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HIP HOP POLITICS

Recognizing souther complexity

*Jenny Mbaye***Introduction**

The urban 'south' is built through practices that are necessarily multiple. Here, culture is conceptually foundational. Not simply context, it is a field that allows for productive participation in urban space; as such, it works as a device to activate citizenship in the city symbolically and pragmatically. In this chapter, I draw on the practice of hip hop in Dakar, Senegal, to explore these complex processes and debates. In doing so, I distance myself from previous work on hip hop based on race (Forman and Neal 2004; Neate 2004; Rose 1994) and/or age (Kitwana 2002; Watkins 2005). Such a racial explanation for hip hop is a geo-historical framing of hip hop as a Black American culture, which can be confronted in its forms elsewhere with the actual experiences of Latinos living in American ghettos, of Portuguese or Maghreb immigrant descendants stigmatized in French *banlieues*, of Algonkin Natives parked in Canadian reserves; or, in this case, even young Africans marginalized in gerontocratic societies such as Dakar. Drawing on Chang (2005), I also question the definition of hip hop as a contemporary youth culture. In fact, 'generations are fictions'; they are 'used in larger struggle over power' and stand as 'a way of imposing a narrative' (ibid.: 1). In reality, hip hop pioneers in the USA, France or Senegal, who still actively participate in this movement, are a variety of ages: in their forties, and in some instances, over fifty!¹

Nonetheless, explanations based on race (and age) persist despite exposure to the diverse ways in which hip hop has emerged throughout the world. Overly focused on 'origins', this geo-historical understanding attests to a single referentiality that leads scholars to consider other appearances of hip hop in the world as different 'appropriations' of an 'original' cultural movement. This tendency reflects problematic linear continuities in terms of racial and social geographies and histories (Bennett 1999; Mitchell 2002; Perry 2004; Basu and Lemelle 2006).

In this chapter, I deconstruct such linear and universalist approaches to hip hop as a movement, through Foucault's understanding of 'genealogy' that distances itself from a strict historiography as well as from any study of the origins (Foucault 1977). Rather than maintaining a focus on the systematic and particularistic analysis of the origins of this movement, I am interested instead in the multiple and on-going expressive, discursive, even body-related praxis developed through history's accidents, unexpected deviations and unanticipated dispersions; in other words, the 'genealogy' of its 'descents' (ibid.). Such a focus suggests a genealogy that is an epistemological project, seeking to subvert the totalitarian nature of globalizing discourse regarding hip hop. Rather than a single referentiality then, I argue that hip hop is multi-polar and multi-referential.

I draw on this argument and its overarching cultural logic to highlight the situated politics and located practices that shape hip hop in Dakar, recognizing it as a complex phenomenon which itself is a product of the south (of borderline socialities) *and* the north (of enabling economies). Insisting on the situatedness of cultural and musical emergences, in this chapter I argue against a too restrictive blurring of what is conceived as ‘from the north’ and as ‘from the south’, focusing instead on the boundaries that people draw on and cross, culturally across the city. A focus on hip hop in Dakar thus grapples with a generalized social marginalization, i.e. a southern movement in cities of both south and north, while highlighting the relational and relative dimension of difference in the city, the multiple and simultaneous realities that cohabit everyday life in the Senegalese capital city.

The first part of this chapter draws on Foucault’s concept of ‘genealogy’ (Foucault 1977) to challenge binary explanations of hip hop. I highlight hip hop as a *mondialised* expression, a ‘third space’ (Bhabha 2004). I situate this movement as a ‘transculture’, simultaneously marked by singularity and communality, of ‘borderline’ socialities (ibid.). Understanding hip hop as a ‘transcultural mediation’, I focus in the second part of the chapter on the constitutive performances of hip hop music, one of the aesthetical expressions of this ‘transculture’, drawing on the process of *métissage* in order to formulate hip hop discursive practices as forms of singular *bricolage* (Lévi-Strauss 1962). This perspective allows me to address the constitutive performances in hip hop music as political actions that displace the borders of common singularities; on a southern urban *beat*, I thus explore Dakar’s hip hop politics.

I emphasize and illustrate this ‘liminal’ perspective beyond binaries (Nouss 2005), to approach borderline socialities and redefine what it means to live in relation to – and, to be at – the borders. In the final part of the chapter, I argue what makes hip hop’s emergence particular, tied into Dakar’s youth and its postcolonial sociality. Through this discussion, I thus explore what it means and implies to be a young Senegalese urban citizen, a ‘southern’, or ‘borderline’, positioning in a West African city. Finally, I highlight how, in Dakar, such hip hop transcultural politics inform, moreover, a distinctive type of ‘ethical’ economy (Arvidsson *et al.* 2008). This local grounding makes possible ‘techniques of value that address the uncertainties of economic and ontological life’ (Neilson and Rossiter 2005). By focusing on the productive and economic dynamics of the aesthetics of hip hop, I argue that hip hop has become the informed product of identity politics and economic deeds, which has the potential to inscribe radical social change in the city.

Hip hop in translation: *mondialised* genealogy

As a culture and as a music, hip hop is always embedded in the context from which it emerges. Although it initially appeared in the 1970s in the Bronx in New York, hip hop is now part of the reality of diverse urban communities throughout the world. Here Bakhtin’s polyphonic conception of the carnivalesque narration is useful, where ‘there is no centre that dictates meaning [...]. Singularities all express themselves freely and together through their dialogue create the common narrative structures’ (Bakhtin, 1970 quoted in Hardt and Negri 2004: 249). Put differently, wherever hip hop emerges, another ‘world’, another *mondialité*, is created, with local innovation its reference. Indeed, neither global phenomena, nor local, hip hop emergences are *mondialised* inscriptions; at the same time, diverse and multiple, as well as, situated and singular.² The French language allows for such a distinction with the word *monde* that simultaneously stands for ‘world’ and ‘people’, and with *mondialisation*³ read as the simultaneous process of emergence. Drawing on this concept, I oppose the recurrent binaries inherent in dialogical discourse about globalization, a *mondialised* approach that goes beyond centres and borders, allowing for multiple diversities.

