a hip hop aesthetic, these alterations typically entail slight rhythmic modifications (usually, the cutting off the ends of rhythmic phrases), that leave intact the traditional style of playing.

In the previous chapter, I explored what Senegalese rappers perceive as a pronounced break in lyrical content with contemporary U.S. rappers, where Senegalese hip hop is positioned as a more authentic hip hop true to U.S. oldschool conscientiousness in contrast with the commercial bent of recent U.S. artists. But despite this, a sense of *aesthetic* continuity is expressed over and over again in a circuitous argument in which norms must be adhered to

because hip hop is international, but hip hop is international because everyone adheres to these norms. As Drygun, from the early rap group Yatfu, comments,

I think that the similarity between American rap and Senegalese rap is rap. Because you can't rap over anything other than 4/4. When you rap, it is over an instrumental, you can do it over whatever you like but you are always going to count 1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4. It's always over the measure . . . Rap, or more generally, hip hop, is universal. Even Japanese who do hip hop will always rap over 1-2-3-4. So this is a measure. Rap is 8 bars, 16 bars, 32 bars – whatever you want but always over the measure.³⁷

Similarly, Kalif compares U.S. and Senegalese hip hop, saying,

What is similar is what is universal, in hip hop music in general, which is to say the rhythm, the technique, the flow, that is universal you can go to Japan and they will use the same techniques and rhythms . . . There are flows you find in France, Africa, and the United States. There are words that are universally hip hop. But each also has its own identity in hip hop.

The incorporation of indigenous musical elements is generally viewed as a way of localizing hip hop and expressing localized musical identities. But at the same time, an emphasis on remaining “truly hip hop” influences the aesthetic choices that Senegalese rappers make. In order to stay within what are understood as global “norms,” it becomes crucial that the incorporation of local instruments not obscure what are seen as basic organizing principles of hip hop production. The discursively constructed connectivity with African American youth that I explored in the previous chapter is thus equally *musically* constructed through the same adherence to the international U.S. production techniques that enables the indigenization of the genre.

Rapper/producer Gary of Zair ak Batine describes his approach to constructing hip hop tracks, “For me, hip hop is a form. It's the base. After, now you can add. The kora, the djembe,

³⁷ The idea that hip hop is invariably in 4/4 is a common one in Senegal's underground scene, although this is not always the case in U.S. hip hop, where you can occasionally hear songs in compound meter (12/8), although with an emphasis on beats 4 and 10 (the 2nd and 4th groupings of beats) that replicates the offbeats of a 4/4 hip hop track. In Senegalese underground rap, 12/8 is rare but not unheard of – for example, the Rap Galsen news website boyjump.com's multi-artist promotional music video “Hip Hop ak Technology” is in 12/8 and uses traditional instruments.

but it remains hip hop; you can't change that." Similarly, Djily Bagdad describes sampling indigenous instruments as a substitution of African elements into a U.S. production style.

Americans use electric guitars, keyboards, a lot of modern stuff. Sometimes instead of drums we'll use sabar. Instead of guitar you'll use a xalam or kora, it's more exotic, but it's good . . . Basically like, when you take guitar, you can replace it with some kora, I think . . . it depends on the song. If it is kind of emotional, kora is more touching the emotions better I think than guitar, and sometimes be more traditional and stuff. We put kora in it, sometimes we put balafon in the place of the piano, you know just to switch, to do some African stuff.

It is significant that these processes of musical indigenization not only leave fundamental characteristics of hip hop – such as layering, sampling, and referentiality – unaltered but in fact depend on those intertextual characteristics. Gary and Djily Bagdad describe substitution, not alteration, through sampling, itself a foundational technique of hip hop production. At the same time, the very fact of localization is understood as an essentially hip hop practice. The introduction of traditional music into hip hop therefore doesn't fundamentally change hip hop *or* indigenous music. In other words, this isn't a hybridizing process that creates something new; instead, rappers exploit the potentialities inherent in hip hop's generic structure to bring local performance into a transnational musical dialogue. The possibility of musical hybridity is undermined by this lack of generic alteration, as production techniques result not in a new, *different* music – the product of hybrid coupling – but rather in a definitively hip hop musical product that contains within it equally unaltered fragments of indigenous musical production.

Local Music, World Markets

We are from the post-Independence generation that has begun to be a little more free from the French and Cuban music that was brought by Europeans. We are influenced by South Africans – groups like Ladysmith Black Mambazo. We are part of this dynamic – of revalorizing Africa and making music that is more international. Hip hop is a platform the whole world uses to express itself, but we've chosen to incorporate African music, using hip hop as a point of contact between African youth and the rest of the world.

- Daara J

In June 2011, Africulturbain hosts the 4th annual edition of Dakar's only international hip hop festival. Although the French Institute in downtown Dakar makes a point of punctuality, I arrive early only to find that the Institute won't let workers from Festa2H sound check for the closing concert until a small private event taking place behind the restaurant is finished. When the concert finally starts, 90 minutes late (and the only tardy event out of many I've attended at the Institute), the crowd reflects the venue – mostly white foreigners, with American and Senegalese workers from the U.S. embassy taking their reserved seats in the front row, a privilege earned through the Public Affairs Section's financial sponsorship.

Following European artists in town for the festival, Matador of Waa BMG 44 takes the stage in the night's final performance, foregoing the DJ setup utilized by earlier artists in favor of a live orchestra - drum kit, bass, keyboard, and a musician who moves between numerous traditional instruments. The performance opens with a hauntingly bowed bass guitar introduction, until other instruments make their delayed entrance - an amplified kora, drums, synthesizer. Matador moves onto the stage with slow, deliberate steps, sliding into an eerie, strained rendition of spoken-word inflected verses, his crackling voice dropping capriciously from loud to soft and back again. The performance is alternately frenetic, seductive, hardcore. Matador's lyrics catalyze a call and response with the drummer/kora player, who sings and narrates between verses. The rapper intersperses short monologues about Senegal, religion, the plight of children. As his performance crashes to a close he introduces his traditional counterpart the korist, there to represent SUBA (Wolof for "tomorrow"), a cultural center outside of Dakar that teaches children the traditional instruments that are getting "lost" in the country's unstable drive towards development.



Figure 39 – Matador at the French Institute

Alongside Matador, Senegal’s internationally successful rappers can be counted on one hand, and foremost among them are two of Senegal’s founding groups, PBS and Daara J. Unlike the local rappers cited above, whose albums typically include one or two token tracks incorporating traditional music, the internationally-released albums of Daara J and the now defunct group PBS, as well as DJ Awadi’s (of PBS) solo albums are heavy handed in their incorporation of traditional instruments, which form the basis for the majority of musical tracks on any given album. This extensive use of traditional music resonates with their narratives of hip hop as an essentially indigenous music stemming from the mythologized practices of ancient griots and reinvigorated by a new generation of modern, rapping “griots” (as described in Chapter 3). This combined discursive and musical linking of hip hop and traditional music correlates with their positionality vis-à-vis an international market.

DJ Awadi’s 2008 *Sunugaal* album demonstrates a fairly typical breakdown of local signifiers of place in Senegalese hip hop albums that have successfully carved a niche in the

world music market.³⁸ The name of the album itself can be read as a localizing strategy, utilizing a common play on words in which Senegal is revisioned as “Sunugaal” by Wolof speakers, who turn the country’s name into an indigenous language phrase meaning “our (sunu) boat (gaal).” More than a clever play on words, the phrase is sometimes said to be the actual origin of the country’s name, deriving from linguistic misunderstandings between early French visitors and Wolof fishermen.³⁹ Today, the ubiquitous trope of the boat takes on added significance in light of the often-fatal illegal migrations to Europe in the wooden boats that become floating caskets for youth looking for an alternative to the poverty and unemployment that faces them at home.

Sunugaal opens with the title track, where Awadi raps in Wolof peppered with French over a languid kora-esque guitar accompaniment and gentle drums. The lyrics describe the hardships of contemporary Senegalese existence and condemn the Senegalese government for its complicity in creating those hardships, thus driving people towards the dangerous ocean migrations that so often end in tragedy. The second track on the album is a remake of a popular Cameroonian song “Tsamina” from the 1960s, the same song on which the 2010 World Cup theme (sung by Colombian international pop star Shakira) was based. In Awadi’s version, the Wolof talking drum revisions the refrain as something distinctly Senegalese, while a rhythmic interlude in the middle invokes Ivorian coupé décalé dance music. The album continues in its retro imaginings of Senegal with “Le Cri du Peuple,” a French-language track decrying the financial hardships of life in urban Senegal over a salsa-inspired hip hop beat. The next track “Rosa,” creates a diasporic musical imagery, overlaying Brazilian samba rhythms with sabar

³⁸ Other albums include *Presidents de l’Afrique*, another solo album by DJ Awadi, as well as his collaborative albums with Duggy T as Positive Black Soul; these include *Run Cool* and *Salaam*. Daara J’s *Boomerang* and *School of Life* albums also follow this general model.

³⁹ As Baye Ndiagne of 5kiem Underground explains, “The word Senegal is deformed. We used to say *sunu gaal*. Because the French came and asked a fisherman, Where is this? But the guy thought he had asked, *what* is this? He said, it’s our boat [sunu gaal] . . . and so then they deformed the word to say Senegal . . . That’s the history. Senegal is *sunu gaal*. *Sunu gaal* is ‘our boat’.”

drums played by legendary géwël DouDou Ndiaye. The album returns to Senegal with “J’accuse,” where Awadi riffs off Emile Zola’s notorious open letter to the French government, rapping his own French-language letter accusing the presidents of the world’s superpowers of crimes against humanity over a sparse, kora-based accompaniment performed by griot Noumoucounda Cissoko, who also sings the refrain. The album’s eighteen tracks continue along these lines, seamlessly combining the most modern of hip hop production practices with musical signifiers of local place magnified through the names of globally recognized world music masters of the drum and kora. French lyrics render the album accessible to a global audience, while keeping just enough Wolof to emphasize a sense of difference that makes the music all the more marketable. The topics range between explicit indictments of local and global political leaders, social commentary on contemporary life in Senegal, and more lighthearted, dance rhythm-based tracks.

Local rappers are very aware of international rappers’ strategic use of traditional instruments in both recorded and live performance to seduce a Western audience much more interested in something African and different than in an off-shore version of American hip hop.

Rapper Almamy of 23.3 comments,

Daara J plays with live traditional instruments. Awadi has done it – he brings djembe, you know this doesn’t exist in American rap, it’s another music outside of hip hop that comes from Africa. And many African groups that travel internationally do it. They don’t go on stage with guitar, a drum set, but rather instead of using a guitar they’ll use kora, the xalam, instruments that if you hear you might say it’s the guitar that plays while in fact they are African instruments that can make really great songs, like with djembe or sabar on wolof, flute, balafon, they use that. So it’s a question of audience.

