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Euroscapes in Senegal Seen Through the Lense of the Hip Hop Movement

Euroscapes au Sénégal vu à travers le lense du mouvement Hip Hop

Nannette Abrahams

AUTHOR’S NOTE

A shorter version of this article has been presented during the concluding event of FP7 Project EuroBroadMap, Visions of Europe in the World, 2 December 2011, Rouen, France.

Introduction

1 “Y’en a marre ci naxa salèbi woku dox deug dumoyu ci laissez aller bi”
   I am fed up with the slackness taking place in this country
   (anthem from collective «y en a marre» 2011)

2 Headlines on Senegal have shifted from dead migrant bodies along Europe’s popular holiday island resorts during the years 2005-08 towards political unrests during the recent pre-election period in 2011/12. In a way both occasions can be described as strategies of resistance by predominantly Senegalese youth.

3 Migrants decision to take overfilled fishing boats along Senegal’s coast to “exit” in direction to the Canary Islands under life-risking conditions coined “Barça wala Barsax” (meaning Barcelona or die trying in Wolof) can be interpreted as forms of countering increasingly restrictive European immigration, visa and bordering policies that accompanied the Schengen process. Europe in turn reacted with the installment of the Global Approach to Migration in 2005 that seeks to manage migration along three axes: development and migration, the control of “illegal migration”, and legal labor migration. The presupposed turn in how Europe seeks to govern migration from a hard power to soft power approach however is accompanied with increased and technologically advanced
re-bordering practices. In context of The Hague program (2004) European border controls were externalized via agencies such as Frontex. Senegal is considered as one of Europe’s “success stories” in the combat against “illegal” migration through European border policies put in place in “cooperation” with African states far beyond European territory. Nonetheless migration in Senegal has not turned into an obsolete notion of the past but now-a-days attention has drifted from dead migrant bodies along Europe’s popular holiday island resorts towards casualties during political unrests in Senegal.

Likewise the migrants who chose to “exit” Senegal during the mid-2000s it was also foremost youth in “waithood” (Honwana 2012, Navtej Dhillon and Traik Yousef 2007, Diane Singerman 2007) that took to the streets during the current political demonstrations that ended up bringing about the second Senegalese “Alternance”. The first Alternance refers to Abdouly Wade’s inauguration on 19 March 2000 a historic date for the Senegalese people putting an end to 40 years of rule of the socialist party. Wade’s political campaign focusing on youth employment and anti-corruption yielded especially among Senegalese youth. At the time the Senegalese hip-hop milieu played a crucial role in helping Wade to power not directly but indirectly by using their popularity as a driving force to politically mobilize the youth to make use of the voting rights. Hip-hop agency in Senegal is closely linked to this identification of bringing about “democratic” change and using arts as a voice of resistance.

The introductory quote, taken from the anthem of a collective of Senegalese rappers called “y en a marre” roughly translated as “I’m fed up” or “enough is enough” symbolizes the continuity of Senegalese hip-hop activism during the recent pre-election period in Senegal. Y en a marre originated at the beginning of 2011 in nostalgia of the “bread and roses” revolution in Tunisia. Their youth movement presents both a continuation as well as a radicalization of Senegalese hip-hop agency. Their combat for “democratic change” and social justice reflected the political disillusion felt among the young generation who had grown up under Wade’s failed promise as part of a young African generation growing up under post-independence in context of globalization processes (see Katz 2004, Burgess 2005, Abbink and van Kessel 2005; Honwana and de Boeck 2005; Christiansen et al. 2006, Honwana 2012). It is a disenfranchised generation who are encouraged by neoliberal discourses to become globalized consumers whilst pushed into notions of patriotism and religious expectations by their governments and religious leaders (Honwana 2012: 5). It is in this context that Senegalese youth imitated, incorporated and re-interpreted hip-hop culture in their own geographic imagination (Gregory 1994). It is also in this context that many Senegalese youth chose to escape the ‘social malaise’ by taking the boats to Europe during Wade’s second re-election in 2007. However by 2012 the “choice” to exit via boat had been governed almost impossible and instead youth took to the streets in order to “voice” their rights and fight for political change once again under the lead of the hip-hop movement.