Wherever hip hop emerges, this ‘transculture’ is evident in three artistic expressions – dance,⁴ painting⁵ and music (DJing⁶ and MCing⁷) – an original translation. A translation is a proclamation that necessarily involves a mediation: beyond the transfer of a volatile message, translating means that

something can be said in this language and in the other (Nouss 2005: 42–3). Translating reveals what all the languages have in common beyond their formal or historical relationships: each language is one, singular, and participates in what goes beyond it. Translation is a ‘transcultural operation’, a third language or space, open and real. As Nouss puts it, such a ‘third space’ recalls the possibility of the ‘and’, of multi-belonging, rather than binary cuttings of hyphenated identities. This type of ‘liminal thinking’ confronts any essentialization (Nouss 2005: 44). Defining a *unitas multiplex*, Morin addresses a similar challenge in the difficulty of thinking of Europe in the multiple, in the singular, and in the singular in the multiple (Morin 1990: 24; quoted in Nouss 2002: 111). Applying Nouss’s ‘liminal thinking’ to hip hop, I understand hip hop as a ‘transculture’: a culture existing in a permanent openness, a culture that exists by itself, but one that can only be expressed through other cultures (see also Ortiz on ‘transculturation’, 1995: 98).

Transcultural hip hop and its *métisse* music

Borrowing from the Surrealists (Breton and Soupault 1971), the hermit crab is a useful metaphor that exemplifies my purpose. Like this small marine crustacean, which does not own its habitat but creates it from empty seashells in order to survive and grow, hip hop requires another cultural ‘habitat’ to live and develop as a culture. Put differently, hip hop is a ‘transculture’ insofar as it stands, in each time and place, as a singular translation of a commonality. The latter is inscribed in the diverse and multiple receptacles of social marginalization, of ‘borderline conditions’ (Bhabha 2004), whether located in southern or northern cities. As such, hip hop emergences translate in a singular way, a communality inscribed in the multiple forms of social marginalization, both real and imaginary (Motley and Henderson 2008: 245). Indeed, hip hop disrupts a situation of borders and margins, whose relationships situate social and economic practices especially manifest in the city. From this perspective, hip hop constitutes a phenomenon localized on the borders, on the margins of an assumed sociality and urbanity; it tends to emerge from a ‘southern positioning,’ a place of marginality; it is a ‘path of passage for a borderline sociality’ in cities north and south. Despite its character as a collective phenomenon, each emergence of hip hop and its borderline position in society is distinctively situated.⁸ Likewise, the deployment of an alternative discourse on urban conditions is always produced in an individual and singular way. In fact, while hip hop is a transculture, hip hop music, as any singular action allowed by this transcultural space, is *métisse*.

Métissage develops from Lévi-Strauss’s notion of ‘*bricolage*’ (Lévi-Strauss 1962): while the erudite is preoccupied with and submitted to structures, the *bricoleur* trifles with structures in order to construct other realities (Nouss 2005: 33). Hip hop music can be understood as *métissage* in that it can be apprehended as a ‘form’, never settled; a *métisse* form that moves from one singularity to another. Rather than a concept or an object, hip hop music thus stands as a system of communication, a type of speech which is ‘dissociable’ from its content: a ‘form’ in the sense developed and applied by Barthes to a ‘myth’. As far as Barthes’ ‘myth’ or hip hop music are concerned, ‘the form does not suppress the meaning, it only impoverishes it, it puts it at a distance, [and] it holds it at one’s disposal’ (Barthes 1993: 109).

The hip hop musical genre is thus vast and encompasses a multiplicity of discursive practices,⁹ inscribed in various social, political, economic, geographical or linguistic contexts. In Dakar, for instance, hip hop musical forms are far from uniform. There is the ‘hardcore’ that describes the most radical groups; the ‘cool’ or ‘soft’ that refers to an emphasis on themes such as love; and a third that mixes the two (Niang 2006: 181). Beyond these three tendencies, there are multiple other forms of hip hop music located in the hip hop inscription of the Senegalese capital city itself. Speaking to and through the body, rather than a reference to the reality of the artist, hip hop music displays the body of the individual, spatialized and historicized, whether in the performance of the MC or the DJ,¹⁰ the two *bricoleurs* of this ‘organic’ form. On one hand, the DJ can be unique, through the ‘writing of his/her

voice' (Rubin 2003), by historicizing and spatializing his *beat*, thanks to techniques of *sampling* and programmed rhythms; on the other hand, the oral performance of the MC¹¹ reminds us of the integration of discourse in the body and the voice, and vice versa (see Figure 34.1).

Nevertheless, while hip hop music remains a 'form' open to any and every singularity, for the sake of the forthcoming political argument, two broad tendencies in hip hop discursive practices can be distinguished in Dakar. One is commercial hip hop music, based on the entertaining *praxis* of the Master of Ceremony; and, the other is hip hop music with a message, reflective of grounded realities in the city and nation. Contrary to the commercial version that plays on imaginary fantasies for the sake of popular entertainment and individual profit, hip hop music with a message deploys a historicized 'narrative' that refutes the past and positions towards the future. It depicts actual identities and realities with an expressive social commentary that offers descriptions of particular issues as well as instructive messages to reshape borderline sociality. As such, this kind of hip hop music becomes a 'form-subject', which permits the acting political and social subject to think (Meschonnic 1995: 21).

