**"Mbedd baa ngi ni!" (here's the street): the representation of urban spaces among young Senegalese rappers**

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| Walakaana gë ak toroxtan gë, moom lañu weccoox naatange | *They made us exchange wealth with misery and poverty* |
| Xoolal *laif* bi ni mu fi tangë, ni mu fi *taree*, ni mu fi lakkë | *See how life is hot (hard) here, it's rotten, it burns here* |
| Tang jëpp ni *fair*, diwaan yepp kayë japp dayë | *Hot as fire, everywhere you go, you'll find only shit* |
| *Laif*u *striit*, laj ko *gay*ë, succ lë sotti yuri *eksplosee* | *Street life, ask the guys, it stabs you, it makes you explode and become empty* |
| *Eksposee* say butit ci *trottuar*u mbedd mi | *It has your guts exposed on the street sidewalk* |
| Ngir am tuuti weccit. Ah sim! Bi *striit*, amul tiit | *Just for some coins. Oh! In the street, no place for fear* |
| Goor fit, tox *shit* ak kaali, ngir mënna yokk *seks* ak fit. […] | *A brave man smokes hashish and weed, for his sexual force and his courage […]* |
| Ñakk CFA tax, suñu xol yi du toog ba contaan di beg | *For lack of money (CFA francs), our hearts are not satisfied* |
| Fii fokk nga negg, *striit* bi lañu dénk suñu bëkk-néeg, boo bëgg nekk. | *Here you have to be nasty, we made the street our speaker, if you want to survive.* |
| (refrain) Mbedd baa ngi ni… | *Here's the street…* |
| Ni nga ñuy séene, noonu nga ñuy bayye | *You will find us the way you judged us* |
| Mbedd lañu ndeyale, baayale… | *We have the street as a mother, as a father…* |

These lyrics, taken from the song "Mbedd mi" ("the street") by Alioune G., aka Kunta Kinte, are a good example of how street life and urban marginality can work as a key factor of identity for rappers in Senegal – as elsewhere – and how they can be represented, and somehow idealized, to correspond to a certain aesthetics typical of hip hop and rap. The street is here depicted as an horizon of hardness and conflict, but also of territorial and affective affiliation: the *bëkk-néeg* is the main confident and speaker for a religious authority, and the street is significantly compared to a mother or a father. Apparently, urban marginality is assumed as both a symbol of suffering ("*our hearts are not satisfied*") and oppression ("*they made us exchange wealth with misery and poverty*"), legitimating a political discourse of rebellion, and as a source of identity, construction of self ("*no place for fear*", "*you have to be nasty… if you want to survive*") and even pride.

*The arrival of rap in Senegal*

To put these discourses in perspective and try to understand something more about the historical and social context where they were first, and are now, developed, let's go back to the beginnings of the diffusion of rap in Senegal.

The late 80s and the early 90s were years of political turbulence and transformation in Senegal: the discontent about President Abdou Diouf and its government reached its top. Diouf was carrying the political heritage of former president Leopold Sedar Senghor, the father of national independence, but he was dealing with his tasks with much less charisma; plus, the policies of structural adjustment and the reduction of public expenses imposed by the international financial institutions made him highly

unpopular. While the ruling socialist party maintained the support of peasants and rural inhabitants, leaders of opposition parties were gaining support in urban areas, especially among younger generations. High school and university students became engaged in movements and organised the protest, and 1988 is still remembered as the *année blanche*, the "white year", when the government invalidated the whole scholar year because of the too numerous strikes. Similar protests were to be repeated in virtually every subsequent election, until the historical *sopi* ("change" in wolof) in the year 2000, when opposition candidate Abdoulaye Wade won the presidential elections and the socialist party was defeated after 40 years of uninterrupted rule.
In the same period, the younger generation seemed to become protagonist in this social and political processes, for the good and for the bad: apart from the student manifestations, the resentment also found violent outcomes in the clashes between young Senegalese and immigrants from nearby Mauritania, during the political crisis opposing the two countries in 1989-1990. On the other hand, popular culture was enriched by *Set-Setal*, a spontaneous movement which gathered young people decorating the city walls, and peacefully protesting against both political and environmental degradation.


Mural painting in *Set Setal* style, in the area of HLM (*photo: C. Lanzano*)