In light of the situation along Senegalese shores and migrants increasingly illegalized journey to Europe as well as in light of the critical activist tradition of the Senegalese hip-hop milieu a flyer (see fig. 1) I had received during the World Social Forum (WSF) 2011 in Dakar from a hip-hop cultural-activists organization called Africulturban struck my attention. The flyer promotes an awareness campaign against illegal migration financed by the IOM, a major and often criticized actor (see Georgi 2010) in what Walters and Andrijasevic (2010) call “the international government of borders”. It made no sense to me why a critical milieu that engages itself in fights for social justice, and whose
members especially in the case of Africulturban live in socio-economic precarious situations and fall exactly in the European categorization of potential “illegal immigrant”, was promoting a discourse that at first sight seems to portray an uncritical reproduction of an European border regime. At first sight the narrative on the flyer seems to reflect a biopolitical securitization of migration by raising awareness that sensitizes “Against Illegal Migration and Aids” thereby constructing migration one as an illegal category and secondly as a threat to life in line with Aids.

With the help of ethnographic research conducted in Senegal during 2011 and 2012 and using interpretive methodology (Yanow 2003) and popular geopolitics (Dittmer and Dodds 2008), this paper makes two connected claims. First, that the hip-hop discourse against “illegal migration” does not represent a simple reproduction of a European securitization rather it entails also a geopolitical critique towards Europe. Hip-hop narratives on migration do not share the same ambition as migrant activist’s discourses for the right to migrate however both discourses share notions of a borderless world and confront Europe’s antagonism. Secondly, the local fight of the Senegalese hip-hop movement to “voice” ones rights needs to be understood in interrelation with migrant’s choice to “exit” in context of ongoing re-bordering and globalization processes.

Figure 1: Flyer from Africulturban.

Ethnographic Mapping of Euroscapes in Senegal

From a poststructural theoretical lens research questions focus on the how instead of the why that is how knowledge in a certain field is produced, which discourses arise from that and how this grid is interrelated to certain forms of identity production. Such a Foucauldian (1977-78) research perspective is at the back of the securitization literature
be it in regard to borders (Rajaram/Grundy-Warr 2007), migration (Bigo 2000, 2006, Huysmans 2000, 2006) or development (Duffield 2010). It can be understood as a continuation of critical social theory (Lemke 2008: 12; Dean 1999: 3; Ziai 2006: 11) that uses constructivist qualitative instead of quantitative methods by putting the “Werturteilsfreiheit” [objective truth] into question and taking the social construction of realities into account (Horkheimer 1937). Such methodological flexibility within the research process makes it possible to look at the problem of European migration regime from the other side that is through the perception of an artist-activists movement. During my ethnographic research in Senegal in 2011 and 2012 I was able to acquire repeated insights into the Senegalese hip-hop milieu using interpretive methods (Yanow 2003: 9). I conducted over twenty interviews with well-known artists and cultural operators in the scene, and did participant observations during festivals, trips, etc., supplemented by what Klaus Dodds (2008) calls popular geopolitics that is a qualitative analysis of relevant rap songs, video-clips and films produced in the milieu. This field research period took place during a time prior and following the Senegalese presidential and parliamentary elections in 2012 that led to Macky Sall’s victory on 25 March 2012 who defeated his predecessor and former mentor Abdoulaye Wade. The analysis of the hip-hop milieu during this time of political tension and change enabled significant insights into the relationship between the Senegalese hip-hop scene and their role as political activist and the interconnection of this activism to their perceptions on migration.

In order to analyze this form geopolitical agency that develops in relation to fluid border practices transcending clear distinctions between “inside” and “outside” this paper uses the terminology of agency as developed in the border securitization literature of Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2007). In contrast to a static and inflexible notion of the border, the term “borderscapes” allows an analysis of the border “as mobile, perspectival, and relational” (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007: x). The border here is neither understood in traditional terms of the nation-state and static notions of enclosed territory, nor is the border understood as an overcome entity of the past, replaced by a “borderless world” (Ohmae 1990). The border is understood as a zone where territorial resolutions collapses, where living experiences cross cut and cross over into unintended spaces, where the construction of what is “inside” and “outside” of the border are merged. Agency in this context is “given life by, fluid border practices that fold inward and outward” (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007: xi).