This critical mix is illustrated below in an extract from Senegalese Matador's track 'Hip Hop Attitude', which highlights how such a 'hip hop writing of the voice' goes 'beyond simply writing and reciting', but is about 'setting down' oneself on the *beat*; it stands in one's 'veins', as a 'way of living', 'self-made in the streets', in which a 'resourceful spirit' is about 'working hard' and 'serving others before oneself'.



Figure 34.1 June 2013 – Pre-show of Yakaar Festival of Urban Music, with Keur Gui and NitDoff Killah (Location: French Institute in Dakar, at Dakar-Plateau)

Photo: Jenny F. Mbaye

Hip Hop Attitude leu sopi saye habitude leu
Jeul sène fit conscience si quite leu
Tek si kaw beat rap si siditeu
[...]
Tolouwayou Hip Hop xajoul si boppou golo
Limu eumb mo bari, Yémou si bind tari
Hip Hop téré nélaaw politic kate you bari
[...]
Si mbéd mi lagnou guetaro bokougnou ak wa Benno [...]
Doko xar niar béne boppouleu béne corps leu
Béne khatieleu béne dor béne movement
[...]
Hip Hop Hip dibi Hop, mou dadi oup sama bop yow
Yes fignou jugué sori, Xamo fignou jeum ; sorry, bala ngaye lekk fori
Xar mat gori, dor war amoul wori, niak do am lou bari
Dérète tokh bakanou gor yi
[...]
Hip Hop lagniye téwal
[...]
Diglé thiangaye sétoo, lax diaye lékoo
Wathié stress yégueul moralou nit té né

Hip Hop is a way of living, attitudes that change bad habits
Hip Hop is about confirmed bravery, all settled up with your conscious
Setting down myself on the instrumental; rap is in my veins
[...]
Hip Hop ain't made for empty minds
It has many dimensions that go beyond simply writing or reciting
Hip Hop is the cause of politicians' lack of sleep
[...]
For a long time self-made in the streets [...]
You can't divide it; it's one same head, one same body
Same position, same hitting capacity, one sole movement
[...]
Hip Hop only on my mind
Yes, we're coming from far, and sorry, you can't know where we aspire to go
A pain to get our teeth into something, always in resourcefulness spirit
We're not worried 'though we're not wealthy, we work hard for tomorrow
Blood drips from the nose of an upright warrior'
[...]
We represent Hip Hop
[...]
Advices giver, which doesn't get to receive any; serving others before oneself
Eradicating stress, uplifting the moral of population, in times we so need it¹²

(Extract from Matador 'Hip Hop Attitude', 2012)

For hip hop artists in Dakar, hip hop music has become an artistic path of self-creation, to which new forms of sociability and cultural expression attach. In fact, the hip hop sound, multi-polar in

its expression, demonstrating no referential centrality, and uncovering diverse *historicités*, appears as an already 'translated' musical creation. It stands as a *métisse* form. Indeed, hip hop music has become a '*mondialised* myth' that integrates the spatialized and historicized individual body in its discourse. In doing so, it reminds us that a 'borderline situation', a 'southern position', is not synonymous with subordination. On the contrary, as we shall now see, this position shapes possible 'political actions'.

On the 'southern' side of the city: hip hop politics

Senegalese urban society is subjected to a generational segregation, where young people are victims of a logic of exclusion based on the tradition of respect to the eldest. This logic implies obedience, reserve and often silence, tendencies which have marginalized a younger generation from public and social spheres, as well as from private family spaces (Diouf 1999: 42). While young urban citizens face precarious living conditions (Biaya 2000: 13), the *métisse* musical form can become a 'writing of the voice' that is capable of interacting with and informing an alternative political configuration. Through hip hop music young urbanites deploy another form of sociality than the one ascribed by the dominant urban culture, as well as creating an alternative practice of democratic discourse.

Originally from Thiaroye, a peripheral *banlieue* in the region of Dakar, Matador is a founding member of the well-known group, *Wa BMG 44*. For him, discursive performances are motivated by a lived situation of marginalization, by his experience of 'out-of-place' sociality and the problems of identification with his locality, as well as by his profound desire for individuation and vivid realization. For about 20 years, his hip hop 'writing of the voice' has allowed him to articulate another sociality that is particular to his own pride in his social and political positionality in Dakar. He explains below:

Whenever we were saying that we were coming from Thiaroye, people were fleeing from us because it was synonymous of drugs, thieves, deviance, etc. We really wanted to show them that one could live in Thiaroye and still be someone!

(Interview conducted with Matador on 29 February 2009)

This motivation of 'being someone' invokes the lived possibility offered by *métissage* of constant becoming, of belonging to multiple singularities (Nouss 2005: 28–9). This *métisse* possibility permits Matador to redefine a marginalized sociality into something else: one in which marginalization is no longer synonymous with subordination, but instead, marks reinvention, a sociality in which one can 'come from Thiaroye' and still 'be someone'. In fact, what is politically at stake in this musical form reshapes what 'one is', to aim, instead, for what one could be, both singularly and collectively.

Founding member of the pioneer hip hop group *Positive Black Soul*, Didier Awadi reaffirms this politics, through invoking his cultural referents in his album *Présidents d'Afrique*. Faithful to the vision of the Burkinabè revolutionary Thomas Sankara, Awadi wants to 'dare inventing his future', while deploying another sociality, both ideal and real. On one hand, he provides different political ideals,¹³ while referring to African personalities such as the first president of Ghana Kwame Nkruma, the Mandingo hero who fiercely resisted French colonization, Samory Touré, and the father of the 'African renaissance', Cheikh Anta Diop; on the other hand, as a pioneer, he marks this identity through his entrepreneurial trajectory, like other hip hop entrepreneurs in Dakar, 'new figures of success' (Havard 2001). Indeed, besides an on-going successful career as artist, Awadi began in 1998 to contribute to the musical sector of Dakar with the creation of his first home studio, *Taf-Taf Production* and the rental of his PA system. In 2003, *Taf-Taf Production* became *Studio Sankara*, a more formal and professional company for music production that actively balances the production of musical acts and commercial advertising spots. He explains:

Before in Senegal, advertising was a field monopolised by Ivorian, French or Moroccan people. We wanted to show them that we could do this job without inhibition. [...] And we show that it was possible once you believe and invest in it.