For manager Lamine Ndao, international artists have already demonstrated to local rappers the keys to successful promotion abroad:

There are artists who understand, you do things that are international. There’s the rhythm. You use instruments that are African, but you don’t go into hip hop, you use African instruments that work in the hip hop norm, the international norm. So the Europeans and

Americans are going to be interested in this new color. So maybe Daara J and Awadi use instruments like tama, djembe, kora, even Americans learn this there, there are foreigners who come here just to learn these kinds of instruments. It's the culture – they have tried to export and import the culture . . . For me if you want to pursue an international audience you need to be intelligent, you need to say to yourself, Americans want this kind of music. There are instruments that are new for them, so you export your own music to please them

Concerns for market success inevitably influence rappers' musical decisions, and an emphasis on making "real" hip hop collides with the recognition that for an international audience charmed by the musical markers of difference that designate popular music as "world music," well-constructed, lyrically sophisticated hip hop isn't enough in and of itself, as Almamy explains,

You shouldn't limit yourself to Senegal. You should search an international market. If you bring beats to Europe or the United States that sample Norah Jones, that isn't going to interest people. They see this every day. But if you bring a song with kora, they aren't familiar with that, with balafon – they want to discover what's going on, if you bring this kind of song they'll try to discover what it's about.

Along the same lines, Djily Bagdad comments,

I have ideas, for future projects with more traditional stuff. Because sometimes internationally they say you are doing the same stuff as America and France. You have to do your own thing! I think we're going to explore that in our next album, one or two tracks to see how people will appreciate it.

Senegalese hip hop is thus marked by a particularity, wherein what is musically localized is what is internationally viable, while what is generically international is limited to local audiences. The local underground's belief in the importance of the generic norms of hip hop is thus tempered by the recognition of international market preferences for musical difference.

Despite this awareness of international market pressures, several local rappers, like Books of Sen Kumpë, express the opinion that it is the good fortune and business savvy of international rappers, more than anything else, that account for their success. He says,

Maybe it's that their music is different. But there are others who make good music like them. I'm not just saying commercial music but music that can cross borders. But maybe they don't have good contacts, or maybe they don't know where they need to go to export their music. The people who have had the chance to get out are from Senegal. They

should give a chance to others. They should go to their contacts and encourage them to come to Senegal and see the other good rappers who are here.

Global Articulations and Local Flows

In Senegal, as in numerous hip hop cultures throughout the globe, the shift from rapping in English to utilizing local languages is perhaps the primary way of localizing hip hop.⁴⁰ But at the same time that linguistic choices function as a key indigenizing strategy, they are also central to the construction of Senegalese hip hop as a transnational (and internationally viable) music. Thus international rappers, while marking difference through the use of Wolof lyrics, still rap primarily in French. DJ Awadi explains the importance of adjusting language to local and international audiences:

I rap a lot in French. Because I'm not only listened to in Senegal. So French is bigger and I don't only want to speak to Senegalese but to Africa in general. But certain things you should say in Wolof when it's a theme that is specific to Senegal. I rap in French and in Wolof but if I spoke Swahili I'd rap in that – I'm not someone with linguistic barriers. If you only do Wolof your music will stop here unfortunately.

In contrast, the general norm for local rappers, with certain exceptions such as Nix, who raps primarily in French, and N-Jah of Tigrim Bi, who loves to rap in English (a language he learned without ever traveling abroad), is to rap in Wolof. Thus while local rappers often insist on musical aesthetics as something that is necessarily continuous between U.S. and Senegalese hip hop, language becomes a primary tool by which hip hop is consciously localized, going hand-in-hand with the musical construction of locality described above. As Mame Xa expresses succinctly, “Since Wolof is what I've learned and Senegal is where I'm located that's what I rap in.” Reskape explains his own progression as an artist:

⁴⁰ See, for example, several of the chapters from the recently published *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of language* (Alim et al. 2009), such as Allastair Pennycook and Tony Mitchell's discussion of the use of the Maori language in hip hop in New Zealand, Jennifer Roth-Gordon's chapter on Brazilian hip hop, and Angel Lin's exploration of the use of Cantonese in Hong Kong hip hop.

When I started rapping it was really in French, and then people said to me, you are in Senegal and it's true that French is somewhat open as a language but you need to build a foundation, and a lot of people here only understand Wolof. And I think that to really pass your message well you need to use English because it's a language that is universal, but Wolof is only spoken in Senegal . . . So [English] is a language that can help you internationally.

Reskape highlights the fundamental problem of language use for local rappers, who need to rap in Wolof to establish themselves vis-à-vis a local audience but at the same time are aware of the importance of language in reaching an audience outside of Senegal. Since this is seen as the only way to hip hop-based financial success (à la PBS and Daara J), many express enthusiasm for rapping in other languages while emphasizing that a rapper must first be capable of communicating with a local audience. As rapper Toussa explains,

The fact of rapping in Wolof, here the population wants to know what you're talking about. When you rap in French that makes an overture to Europe. When you rap in English that's an overture. Because these are official languages. And yes, it's a question of public also. To succeed, you have to win [a public] where you are. So you rap in Wolof, and then for other people to know [what you are saying] you use other languages.

While Toussa represents the newest school of hip hoppers to emerge in Dakar, her views are strikingly similar to those of oldschool rapper Drygun, who comments,

Well I would say a rapper that starts in Senegal is going to rap in Wolof. Because already, before being known abroad, for example in France or in the United States, you have to first make yourself known in your country, and so you need to rap in Wolof. If you rap in Wolof and make yourself known and respected in your country, then you can start rapping in French. Here you can also rap in French because there is a French community and it's the official language . . . if you can express yourself in French you are more open to other regions, to another world . . . Same thing with English in the United States.

Nix, the rapper whose song opens this chapter and whose career is pushing forwards towards an international audience, is known for rapping primarily in French. He explains,

For a Senegalese rapper if you rap in Wolof you touch everyone – the whole world understands Wolof here . . . If you rap in French, you are understood by a good part of the population but you can also leave and bring your music elsewhere, diffuse your music through all the French territories. So from a business point of view that is interesting. If you rap in English, people here won't understand you but it's a universal language.

Like Nix, Djily Bagdad, who lived for several years in Atlanta and New York before returning to Senegal in 2005, believes in the significance of foreign languages, and particularly English language competence, in pushing a hip hop career forward towards the international arena:

English is the most spoken language, so there's a big advantage to rhyming in English even if you can't do it like Americans do, but just to be understood on an international level. A lot of people have suggested we rhyme in English and French so that maybe people going abroad will bring the album with them. So I'm working on some tracks in English, because here the market is not that good. People don't buy CDs or tickets to concerts. If you're going to make any money you need to go to Europe or the U.S.

An interest in using French or English to reach an international audience doesn't always indicate a concern for financial success; sometimes it has to do with a belief in the significance of the messages rappers bring in their music and a desire to share this with a larger audience. Books comments,

If I do a song that I want people who don't understand Wolof to understand, I prefer to put the little words I understand in English, I don't dare risk putting whole sentences in English. But if I learned English well I would like to do that, to open up my music to another audience that doesn't understand what I say in Wolof. Like our song "Freedom," even if you don't understand Wolof you understand we're talking about Freedom. If you listen carefully to "Gnu Gnuy," you'll understand that we're talking about street life because we keep saying "bad boy." In "Freedom" you hear "free free free." And you know we're talking about freedom.

Along the same lines, Falsower of 23.3 told me,

Honestly I would really like to speak English because I have things I would like to let the rest of the world know. If you rap in Wolof only Senegalese people can understand you. What would be advantageous would be to speak English. Like the song "Suuf si", if we had the chance to translate this to English that would really be something, because it goes beyond our territory, it talks about the whole world. It's different than "Real Address" where I talk about my own reality.

Falsower highlights the juxtaposition of global and local spatialities that characterizes Senegalese hip hop, contrasting the song "Suuf si," which describes natural disasters throughout the globe as god's punishment for the sins of mankind, with the detailed descriptions of his neighborhood in "Real Address."

But while it's generally accepted that French and/or English lyrics are necessary for international success, not every rapper agrees. Rapper Bakhaw of Da Brains states,

Well I'm talking about Da Brains, our philosophy is to always rap in Wolof. It's true sometimes we do things in English but we want to sell our Wolof music internationally. You can rap in English like Lil Wayne but you will never shock the American public . . . Music will never change and I can achieve that level in no matter what language. Now when you go to Europe they play Ivorian music and everyone gets it. You can rap in French but you can't go to France and impress people there.

His brother Jiby adds,

Our problem is we love what Jay Z does even though we don't all understand what he says, we love his style. The Senegalese love people without understanding their languages. Why not love rap in Wolof. The Senegalese who can love a song in English can love a song in Wolof. That's it. We are proud.

Like Da Brains, Mame Xa refuses to accept that rap has to be in English (or even in French, which he doesn't really speak) in order to succeed internationally, instead citing the aesthetic impact of the music:

Maybe if you are rapping in English the advantage is that you can go to another country outside Senegal. But . . . it's not just the text that's important but the flow. Or maybe the instruments or something else inside the song. It's not obligatory that you rap in English for your rap to get out. And it's not obligatory that you rap in Wolof for people here to like it, either.

The contrasting views that these rappers express highlight the complexity of linguistic decisions in Senegalese hip hop. The question of language is complicated by a major shift in the demographic makeup of hip hoppers over the last decade. Although most of the earliest generation of rappers came from comfortably middle-class or affluent neighborhoods and are literate in French, a new generation of rappers has emerged/is emerging from the poorer neighborhoods of Dakar and the surrounding banlieue, rappers who may not speak more than minimal French or know how to read or write, instead composing and preserving their lyrics mentally. The choice between Wolof and French or English is thus based on myriad factors, including audience, class background of the artist, and the complicated dynamic between pride in

and responsibility to local origins and communities and the desire for financial stability that is symbolized in international market success. But more than anything, it has to do with the idea of flow that Mame Xa invokes. In U.S. hip hop, *flow* refers to the rhythmic patterns and cadences of a rapper's lines as well as the intricate interweave of lyrical delivery and musical track. As U.S. rapper Jay Z explains,

The beat is only one half of a rap song's rhythm. The other is the flow. When a rapper jumps on a beat, he adds his own rhythm. Sometimes you stay in the pocket of the beat and just let the rhymes land on the square so that the beat and flow become one. But sometimes the flow chops up the beat, breaks the beat into smaller units, forces in multiple syllables and repeated sounds and internal rhymes, or hangs a drunken leg over the last *bap* and keeps going, sneaks out of that bitch (2011:12)

Rapping thus not only constitutes a textual or linguistic element of hip hop; it also functions as an important determinant of musical aesthetic. It is flow as a defining element of hip hop performance practice that enables Senegalese rappers to appreciate and appropriate U.S. hip hop music without necessarily having a mastery of the English language. Maestro DD of Zaire ak Batine explains,

We don't want to change the language just to do what other people are doing. Here, if there's the flow, if there's the rhythm, if there's the technique, then that will do. Here, we hear Americans, we hear French people, without knowing what they're saying, but nevertheless we like the flow, the rhythm, all that. But why change? We love Wolof . . . if we also want people to understand what we're saying, we'll try to write in English, but usually we write in Wolof.