“The term borderscapes is an entry point, allowing for a study of the border as mobile, perspectival, and relational” (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007: X).

“Politics of becoming” are linked to political process and disconnected from rigid territorial notions of community and become an act of social performance through effective identity performance. Hence, this conceptual terminology is an interesting starting point when looking at fuzzy identifications with the border, especially when trying to analyze forms of identity construction that are at the same time mobile and local that act locally but at the same time move in transnational encounters, as is the case with the Senegalese hip-hop milieu. In order to analyze agency and Senegalese hip-hop perceptions in regard to the externalization of European migration policies to Senegal this article uses the term “euroscapes” in the style of “borderscapes” to emphasize the crisscrossing element of current European re-bordering practices within and beyond the border. Euroscapes have been deployed to Senegal in a significant manner as of 2006 in
context of the Global Approach to Migration. A part from being a key “partner” country for European Union (EU) development policies, Senegal is furthermore a crucial “partner” in regard to European migration policies. Thus, Senegal is an interesting case study when addressing the critical geopolitical question of how such “geo-graphing” of eurosca pes in Senegal has been practiced, especially because “geo-power” is not an “innocent”, “natural” geographic representation of the world but rather “a product of histories of struggle between competing authorities over power to organize, occupy, and administer space” (Ó Tuathail 1996: 1, 2).

“Geography was not something already possessed by the earth but an active writing of the earth by an expanding, centralizing imperial state. It was not a noun but a verb, a geo-graphing, an earth-writing by ambitious endo-colonizing and exocolonizing states who sought to seize space and organize it to fit their own cultural visions and material interests” (Ó Tuathail 1996: 2).

Since this geopolitical production of space during imperial and colonial times plays an important role in historic relations between Europe and Africa it is important to consider how such a geo-graphing is re-activated into current ways of ‘doing border’. The way how events of “floods” of illegalized migrants leaving West Africa’s coastal shores towards the Canary Islands in modified fishing boats called “pirogue” from spots like Nouadhibou (Mauretania bordescapes with Morocco), over St. Louis (northern Senegal bordescapes with Mauretania), to Kayar, and Dakar’s Banlieues, up to the Casamance (south Senegal bordescapes with The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau) were mass-mediatized and made knowledgeable via cartographic (e.g. Frontex maps) devises and other forms of international expertise (e.g. IOM) is a modern way of re-writing the earth not by a centralizing imperial nation-state but as part of a Europeanization and Schengen process. After the incidents of Ceuta and Melilla in 2005 where African migrants succeeded in breaking through the border fences whilst others were shot down by Moroccan and Spanish border police and in context of increasing sea-route migration from West Africa to the Canary Islands the various European heads of state exerted pressure on the European Commission to provide fast strategic answers of how to deal with the question of international migration that ended with the implementation of the “Global Approach to Migration” (Tsianos and Ibrahim 2009: 2). The construction of migration as a security threat and the criminalization of “illegal” migrants had started on level of European member states since the mid-1980s “and are now an integral part of European Union (EU) policies” (Lavenex 1999: 2). The abolishment of internal border controls and the promotion of freedom of movement go hand in hand with the transformation of border checks to the “external frontiers” (Walters 2002: 561). However, with the application of the Global Approach migration is not only constructed as a security threat to the receiving countries but also for the life of the migrant himself. The novelty of this “holisitic” migration management approach is supposed to be a conceptual turn declaring migration no longer as a “problem” but as a “normal process” that if “managed” in the “right” way can benefit all, which is why emphasis is put on the implication of third countries (Geiger and Pécoud 2012: 11).