(Interview conducted with Didier Awadi, 25 February 2009)

The recurrence of the '*we*' in his argument highlights that behind most hip hop artists, there is a 'family', a posse, a crew. The crew not only accompanies hip hop artists to their performances, even joining them on stage to assist with the shouting of the chorus, and verses, for instance, but also takes on a variety of 'official' jobs, essential to help maintain, promote and support hip hop performers (Herson 2000: 33–5; Niang 2006: 178). As Awadi puts it, it was about 'giving work to all the crew I grew up with; and giving work to the neighbours' (Interview conducted with Didier Awadi on 25 February 2009). Here, the writing of the voice thus also stands as a commitment, a responsibility (Benga 2002: 301); a writing of the voice through which legitimacy is ensured through the constitution and the active existence of the group. Indeed, hip hop artists 'identify permanently with their groups, even if they also represent broader communities [...] [and their] attachment to the posse is always inextricably related to the omnipresent principle of commitment' (Niang 2006: 179).

The 'omnipresent principle of commitment' is directed and addressed to what I refer to as the 'emotional site' of the artists, i.e. to their posse, their crew, and more largely to their neighbourhood or their community, whether defined as 'hip hop transculture', urban youth, West African youth, or a general southern positioning located in borderline socialities. This 'writing of the voice' is thus always multiple, 'representing' something more than an individual and his or her politics: indeed, it also implies another way of doing politics and entering the public political debate, by inscribing a political discourse *per se* inside artistic practices. As Latour reminds us, '[...] he who talks does not talk *about himself but about another*, who is not *one* but Legion. [...] he who talks does not have speech; he talks on others' behalf' (2003: 160).¹⁴

When developing musical performances, hip hop participants create this specific link between their own lives and their 'emotional site' from and for which they speak. As such, they talk for those who cannot speak for themselves and give them, by the same token, the possibility of knowing and understanding (Benga 2002: 302). In the terrain of politics, they offer an alternative practice situated on the 'borders' of institutionally shaped democratic discourse,¹⁵ and thus fill in a considerable gap between public officials of the republic, and a great part of its population. As such, in their discursive performances, they address issues that are considered taboo in their respective countries such as governmental corruption,¹⁶ mentally ill people and the deplorable conditions of the prison system,¹⁷ legalized injustices afflicting African women (excision, rape, forced marriage¹⁸), or the disillusion and distress¹⁹ of *sénégalérienne*²⁰ youth. Such practices, moreover, are not limited to simple denunciation, but also encourage people to stand up for themselves, talk for themselves and express their own opinions.

Through this constant interaction of private domain and the public space of politics, hip hop artists participate in the construction of a citizen consciousness (Diouf 2002: 285). This is something that Matador highlights through his project 'Hip Hop Education':²¹

We know that kids love hip hop culture and we want to use this culture to make them aware of their surroundings. This is something that we would like to teach throughout the country and in different sectors: make the youth understand that they should not wait for the state and should act to maintain their own environment, which is theirs or will be the ones of their younger brothers or sisters. [...] These are more projects of citizenship.

(Interview conducted with Matador, 29 February 2009)

Hip hop music thus reveals itself as political action, redefining the spatial structure and the social order of the city. It is a 'writing of the voice' both singular and multiple, and, as the examples of Awadi and

Matador demonstrate, eminently political. However, it is also a writing that inscribes itself in the political realm as an always distinctively situated, 'southern transculture', a dimension explored in the following discussion on the politics of hip hop in Dakar.

As a young Senegalese urban citizen...

The paradox of contemporary urban change is expressed in 'the simultaneous expansiveness and closure of the city' (Krimm 2007: xxxiii; 5–7). In the Senegalese capital, this paradox particularly affects the youngest generations economically, politically and culturally. Indeed, in the region of Dakar, where more than 50 per cent of the population is under 20 years old (Agence Nationale de Statistique et de la Démographie 2007: 31; 49–50), almost one person out of two is officially out of work. The proportion of the active population currently employed is 51.1 per cent. Moreover, higher levels of education do not guarantee getting a job: almost a quarter (23.5 per cent) of those affected by unemployment hold a university degree. Despite its repetitive promises, the public sector cannot absorb the unemployment crisis, and the formal private sector remains a marginal player in a society dominated by its informal economy, which contributes 60 per cent of the national GDP.²² An important gap exists between the expectations of young people for employment and the actual possibilities offered in the job market, exacerbating social demands that are already high because of increased poverty (Agence Nationale de Statistique et de la Démographie 2007: 55). The urban expression of this national conundrum is significant: only 0.3 per cent of national territory, Dakar is home to more than half the nation's urban population (53 per cent) and its litany of ills.²³ Matador describes the political consequences of these trends:

To be a young person in Senegal is really to be cut-off from a lot of things that are happening. [...] The state does everything it can to put people to sleep and most of all the young people. [...] We know that we will never get anything from the state and whatever we would ask the state will not give it to us. First, because the state does not understand what is an urban culture, worse what is the hip hop culture. They think that we are the worst enemies of the state because throughout our texts we have always criticised the state.