Flow as an aesthetic element was important to young Senegalese captivated by American hip hop in the 1980s and '90s, as Almayy of 23.3 describes,

It's a question of feeling. Because you know, when you listen, when we didn't understand English, you'd listen to a Redman rapping or Keith Murray, Eric Sermon, you don't know what they said but their way of rapping, their flow, it was extraordinary that you wanted to listen without understanding what they were saying, like it was a well drawn picture, their way of rapping, their beats, and that let you be able to listen and know who was really good even without knowing what he was saying. Now, you make a song, whether it's the flow that interests people, or you make a song, people understand what you say and they say that you are really good and you say things that can help

people to surmount their obstacles. If you do a song in French that can let people who understand French know you are capable, if you do it in English it will make people who understand English understand what you are capable of doing. But if you rap in Wolof they won't understand – then it will be the music and the flow that grab them.

Regardless of local rappers' position on the necessity of foreign languages in reaching an international market, they all agree on the importance of good flow. As Books explains,

You can't do a song in English to shock Americans. Because that's their language that you've only studied. You can make a song they'll understand but you can't have the same slang and feeling that they understand in the streets there. Same thing in French. You can't make a good song in French like IAM or Soprano. We grew up with Wolof and we understand it well. It's not to say we'll never rap in French or English, we can do little bits. When I want to do a song in French, I can call Nix for example, he raps well in French. If I want a French verse, why not just call Nix and have him do it? You can have good diction that way because he really knows French. If I want to do a song in English why not go see Fly the Ripper and have him do it? He speaks English really well.

The choice of Wolof is thus not only a linguistic localizing strategy but also equally an aesthetic choice that prioritizes flow as a musical element that is crucial to good hip hop performance.

This focus on flow is foregrounded in studio sessions, where rappers spend an immense amount of time correcting each other's Wolof grammar and diction. In focusing on skillful Wolof flow over questionable lyrics in a second or third language, these rappers prioritize aesthetics as a practice of global connectivity over linguistic accessibility for an international market.

Transatlantic Signifying

At three o'clock in the morning in Kaolack, a small city four hours outside Dakar, hip hop label Jolof4Life finally kicks off its multi-artist performance to the delighted cheers of a young audience that has waited weeks for this show. Rap duo Sen Kumpë bounces on stage shouting "Medina in the house," in a formulaic yet enthusiastically received nod to their neighborhood, Dakar's "native quarter." The beat drops, the rappers launching into energized verses in Wolof until reaching the chorus, where Books chants "Kumpë Sen is back, Kumpë Sen

is back, Get up, Stand up, *allez allez*,” and Bourba replies “La-di da-di relax your body . . . Senegal, New York, *ou bien Paris*.” More than a catchy refrain, these lyrics draw on African American rap with a well known, oft-cited phrase from early U.S. hip hop (“hey la-di-da-di,”) while explicitly referencing hip hop culture’s transnational flows between Senegal, the United States, and France. Through musical and lyrical intertextuality situated in performance, Sen Kumpë constructs a complex sense of place that is at once global and local.

Over musical tracks that draw on the conventions of hip hop production to incorporate local elements, Senegalese rappers lyrically signify on U.S. hip hop, reference neighborhoods of origin, and utilize indigenous and colonial languages to localize hip hop while engaging in a transatlantic musical dialogue. An important performative aspect of linguistic intertextuality is the practice of lyrical signifying that has almost always been central to hip hop performance in the United States, as rappers respond to the words of other artists or repeat them, sometimes with a deliberately revised meaning. Signifying’s generic significance is not lost on Senegalese rappers; Sen Kumpë’s line “hey la-di-da-di” in the performance described above is just one of many instances of transatlantic signifying among Dakar artists. In repeating these lyrics, Sen Kumpë creates an intertextual relationship not just with old school U.S. rapper Slick Rick, whose 1985 single “La Di Da Di” originated the now ubiquitous hip hop phrase, but also with the myriad rappers who have likewise used these lyrics, among them West Coast rapper Snoop Dogg, in his song, “Lodi Dodi,” and female duo Salt ‘n Pepa, in their song “The Showstopper.” These particular lyrics have been sampled or signified on so frequently that they are certainly well known to most members of U.S. hip hop culture, practitioners and fans alike. In incorporating these lyrics into their own music, Sen Kumpë constructs a musical and lyrical relationship both with U.S. rappers and with U.S. hip hop culture more generally.

In addition to signifying in this way on the lyrics of U.S. rappers, as in U.S. hip hop Senegalese rappers also sometimes sample the voices of historical or political figures, including local Senegalese leaders, renowned African leaders like Nelson Mandela and Thomas Sankara, and African American figures such as Martin Luther King and Barack Obama. These practices of lyrical signifying can be read as the musically situated expressions of transnational identifications based on understandings of shared experiences of racialized oppression.

Beyond these explicit lyrical references, Dakar rappers performatively signify on the localizing practices of U.S. rappers. This goes beyond the musical production of Africanity/Senegaleseness described above to the performance of neighborhood identifications that resonate with U.S. hip hop practice, where rappers identify with particular localities in increasingly specific increments.⁴¹ Reskape, whose song (and popular music video) “Tewal sa Gohk,” stands as a musical exhortation for youth to rep their hoods, explains that hip hop.

Can let people do the geography of Senegal, to localize people they never knew. When I did a song about Parcelles, yeah a lot of people already live here but now when people hear Parcelles they say, Reskape. Or when you say Reskape you have to say Parcelles. I think that’s important. Before appearing on TV, every artist was supported by a neighborhood . . . I was born in Pikine but I grew up in Parcelles, and that’s where I learned everything in life. That’s where I learned what hip hop is, what friendship is, what love is. Good and bad, I’ve learned it there, and all that forms a man. And when we do it it’s not to limit yourself, because when I wrote that song it’s actually called “Tewal sa Gohk” which means represent your city. So if I represent Parcelles, Tigrim Bi represents Pikine, Keur Gui represents Kaolack, if everyone represents their neighborhood, and all these people come together, it’s like we represent Senegal.

Neighborhoods thus function as important sources of inspiration for rappers. 23.3’s song “My Address,” for example, is directly inspired by Falsower’s experiences growing up in Grand Yoff, described in detail in the form of practical directions to his house. He says,

I tell myself that the street wrote this. I didn’t create this. I just gave it rhythm. What you experience in your neighborhood gives you a lot. It’s another world. How people live.

⁴¹ The members of U.S. rap group Run DMC, for example, could identify through their music as belonging to the East Coast, to New York, to Queens, to Hollis, to Two-Fifths Park.

How do they act? What are their ideologies? There are all these factors that permit you to really understand the neighborhood. In hip hop this inspires us, it allows to see how to adapt our music, how to really use the hip hop that wasn't our music. The neighborhood inspires me.

Thus while musically, Senegalese rappers localize hip hop on a national (and sometimes pan-African) scale, they lyrically and performatively focus this localization in closer, first to a distinction between the town and banlieue, and then to specific neighborhoods. In February 2011, I found myself acting as second “cameraman” for the shooting of 23.3’s music video, “Get Up.” The song’s chorus features the repeating phrase, “suñu Senegal” (our Senegal), and over two days of filming we frequented various iconic locations, from the large “SENEGAL” graffiti on the walls of Leopold Senghor Stadium in Falsower’s neighborhood of Grand Yoff, to Avenue Malik Sy, the main thoroughfare in Almamy’s Medina neighborhood, where special attention was paid to capturing the uniquely Senegalese forms of transport, including brightly painted mini-buses and horse-drawn wagons. We also filmed in the immediate areas surrounding the houses of both rappers, capturing barbershops, shoemakers, and local residents.



Figure 40 – 23.3. video shoot outside Leopold Senghor Stadium



Figure 41 – 23.3 prepares to film inside a local shoemaker's shop

While in U.S. hip hop, neighborhood loyalties have often played a role in clashes between artists, in Senegal there is a sense that local identifications need to be subsumed in favor of a larger national hip hop culture. Books explains,

Everything you live in life, even your watch that you wear on your hand, you have to put: made in China, made in USA, made in Burkina, made in Senegal. And it's normal. We have to know that artists come from certain neighborhoods, as a reference point. But it doesn't change what they say. I would say the battle is the same . . . When you come to Medina, P.A. [Parcelles Assainies], Grand Yoff, Pikine, the banlieue, we all talk about the same cause and fight for the same cause.

When rappers identify their neighborhoods in this way, they do so conscious of the fact that this is a defining element of U.S. hip hop. According to Nix, neighborhoods are “something rappers talk about a lot. And in general it's something that really belongs to rap. Even where you come from, Jay-Z says I'm from Brooklyn.” As in the United States, Senegalese rappers often privilege as “authentic” hip hop that comes from poorer neighborhoods. As I described in the previous chapter, neighborhoods like Medina are likened (and perhaps justifiably so, considering the quarter's history) to the housing projects of U.S. inner cities, and the banlieue of Pikine,

Parcelles Assainies, and Guidewaay are similarly perceived as ghettoized urban spaces. This emphasis on locality that permeates Senegalese hip hop performance thus constitutes a defining characteristic of the genre that strengthens a sense of aesthetic and socio-economic continuity between Senegalese and U.S. rappers. But at the same time, it enables Senegalese rappers to appropriate hip hop as something that is truly their own, by equating the production of authentic hip hop with the production of local Senegalese place.

Performing Locality

The linguistic and musical practices that localize hip hop within its own generic parameters are situated in performance – both formal performance (e.g. concerts) as well as the daily performance of hip hop identities. The lyrical and discursive performance of neighborhood identifications described above go hand in hand with sartorial and kinetic practices that do the same. Lamine Ndao comments on hip hop fashion in Senegal

There are a lot of people who tend to style themselves like Americans. But everyone says, its an American culture, hip hop has an American origin, and hip hop has its fundamentals and a culture, and that has to do with the way of dressing and promoting certain things. In hip hop there is streetwear, your swagger must be hip hop. Always, each person should reflect hip hop when people see you. For example when you see a Senegalese rapper you'll say to yourself that he's American. But it's just that he's a rapper. You can't see a basketball player and he dresses like a rapper. Well maybe hip hop and basketball resemble each other, but maybe soccer, if we talk about soccer. Soccer players are going to wear sweatpants, dress like athletes. Wrestlers imitate rappers – when they come to fight, they have their fitteds, their bling, their Timberlands, their Airforce Ones. Maybe a white T – because all of this is hip hop. So for me it's just a question of culture. And clothing and accessories all has to do with hip hop.