It is in this context that a European migration and border regime was externalized to West Africa in such ways that until present eurosca pes are practiced on Senegalese air, sea, and land territory way beyond Europe’s external borders. Europe’s border agency Frontex first joint sea operations, Hera I and II, took place in 2006 along the coastal shores of Senegal, Mauretania and Cape Verde in an effort to prevent migration before it
even happens and still remains a focal point in European externalization practices. It is a heterogeneous grid consisting of bilateral cooperation between Spain and Senegal with the collaboration of various other EU member states and the EU agencies Frontex and Europol as well as different Senegalese agencies such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Senegalese Army that make up a “localized border regime” (Kasperek and Wagner 2012: 174) in Senegal. In consideration of how far European re-bordering practices have penetrated into the national politics of the EU’s “partner” countries the critical question that needs to be addressed here is what kind of geopolitical counter agency does such discourse produce among a young generation “unwanted” in Europe an “in waithood” at home?

**Hip-Hop Galsen Moving in Translocal Borderscapes**

In contrast to the term euroscape that signifies the way how European migration policies are governed beyond European territory the term translocal borderscapes is used to describe the way how hip-hop culture developed in Senegal. Senegalese hip-hop is a very interesting locale when investigating perceptions and forms of agency that develop in a context where the border is reactivated under new conditions in emerging transnational social spaces (Rumford 2005 in: Andrijasevic and Walters 2010: 978). This paper uses the term translocal instead of transnational in order to stress the simultaneousness of an artistic-activist form of agency that developed in specific geographic locations whilst simultaneously moving in encounters that transcend the sphere of specific neighborhoods, cities, states, regions and continents. Not only does migration constitute a relevant topic within Senegalese rap songs although it is not the main thematic priority, but also can it be placed in a setting where living experiences cross over into unintended spaces. As highlighted in the borderscapes terminology acts of social performance are linked to political process and disconnected from rigid territorial notions (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007: xi) which becomes obvious when looking at the way how hip-hop activism in Senegal emerged and is practiced.

During the late 1980s early 1990s when the hip-hop scene first started to develop in Senegal it can be more or less described as an attempt to copy US-based hip-hop culture and role models such as Public Enemy, Zulu Nation and the likes whose music and magazines had been circulated to Senegal via Senegalese migrants in Europe or the United States. This phase of imitation was a time where hip-hop Galsen tried to find its own cultural voice and identity in inspiration of U.S. hip-hop pioneers and artists of the golden age era but translated into everyday realities of an urban Senegalese environment. Galsen stands for Senegal in the French youth language Verlan (Sen(e) + Gal backwards) and is a terminology often used within the milieu to express the geographic distinctive feature of a U.S.-based but globalized youth culture and art form. By the end 1990s this search process had been completed and hip-hop Galsen had developed its very own, context and time specific character that played out in form of political engagement of the scene during the first “Alternance” in 2000. What had started out as an imported culture product had over time been glocalized and turned into a very specific Senegalese linguistic, normative and cultural form of expression. Whereas early rap songs would be held in English or French Cool Kox6 from Pee Froiss introduced the Wolof turn which still presents the most dominant language within Senegalese Rap, however simultaneously in mixture with French and English, thus linguistically moving in translocal borderscapes.
The translation from English to Wolof of Public Enemy’s influential song “fight the power” by Ndongo D from Dara J raised awareness among Senegalese youth that hip-hop was more than just fun it was a new powerful platform of expression. The in-cooperation of words as a weapon and as an outlet for critical reflection of society nourished the urge to “exteriorize” what the Senegalese youth felt in their hearts about their country (African Underground 2009). Hip-hop “became the Esperanto of youth rebellion and a generation-defining movement” portraying a “polycultural generation’s worldview” that transformed not only American youth culture (Chang 2007):

«On rap avec notre langages et on parle de notre histoire. L’Américain il se habille comme ça mais il parle de ce qu’il vie. L’Européen il dit ce que ce passe chez lui. Et c’est ça la culture hip-hop! Et il nous permet de comprendre à travers ces lyrics comment, qu’est-ce que se passe réellement en France ou dans son pays et nous en faisons notre rap on permet au Hip-Hoppeur Européen ou Américain de comprendre réellement ce que ce passe en Afrique.» (Matador Interview July 2012)