(Interview conducted with Matador, 29 February 2009)

He highlights the 'borderline situation' of youth and their conflicting relations with the official city, as well as the conflicting and mutually suspicious relations between the government and disillusioned youth, who lack confidence in any future perspective and are stuck 'waiting'.

While the disjunctions between economic, political, cultural and symbolic territories have accelerated, Mbembé suggests that it is at such 'interstices' that historical action takes place (2000: 43); in this context, this history, and the institutional violence that it responds to, clearly distinguishes between cohorts of individuals born before or at the edge of independence, and the 'children of the crisis' (Biaya 2000: 29; 2002: 350). The latter is marked clearly in the events of 2011 that saw the emergence of the Senegalese movement 'Y'en a marre! (YAM)'²⁴, in which Dakar's youth, led by hip hop artists, affirmed themselves as critical actors in their country through political protest and social contestation. Formed in January 2011, this youthful collective declared no ties to any political party, emerging instead as a watchdog movement, formed on the urban margins of the city, the working-class district of Parcelles Assainies. Its refusal to be co-opted by establishment politicians marked the movement as radical, free of conventional forms of urban political manipulation. More importantly, it insisted on a mediation position, with its members and discourse acting as intermediaries between public officials and the population, but also as a source of independent media, through musical and audio-visual productions.

As such, YAM! voices the frustrations of the people, a seemingly cyclically disillusioned population living in a city scarred by recurrent power and water cuts, pervasive poverty and institutionalized corruption. Apart from protests and rallies – repetitive large-scale demonstrations, one of which on 23 June 2011 forced then-President Wade to back away from constitutional changes that would have ensured him a third term in office – the movement also uses hip hop music as means of spreading its message. Capitalizing on the fame of its founders, it released at the end of 2011 a compilation self-titled ‘Y’en A Marre’. This was yet another expression, an aesthetic one, from urban youth, those who ‘belonged to sacrificed generations, with no future, and in total contradiction with the announced objectives and discourses of the government’ (Biaya 2000: 22); a youth living and organizing against the state and an urban society that marginalizes them. Repeatedly experiencing institutional violence, the urban youth have also historically (Setal,²⁵ Boul Faalé²⁶) mobilized in times of social turmoil, rejecting their ascribed marginal sociality by those in political power and the economic situation, as well as the submissive social prescriptions of tradition.

Through this quest for elementary civic rights (education, employment, implication in political processes that concern them), Dakar youth have created in hip hop a place as political actors, as well as cultural entrepreneurs, in the Senegalese metropolitan scene. Indeed, emerging from a ‘third space’ – hip hop’s ‘southern transculture’ – this cultural and musical expression has offered an alternative politics that interacts and impacts on the economic dimensions of the music scene. Moreover, as hip hop artists, a particular ethics – a ‘philosophy’ that sensitively informs practice – strongly influences the form of cultural entrepreneurship. How the political production of Senegalese hip hop *métis* interacts with and impacts on the economic production of their musical expression, is thus the focus of the final section in this chapter.

An ethical economy of hip hop music

As Matador asserts: ‘[...] people already recognise that rappers do not only say the truth but they are also workers and developers’ (Interview conducted by the author with Matador on 29 February 2009). In other words, the Dakar hip hop culture’s economy highlights a production characterized by an ‘ethical economy’ (Arvidsson *et al.* 2008), which is ‘mainly coordinated through non-monetary incentives’. As such, hip hop music economy incorporates a traditional rational capitalist economy of an individual, as well as an affectivity that is relational, linked to the collective, the community, and the ‘emotional site’. This affectivity is deployed around two principles of praxis: ‘representing’ and ‘proving’; or as Matador put it, in the previous extract of his track, ‘working hard’ and ‘serving others before oneself’. These two principles stand as *mondialised* hip hop ‘transcultural codes’ and reflect on the one hand, a notion of original ‘writing’ as well as individual challenge (‘proving’); and, on the other, an attachment to the ‘emotional site’ (‘representing’).

In fact, while there is not a fixed doctrine relative to hip hop, there are some recurrent cultural codes attached to this ‘southern transculture’, elements that translate in different practices around the world and bind together this community. It is first about ‘proving’ oneself, learning to be the best from where you are, from what you have; in other words, it is about challenging oneself in a positive way. Second, it is about ‘representing’, returning and dedicating the benefits of this individual challenge to the hip hop community and its participants. In this respect, Thomas draws a list of such codes: ‘keeping it real’, ‘speak truth to power’, ‘change the game’, ‘represent the hood’, ‘self-expression’ (2007); while Mitchell defines more generally an ‘ethos’ that reflects an independent lifestyle involving both ‘raising the bar’ and an attachment to territory through political and social engagement (Mitchell 2007). Understanding the hip hop music economy as an ethical economy based on ‘proving’ oneself and ‘representing’ one’s community explains the logic of the entrepreneurial motive beyond a market economy justified by monetary incentives alone (Arvidsson *et al.* 2008: 10). It also illuminates the

authority of specific affective affinities to elaborate an informal social infrastructure. These specifically situated relations active in hip hop music and the 'transcultural politics' of its participants are reflected in this ethical economy, and reveal practices that take different forms in the varied contexts in which hip hop flourishes.