In adopting U.S. hip hop “swagger,” – a combination of clothing styles drawn from U.S. hip hop culture and physical comportment that includes walking in a certain way, greeting with certain handshakes and slang, and even the frequent failure to remove sneakers when entering into a room as Senegalese social norms would dictate (local footwear slips off more easily) – Dakar

rappers embody hip hop identities. At the same time, they meaningfully repurpose these practices as they localize their performative engagement with global hip hop fashion. For example, the widely adopted U.S. hip hop practice of wearing fitted baseball caps in various color schemes that represent geographical identifications (East coast U.S. rappers wearing New York Yankees caps, West Coast gangsta rappers favoring the LA Dodgers logo) is often revisioned to communicate Senegalese spatial references, so that you might see Reskape wearing a Pittsburgh Pirates hat (with a simple “P” logo) to represent Parcelles Assainies. The physical embodiment of hip hop identities in clothing and bodily movement also entails the physical performances of neighborhood identifications. For example in Sen Kumpe’s “Gnu Gnuy” video, the rappers can be seen creating an “M” with their fingers to symbolize Medina, and Reskape’s “Tewal sa Gokh” video features the rapper holding up his two hands to form “P.A.”

Linguistic practices are a central element of the performance of hip hop identities in everyday life. Linguistic anthropologist H. Samy Alim describes the linguistic practices of U.S. hip hop culture as both deriving from and expanding African American Vernacular English (AAVE) to create what he refers to as Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL). Many hip hop communities outside of the U.S., while rapping in languages other than English, have adapted HHNL and incorporated it into their hip hop practice (see Alim 2006; Mitchell 2001). The language and linguistic practices of U.S. hip hop culture thus become a key medium through which a global or transnational community is imagined and sustained. This is certainly the case in Dakar, where local variants of HHNL play an important role in marking people as hip hop practitioners. In their music and in daily interactions Senegalese rappers and fans draw on HHNL, creating a linguistic intertextuality that goes beyond the explicit lyrical signifying found in musical performance to inform and shape daily interactions and sense of identification with a

larger, transnational hip hop community. Even rappers who don't speak English often pepper their everyday speech with words taken from African American Vernacular English as accessed via U.S. hip hop; words like "hood," "gangsta," "nigga," "whack," etc. This can be seen in the song that opens this chapter, where Nix seamlessly inserts African American vernacular speech into Wolof grammar in phrases like "Homie dina baax" (Homie it'll all be good). And as in U.S. hip hop, many rappers incorporate the word "nigga" as a personal identifier in their lyrics, everyday speech, and even artist names: Almamy of 23.3 goes by Nigga Me, Books of Sen Kumpé is known as Nigga Books, and N-Jah of Tigrim Bi only recently changed his name from Niggah Jah after reflecting on contemporary debates surrounding the use of the word in the African American community. In Dakar, the use of English language therefore goes beyond a concern for international market success to function as a performative identification with black American youth.

Conclusions

In the processes and products of Senegalese hip hop, the musical elements of local performance are inserted into a hip hop framework in a way consistent with the genre's long history of intertextual layering and referential production. The sampling of local elements, the use of indigenous languages, and the lyrical invocation of place can all be read as practices that localize Senegalese youth's appropriation of a globalized musical form. But in their insistence on these practices as essential characteristics of a U.S. hip hop idiom, Senegalese rappers define the very process of producing locality as a global one reliant on hip hop's historic development in the United States, in the context of the racialized socio-economic struggles in which they find parallels to their own experiences of urban postcoloniality. Hip hop production – the creation of

musical tracks, the development of indigenized flow, the embodied and linguistic performances of place-based hip hop identifications – thus becomes the production of a transnational connectivity grounded equally in Dakar and the United States.

In insisting on maintaining these international hip hop production norms, rappers distance themselves from what they understand as the locally limiting hybridity that characterizes Senegal's modern traditional music, *mbalax*. The previous chapter explored underground rappers' perceptions of this popular genre as valueless in the face of the combined disenfranchisement of lingering traditional social structures and (post)colonial modernizing projects. Rappers' dismissals of *mbalax*'s traditional modernity, however, center not on the genre's extensive use of local instruments and rhythms but rather on its reliance on traditional speech genres, particularly the "singing" of patrons. An adherence to intertextual production practices enables rappers to separate the musical and spoken elements of traditional performance practice, laying claim to musical markers of local place even as they deliberately detach them from traditionally inflected social relations. Through practices of sampling that explicitly avoid the hybrid creation of new musical forms to emphasize a global hip hop aesthetic, decontextualized fragments of traditional music are disassociated from a direct connection to griot speech genres.

Intertextuality therefore functions as a strategic practice through which Senegalese youth navigate the complexity of postcolonial urban existence, bypassing *mbalax* as the music of a stagnant, underdeveloped modernity even as they reject internationally marketable narratives of hip hop as the modern reincarnation of a supposedly purer, precolonial griot tradition. Instead, they recontextualize tradition within a global musical idiom, producing musical narratives of the complex interconnections of tradition, modernity, and globality that characterize their own lived

existence. Through performative intertextualities that strategically separate and rejoin music, speech, and histories, rappers situate themselves in locally grounded, globally articulating place.

FIVE

RE-LOCATING MYTH: HIP HOP IN BETWEEN

At 11:30 on a Wednesday night, the Brazilian bar Zabumba in Culver City, California, is still fairly empty. Senegalese rappers Sandstorm Ja Wolofman and Smoka Seezy jump on stage as their instrumental begins, a sparse hip hop beat stylistically indistinguishable from the music of the African American groups who have already performed. They flow between Wolof, French, and Black Vernacular English in their rapped narratives of Africa, of slavery, of oppression and freedom. Smoka Seezy wears a hooded, puffy down jacket over a dark T-shirt, denim shorts with hemp leaf appliqué, and shiny silver sneakers; later in the evening, he will cover all this with a long caftan made from shiny *basin*, an expensive West African fabric. At his side, Sandstorm's dark jeans, boots, and leather vest are accented with a camouflage cap, Muslim prayer beads, and a protective leather amulet, all topped with a silver pendant inscribed, "I am nobody's slave." They dance on stage during their verses, moving with widespread legs in large turned out steps that call to mind the opening movements of men gearing up to dance mbalax in Dakar nightclubs. As the scattered crowd moves in front of the tiny, poorly lit stage, Smoka Seezy takes the mic to rap in a low, gravelly voice:

*Je suis ce que je suis [I am what I am]
They say that I'm a nigga, but I'm a get bigga
I got a plan bigger than the white man say
I remember yesterday when I used to be a king
By the end of the day they took my place, I got replaced
Gorée Island was the last piece of home I saw
They chained me up from feet to neck; I was a slave
But watch me now surfacing in Babylon
I'm tryin to earn my earning and reclaim my throne
Maa ngi ni, Maa ngi ne [I am here, I am there]*

Smoka Seezy recounts a personalized narrative of black experience, rooted in precolonial

African royalty and forcibly routed through the historic symbol of Gorée Island to land in what

Rastafarianism's diasporic religious consciousness identifies as the contemporary Babylon of the new world. His lyrical narrative merges with the embodied performance of in-betweenness, overlaying signs of Africanness and African Americanness as historically intertwined yet distinct facets of blackness. This is at once a performance of sameness and difference, of multiple belongings and of non-belonging.

As global flows increase and intensify, musical imaginings of diasporic connection expand the borders of the black Atlantic beyond the geographical scope of the transatlantic slave trade. This dissertation has focused on the movement of music between Africa and its diaspora – the musical construction of a Black Atlantic consciousness in which Africa is implicated as much as the Americas. But as music moves, so do the people that create, receive, and appropriate it. Thus while the previous chapters have explored the musical appropriation of diaspora in Africa, this chapter is about Africa in the diaspora. Drawing on a focused ethnographic case study with these two Senegalese rappers in Los Angeles from 2005-2007, it explores their production and revisions of hip hop origin myths as performative strategies for negotiating diaspora. Engaging recent scholarship on immigrants, transnationalism, and diaspora, I examine how the positionality of Senegalese immigrants vis-à-vis their home and African American communities affects the ways in and reasons for which they produce hip hop. The preceding chapters reconstructed musical, lyrical, and discursive hip hop narratives through which Senegalese youth strategically navigate local and global modernities; this chapter looks at how these immigrant rappers draw on and adapt these same narratives as they negotiate a new racialized positionality between cultures. Through the performative layering of mythologized histories, these rappers legitimate their claim to hip hop within the music's historic community of origin, aligning

themselves with African American youth even as they simultaneously assert difference from them.

Black Immigrants in Diaspora

As described in the previous chapters, Senegal's limited educational and economic opportunities have resulted in a steady flow of immigration to western "lands of opportunity." As more and more youth leave their country in search of what they think will be better lives in Europe and North America, the international networks in which they live increasingly attract scholarly inquiry. This emerging body of scholarship on Senegalese immigrants in North American (most often, New York) and Europe generally adopts a framework of transnationalism, placing it in a larger body of literature on the creation of translocal social spaces and transnational networks of people and capital that create new forms of citizenship reliant on and intrinsic to the workings of multiple nation-states (see Basch et al. 1994; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001). This focus on transnationalism is explicitly a move away from older models based on sociologist Milton Myron Gordon's influential assertion that immigrants to the United States follow a multi-stage process of assimilation to dominant Anglo-American society (1964), a formulation complicated by later scholars who further explored the role of racialization in preventing assimilation (see Portes et al. 1999; Portes 1999), as well as deliberate processes of asserting racial or ethnic identity that thwart "successful" assimilation (see, for example, Mary Waters' 2001 work on West Indian immigrants). The extended Senegalese community in New York City, living in culturally vibrant enclaves in Harlem and Brooklyn and participating in extended international Mouride networks rooted firmly in the Senegalese economy, has been fruitfully explored as an instant of transnationalism by a growing group of scholars, who stress

the importance of Senegalese cultural norms in determining status within the translocal social spaces of an immigrant community that is as much rooted in Senegalese politics, economy, and religious practice as in any sense of attempted assimilation to the U.S. host culture (see Kane 2011; Salzbrunn 2004; Stoller 2002).