This linguistic turn opened new spaces for normative and cultural forms of expression that developed in differentiation to US-based hip-hop and in accordance as well as challenging traditional and religious Muslim educational values. The process of finding its own cultural identity went hand in hand with its development as a voice of the voiceless rapping about political and religious corruption, social malaise and injustice often with severe consequences for their personal life’s. Thus, effective identity construction enabled the engagement of the milieu in acts of socio-political performance that managed to develop a significant mobilizing force amongst Senegalese youth during the regime change in 2000 helping Abdoulaye Wade indirectly to power. This political engagement has re-gained momentum during the current elections most prominently in form of the youth movement “y en a marre”. Y en a marre started as a collaboration of Senegalese rappers founded on 16 January 2011 that is exactly two days after Ben Ali had fled Tunisia by the rap-group KeurGui from Kaolack and a journalist friend of theirs. They addressed the difficult living situations in Senegal starting with ongoing electricity cuts, high living costs, food insecurity, unemployment, education, health, political pressure of religious leaders and most of all the bad governance under Wade’s regime, thus it started as a national struggle addressing local needs but nonetheless very much in mood of the Tunisian revolution. Y en a marre was launched to the press on 18 January with support of the popular Dakar rappers Simon Jolof4Life and Fou Malade whose involvement increased the attention the collective enjoyed. The spontaneous development of the Tunisian revolution and the actual fall of Ben Ali that was taking place within immediate vicinity at that point in time very much encouraged the notion that actively stating “enough is enough” could actually bring about political change.

Y en a marre: A local fight for global rights?

Although y en a marre’s socio-political engagement urging citizens to make use of their voting rights stands very much in continuation of Senegalese hip-hop tradition this paper argues that the way how socio-political performance was enacted by the movement y en a marre reached another more radical dimension which needs to be understood in a global revolutionary context. The genesis and also popularity of y en a marre’s local fight for social citizenship or rather a people-centered government needs to be situated in a context that transcends or maybe rather crisscrosses Senegal’s territorial frontiers. What
had started as a typical Senegalese political discussion around cups of Ataya (green tea) in January only turned into a movement on Wade’s symbolic victory day on 19 March 2011 that is after relevant translocal encounters had taken place during the occasion of the WSF in Dakar from 6 – 11 February 2011. That day y en a marre with the support of the entire hip-hop scene organized a massively attended public assembly in a symbolic act of reclaiming the historic date for the Senegalese people. This event marked a new form of enacting hip-hop agency that transcended the mere use of lyrics; the rappers climbed on stage denouncing Wade’s bad governance whilst petitions addressed at the international community were passed among the spectators. On 23 June 2011 this modified form of hip-hop agency further radicalized. This was the first day of violent confrontations that reoccurred in January and February prior to the first election round between national security forces and demonstrators’ opposing Wade’s planned constitutional changes. Y en a marre actively participated in the demonstrations by openly calling out for a revolution; the slogan “Ne Touche Pas Ma Constitution” turned into «Wade Dégage!».

20 «C’est [y en a marre] un mouvement d’éveille, c’est un mouvement qui va constituer une sentinelle un mouvement régulateur entre les politiques et les populations, parce que jusqu’à présent nous en Afrique beaucoup des pays ils ont que des populations mais ils n’ont pas encore des peuples, parce que quand le peuple n’a pas le pouvoir de décision ça veut dire que ce n’est pas encore un peuple c’est des populations.» (Thiat de Keur Gui Interview May 2011)