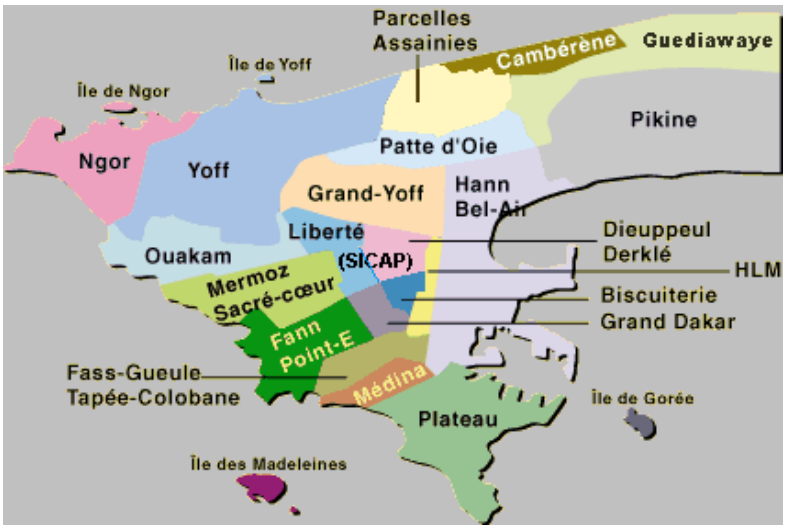

Mural painting in hip hop style, in the area of HLM (*photo: C. Lanzano*)

During the late 80s, the influence of international hip hop among Senegalese youth initially consisted mainly in the diffusion of rap records imported from United States and France, in the adoption of a correspondent clothing style – oversize T-shirts and trousers, baseball caps, bandannas, big tennis shoes… – and in a certain interest in break dance, later nearly abandoned. Understandably enough, the new fashion appealed mainly to middle and upper class youth, who had financial and cultural resources allowing them to have access to imported media and cloths. "We were *daddy boys* who wanted to belong to a trendy milieu", in the words of Didier Awadi, leader of the pioneer group Positive Black Soul (quoted in Niang, 2006).
In fact, the geographical location of the crews and the first production studios showed this privileged social connotation: city areas in Dakar like Sicap or Dieuppeul, located in the midway between the administrative centre and the poorest outskirts, were the basis for Positive Black Soul, the pioneer group in the history of Senegalese rap, and of Studio Sankara, where first demos and album were produced. These areas are constituted mainly by small detached houses initially conceived for employees in the public administration and now inhabited by middle class families.
It was in this somehow privileged context that took form in 1989 the first successful group in Senegalese rap, Positive Black Soul, which resulted from the association of two former rival solo artists, Didier Awadi and Amadou Barry (aka Doug E. Tee), respectively based in the two areas of Sicap Amitié 2 and Sicap Liberté 6. After having rehearsed and played in concerts for some years, they released in 1994 their first album, "Boul falé" (also written *bul faalé*), which is wolof for "don't worry" or "don't bother": the song became an immediate success, and its title became a sort of slogan which

came to represent a new attitude typical of youth, often described as more self-aware, more individualistic, and more indifferent to traditions and social conventions:

> […] la génération *bul faale* […] appelle à l'émancipation par rapport aux carcans culturels, sociaux et familiaux, et met en avant l'individu, qui n'est plus seulement le produit de son milieu mais aussi le produit de ses actes. En ce sens, la jeunesse sénégalaise a produit une philosophie de l'action qui passe notamment par une revalorisation de la réussite par l'effort et le travail, que l'on retrouve véritablement de façon transversale dans toutes les formulations et manifestations du *bul faale* […] (Havard, 2001: 70)[1]

In the meantime, with the early 90s had come the end of the State monopoly over radio frequencies: the first experiments, limited to Dakar area, were followed by a definitive liberalisation which replaced the monopoly of State-owned RTS (Radio-Télévision Sénégalaise) with dozens of new stations, among private broadcasts, local radios and *radios communautaires* (co-operative non profit radios). Radio pluralism benefited not only journalism and freedom of press, but also the national record industry, opening new spaces of promotion and visibility for young musicians. All musical genres were favoured by this change, but especially rap, made more accessible for a broader audience and given an opportunity to significantly enlarge the social basis of the hip hop movement. As a result, rap lost progressively its upper-class characterisation and became more popular. The shift towards the use of wolof in Senegalese rap texts enlarged the audience, too, and by the end of the decade rap had reached marginalized peripheral areas like Guediawaye, Pikine or Thiaroye, and other cities in the country.




Dakar map with city areas (*www.senegal-online.com*)

*'Ville' and 'banlieue': territorial controversies*

Similarly to the United States, the expansion of Senegalese rap across the whole urban territory of Dakar was accompanied by the first territorial controversies between artists coming from different neighbourhoods. In 1998, group Rap'Adio published their seminal album "Ku weet xam sa bopp" ("the one who stands alone knows himself"), founding a trend in Senegalese rap that would later be indicated as "hardcore": their songs were characterized by essentiality, absence of melody, a more aggressive beat and explicit lyrics denouncing the commercial side of mainstream rap in Senegal and attacking other artists. The practice of "clash" or "clashing", as it is called in Senegal using an English word, was thus opened, replicating the increase of aggressiveness in American and French hip hop, although at a much lesser level and with softer consequences.