The presence of recent African immigrants within the already diasporic communities of the United States also raises the question of diaspora as a theoretical framework. Paul Zeleza suggests that the United States hosts multiple, layered African diasporas, a historic diaspora and a staggered contemporary diaspora that have unique and intersecting relationships to their homelands and hostland as well as to each other. Many scholars of transnationalism, however, emphasize a distinction between diaspora and transnationalism that hinges on diaspora's severance from a home and definitive experiences of displacement as opposed to transnationalism's continued interreliance on a home nation-state (e.g. Basch et al.; Glick Schiller and Fouron; Khan 2004). Nevertheless, I would suggest that in the case of African immigrants, whether transnationalist or not, the idea of a new diaspora is useful inasmuch as it evokes the previous diaspora in and against which African immigrants identify and are identified. In the United States, the role of race as a dominant structuring category shapes the practices of Caribbean and African immigrants, who leave societies where race was not an overriding identifying marker to come to a country where racism is ingrained in the national consciousness and where their cultural differences with African Americans are effaced by hegemonic constructions of blackness. In seeking to differentiate themselves from the negative social stereotypes associated with American blackness, Caribbean and African immigrants often construct racial, pan-African or pan-Caribbean identities that mark difference from African Americans; through drawing on different cultural and geographic origins, they attempt to

counteract the low social status assigned to black people in American society, although these same identifications are in some cases drawn upon to construct solidarity with African Americans as well as other immigrants (Arthur 2009; Waters 1999). Thus while scholars are perhaps right to criticize the positioning of any “black” immigrant as a member of diaspora – thus diluting diaspora’s historical significance in favor of an essentialized, non-materialist definition – the transnationalist practices of African and Caribbean immigrants are imbricated with the existence of historic diasporas within and against which immigrants of color define themselves/are hegemonically defined; furthermore, similar practices of cultural differentiation can be observed in the actions of immigrants who exist marginally to transnational networks, like the rappers in this chapter.

It is important to remember in all this that blackness itself is a social construction, not a concrete fact that either does or does not affect people depending on socio-geographical context. In fact one could argue that African immigrants aren’t “black” at all until they come to the United States and are defined for the first time against an overriding national whiteness. Speaking from his own experience as an African refugee in Canada, Awad Ibrahim describes African immigrants coming to North America as entering a social imaginary where they are “already imagined, constructed, and thus treated as ‘Black’ by hegemonic discourses and groups” (2004: 78). This social inscription of blackness takes a physical cue – the color of one’s skin – and conflates it with “being” African American, characterized by a particular set of linguistic, cultural, historical, and socio-psychic factors and characteristics as well as negative stereotypes and social prejudice (Ibrahim 2004). The hegemonic ascription of “blackness” inscribes a very specific difference onto the immigrant body.

The negotiation of these ascriptions and inscriptions of blackness – of *difference* – can be understood as defining diaspora itself. Increasingly, social theorists are moving away from conceptions of diaspora as a point of arrival, instead calling for theorization of diaspora as process. In his work on Senegalese migrants in Italy, anthropologist Donald Carter suggests that we define diaspora as a way of being rather than a stage of displacement that precedes assimilation into the host society; instead, he understands diaspora as an experience of alterity “a way of being ‘other’” in a new social context that prioritizes sameness (2010:72). Likewise, Zeleza describes a diasporic consciousness that, in the face of marginalization, invokes a different origin, as “a rhetoric of self-affirmation, of belonging to ‘here’ differently”(2009:32). Invoking a Du Boisian double consciousness, Zeleza classifies this diasporic consciousness as a *multiple* consciousness that intersects racial, national, and transnational affiliations in its imaginings of shared experiences of struggle across the boundaries of time and space (2009:33).

In this chapter I engage diaspora as a processual negotiation of alterity, positing the hip hop production of Senegalese immigrants in Los Angeles as the performative expression of a particular diasporic consciousness marked by strategic maneuvering between multiple layers of difference. The immigrant rappers in this chapter don’t participate in the extensive community or clear economic relationships that characterize New York’s transnational immigrant community, but neither are they assimilated into mainstream American culture (an assimilation that is arguably impossible for immigrants of color). Rather, they position themselves within the overlapping diasporic communities of Los Angeles, where, in the absence of a large immigrant community, they turn to hip hop as a way of negotiating their existence between an African home and an American diaspora. Strategically re-constructing the same origin myths that situate

rappers in Senegal vis-à-vis local and global markets and modernities, they adapt these narratives to their lived experiences of diaspora.⁴²

Rerouting Hip Hop: From Dakar to Los Angeles

It was a warm day in late September when I first met Cheikh and Assane by the Pacific Ocean in Los Angeles. New to the city, to graduate school, and to ethnomusicology, I had ventured out on the metro bus to explore my surroundings. As I walked from the bus stop, passing beneath the large metal letters that announce to newcomers their arrival at “Venice Beach,” I stopped for a moment to take in my surroundings. Roller bladers and pedestrians crowded a concrete walkway edged on one side with shops selling everything from glass pipes to couture sunglasses. A row of vendors and street performers lined the opposite side of the walkway, while further out into the sand, bikinied neo-hippies twirled ribbon sticks in the middle of a massive drum circle. As I wandered down the boardwalk, eyeing paintings, jewelry, and the occasional living statue, a friendly request to view Cheikh and Assane’s table of merchandise – T-shirts, incense, and a few pairs of handmade leather shoes from Africa – blossomed into a long conversation about Senegalese hip hop, shouted over the blast of their battery-operated stereo, along with an invitation to come say hello the next time I was at the beach. This chance acquaintance ultimately grew into a long-term project for the M.A. in ethnomusicology, and, although it comes as one of the final chapters in this dissertation, became the starting point for this larger inquiry into Senegalese hip hop. The material in this chapter is drawn from 18 months of ethnographic research with Cheikh and Assane, from 2005-2007.

⁴² The focus of this chapter on Los Angeles, a city without a major Senegalese immigrant population, in the context of a body of literature on the significant immigrant communities in other cities, begs a comparison with Senegalese immigrant hip hop in a city such as New York or Washington, D.C. While such a comparison is outside the scope of this dissertation, it would be an impactful addition; in the future, I plan to expand this project in the direction of this U.S./U.S. comparative dimension.

Cheikh and Assane are both Senegalese immigrants who lived and worked in Los Angeles (Assane has since moved to France) and whose social networks, livelihood, and individual expression during this period centered primarily on hip hop production. Their paths to Los Angeles converged and diverged in significant ways. Both come from upper-middle class families in Senegal, with fathers that held coveted government employment: families with the financial means to send their adult francophone sons overseas. Although they met for the first time in Los Angeles, both grew up in the same residential neighborhood of Dakar, Liberté VI. Assane, however, was born in Paris and holds French citizenship. Cheikh's family sent him to Canada in 1991 to pursue his bachelor's degree. Around the time of the devaluation of the West African CFA franc in 1994, he dropped out to move to Washington D.C., finally making his way to Los Angeles in 2001.⁴³ Assane came directly to Los Angeles from Dakar in 1999, with vague plans to pursue higher education and because his sister, who was already going to college there, was able to procure him a visa in the comparatively lax pre-9/11 atmosphere.

As the city of Venice tightened its regulations on boardwalk merchants in an effort to protect established businesses from encroaching street vendors, I saw Cheikh and Assane first shift their merchandise to things that were more identifiably "African" (or at least "handmade"), and then give up their table altogether to join the circles of local independent rappers who move up and down the boardwalk enticing tourists to buy their self-produced CDs at 5 or 10 dollars a piece. When we met, they were street vendors who liked to rap and were working on an album. Within a year, their entire lives had shifted to the point where their work, leisure, and even habitation all revolved around hip hop. Although there is a small community of Senegalese

⁴³ In 1994, the CFA (Communauté financière Africaine) franc underwent a 50 percent devaluation as part of structural adjustment efforts, with severe adverse effects for the daily lives not only of Senegalese citizens but also the citizens of the numerous other West African countries who use this currency. In some cases, this devaluation made it impossible for Senegalese students abroad to finish their studies.

immigrants in Los Angeles, Cheikh and Assane replaced this community with one constructed in and through hip hop affiliations. This was a conscious decision; as Assane explained, interaction with his “own culture” would be a distraction from his music making and hinder him in focusing on “what [he] wants to do,” namely, achieve financial security and success through hip hop. Instead, a core group of fellow rappers and beatmakers constituted Cheikh and Assane’s immediate circle of friends. These men worked together, hung out together, and often lived together in temporary or semi-permanent situations.

The rappers took every opportunity available to perform, usually in small clubs with “ethnic” themes such as FaisDoDo in West Adams, or Zabumba in Culver City; these performances were communal events, and often what was supposed to be a performance of only two or three rappers, or small hip hop collectives, turned into a rowdy group performance, with rappers jumping on stage to dance with their friends who were actually scheduled to perform. Similarly, when selling CDs at Venice Beach, different groups of rappers often coalesced into larger groups, although this was sometimes viewed by Cheikh as detracting from sales. Within these groups, men usually refer to each other by their rapper names rather than their given names; although I met them as Cheikh and Assane, while I knew them they shifted to identifying themselves almost exclusively by their rapper names, Sandstorm Ja Wolofman (Cheikh) and Smoka Seezy (Assane).

The difference in when each of these men came to North America, as well as the near decade that separates them in age, is significant because of where it places them in terms of hip hop’s development in Senegal, a positioning that affects their individual perceptions of hip hop there. Born in the early 1970s and leaving Senegal in the early ’90s, Sandstorm Ja experienced the birth pangs of hip hop in Senegal only to leave before the music matured into the firmly

rooted localized hip hop scene that exists today. As a teenager, he listened to American hip hop, appreciating its musical aspects despite his inability to decipher the English words. Hip hop spurred an interest in English, and he describes looking at English dictionaries in an attempt to understand what his favorite artists were talking about. Despite linguistic obstacles, the American rappers he cites as influential are those he views as politically conscious and include KRS-One, NWA, and Chuck D of Public Enemy. These artists are, he states, “the ones that were like, doing hip hop as it was supposed to be, which was a social tool, talking about something.” At this time in Senegal (the mid-late 1980s), people were listening to American imports and creating involved dance choreographies, but they were not yet creating their own hip hop; like many of Dakar’s early wave of rappers, Sandstorm also participated in competitive hip hop dance crews. He left Senegal just before Positive Black Soul’s 1992 debut album marked the first professionally produced Senegalese hip hop album and introduced original local hip hop to a Senegalese audience. Upon relocating to from Canada to Washington D.C., Sandstorm was inspired by his interactions with other West African immigrants in the city to try his hand at hip hop. By the time he moved to Los Angeles in 2001, he was an aspiring rapper.