21 Although y en a marre’s political activism stands very much in continuation of hip-hop Galsen agency and despite the fact that they were not the only rappers involved in the recent regime change their political performativity to create a regulatory body between politicians and the people was more radically put into direct actions. Their intense participation in the demonstrations or “going towards” the population through community meetings and activism and the political repercussions they faced portrays a changed mode of enacting hip-hop agency beyond narratives. In regard to the previous involvement of the hip-hop milieu during Wade’s coming to power it makes sense that the discourse of “enough is enough” needed to be performed in a more radical way of “turning words into action” (Thiat 2011) in order to once again develop a major mobilization force among the youth. This fight significantly developed as of 23 June, that day the oppositional movement M23 was born and joined forces with the youth movement y en a marre and together they were able to build up enough political pressure in order to have Wade withdraw the proposed constitutional changes in the end bringing about the regime change. Both sides needed the platform of the other to push their cause. The base for those networks was made during the WSF where the leaders of y en a marre established the necessary connections with international activists and Senegalese civil society backed by international NGOs who are a driving element within the M23. Y en a marre used the forum to promote their newly founded collective y en a marre and a previously released rap compilation by Fou Malade and Thiat addressing the annulation of “Third World” debt; a topic connecting the social malaise people were suffering in Senegal to issues of concern to the anti-globalization movement. It was this combination of socio-economic inequalities discussed with a focus on Africa due to the spatiality of the forum and the historic momentum of the Arab Spring with Mubarak’s fall taking place that underlined the significance of the y en a marre movement. The space of the WSF played a role in turning y en a marre from a discourse to a local movement that developed in translocal borderscapes.
“Xippil xol, yewul bok, mungi nathie, yangi nelaw, Senegalais yangi nelaw. [Ouvre les yeux et regarde, réveille-toi, il commence à faire jour, tu dors toujours. Sénégalais tu dors.] (Matador, Xippil Xol, 2007)

The radicalization of hip-hop agency in a global revolutionary context encouraged a disillusioned generation to believe in the authenticity of y en a marre’s struggle as a proclaimed “a-political” movement for the people. The analysis of youth as political actor or as citizen goes hand in hand with societal transformations along the lines of a generation gap. Youth in Africa develops agency in a way that “both conform(s) to and challenge(s) the standards imposed on them by traditional hierarchies, national politics, and global forces” (Honwana 2012: 14). The Senegalese youth that took to the streets in 2011/12 either via mobilization of the oppositional movement M23 or via the youth movement y en a marre, or spontaneously shared the common ground of being part of a young Senegalese generation “in waithood”. They had witnessed hope’s set into the first Alternance and grew up under Wade’s failed promise during a time when Europe’s Africa pessimism had gone hand in hand with increasingly restrictive immigration and asylum policies that under a Europeanization process had led to the externalization of European migration-security interests to Senegal. The installment of a localized border regime to Senegal as of 2006 had by 2010 “effectively” shut down the “choice” of migrants to “exit” or rather rendered it more difficult, more expensive and increased the accompanying insecurities. As Matador analysis in his famous slam-song “Xippil Xol” from 2007 after 7 years of Wade’s reign “social malaise” and political corruption had not been erased on the contrary they had once again reached a point where the youth fled into one of three options; taking the boats to Europe, becoming religious Talibé (followers), or criminals. Matador’s plea to the Senegalese people in this song is to “open your eyes” and “wake up” to take a stand and bring about change basically what happened with the y en a marre movement five years later. The question is why had the political activism of the hip-hop milieu reached another climax in 2011/12 and not in 2007 even though socio-economic pressures existed at the time. This paper claims that y en a marre was able to develop the mobilizing force of the youth at that point in time due to an interconnected process of inner societal and external mechanisms of exclusion that pushed people to the street in Senegal in order to take up a local fight to “voice” ones rights. Between 2007 and 2011 the social “malaise” in Senegal had increased as result of interconnected national and global dynamics. On the one hand Wade’s politics encouraged a growing gap between the poor and the newly rich elite on the other hand the world food and financial crisis (e.g. reduction of remittances from migrants, ILO 2010) had effected the socio-economic situation in Senegal. This happened in a context where the presupposed “normative shift” in European policies from a merely restrictive towards a more development-oriented migration management approach has not led to a change on level of its practices (Lavenex und Kunz 2008), or rather that the primarily geopolitical goal stays to combat the constructed threat of “illegal” migration (Tsianos and Ibrahim 2009: 1). Such “political dynamics of fear” define the border as a tool of exclusion and inclusion aiming to protect a community against the constructed threat of otherness characterized by the demonized migrant (Rajaram/Grundy-Warr 2007: X). Thus, the way how current European migration-border policies are practiced does two things at the same time. It reactivates geopolitical traditions of the border as propagated by the concept of the nation-state differentiating between those who belong and those who don’t (Sidaway 2007) between those categorized as “wanted” and “unwanted” (Shamir 2005, Bigo 2007),
as “legal” and potentially “illegal”, between those governed “mobile” and “immobile”. At the same time a transformed definition of how to best govern migration includes a biopolitical management of mobile populations by not only constructing the migrant as a “threat” but also as a “victim” thus reinforcing the “urgency” of re-bordering politics to “save and protect” the “bare life” of the migrant. In that sense traditional geopolitical discourses are reactivated as well as biopoliticized simultaneously—highlighting this multiplicity and complexity of and at the border. From this research perspective one needs to address the question of a “new political” which looks at “community and agency that work within and against, and are given life by, fluid border practices that fold inward and outward” (Rajaram/Grundy-Warr 2007: Xi). This paper argues that the successful political performativity of the Senegalese hip-hop milieu needs to be analyzed as a “politics of becoming” linked to political process and disconnected from rigid territorial notions of community. The search for more ‘democracy’ and more equal political, social and economic rights that had pushed people to the Tahrir Square (bordermonitoring.eu 2011) had also pushed people to take to the streets in Senegal in 2011/12. It is the same search that encouraged African migrants to previously take the boats to claim the freedom of movement otherwise denied by European geo-graphing of mobility and immobility.