Still, in the song "Xibaru underground" ("news from underground"), Rap'Adio sang:

[1] "[…] the *bul faale* generation […] calls for the emancipation from cultural, social and family ties, and puts forth the individual, who is no more the mere product of its *milieu*, but also the product of its own actions. Thus, Senegalese youth has produced a philosophy of action which passes through a reassessment of success, achieved through effort and work, a reassessment that can be found across all formulations and manifestations of *bul faale* […]"

Have you ever seen MCs declaiming their verses
Just to allow the gals to shake their hips?
I'm still aware of my mission
Unlike those fake MCs trying to smooth the edges
Only to sell their products in the market. […]
MC, go back to hip hop sources
Or else I'll have to weave for you a proper loincloth
And handle it to you, so that you reach your place
In the middle of the dance circles, where you'll be shaking your ass […] [2]

This excerpt exemplifies several focal points in the polemical attitude of hardcore rappers: the claim to stand for "real hip hop", truth and the "sources" of the movement; the criticism of the market and of commercial rap; and, in the end, a certain hostility towards traditional music and *sabar* dances, where women gather in circles and dance to the sound of drummers, shaking their bodies and often showing the *beco* ("loincloths") under their skirts.

The relative success of hardcore rap– Rap'Adio were followed by several groups such as WaBMG44 and WaGëblë, who received great attention – didn't stop mainstream rappers to pursue their careers, to gain further visibility in the national media, and to "sell their products in the market"; but, especially for beginners, the hardcore claim of legitimacy began an important reference for self-representation and merged with the senses of belonging and the geographical rivalries animating the hip hop movement in Dakar. Here is how P Blow, member of group Tigrim Bi based in the suburb of Pikine, expresses these tensions during an interview:

> Là avant tout il faut noter que la musique rap américaine est née dans les *ghettos* newyorkais […] Negger Jah dit déjà, dans l'intro de notre album, "*rap belongs to the ghetto, and the ghetto is everywhere you go*". C'est à dire que… le rap est né de la banlieue, du ghetto, et le ghetto est n'importe où tu vas. Mais seulement, n'importe où tu vas, d'accord… mais en ville tu ne peux pas voir ce que tu peux voir dans la banlieue. Donc là, la banlieue est quelque chose de très important par rapport à l'inspiration, par rapport à l'orientation du rappeur. Parce que là… il te suffit de te mettre sur ton balcon pour voir effectivement des choses que tu ne verras pas en ville, quoi. Et là il se passent des choses que l'on raconte parce qu'on les vit: par exemple, tu te retrouves dans une maison où quinze personnes partagent des chambres. C'est incroyable mais c'est vrai. Tu trouves une maison où… ils n'ont pas à manger, pendant deux jours: ça se passe ici. Tu trouves des *lost generation*: des gens qui ont quitté leurs maisons, hein?, pour se retrouver dans la rue parce qu'ils n'ont pas où aller. […] Donc la banlieue est source d'inspiration pour nous les rappeurs engagés, quoi. Par rapport à ce que nous avons adopté comme style de rap, *hard core*, il signifie que l'engagement pour nous… alors, cet engagement-là, il faut quand même des sources, il faut quand même de l'inspiration, il faut quand même que tu vis ce que tu dis, quoi. Donc, pour nous le rap c'est ça: c'est en fait une musique dans laquelle on retrouve que des vérités; c'est du début à la fin, tu dis que ce que tu vis, quoi.[3]

Although some oppositions between bordering city areas can be found – some informants based in Sicap Liberté often suggested me to keep far from the bordering area of Sicap Sacré-Coeur for its alleged dangerousness – the main cleavage is between the city centre – *la ville* – and the outskirts – *la banlieue*: but these are evidently quite vague concepts. The *ville* can designate the whole territory of

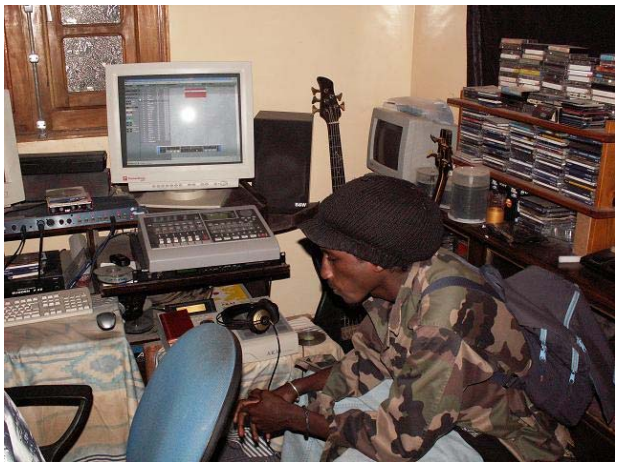
[2] The original lyrics are in wolof, and the translation is found at *http://www.senerap.org*

[3] "First of all you have to notice that American rap was born in the ghettos of New York […] Negger Jah [another member of the group] says it in the introduction of our album, he says "*rap belongs to the ghetto, and the ghetto is everywhere you go*" [in English]. It means that… rap was born from the *banlieue* [suburbs], from the ghetto, and the ghetto is everywhere you go. But only, everywhere you go, ok… but in the city you can't see what you see in the *banlieue*. So, the *banlieue* is something very important for inspiration, and for the rapper's orientation. Because… here you just need to go in the balcony to really see things that you won't see in the city, you know. Here things happen and they are told because they are lived: for example, you find yourself in a house where fifteen people share some rooms. It's incredible but it's true. You find a house where… they have nothing to eat, for two days: that happens here. You find some *lost generation* [in English]: people who left their houses, huh?, to find themselves in the street because they got nowhere to go. […] So the *banlieue* is source of inspiration for us, socially committed rappers, you know. With respect to the rap style we have adopted, hard core, it means that our commitment… you need some sources, for that commitment, you need some inspiration, you need to live what you say, you know. So, rap for us is this: a music where you find truths; from the beginning to the end, you say what you live, you know".