Smoka Seezy’s story of hip hop in Senegal is different. Born in the early ’80s, Smoka Seezy didn’t leave Dakar until 1999, meaning that he experienced the explosion of hip hop culture that took place there in the ’90s and the transformative entrance of Rap’Adio into the Senegalese hip hop scene in 1998. Living in Dakar through the ’90s, he listened to American rappers such as KRS-One, Tupac, and Nas. He estimates that when he left Senegal in 1999, there were already as many as 2,000 Senegalese MCs, rapping in French, Wolof, and English over European-produced beats released primarily on European labels and repurposed by Senegalese

artists. Smoka Seezy himself had already begun rapping in informal settings such as house parties when he left Senegal.

Retelling Myth

As immigrants in Los Angeles, a city without a significant Senegalese community and with a long history of racial tensions, Sandstorm and Smoka Seezy position themselves within and against the historic African diaspora through hip hop. Their performative engagement with black American culture is mediated through the particular narratives they tell about hip hop, narratives that freshly overlay the multiply positioned mythologies of hip hop explored in the previous chapters to conflate the authenticity of African roots with the authenticity of a mythologized “true” hip hop. Drawing on these preexisting narratives of griot performance and hip hop, they re-construct a myth of Senegalese hip hop that is informed by their experiential understandings of layered diasporas.

Smoka Seezy and Sandstorm Ja both describe their experiences of immigration as marked by disillusionment and racialization. Smoka Seezy came to America, as he puts it, “just to come,” enticed by visions of America as presented via international media outlets and hoping to achieve financial success. He expresses disillusionment with this so-called American dream, stating,

When you're outside of America, they sell you a dream. And when you come here you realize that it's really not what you thought it was. That's the false advertisement they give and a lot of people come here with high expectations. And you come to realize that this is like a struggle, and it just continue.

Lured by the spectacular consumption that defines U.S. society for many Senegalese whose only exposure to the United States comes via French-dubbed U.S. movies (and now, television shows like MTV's *My Super Sweet Sixteen*, which showcases the exorbitant birthday celebrations of

rich American teenage girls), Smoka Seezy and Sandstorm, like many Senegalese immigrants to the United States, in reality struggle daily to make ends meet. These economic struggles are compounded by their newly racialized status as black immigrants in a white-dominated society.

Sandstorm Ja explains,

Coming from Africa I never really faced racism, in Senegal. So like, whatever somebody, a black person that had grown up here, can take or got used to I know I can't get used to. You know because I mean, I don't know that. I don't like to be followed in a store. I know nobody likes that, but I had to learn about that when I got here, like, oh shit, this really exists. So I turn around and I go to the stores, when I go there somebody follow me and I turn around and I tell 'em, don't follow me, I don't need nothing from your store I got mine . . .

This racialization as African immigrants is further complicated by the fact that Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy, like 95% of the Senegalese population, are Muslims. In the post-9/11 United States, this element of their identity is something that they often downplay in fear of exacerbating the social repercussions of blackness. Sandstorm Ja says, "I'm proud of being Muslim, you know what I'm saying, I'm not trying to display it, I'm not trying to even talk about it. Because people have the wrong impression of Muslims, and you know, it's hard being a Muslim in here these days."

These experiences of racism, religious prejudice, and economic struggle as defining characteristics of the immigrant experience are enmeshed with hip hop, which both reflects and creates a multilayered connectivity with African Americans based in past and present struggles on both sides of the Atlantic. As Sandstorm explains,

Definitely coming from [Africa] you can see what African Americans are going through, and it makes me mad, you know. And through music, I'm trying to talk about Africa, but I'm also trying to uplift like, all black people on earth. And eventually everybody, because it's all for peace, for black people to be in peace.

Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy's frank descriptions of their experiences as black immigrants in the United States highlight the extent to which their understandings of their own music-making

activities are imbricated with the experience of immigration, from leaving an African homeland, to the adjustment to U.S. society, to the anticipation of an eventual return home. While functioning as an outlet for commentary on these experiences, hip hop activities also become a way of negotiating daily life in diaspora, creating performative connectivities with histories and communities in Africa and the United States.

While the narratives that Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy tell about hip hop resonate with those already explored in earlier chapters, the two rappers strategically adjust these narratives to a different reality in which a connectivity with Africa and African Americans takes on different, more immediate significance, as they struggle for acceptance into the African American hip hop community. At the same time, they emphasize hip hop's historic rootedness in Senegal as a way of claiming their own right to hip hop production within the music's historic community of origin. Both Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy describe hip hop as rooted in griot origins, in keeping with the narrative that was dominant when both of them left Senegal, when the most prominent hip hop voices were Positive Black Soul and Daara J. While in Senegal this myth of griot origins depends on an understanding of tradition as a valuable cultural relic confined to the past, Sandstorm and Smoka Seezy nevertheless also acknowledge the contemporary popular genre mbalax as a manifestation of traditional culture. The valorized griot tradition claimed by Senegal's international rappers meshes somewhat uneasily with this recognition of mbalax's disdained taasu performances as contemporary griot practice. Sandstorm Ja explains,

Growing up I heard mbalax, you know, that's like the Senegalese traditional music. Like a lot of drums and a lot of something called taasu. It's just like, I won't say like hip hop, but it just like, on that verbal, griots used to, you know, do that . . . I wasn't into it, you know what I mean to tell you the truth, even though it's traditional. Because at the time that was just like women that was really feeling the artist doing that, and that was mostly like, you know, singing about people . . . and like there's been a lot a things going on in Africa, like corruption and things like that, so sometimes people be singing about people,

you know what I mean, to get something from them, and I never was like down with things like that.

Like Sandstorm Ja, Smoka Seezy explains that taasu has been corrupted in contemporary music, saying,

People used to do rap, but it, it was more traditional, nobody ever took it like far as musically . . . It's called taasu. It's like a traditional thing, it's like from the ancient time. Like the griot used to tell you about like your history, your grandfathers you know, like your great grandfathers, who they are, what they did, just like keep you uh, with your history. And that's what rap used to be about. It was just traditional. But now, you know, it become all commercial.

Smoka Seezy identifies rap/taasu as a thing of the past even as he is critical of its commercial contemporary form(s), not only in mbalax but also in the commercialized U.S. hip hop that stands as the foil to hip hop's invented tradition.

Like Dakar rappers, Smoka Seezy and Sandstorm Ja understand hip hop as a music of truth that is better equipped than mbalax to speak to the reality of contemporary Senegalese urban existence. This comes out of hip hop's invented tradition, which Sandstorm Ja, like his Dakar counterparts, understands as being exemplarily represented in Senegal. He says,

Hip hop in Senegal is growing, man, it's like, it's big . . . everything is political in hip hop in Senegal. If you're not political, you be just like, be lookin' funny, like they be like, what the hell is wrong with this guy. So it's all for the society; you gotta be talkin' about something, if it's your life, or just street life, or society, you know, respect for the elders, just anything that, you know, that means values.

For Sandstorm Ja, Senegalese hip hop is doubly authentic, rooted in griot tradition and faithful to its U.S. history that U.S. rappers themselves seem to have abandoned. Likewise, Smoka Seezy reiterates an invented tradition of U.S. hip hop that, in a somewhat obsessive concern with labeling, often juxtaposes “rap” as a commercialized performance genre with “hip hop” as a cultural movement focused on awareness and consciousness, where rappers rap and MCs do hip hop. He says,

There's always gonna be MCs and rappers. You know the difference between an MC and a rapper is like, a rapper is the man that's like a commercial nigga. Excuse my French . . . But you know like, a rapper is the industry nigga, that fool which tries to make money offa somethin that's not right, and livin life actin like an actor, like in Hollywood, they all fake. And an MC is somebody talkin about his life, and whats' goin on around him. You come here in America you find that, you go to Africa you find the same, which is really very disgustin. It's like those the bugs of hip hop.

These two contrasting views of hip hop in Senegal reflect the generational difference between the two rappers; Sandstorm Ja left Senegal very early on when hip hop was still largely influenced by a then-contemporary generation of conscious U.S. rappers, whereas Assane left later when the hip hop that was brought via globalizing flows to Senegal was much more varied and included the same “commercial” music that he, Sandstorm Ja, and their Dakar counterparts all understand as a betrayal of hip hop’s true nature.

Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy therefore draw on the same mythology of U.S. hip hop as Dakar rappers to position the music as one that is inherently a music of social consciousness. But unlike rappers in Dakar, who focus on local social issues in their music, here this emphasis on social consciousness takes the form of lyrics centered on Africa and its diaspora, forging explicit connections between Senegal and black America. Sandstorm explains,

I would say 70% [of our songs] are just straight political, about what we feel, what we see, government-wise. But our topics are mostly like global stuff, you know like religion, races, slavery, you know what I mean, the black plight . . . So that’s what we try to do, and restore some kind of dignity to Africans. Because also in the hip hop business, you say we African hip hop artists, people have a tendency to think you’re a joke. We are not joking.

For these two rappers, novel experiences of racism in the United States inspire a sense of connectivity with “all black people” that is based as much in contemporary lived experiences of racial discrimination as in historic diasporic connections.

While Smoka Seezy and Sandstorm see mbalax as a modern commercialized music that contributes little to society, they, unlike their Dakar counterparts, still embrace the mythologized

griot, whose trajectory culminated in the equally mythologized socially conscious artistic production of “oldschool” U.S. hip hop artists. This reconstituted tradition then returned to Africa to supplant the corrupted manifestation of griot performance in mbalax. In this re-visioning of hip hop myth, the music’s authenticity comes equally from its rootedness in Africa and from its social history of struggle and activism in the United States. This is a narrative that in form is very similar to that of international Senegalese rappers; but in function it is markedly different. By dismissing taasu’s contemporary Senegalese manifestations in favor of its mythologized past and its reworked consciousness in the new world, they claim an inherent right to hip hop, a music whose “origins” mirror their own. This claim to origins, combined with an emphasis on a U.S. invented tradition that positions hip hop as necessarily socially conscious, legitimizes them as African rappers within an African American hip hop community. In their narratives, hip hop bookends diaspora, like their own experience of immigration as something beginning and ending in Africa but maturing in the United States.

Producing Difference

In the preceding chapter, I characterized hip hop in Dakar as marked by the production of multi-referential place: a globally interconnected locality. In contrast, Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy construct a sense of place that is “in between” Senegal and black America; this is not simply an expression of displacement but rather an active process of situation within a larger black Atlantic world. While they acknowledge and value a connectivity with African Americans rooted in an historic African diaspora, their contemporary experience of that diaspora also sparks a desire to highlight difference, a difference that is distinct from black American difference vis-à-vis a racist national polity. At the same time that hip hop activities forge and reinforce social

and historic connections with African Americans, they therefore also function to reinscribe difference through the performance of “Africanness” on many levels including musical, lyrical, discursive, sartorial, and kinetic. Hip hop production is thus the production of communal belonging but also of difference, of the alterity that characterizes diaspora.