Migrant’s choice to “exit” and the hip-hop milieu political activism to “voice” their rights and take up the local fight for socio-political change at home are not the same choices but they are not opposites either rather they developed in relation to each other. This is clear not only in regard to the mobilization force of the youth but also in regard to national security forces they were confronted with during the manifestations. The main way how the pillar to “control illegal migration” of the Global Approach had been practiced in Senegal was by strengthening Senegal’s national security forces through training, ‘expertise’ and facilitation of technology. From the point of view of European security actors this was argued to be in the national security interest of Senegal confronted with the human tragedy of the loss of a generation (brain drain dilemma) either at sea or when managing to emigrate. It seems quite cynical that those European re-bordering politics that directly blocked a disillusioned generation at home and indirectly helped mobilizing the youth to fight for political change had also equipped the national security forces whose job it was to suppress those demonstrations in the name of security. The charm of y’en a marre’s fight for social justice to create more of a balance between the rulers and the ruled seems to capture the Zeitgeist not only within its immediate territory in Senegal and bordering regions as triggered off by the Arab spring but also in the OECD world where socio-economic inequalities have increased (OECD report 2008) and erupted in socio-economic tensions as in London or Greece or via the “occupy movements”.

“North and South, First World and Third World, are no longer ‘out there’ but nestled together within all the world’s major cities. (Ankie Hoogvelt 1997)”

Those different struggles might not be directly connected to each other but they all address growing socio-economic inequalities according to their specific time space compression. Y en a marre was able to radicalize hip-hop agency in a way that successfully contributed to bringing about political change due to this revolutionary global context between ‘have and have nots’ which is why their local struggle of “enough is enough” can be understood as a translocal fight for citizenship. In this sense this paper suggests to understand y en a marre’s local combat also as an act of translocal citizenship.
that started as a reaction to regional events and local conditions and developed in a
global context where “political dynamics of fear” and insecurity are understood as direct
repercussions of globalization. This radical hip-hop discourse functions in relation to a
border regime defined as “a grid spread across transnational space of processes of
production, communication and mobility (Shamir 2005)” where the construction of the
border can be understood as a counterpart to a mobile and unequal world (Andrijasevic/
Walters 2010: 978).

Hip-Hop Geopolitics of Mobility and Immobility

It is in this context of translocal borderscapes as part of how hip-hop agency was
performed in context of the y en a marre movement that the narrative on “illegal”
migration within the hip-hop milieu needs to be analyzed. The campaign was initiated
and launched by Africulturban at the peak time of migration via pirogue to Europe a topic
that was very present in day-to-day Senegalese life at the time. Consequently
Africulturban saw their responsibility as artists and activists to use the mobilizing force
of hip-hop to create awareness against “illegal” migration and its risks. This campaign
was then practiced through music using a Rap Compilation “Les Pirogues du Hip Hop Se
Mobilisent Contre La Migration Clandestine” (see fig. 2) that was performed during a
concert-tour in Senegal. During the concerts IOM t-shirts with the slogan «Le Bon Choix
C’est De Prendre La Voie Normale» were distributed. The IOM financed this project but it
was the hip-hop organization that initiated and implemented the project, driven by the
urge to react to what is happening to their fellow comrades on open seas between Africa
and Europe.