Dakar municipality, including nearly the whole peninsula of Cap Vert; or, in other contexts, it can refer to the central area of Plateau, in the southern end of the peninsula, the original centre of the colonial city, today occupied mainly by official and administrative buildings, and inhabited by expatriated and rich locals. Exactly at the opposite, the areas in the north-western part of the peninsula and out, like Guediawaye, Pikine, Thiaroye and Mbao, are all overcrowded, lacking services and often depicted as dangerous, so clearly identifiable as *banlieue* (or even *ghetto*). The great area lying between these two extremes (the Plateau in the south and the northern outskirts) can be classified in different ways, and is indeed very diverse with respect to its social and demographic connotations. It is in this undefined field (where is the centre? where are the margins, the *banlieue*?) that legitimacy is claimed and contested. The fact of living at the margins, in the *banlieue*, passes from being a practical disadvantage in pursuing and funding one's own career, to being a reference in evaluating the authenticity of the artists' commitment in hip hop.

Dakar suburbs are often identified as the main *locus* of marginalisation and social inequality; they are, in fact, the more recent outcome of the messy urban development of the capital, the areas where the presence of the State is weaker, and whose short history makes it more urgent to fill the "symbolic void" of the place, even through rappers' art. Although today areas like Parcelles Assainies, Guediawaye and Pikine are socially diverse and not comparable to slums; although several rappers coming from the *banlieue* are today experiencing a certain success at a national level, and recording studios and festival are being created far from the centre, while at the same time beginners coming from more privileged areas can experience similar difficulties in gaining support and visibility; despite all this, the *banlieue* corresponds in the imaginary to the American ghetto, and can legitimate the artists in their protesting and speaking out for the poor.


Festival "Hip hop rap découverte" at Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor, between Sicap and Grand Dakar (semi-peripheral areas) (*photo: C. Lanzano*)



Small recording studio in Guediawaye (northern periphery) (*photo: C. Lanzano*)

In fact, the differences I witnessed during my researches between hardcore rap and mainstream – or simply non-hardcore – rap are more of a formal kind: hardcore and underground artists have moved towards an ideal "purity" of hip hop through the abandon of melody and the refusal of contamination with other styles and genres, also those labelled as "typically African" or "Senegalese" as, for example, *mbalax*. If we take into consideration the lyrics, the alleged correspondence between soft or mainstream rap and lack of social commitment, on one hand, and between hardcore and political awareness, on the other hand, is not necessarily confirmed: the first generation of rappers has given good examples of commitment, such as the Positive Black Soul whose rap was labelled as *rap philosophique* ("philosophical rap"), while post-hardcore rappers have sometimes been performing more explicit and "hedonist" songs.

Still, this claim of legitimacy is interesting for its asymmetry: while hardcore supporters can sometimes express a certain hostility towards their rivals and claim the purity of their art, those artists who have adopted a softer and more commercial rap cannot do the same, and are forced to support more

inclusive definitions of rap. "*Le rap, c'est tout simplement dire ce que tu ressens, dire la vérité*" [4], I was told by an informant based in the semi-central area of Sicap; he later added that personal honesty is the only guarantee for the commitment in the hip hop community, no matter the economic conditions in which he lives, and that even rappers based in middle-class areas can represent the poor and the dispossessed, because "*quand tu vis à Dakar, tu vois la pauvreté en tout cas: si tu ne la vis pas toi-même, tu vas la voir chez ton voisin*" [5]. What emerges is a constant renegotiation of meanings and values around some fundamental principles – territorial belonging and representation, commitment for truth and awareness of social issues – which are generally taken for granted, but allow some to contest the legitimacy of others. Despite the views interpreting youth subcultures as closed and cohesive spaces of alternative socialisation, we can see the rap in Senegal as a rather open "terrain of contestation" (Fabian, 1998) where also conflicts and differentiations in the hip hop movement can take place.