In 2006, Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy finished recording their joint album, *Cambou Gabar*. Although they had sold self-copied demo CDs before, the completion of the album, combined with increasing legal restrictions on their merchant activities at the beach, was a major factor in their shift from selling jewelry and shirts to selling albums exclusively. In *Cambou Gabar*, the rappers repeatedly overlay past and present journeys from Africa to the contemporary racialized U.S. environment, lyrically constructing an Afro-diasporic consciousness grounded in a generalized African motherland and actively engaged with Caribbean and North American diasporic cultural production. In the song “Da Struggle,” for example, Sandstorm Ja opens with “Never give up on the struggle/how many brothers have to die before we wake?” He critiques what he portrays as the irresponsibility of some black American men, spending their money on “bling bling” and leaving women to raise their children alone, and then indicts racially motivated police violence by referencing the brutal 1999 New York Police Department murder of unarmed 23 year old Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo, an example that takes a common critique of police violence against African Americans and revises it to include West African immigrants. In the next verse, Smoka Seezy takes up the beat, rapping in Wolof and English about colonial and neocolonial exploitation of African people and natural resources. The final verse is rapped by Sandstorm, who “takes it back to the motherland” as he recites the names of African political and cultural leaders including Kwame Nkrumah, Thomas Sankara, and Cheikh Anta Diop. He ends his verse with a rapped quotation from reggae icon Bob Marley: “Africa Unite ‘cause we movin’

right out of Babylon.” In this, as in the majority of songs on the album, Smoka Seezy and Sandstorm lyrically construct a diasporic continuum that draws multi-layered parallels between white exploitation of Africa, the longstanding consequences of slavery in the United States, and contemporary racialized violence. At the same time, they invoke African leaders and diasporic musical figures in a redemptive note that, in conjunction with intertextual signifying on Afro-diasporic musics like U.S. hip hop and reggae, locates the solution to African-diasporic struggle in Africa itself.

These lyrical strategies go hand in hand with linguistic practices that alternately express sameness and difference. In the previous chapter I described the use of Wolof in Dakar as a localizing strategy that authenticates hip hop within its own performance norms, while the use of Black Vernacular English creates a transnational connection with African Americans. In the case of these immigrant rappers, the common use of language as a localizing strategy is modified to produce not locality but inbetweenness. Their use of Wolof locates them outside of the African diaspora and within an African home, even as the use of black Vernacular English does the opposite, creating a performative linguistic connection to black America. In the United States, Wolof lyrics are unintelligible to the people who buy *Cambou Gabar* – primarily tourists or local sightseers. Wolof thus functions to express non-local place, which the rappers discursively construct (for the benefit of potential buyers) as “African.” The use of Wolof as a marker of difference becomes very clear in the opening track of the album, where Sandstorm Ja switches back and forth between English and Wolof lyrics, pronouncing clearly in English “Here I go again, Nigga Sandstorm Ja from the Motherland” before switching over to nearly inaudible, poorly articulated Wolof lyrics. He follows this pattern throughout the song, alternating between

clear English and muddled Wolof lyrics until the latter do more to communicate difference than an actual verbal message.

This dynamic of sameness and difference also comes into play musically. Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy don't incorporate African instruments in their music.⁴⁴ Neither, however, do they strive for complete similitude with African American hip hop, despite the fact that their beats aren't necessarily readily distinguishable from other North American hip hop tracks. Instead, the musical production of difference replaces Dakar artists' production of local Senegalese place. Both Sandstorm and Smoka Seezy integrate their lyrics with a musical style that self-consciously strives for individuality and innovation, whether through vocal timbre influenced by the nasalized style of West African singers or the creation of unique vocal effects that function to personalize the musical style without changing the meaning of the lyrics.⁴⁵ In addition, the linguistic choices described above come into play as musical elements. In the previous chapter, I described flow as an important element of a hip hop musical aesthetic that depends on the rhythmic relationship between the beat and lyrics. The rappers' flows in *Cambou Gabar* are disjointed and capricious, the constant cutting back and forth between languages creating an aesthetic sense of constant, sometimes jarring, movement between different locations, locations that the lyrical content helps to identify as different nodes in the black Atlantic world.

These lyrical and musical movements between sameness and difference are situated in embodied performance. Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy's engagement with U.S. hip hop fashion

⁴⁴ There are also circumstantial limitations on beat production, as African instruments and musicians obviously are not as readily available in Los Angeles as in Dakar

⁴⁵ These vocal effects include an extended rolled "r" within the lyrics (sometimes but not always where an actual letter "r" is present); this same rolled "r" initiated, and at times terminated, with a hard "c", producing a sound like the word "creek" (where the "r" is again rolled), and finally; this "creek" syllable initiated on a pitch low in Cheikh's vocal range and moving in a rapid glissando to a higher pitch (an interval of about a minor seventh over the course of one or two beats, depending on the song).

is marked by the introduction of visual signs of Africa, which take the form both of traditional clothing (as in Smoka Seezy's boubou described at the beginning of this chapter) as well as the wearing of symbols of Africa, such as flags or images of the continent itself. This is markedly different from Dakar, where rappers understand hip hop style as a universal cultural norm and many even explicitly disparage the use of traditional clothing by Senegalese rappers abroad.⁴⁶ Smoka Seezy in particular favors U.S. hip hop gear, but this is often modified by symbols of national belonging such as the Senegalese flag. Sandstorm Ja, on the other hand, favors militaristic clothing with images of Africa, the Senegalese flag, or various revolutionary figures, often mixed with prayer beads and batik vests, projecting a sort of black nationalism re-centered on Africa. While in Dakar an adherence to U.S. hip hop fashion becomes a performative expression of global interconnection, in Los Angeles the Africanization of hip hop fashion marks difference without foregoing that same connectivity. Likewise, while Dakar rappers channel the kinetic performance practices of U.S. hip hop, Sandstorm and Smoka Seezy move on stage in ways that resemble traditional Senegalese dance more than U.S. hip hop movement. Although in their daily interactions their bodily movements and greetings draw on hip hop culture, in formal performance they introduce African elements to their physical performance of identity, one based not in local place but in strategic shifts between locality and difference.

The performance of Africanness/difference goes beyond the navigating of diasporic alterity to a more practical concern with sales. Smoka Seezy and Sandstorm's confluences of consciousness and Africanness as markers of authenticity in their performance can be read as an

⁴⁶ For example, Drygun of Yatfu explained to me, "Today we know that hip hop is fitted, baggy jeans, sneakers, so it's not worth trying to wear traditional clothes. If you go to the United States people only need to see your skin to know that you are African. With nothing other than your language they will know you are African, so it's not worth putting on a boubou to show people you're African. Just your language, just your skin – that will show people you are African . . . Africanness is in language, not in clothes but in language and a way of doing."

effective marketing strategy. When hawking his music to tourists and sightseers on Venice Beach, Smoka Seezy's formulaic pitch is: "Yo, how you doin today. Check out my new album; this is conscious hip hop. It's definitely not gangsta or commercial like what they play on the radio." In addition to this emphasis on a distinctive "consciousness" that sets their music apart from that of other rappers, both Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy are very aware that their Africanness is a selling point with tourists in Los Angeles, and they capitalized on this whenever possible, at times carrying djembe drums with them to the beach or even playing them in Hollywood on the street for money (neither has any training in drumming). Like their compatriots selling generic Africana on the streets of New York, Smoka Seezy and Sandstorm have realized that a simulated Africa (not, persay, Senegal) really sells in the United States, largely due to an Afrocentrism that centers on nostalgic constructions of a monolithic, ancient African culture.⁴⁷

Unlike the majority of Dakar rappers, Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy thus understand hip hop as having the potential for providing economic stability. Nowhere was this more evident than at the end of my first interview with Smoka Seezy. As we wrapped up the interview, he spoke into the mic: "Right now we here at Venice Beach talkin, it's a Saturday, on the month of like, you know, early March. I'm nobody out here, like struggling, tryin to make money offa like, a booth. We got jewelry, incense, shirts, but everything gonna go right though." He insisted on listening to the entire interview immediately, and then excitedly called to Sandstorm, "you gotta hear my interview man. I say, 'I'm here at Venice Beach, early March man, that's where the interview ends. That's where the next interview's gonna start, when a nigga's got some cheese [money] in his pocket."

⁴⁷ See Paul Stoller's 2002 work on Senegalese and other West African vendors in New York, who profit from the commercialization of Afrocentrism as they sell generic Africana to American consumers.

Sandstorm Ja and Smoky Seezy's performances of Africanness are a response to their positioning within diaspora, and authenticate them as rappers in a context where authenticity as non-Americans is a concern in a way that it isn't in Dakar. As they produce hip hop, Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy signal difference in ways that make difference synonymous with multiply-situated blackness, summing up the experience of immigration in its embodiment of alterity. This is not then, so much a movement between sameness and difference as between two different facets of difference; two different yet intertwined identifications with blackness.

Conclusions

In Los Angeles, Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy draw on the same narratives that define hip hop production in Senegal and combine them to imagine hip hop as fundamentally African but defined by a mythologized consciousness that grounds it equally in diaspora. In producing hip hop, they harken back to a home, a generic Africa that serves as a common starting point for them and the African Americans with whom they interact. The idea that hip hop comes from Africa speaks to an understanding of historical racialized connectivity with African Americans that is bolstered by contemporary shared experiences of racism in diaspora, while also laying claim to hip hop as inherently theirs. At the same time, through drawing on and layering these myths, they strategically differentiate themselves from African Americans.

I argue that this performance of hip hop identities as both essentially African and fundamentally African American is a way of navigating their presence as immigrants within the historic African diaspora, and that it is driven by their experiences of immigration and the social inscription of blackness on their bodies. Diaspora is not simply the experience of displacement; nor, however, can the contemporary and historic African diasporas be conflated in their shared

experiences of alterity. Instead, the contemporary African diaspora is a diaspora precisely because of its engagement with multiple, mutually constitutive layers of difference. In this case, it is through hip hop – a diasporic music re-imagined as African – that these two men align themselves strategically with differences that are distinct yet historically connected, layering them, positioning themselves as anterior to but contemporary of black American difference. The performative intertextuality of (Senegalese) hip hop thus functions in this instance as a musical expression of the interplay of new and historic African diasporas. Layering Senegalese and American myths of hip hop origins with embodied performances of Africanness and African Americanness, Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy musically re(produce) the lived experience of diaspora's layered difference. The sense of place that Sandstorm Ja and Smoka Seezy produce through hip hop is therefore defined through, within, and against diaspora. This is the production not of locality or of globality but of neither and of both – of place in-between, of diaspora itself.