While I distance myself from any ethnic or racial presumption in hip hop community, I draw here on an 'enclave logic' (Basu and Werbner 2001) to understand the ways in which a community that shares identities and practices, organizes itself internally in order to respond to its production as well as consumption needs. Such an endogenous system implies the internal organization and coordination of the enclave as a key element in comprehending the dynamics of participants' enterprises. This framework emerges from the US context, where it has been argued that a hip hop 'aesthetics of entrepreneurship' is evident in artists' growing awareness of the importance of the entrepreneurial dynamic in the hip hop culture and industry (Muhammad 1999). Unlike previous generations of African Americans in the entertainment world, hip hop music entrepreneurs in the USA have been perceived as an ethnic enclave economic structure, whose participants capitalize on their access to this creative niche for economic rewards beyond it (Basu and Werbner 2001). Systematically planning and organizing businesses beyond their musical production, in this context hip hop entrepreneurs have developed complex economic portfolios, packaging musical production as commodity and networking through aesthetics and business collaborations to find employment, set up secondary businesses and professional services centred around hip hop culture and music. Nowadays, many people celebrate hip hop moguls who emerged in the American market, despite the fact that these entrepreneurs always have a link with major music corporations, either under pressing and distribution deals or joint ventures.

In Dakar this 'enclave' economy and its 'aesthetics of entrepreneurship' has been organized so that participants have a certain capacity to create autonomously inside their community, but also an awareness of themselves as a new generation of cultural entrepreneurs active in their city. In Dakar, the hip hop ethical music economy articulates through two modes, in which the hip hop individual and collective are inextricably linked: 'peer production' and 'communal governance' (Bauwens 2009a, 2009b). In the Senegalese experience, the enclave perspective suggests a cooperative, community-based as well as community-oriented form of entrepreneurship, which contrasts with the US individualistic approach to enclave entrepreneurial initiatives, in which only a few moguls succeed. Indeed, while the entrepreneurial initiatives developed by American hip hop moguls aim to increase their respective market shares, in Dakar, the strategic rationale of hip hop entrepreneurs is to create this very market in a locale that is ignored by the global music corporations. In fact, Dakar's participants are aware that, contrary to US or European music, their musical production rarely leaves the country, let alone the region. Consequently they strive to develop an alternative terrain for productive music making locally.

'Peer production' thus draws together economic practices by Dakar-based hip hop entrepreneurs which help them gain autonomy through the ownership of the material conditions of production. This independent production capacity helps create a dynamic business ecology to ensure the survival as well as the continuing development of their market. Creating and developing an alternative terrain for their own market in order to 'prove' themselves and 'represent' their community, these entrepreneurs have endeavoured to produce autonomously for the benefit of their community. To do this these participants must own the initial recording device and instruments necessary to produce music. They also have to develop 'home studios' and engage in auto-production as well as the diversification of music-related activities throughout the chain of production (see Figure 34.2).

To penetrate new areas of expertise, hip hop actors extend their entrepreneurial initiatives to festivals, media (radio, TV, webzines, written press) that are expressly dedicated to hip hop, as well as recording studios, fully equipped rehearsal rooms,²⁷ independent labels, duplication plants,²⁸ street wear fashion brands,²⁹ cultural associations, audio-visual and graphic designer companies, as well as security agencies.³⁰ In fact, since 2006, a dynamic business ecology has emerged to support the peer



Figure 34.2 June 2013 – Residency ‘Diversitart’, with Matador (Senegal), Francoman (Mauritania) and Kaffé Lagaffe (Niger) (Location: Africulturban Association, at Pikine)
Photo: Daouda Fall

production process in hip hop music. Hip hop artists have thus developed a vertical integration and interconnectedness between different parts of the music production process, through and for their community, with alternative avenues for the production, promotion and distribution of their musical products. One of the most visible contemporary hip hop artists on the Senegalese scene, Simon BisBi Clan created an enterprise of music production and promotion that puts together a duplication plant, a street wear fashion brand, a unit of graphic design and audio-visual production as well as a conception around a musical label dedicated to hip hop:

It’s a label 100 per cent hip hop [...] where one can enter into a studio, record, mix, do the mastering, duplicate the product, make a jacket, and then just go to the Copyrights Bureau to get stamps.³¹ It is a complete service [...] It was really the present that I wanted to offer to the hip hop movement, and at affordable prices [...] And people starts to come for the quality as well; they see the difference!

(Interview conducted with Simon, 21 February 2009)

As a means of quality control, selection and critique, ‘communal governance’ highlights, in contrast, the reflexive self-organization and self-regulation of autonomous participants in the hip hop community. A participative process, based on the principle of self-rule, this ethos is applied to the productive sphere, so that ‘market competition is balanced by co-operation, the invisible hand is combined with a visible handshake’.³² As a *métisse* form open to any and every individuality, individual participation is

equipotential; there is no a priori selection to productively engage with the community (Bauwens 2005). In fact, hip hop actors voluntarily engage with indirect, rather than direct reward in the form of monetary compensation.

More precisely, this peer governance is based on the voluntary engagement of participants, and simultaneously on the self-regulation of the productive community by affective affinity (Arvidsson *et al.* 2008: 11). Indeed, such participatory production distinguishes itself from traditional capitalist methods of coercion such as dependence-based wage work where productivity is based on mutual self-interest. Rather, motivation is 'intrinsically positive, i.e. deriving from passion rather than from "extrinsic positives" (self-interest or greed, motivated by the external monetary system)' (Bauwens 2009b: 127). Moreover, the capacity to contribute is verified in the process of contribution itself (Bauwens 2005); what counts is demonstrated ability, not prior formal proof. The popular hip hop expression 'it's not where you're from, but where you're at' acknowledges such a participatory process that is not based on a prerequisite, but credited in the participation itself. Indeed, hip hop governance is guaranteed by an internal self-regulation by participants through reputation systems that are used for communal validation (Bauwens 2005: 2): the fact that 'people start to come for the quality' and 'see the difference'.