*Moving inside the city*

On one hand, the spatial awareness of hip hop discourse finds in the urban structure of Dakar a favourable terrain – a complex succession of neighbourhoods with social and economical diverse connotation, alternating elite, middle-class and popular areas – for organising the controversies between artists on a territorial basis; at the same time, though, the great mobility of rappers, and in general of young people, inside the city makes these dynamics more contradictory that one might think in the beginning. In fact, Senegalese young people are seldom enclosed in a urban ghetto with no possible (temporary) way out, because the dispersion of enlarged families in Dakar territory allow a certain mobility among the different areas of the city. The possibility, or sometimes the necessity, of residing for some periods far from one's birthplace, in the houses of other members of the family located in other city areas, or even in other regions of the country, is a common experience for most youth, who seldom attribute a particular meaning to this. In the case of rappers, though, this kind of experience creates an ensemble of multiple territorial identities, which constitutes an important resource for a broader visibility and more numerous opportunities of performance, but also a more complex identity to cope with.

Let's take three cases among my informants. Ibrahima D., rapper and festival organiser, lives alone in a house with his three brothers in Sicap Liberté. Most of his friends live nearby and often meet at his house. Ibrahima performed for the first time in the nearby football stadium Demba Diop, he rehearses in a cultural centre not too far, and presents Sicap as his area, shooting most of his clips in its streets. Still, Ibrahima spent part of his childhood and teenage in the northern suburb of Pikine, where he worked as a DJ in a local radio; he often spends time in Saint-Louis or in Dagana, towns in the northern regions of Senegal, where part of his family is located and where he worked in the past as a radio DJ as well; thanks to this, he performed at the University of Dakar during the annual meeting of the Amicale des Étudiants du Walo, an association gathering university students coming from the north of the country.

Alioune G. resides mainly in the university campus, living in a small room with some friends: he is quite active in the association Hip Hop Campus, which gathers students active in music, especially in rap and reggae. Nearly every week-end, he leaves the room for his father's house in Mbao, just outside Dakar, where his brothers and his father's widows still live regularly and where he has a room for him where he keeps all his albums and material: he considers himself a rapper from Mbao, and he shot most scenes of his clip in Mbao, inside and outside the house. Still, after the death of his father, his mother moved back to Rufisque, a town south of Mbao – with an independent administration, but still considered as part of Dakar greater metropolitan area – and he has also performed in some festivals in the town as a rapper from Rufisque.

I first interviewed the group Nieri Ko in a room of the university campus, where one of their friends and manager lived; none of the members lived in the campus, but they like to present their rap as intellectual and committed, so they probably chose the place for this reason. Other meetings took place in one of the members' sister in a semi-peripheral area along the V.D.N. (a big avenue inside the city),

[4] "Rap is simply about saying what you feel inside, singing the truth".

[5] "When you live in Dakar, you see poverty anyway: if you don't experience it yourself, you'll see it at your neighbour's".

where the group regularly meets. Its three members, Baba, Moustapha and Samba, live in the northern suburbs of Guediawaye and Pikine, and consider Pikine the area they represent: we filmed some interviews outside the house of Baba's father, where they meet with friends and take tea together in what they call jokingly the *xayma*, a wolof word to indicate the traditional tent where Mauritanians take tea.

These three examples are characterised by the recurrent presence of a particular place: the student campus of the University of Dakar. Sort of city inside the city, the campus includes several pavilions for the accommodation of students, administrative buildings, canteens, a mosque, and a huge number of small kiosks and informal vendors providing the students the services they need since they spend most of their time in this microcosm. A lot of associations and unions are based in the campus, witnessing the vitality of associative life among students: territorial *amicales* are a particular kind of association, gathering students who were born in the same city or region, or country – in the case of the quite numerous foreign students – or who belong to the same ethnic group[6]. Paradoxically, the university campus, conceived as a locus of integration for the youth from the whole country into a national community, or alternatively for the youth from the whole sub-region into a pan-African community, offers many opportunities for reassessing or negotiating local identities.

University library in the campus (*photo: C. Lanzano*)


Association "Hip Hop Campus", gathering rap and reggae artists in the university campus

The fact that many rappers are based in the campus, or form their groups with friends they met there, is a factor of re-composition of territorial belonging. Their mobility in the city or their spatial undetermined identity (if we consider the campus as a sort of non-place) does not prevent the artists to assess a particular identity – or many, but in distinct situations. In hip hop, the idea of "represent" (Forman, 2000) allows the foundation of a career on a precise reference community, at the same time crediting the rapper with a social role of speaker in the name of a broader group of people[7]. But these identities, as we have seen, are never exclusive: Ibrahima D. can declare his emotional attachment for Sicap, the city area where he was born, while performing at a meeting of students from Walo, and picturing himself as an artistic entrepreneur organising music festivals in a northern city; Alioune G. can make profit of his experience of living abroad – in Ivory Coast – with his affluent father for some years, without sounding less authentic as a true underground rapper from the Dakar *banlieue* (but which one? Mbao? Rufisque? In fact, both); the members of Nieri Ko can obtain support from a mayor of an *arrondissement* in Pikine, as a way of encouraging artistic activities in the suburbs, while spending most of

[6] Ethnic-based associations or political parties are forbidden in Senegal, but some *amicales*, though not officially recruiting on an ethnic basis, are constituted in defence of minority languages.