SIX

CONCLUSIONS

BEYOND HYBRIDITY: REPRESENTING MYTH

The aim of an ethnography of the global imagination must be to examine why and in what way people's measure of the real, truthful, and authentic change and through which discursive and expressive genres and by which technological means they create a sense of certainty about the world they live in (Erlmann 1999:4-5).

In this dissertation I have argued that some Senegalese youth, both in Dakar and in the United States, make sense of their lived experiences of situated modernities through musical practice, drawing on the conventions of hip hop genre to actively produce diaspora as an interconnected set of locations largely defined by their relationship to each other. Like earlier urban popular musicians in Senegal (and throughout Africa), Dakar rappers draw on discourses of tradition and lyrical and musical referents of place to strengthen local ties. At the same time, they position themselves firmly within a global musical network overlaid on and imagined through understandings of diaspora, racial identity, and social history.

Veit Erlmann conceives of the “global imagination” as the articulation of western and African modalities of interests, languages, styles, images that come into play in the crafting of modern subjectivities. In our efforts to understand how situated actors make sense of their lived experiences of modernities, he argues, the point isn't to distinguish fact and fiction, but to “examine the kinds of truths that are produced in colonial and postcolonial contexts”(1999:5). In this dissertation I have attempted to do just this – to examine the narratives and mythologies that associate certain kinds of musical production with certain experiences of modernity and that render production practice itself the production of and negotiation between different nodes in the black Atlantic world. I have suggested that Senegalese youth draw on hip hop practices of musical and lyrical intertextuality to produce musical palimpsests in which the local is layered on

the global layered on the local. In reaching back through the past to create these aural memories, Senegalese rappers actively construct and negotiate contemporary urban space as a hub of local and global interconnections, via the production of music that overlays, rather than blends, distinct performance genres. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 explored the specific ways in which Senegalese hip hop practitioners consciously engage genre to position themselves along the temporal and spatial axes of the black Atlantic, as they create musical dialogues that trace and re-inscribe paths of diasporic connection.

The aural layering of histories of translocal and global interconnection and exchange onto the U.S. history already embedded in U.S. hip hop produces aural memories that draw on multiple mythologized pasts in their interlocking narratives – narratives not of hybrid difference or novelty but rather of sameness and historicity. For Senegalese rappers, hip hop’s layered production techniques produce musical narratives of an interconnectivity that has as much to do with contemporary musical practice as with ancestral music practitioners. Both international and local rappers connect local performance practice (perceived and described as “tradition”) and hip hop (as a globalized music of the African diaspora), although they do so in markedly different ways. In the case of international rappers, this sense of connectedness is rooted in knowledge of histories of forced migrations from West Africa to the Americas, but it also depends largely on the seemingly more concrete stylistic connection that emerges from the actual *sound* of griot verbal performance. For local rappers, it is the contemporary lived experiences of urban postcoloniality that connect them with the contemporary African American community. The recourse to tradition that has marked so much of popular music production in colonial and postcolonial African societies also becomes, in this case, a claim to global interconnectivity, so that music perceived as local/traditional and music seen as global/modern are *both* positioned as

two sides of the same coin: international rappers understand hip hop as always already indigenous, while local rappers view their hip hop as global not despite but because of its very localness.

Both of these narratives function through negating the basic tenet of hybridity – the convergence of preexisting difference into something new. Instead, international rappers intertextually layer two musics (hip hop and traditional griot performance) that they discursively position as equivalent, thus making difference into sameness. Local rappers, on the other hand, do the exact opposite – they maintain that hip hop and traditional music are different and they insist that their hip hop performance maintains that difference rather than effacing it. Here, the aim is not to make something hybrid and new; hip hop’s very generic parameters allow for music that is grounded in Senegalese particularity and still definitively hip hop. Hip hop’s generic intertextuality allow these rappers to decontextualize traditional music from the social relationships in which it is mired as they use it to navigate global modernity. In doing so, they bypass mbalax, which they understand as imbricated in a traditionally-inflected modernity, and they also create an alternative to a griot origin myth, remaking traditional music into something that isn’t stuck in the past but that speaks to the complex interconnections of tradition, modernity, and globality in their own lived existence. The fact that these two different layerings of mythologized cultural production differ so crucially from each other – one privileging African traditional music as the origin of hip hop, the other insisting on hip hop’s essential Americanness – itself complicates ideas of what is global and local and shows that even among practitioners, positionality vis-à-vis local and global flows of capital and culture will affect conceptions and invocations of tradition and modernity. What makes Senegalese hip hop “African,” then, is not necessarily its aesthetic characteristics but rather the multiple discourses of Africanity (as

traditional, as postcolonial, as modern, as ancient, as underdeveloped, as global, as diasporic, etc.) in, through, and against which it is produced.

On Popular Music, Narrative, and Ethnography

If you talk about taasu, it's just a way of singing. That way of singing, you can go to Brazil, to a Brazilian village, for example, you could go to Portugal or Spain, and find people who do like we do and that it's been there a long time. But if you don't do your research, how could you know? . . . There are people who come and do research and see taasu and say that black Americans created hip hop, and maybe they came from Africa, and so forcibly [rap] has to come from Africa. That can't be. Things change in different environments. Cultures are different. If you stay somewhere for centuries – Even if I go live somewhere 2-3 years, I'm going to be influenced by what's there.

- Books, Sen Kumpë

When you're overseas and you hear of Senegal, you hear it's a huge hip hop culture. But . . . when you get here you don't find what you expected. *And most the time they're not looking for real hip hop, they're looking for some traditional thing, not real hip hop.* A lot of people tell me, change your music, do more variety, sing, be more commercial so you can go overseas and sell your music. But I'm not into that. People are going to respect me for my lyrics and my identity, the real hip hop I'm making [emphasis added].

- Djily Bagdad, 5kiem Underground

In December 2011, a colleague sent me a link to a Smithsonian documentary about hip hop around the world. As I scrolled through the footage, I finally arrived the section on Senegal. An image of the African continent appears, zooming in to Senegal and then to images of laundry hanging in a courtyard. The camera moves along rows of concrete houses to a public open area, where a young Nix raps in front of a crowd of children. A man sits at his side playing the kora, although there is no aural evidence of the instrument in the musical track that is playing. The image cuts to rapper Waterflow, from the New York and Switzerland-based group Wagëble Crew, who wears an orange sweatshirt that reads “Rap – lies = Hip Hop.” Waterflow explains in English, “In Senegal we have something we call taasu. You rhyme your thoughts, you know, exactly the same as you rap. But it's been there forever.”

The idea that *taasu* (or griot performance more generally) and hip hop are intrinsically bound in the musical annals of the black Atlantic carries a good deal of clout outside of Senegal, as scholars and world music outlets embrace the idea that hip hop came from, and has returned to, Africa. On the website okayAfrica.com, a journalist posts rapper Keyti's most recent video, introduced by a paragraph about the centuries-old West African tradition of oral storytelling and the role of griots as hereditary keepers of tradition and history. After waxing poetic about the griot, the author states, "Though not a self-proclaimed griot, conscious Senegalese hip-hop [artist](#) Keyti uses his music as a platform to pass on knowledge, share wisdom, and inspire listeners worldwide." The implication, of course, is obvious – Keyti might not see himself as a griot, but that doesn't change the fact that, well, he pretty much *is* one.

In January 2012, an op-ed piece about Senegalese hip hop appeared in the New York Times. The article carefully weaves quotes from Wagëble's *Waterflow* (yes, the same rapper from the Smithsonian film described above, conveniently stateside and available for interview), who describes Senegalese oral griot traditions, with an account of rapper Thiat's political activism in Senegal. The article positions Thiat, like his colleague *Waterflow* (and, as we are made to infer, like Senegalese rappers in general), as a self-fashioned griot, a depiction that clashes with Thiat's actual skepticism of any real connection between griots and rappers (as evidenced in the direct quotes from Thiat incorporated in Chapter 4). The author imagines that Senegalese rappers "would sooner make a pilgrimage to the South Bronx than to the Senegalese, Sufi holy city of Touba," in a misguided attempt at witty writing that belies any familiarity with the (mostly practicing Muslim) Senegalese rappers she describes. Instead, it is suggested, that in keeping with the invented tradition of U.S. hip hop, the South Bronx will serve as (literally) the

new Mecca for this generation of global hip hoppers who, in their ideal blend of social consciousness and African tradition, can bring hip hop back to a mythologized utopic state.

What do journalists and scholars have at stake when they insist on these carefully crafted narratives of Senegalese hip hop that consciously bypass the voices of hip hoppers themselves? For it is western representation, more than anything else, that cycles the griot myth into a global representation of Senegalese hip hop. A handful of inarguably talented but also inarguably privileged Senegalese rappers, whose appeal to tradition and narratives of modern griot hood have boosted their success in global markets, are interviewed over and over again, providing material for writers who don't particularly want to go to the trouble of engaged research just for the sake of a hip new piece of scholarship or journalism. Of course it's possible that these are honest mistakes. In 2011, I myself published a chapter based on my preliminary research in Senegal and secondary sources, one that convincingly argued that young Senegalese rappers see themselves as modern griots.⁴⁸ It was only after I had begun a period of sustained, ethnographic engagement with Senegalese hip hoppers that I realized that I had transplanted the easily accessible narratives of international rappers onto the lives of local rappers who in reality tell very different stories about hip hop. But by only giving a voice to those people who have succeeded in a global capitalist market, we are amplifying already privileged voices, voices that perhaps have been so audible precisely because they are saying what the west already wants to hear. In doing so, we actively maintain a self-other dichotomy that relegates non-western music to an exoticized non-modern other, so that even when Africans are making a music as clearly modern and global as hip hop, they are still somehow rooted in tradition. At the same time, hip hop's post-Exodus corruption at the hands of capitalist America is redeemed in the purer expression of noble, traditional African artists.

⁴⁸ See Appert 2011.

Thus although hip hop is modern and not traditional; although it is produced in cities and not in rural villages; although it may on the surface seem to be just another case of globalized western popular culture and not an “authentic” instance of local cultural production, it is, nevertheless, made by particular people, in particular contexts, for particularly significant reasons, just like the musical subjects of more traditional ethnographic research. It is also increasingly the site where scholars of “traditional” music go to update their curricula vitae without the sustained research that would be expected if they were to write about, say, some form of West African drumming. Although the study of urban popular musics poses unique challenges for ethnographers, to forego the burden of ethnography risks – and I would say, inevitably leads to – the marginalization of certain voices, the erasure of certain narratives, and the artificial amplification of voices, scholarly and otherwise, that narrate from what is already a position of privilege.

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