Equipotentiality is not synonymous with equality or fairness; the hip hop participation system, as any informal system, produces new inequalities. In fact, Simon reminds us: 'before, a lot of people were just public, part of the audience. But now many of them have become rappers themselves. It worked for me though it does not work for everybody.' Indeed, the governance of the hip hop productive community remains intrinsically connected to physical products (whether recorded or live musical productions) that require systematic 'cost-recovery mechanisms' (Bauwens 2009b: 129). In an ethical economy, coordination is ensured through a process of 'affective affinity', whereby participants aim at accumulating respect and recognition from a chosen community (Arvidsson *et al.* 2008: 11), a form of 'reputation economy'. For the most experienced hip hop artists, the accumulation of respect and recognition has sometimes been accompanied by a consequent credit and its privileged monetary compensation from the global music market. In this respect, the most eloquent example is Awadi, who explains how in such cases, artists participate in their productive community:

If one performs live, one needs musicians and it is very expensive to have them, to rehearse with them and not everybody has a training room or the required instruments. Also, one needs to do a real show, i.e. needs to rent a good PA system, need to advertise the event on the radio, TV, through flyers, poster. All this makes a good show but it's not everybody who can do so! Those who have a bit of money because they travel, then come back and are able to organise better show because they have the means to do so.

(Interview conducted with Didier Awadi, 25 February 2009)

This emphasizes the collective approach that is often favoured as a cost-recovery mechanism; what becomes at the regional, national and metropolitan level, a 'benevolent dictatorship' (Bauwens 2009b: 124) directed by more 'established' hip hop participants. The influence of such a 'core leadership' is especially salient in the organization of festivals dedicated to hip hop that are active in the sub-Saharan Francophone region.³³ Indeed, a networking dynamic across cities of Francophone West Africa – including agreement on artists' participation and fees, notably – has emerged among festivals that share a common thematic to sustain live performance and the diffusion of hip hop music. In the Senegalese capital as well, this networking dynamic has developed with the organization of the '72h Hip Hop', an event that includes over a dozen hip hop enterprises, and during which conferences, exhibitions, workshops, and concerts dedicated to the movement are held (see Figure 34.3). In 2010, for its second edition, the city of Dakar integrated the '72h' into its end of the year festivities cultural programme,



Figure 34.3 May 2013 – Hip Hop Flow Up competition, an Africulturban event (Location: Douta Seck House of Culture, at Dakar-Médina)

Photo: Jenny F. Mbaye

the ‘Ribidion’. As Simon concludes, ‘public authorities as well have noted the impact that the movement has on the youth of our country. They did not suspect there existed such an organisation.’³⁴ As such, these entrepreneurs have ‘represented’ their emotional site (‘impact [...] on the youth’) and ‘proved’ their singular ‘writing’ (‘such an organization’) on their urban territory.

Conclusion

In Dakar, hip hop participants collectively but autonomously co-create an ethical economy through creating peer production as well as governing mechanisms. From this perspective, the hip hop music economy is ethical, not in the sense that it translates some form of philosophical universality but because it is situated and particular to local practices. Indeed, rather than a ‘moral’ economy, the hip hop music economy constructs an implicit knowledge economy and elaborates the social infrastructure that is informal, but critical to its success. This ethical feature is a ‘transcultural dimension’ of hip hop that shapes its original Dakarois’ translation. In this respect, this mix of productive and governing processes demonstrates how musical entrepreneurs, through their ethical practices, enhance the convergence of individual and collective hip hop interests. The participatory production and the productive participation of hip hop participants in Dakar thus gives rise to an alternative form of entrepreneurial practice that emerge from this constant and dynamic duality between community and individual.

The hip hop experience in Dakar highlights urban cultures from the south that are diverse and multiple, as well as complexly embedded in the city’s contemporary socio-economic and spatial realities. Built around notions of *mondialisation*, *métissage*, and transculture, the conceptual framework

drawn on grounds, in time and space, a distinctive cultural and musical emergence, revealing the latter as the informed product of situated politics and located practices. In this sense, hip hop and its transcultural elements, its codes of praxis, develop out of a southern positioning, a borderline position that interlinks in complex ways practices of hip hop from the north as well as the south. It always does so, however, while offering an originally translated world or *mondialité*. Singular and multiple, this transculture and its *métisse* expressions thus remind us of the importance of ‘third spaces’ and ‘interstitial zones’ essential to thinking and conceiving urban cultural realities and dynamics across reductive binaries. The field of urban culture is thus more than just contextual background in the study of city dynamics. Instead, it suggests productive sites for marginalized urbanites to enact civic participation and empowerment, politically as well as economically and socially. In the context of crisis, moreover, culture has emerged as a privileged vehicle for social change for young urban (‘southern’) citizens. The Dakar experience highlights how hip hop serves as an effective site for identity formation and negotiation, building a cultural economy that allows for endogenous local capacity building as potential source of individual, as well as collective, growth and development.

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Notes

- 1 For instance, Didier Awadi from the *Positive Black Soul* (Senegal) born in 1969 has just released a new album, *Ma Révolution* (2012); Imhotep from *IAM* (France), and most of the members of his group were born in 1960 and just released their album *Arts Martiens* (2013); also, GrandMaster Flash, *Furious Five* (USA) is born in 1958 and performed in London on 10 February 2011. Just to give an indication regarding the generation fiction and the unstable indication given by age, Priss'K, a pioneer female hip hop artist from Ivory Coast, is nicknamed the 'Vieille Mère du Hip Hop' ('Hip Hop Old Mama') and she was born in 1985!
- 2 This approach thus allows a conception of Hip Hop as an 'ensemble of specificities', of singularities, in which each 'emergence' singularly appears, develops and stands out as another *mondialised* world of this ensemble
- 3 Here, I draw on the contributions of A. Nouss, who introduces the concept of *mondialisation*, in contrast with 'globalisation'; the former refers to the human dimension of an inhabited world, while the latter refers to the concreteness of a soulless economic and material reality (Nouss 2005: 76)
- 4 Various techniques of 'breakdancing' such as *smurf*, *hype*, *double dutch*, *boogaloo*.
- 5 'Graffiti' and 'tags'
- 6 Includes *scratch* and *sampling* techniques.
- 7 Includes *rap* and *human beatbox*.