[7] In fact, the word "represent" is kept in English and used to introduce free-style rap before the performances, reassessing the local identity of every artist and stimulating the reaction of the audience.

their time far from that area. A law student once revealed, not without a certain dose of irony, that he knew many people adhering at the same time to five or six different *amicales*.

*From the ghetto to the world: a cosmopolitan marginality?*

Let's go back to the lyrics of "Mbedd mi" we saw at the beginning, as an example of the hybridism of the wolof spoken in Dakar. While code-switching with French is very frequent in Senegal as in all French post-colonies, especially in urban contexts, loans from English are more interesting here. In this case, we have *gaay* (from the English "guy") and *shit* (a word also used in colloquial French to design hashish), quite frequent; but we also have unusual loans such as *fire*, *street* and *life*, where corresponding wolof terms would have been more suitable. Even a construction like "*laif*-u *striit*" ("street life"), built on a wolof grammatical matrix but completely anglicised, sounds obscure for those not accustomed to this linguistic hybridism. Code-switching with English is becoming more and more widespread, especially among young people, who call one another "*boy*" and answer "*nice*" when asked how they are.

> The inclusion of English words in Urban Wolof is the 'trade mark' of young men, and it has become directly associated in the perceptions of Dakarois with the talk of the *jeunes bandits de Dakar*, 'the young Dakar low-lifes'. […] Young men take pride in the distinctiveness of the speech style, despite its negative connotations, as perhaps young men do the world over. (Swigart, 1994: 181-182)

The switch towards English can reflect the globalization of the imaginary, with the United States functioning as the new universal reference; and this is especially true, obviously, for those youth who recognize themselves in the hip hop movement. At the same time, it is interesting because it represents a partial move away from the colonial and post-colonial cultural projects, choosing a new language and new cultural reference, different from France and from the *francophonie* and the *négritude* sponsored by Leopold Sedar Senghor, as a way to develop "parallel modernities" (Larkin, 1997) in more or less open contrast to official culture. The whole history of urban music in Senegal along the 20th century is a particular example in music of what Jean-François Bayart has called the typical "extraversion" characterizing the history of Africa (Bayart, 2000): a notable case is the success of Cuban and Afro-Caribbean music in Senegal between the 40s and the 70s, when the Spanish language and the reference to Caribbean dance and to Cuba (especially post-revolution Cuba) constituted the raw material for a dimension of popular culture capable of overcoming the French heritage:

> Cuban music's disassociation from any of the major colonial powers in Africa also contributed to its popularity. To be African in a French colony and listen to French music was to be culturally co-opted. As the Senegalese historian Ibrahima Thioub has commented, "power in Senegal talked in French. The people talked back in Spanish". Cuban music provided a progressive alternative to both traditional African music and the hegemonic culture of the colonizers. (Shain, 2002: 91)

The arrival of rap in Senegal could thus be interpreted as a new chapter in the long saga of *métissage* and hybridization through music. In fact, rap has proved to be able to spread over the borders of the African American community, quite all over the world; but if its association with black minorities in the United States has been reformulated in France[8], where the genre has been identified mainly with second and third generations of immigrants from Africa and Arab countries living in the *banlieues*, the racial connotation of rap open different and complex issues in an African country with a huge black majority. In fact, the attempts to replicate a sense of marginality, even when the factual basis of this marginality are quite doubtful, is tied to this process of re-localisation and (partial) re-acquisition of meaning and audiences.

Thus, rap in Senegal both creates spaces of cosmopolitanism and opening to external influences, and brings issues of specificity and authenticity. These tension between universalism and particularism of hip hop is reflected in many interviews. Ahma, who worked in the redaction of a fanzine called Car-Rap-Id[9], puts it this way:

> […] disons que le hip hop et le rap, c'est une culture qui n'a pas de nation. Donc, le *hard core* aux Etats-Unis, notre rap au Sénégal, ou bien… le rap français, ou même le *nip hop* au Japon… si tu les vois au delà

[8] Despite the refusal of colonial heritage we have described, French rap is still another very important reference for Senegalese rappers.

[9] "Car-Rap-Id" is a joke with *car rapide*, a French expression indicating the vehicles used for public transport in Dakar, and rap.

de l'apparence, le message derrière, c'est la même chose, quoi. Bon, les hip-hoppeurs ont essayé de rapper dans leur langue nationale: aux Etats-Unis ils essaient de rapper en anglais, ou bien en argot, et même les gens qui habitent là-bas, des fois ils comprennent pas; en France aussi, le jargon que les jeunes de la banlieue utilisent des fois n'est pas accessible à nous. Donc, il faut rapper à partir de sa langue, de ce qu'on vit, même ici au Sénégal. Mais le but est international. [10]

On the other side, the awareness of the globality of rap and the confrontation with American and French fellows forces Senegalese artists to elaborate a reflection on their specificity. This can give way to criticism and opposition, and can take the form of a cultural or religious claim, as in the words of Nasser, a rapper from Comores residing in Dakar, when he criticises the 'gangsta' attitude of American and French rappers:

[…] c'est un cercle vicieux. Ça commence d'abord aux Etats Unis. Et les rappeurs français imitent ceux des Etats Unis; ils voient 50 Cent, avec des belles voitures, des belles *meufs*… Ils viennent refaire ça en France, et puis le gamin voit ça, et il grandit dans cette délinquance, il voit que lui il fait du rap *hard core*, du rap… euh… du rap… quasiment… rythmé à l'américaine, quoi. Comment dire… pas du rap conscient, comme… Par exemple, je ferai un exemple: un musulman. Un musulman, c'est pas, c'est pas… c'est celui-là qui respecte les traditions. C'est celui-là… qui ne fait pas la même chose que les américains, je veux dire ça. Un musulman, c'est celui qui a une certaine tradition à respecter. Mais imagine un gosse musulman qui grandit dans ce mouvement-là: un mouvement où on parle… de sexe... tout à la télé, quoi. Il ne grandit plus avec cette tradition, il grandit avec une autre tradition. [11]

Another interesting element in this issue about 'cosmopolitanism vs. specificity' is the relative success of afrocentrism[12] among young students and more educated rappers in Dakar. I'll quote an excerpt of a conversation I had with my informant D.I. during a filmed interview[13] to give an idea of this oversimplified and unproblematic positions:

(D.I.) En réalité, ici au Sénégal nous avons nos points de repère: les États-Unis. Si les américains ne faisaient pas du rap, moi non plus j'allais pas rapper: je ne le ferais pas. Mais les français, par contre, je ne les regarde même pas: je ne les kiffe pas. Je ne kiffe pas les français, j'écoute pas leur rap. […] La France n'a pas de culture. Nous avons quelque chose qui nous appartient: mais toi, par exemple… ce que tu portes, là, cette chemise en *bogolan*, c'est africain, c'est pas *tubaab*. Mais les blancs, qu'est-ce qu'ils ont créé?

(me) Je ne sais pas… rien?

(D.I.) Rien. Ils n'ont pas de culture.

(me) Comment ça? Les blancs n'ont pas de culture?

(D.I.) Ils n'ont rien créé, à part les voitures, le luxe… mais ça c'est pas une culture.

(me) Ben, non, le luxe n'est pas culture.

(D.I.) Tu vois. Vous n'avez rien qui vous appartienne.

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[10] "let us say that hip hop and rap are a culture that has no nation. So, hard core in the United States, our rap in Senegal… even French rap, or *nip hop* in Japan… if you look at them beyond the appearance, the message behind is the same, you know. Well, hip-hoppers have tried to rap in their national language: in the United States they try to rap in English, or even in slang, and even people living there sometimes don't understand them; in France, too, slang used by youth from the *banlieue* is sometimes not accessible to us. So, everyone must rap starting from his own language, from what he lives, even here in Senegal. But the purpose is international".

[11] "it's a vicious circle. First of all, it starts in the United States. And French rappers imitate those in the States: they see 50 Cent, with fancy cars, beautiful chicks… They go do the same in France, and the little boy sees that, and he grows up in this delinquency, you know, he sees him doing hard core, a rap… er… a rap… nearly… with an American rhythm, you know. How can I say… not an aware rap, like… I'll make an example: a Muslim. A Muslim is not, he's not… He's the one who respects traditions. He's the one… who doesn't do like the Americans do, that's what I mean. A Muslim is someone who has a certain tradition to respect. But imagine a Muslim child growing up in that movement: a movement where you talk… about sex… everything in TV, you know. He won't grow up anymore with that tradition, he'll grow up with another tradition".

[12] I am aware this definition is vague and contested, but this is not the proper place for a deep discussion of the concept. Such debates have animated the academia in Africa and in Senegal, too (see the heated debate in the pages of CODESRIA Bulletin while it was directed by Achille Mbembe), but the afrocentric positions widespread among youth are obviously more simplified, and generally ignore the Euro-American side of the controversy, to retain more the influences of some African political leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah and Thomas Sankara; of popular culture such as Bob Marley's reggae and the TV series "Roots" inspired by Haley's homonymous novel; or to base on the work of Senegalese linguist and historian Cheikh Anta Diop, to whom the University of Dakar has been dedicated after his death.

[13] It is quite significant that such positions emerged for the first time during the filmed interview, while they had never been suggested during the numerous interviews and conversations I had before with the same informant. Could it be that the switched-on camera gave way to a more performative attitude or to new modalities of self-definition?