- 8 I recognise here the contribution of H. Osumare, who develops the concept of 'connective marginalities' (Osumare 2007: 61)
- 9 *Conscious Rap, Dirty South, Political Rap, East Coast, West Coast, Crunk, Midwest Rap, Hardcore Rap, Gangsta Rap, Jazz Rap, Street Rap, Mainstream Rap, Old School, Pimp Rap, Pop Rap...* all of which are NOT mutually exclusive – for a glimpse into each genre, please refer to the following Wikipedia entry http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_hip_hop_genres.
- 10 For an in-depth discussion of the role of DJ (Disk-Jockey) and of the MC (Master of Ceremony / Master of Composition), see J.F. Mbaye (2009: 297–8).
- 11 Although the MC initially played a more entertaining role in this musical landscape where s/he was simply introducing the DJ to the crowd, I argue that the MC's part became predominant in the musical creation, evolving from 'Master of Ceremony' to 'Master of Composition'.
- 12 This is an extract from Matador's track 'Hip Hop Attitude' from the album *Vox Populi* (2012). English translation by the author based on the initial transcription and translation from Wolof produced by the Africulturban's team.
- 13 This album 'Présidents d'Afrique' is constructed around extracts of speeches given by Cheikh Anta Diop, Kwame Nkruma, Thomas Sankara, Patrice Lumumba, and with various references to Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire or Samory Touré.
- 14 Italics in original text.
- 15 Political expression in vocal music is of course not new, expressing either pro-establishment (national anthems) or anti-establishment (protest songs) messages.
- 16 See, for instance, Awadi's tracks 'J'accuse' and 'Stoppez-les'.
- 17 These are themes that Fou Malade and his collective 'Bat'haillons Blin-D' have especially favoured.
- 18 These are themes especially favoured by the female hip hop artist Sista Fa, who actively participated in a documentary film 'Sarabah', which focused on female genital mutilation.
- 19 See, for instance, Wa BMG 44's track 'Danger'.
- 20 'Sénégalérienne' is an expression created by Xuman from the group Pee Froiss in a track entitled 'Gunman'; this term originally draws on the contraction of the adjective 'sénégalais' (Senegalese in French) and 'galère' (which simultaneously means 'galley' and 'pain').
- 21 'Hip Hop Education' is a project developed by Matador's association Africulturban, through which hip hop artists intervene in primary schools in order to provide artistic activities (concerts, workshops, etc.) as well as to encourage, in partnerships with pupils and teachers, the amelioration of the studying conditions (cleaning up schools, lobbying for funding for better infrastructure).
- 22 See <http://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/country/senegal/overview>, accessed 1 July 2013.
- 23 See <http://www.minfinances.sn/ppsir21.html>, accessed 1 July 2013.
- 24 *Y'en A Marre* means 'fed up' or 'enough is enough' in French.
- 25 *Set Setal* means 'clean and make clean' in Wolof. It was a youth and local movement centred on the neighbourhood in opposition to national movements, the most spectacular expressions of which were wall frescoes, and with *mbalax* as its distinctive soundtrack. This movement was considered as a symbolic response to the tragic border dispute with neighbouring country, Mauritania in 1989.
- 26 *Boul Faalé* means 'don't worry', 'never mind' in Wolof. It is the title of the first musical cassette released by the Senegalese hip hop pioneer group, Positive Black Soul in 1994, in which the group formulated a vehement discourse denouncing the corruption of the PS (Diouf's political party) then in power.
- 27 'Musical enterprises in Senegal', 2009, identified 13 fully equipped rehearsal rooms (both private and public), among which two belonged to hip hop artists, who had invested in this essential material for live performances.
- 28 In Senegal, a quarter of the duplication units belong to hip hop entrepreneurs. One should note however, that they are primarily artisanal burning units rather than proper industrial duplication plants.
- 29 I refer here to the brand '*Bull Doff*' created by the hip hop artist and choreographer, Baay Sooley.
- 30 Positive Black Soul, for instance, would regularly call upon young people of their neighbourhood to be the security during their performances. While these young people used to hanging around in the streets became members of this group's crew occupying the 'function' of bodyguards, after ten years of 'informal' practice, they officially created their bodyguard agency – Delta Force – that is now linked to the Studio Sankara.
- 31 For each release of an album, in Senegal, one needs to declare to the Copyrights Bureau (BSDA) the number of copies to be placed on the market, and to pay the rights for mechanical reproduction through the payment of stamps for each copy.
- 32 See http://p2pfoundation.net/4.1.C_Peer_Governance_a_a_third_mode_of_governance, accessed 1 July 2013.

- 33 Gabao Hip Hop Festival (Gabon); Waga Hip Hop Festival (Burkina Faso); Hip Hop Kankpe Festival (Benin); Assallamalekoum Festival (Mauritania); Hip Hop Awards (Senegal); Festival Festa'2H. (Senegal); Togo Hip Hop Awards (Togo); Guinean Africa Rap Festival (Guinea-Conakry); Hip Hop Wassa Festival (Niger); Mali Hip Hop Awards (Mali); but also in non-Francophone countries: Big Up GB – Movimento Hip Hop Festival (Guinea-Bissao); Hi-Life Festival (Ghana).
- 34 Interview published by the Senegalese Press Agency, APS. Les '72 Heures Hip Hop', événement fédérateur du mouvement (organisateur).