(me) Mais la litterature, le cinéma… c'est de la culture, non?
(D.I.) Mais… moi j'entend quelque chose de traditionnel, qui existe depuis le temps de nos arrière-grands-parents. Par exemple, nous avons les *djembé*, la *kora*, les *tamas*, les percussions, les flûtes… Mais vous, qu'est-ce que vous avez? Vos instruments sont tous copiés à partir des nôtres. Et nous pouvons utiliser vos instruments, mais vous ne pouvez pas utiliser les nôtres. Je sais manœuvrer la guitare, toi tu ne peux pas utiliser le *xalam*.
(me) Ben, c'est normal, quelqu'un devrait m'apprendre.
(D.I.) [laughing] Je vais t'apprendre! Mais moi, j'ai pas besoin d'apprendre à jouer la guitare.
(me) [teasing him] Mais bien sûr tu en as besoin!
(D.I.) Si j'ai une guitare à la maison, au fur et à mesure de jouer je vais apprendre. […] Bref, nous avons notre culture; et puis nous allons prendre vous, l'Occident… nous prendrons vos instruments, vos instrumentaux, vos *beats*… Vous jouerez une musique qui est carrée, et nous allons y ajouter notre cube Maggi, le *saf safal*. [14]

This is just an example of a – quite ironical, after all – statement of afrocentrism I came into by chance. Apart from the interesting nonchalance with which it reverses the power relations embedded in the processes of globalisation in music, transforming the oppressed – African musicians "forced" to adopt the instruments of the West – into the masters – African musicians who can easily handle both musical traditions, unlike their westerner fellows; and apart from the equally interesting contradictions in the final part of the statement, where my informant indirectly confesses the sins of hybridity and exchange, after having defended a rather essentialist and primordialist approach – the cuisine metaphor (*le cube Maggi*) is quite explicit and appropriate in this regard; the dialogue impressed me for its strong claim of an African origin of the musical traditions and instruments of the West. In fact, although often with a less defying and more informed attitude, most of the rappers I interviewed declared that the origins of rap must be searched in the musical traditions of Africa, if not Senegal: they quoted *taasu*, *taaxuraan* and *bakku*[15] – all local forms of oral poetry and spoken-word declamation – as arguments for this claim.
I'm not interested here in confirming or contesting this interpretation: after all, rappers and artists have so far done very little philological work about this issue, since it would require training, technical and financial means far beyond their reach. Still, we can acknowledge that this discourse allows rappers to credit as the authors of a recuperation of authenticity in Senegalese music, after so many years of "extraversion", instead of admitting to perform a process of "globalisation" or, sometimes worse, "Americanisation from below". At the same time, the alleged africanity of rap refers to an idealised image of African tradition that can mobilise transnational solidarities – especially among Black diasporas – and broaden the visibility and the respectability of Senegalese and African rap in the world music market; and it is material for the defence from possible local accusations of xenophilia and passivity towards cultural imperialism.

Many rappers are acting towards an increase of transnational cultural flows and of hybridisation, while openly denying the same fact. Dakar and the other big cities in Africa are evidently huge and schizophrenic receptacles of diverse influences, but the fact that public policies, international trade and

[14] "(D.I.) In fact, here in Senegal we have our reference: the United States. If the Americans didn't rap, I wouldn't either: I wouldn't. But the French, I don't even look at them. I don't dig them. I don't dig the French, I don't listen to their rap. […] France has no culture. We have something that belongs to us: but you, for example… the *bogolan* shirt you are wearing, this is not *tubaab* [European, or white]. But white men, what did they create? / (me) I don't know… nothing? / (D.I.) Nothing. They have no culture. / (me) How can you say that? White men have no culture? / (D.I.) They created nothing, except for cars, luxury… but that is not culture. / (me) Well, no, luxury is not culture. / (D.I.) See? You have nothing that belongs to you. / (me) But literature is culture, cinema is culture, isn't it? / (D.I.) But… I mean something traditional, existing since the times of our ancestors. For example, we have *djembé*, *kora*, *tama*, drums, flutes… But what do you have? Your instruments have been copied from ours. And we can use your instruments, but you can't use ours. I know how to handle a guitar, but you can't use a *xalam*. / (me) Well, of course, someone must teach me. / (D.I.) [laughing] I will. But I don't need to learn how to play a guitar. / (me) [teasing him] Of course you do! / (D.I.) If I have a guitar at home, I'll learn by playing it. […] In short, we have our culture, and we're going to take you, the West… we'll take your instruments, your instrumentals, your beat… You'll play a music which is square, and we're going to add our Maggi cube, the *saf safal* [spices]".
[15] While the execution of *taasu*, a form of satirical praise-singing, and of *taaxuraan*, which often accompanies marriages, is a prerogative of women (Kesteloot, 1992; MacNee, 2000), the *bakku* is a self-praise performed by traditional wrestlers before the competition.

investments, media, and moving people all contribute to what we could superficially name as "cultural globalisation" doesn't mean that an abstract rhetoric of cosmopolitanism and *métissage* will convince the people to give up the rhetoric of local/cultural/religious identities. The general trend to the reinforcement of the latter, of which we find an example in the common-sense afrocentrism we saw before, deserves greater attention on an ethnographic level.
Popular culture situates in this crossroad, a sort of prism reflecting all these issues often with a (self) ironical attitude: young rappers, too, prove very skilled in playing with (re)invented identities and with territorial references always variable and superimposable, from city area to blackness, from africanity to the whole world.

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