«La musique hip-hop c’est ça c’est pour lutter contre quelque chose de négative pour que
ça soit positive. [...] Donc si on voie dans la société que ça va mal c’est à nous les hip-
hoppeur de changer ça.» (Matador June 2012)
Even though it makes sense that the severe risks that such illegalized migration routes entail are problematized by those directly affected by them such narratives are highly problematic. Using the narrative of “illegal” migration seems to be a reproduction of a European border regime because it does not deconstruct problematic categorizations of illegal and legal migration which lead to a hierarchization of mobility. None of the interviewed rappers put this terminology into question apart from Didier Awadi, one of the pioneers in Senegalese hip-hop. Awadi clearly understands the term “illegal” or “clandestine” migration as a racist categorization a point he also makes in his recent pan-African documentary on migration called “Le Point de Vue du Lion” (2011). As already elaborated the risk discourse used by Africulturban and other rappers can also be found in a European securitization of migration that constructs migration as a threat not only to the receiving countries but also to the “illegal” migrants themselves. Hence from a critical migration research and activist perspective the engagement of the hip-hop milieu with the discourse of “illegal migration” in a way reproduces the “political dynamics of fear” that construct the border as a tool of exclusion and inclusion with the goal to protect a community against the constructed threat of otherness. However this paper argues that especially from a critical post-structural research perspective it is necessary to go more deeply into questions of how and in which context such discourses are practiced in order not to jump to premature conclusions.

As the above quote by Matador addresses in regard to the recent regime change to be a hip-hoppeur in Senegal is a conscious choice for critical reflection on issues foremost of inner-societal concern. Although the hip-hop galsen milieu over the last decade has undergone efforts to develop its organizational and financial structures it is still nowhere close to the commercial success of U.S. rappers. Thus, for a Senegalese youth to decide to
become a hip-hoppeur instead of a “Mbalax man” or “lutteur” is a conscious decision based on the motivation of a passion for an urban youth culture and for an art form that allows spaces of critical expression. Fame in this milieu compared to the other two options is much less based on material success instead success is much more about gaining a reputation based on street credibility. Nonetheless this poses a dilemma also reflected within the milieu as reproached by Gaston in his song Super Khonet Star (2007) demanding why Senegalese rappers are not paid for their work which pushes some to stay in Europe whereas the real “warrior” will never opt to escape – he stays to work. Another Senegalese rapper Nix challenges the externally projected notion of “lost hope” set into the African continent and the option to “exit” with the idea of engaging in a struggle to self-create the “African dream”:

31 “Basically in areas like music, you just cannot make it. You have to leave the country. That is why I called the album “The African Dream” because for me, it is very important. [...] a lot of people have started to lose hope, have started to say that there are some things you cannot achieve if you live in Africa. So I am asking, is this the African Dream? Is it just succeeding in a foreign land? Or is it staying here at home and struggling to make it happen, making sure that the African Dream exists here, in Africa, by Africa, for Africans, and in Africa, without feeling the need for aid or feeling the need to go abroad?” (Nix in African Underground Democracy in Dakar – Episode 5 2007)

32 It is a re-occurring notion I stumbled across when analyzing the development of political hip-hop agency in context of Senegalese migrant’s choice to exit the country and the installment of a European border regime to Senegal. I argue that it is crucial to consider this context of a negative external perception of Africa as a “lost continent” and the European perception of “victimized” but also “unwanted” people that developed as dominant rationality during the 1990s in order to better understand the development of hip-hop Galsen agency in relation to its narratives on “illegal” migration. Although Africulturban were the only ones who actually implemented a campaign “against illegal migration” their discourse is widely shared within the hip-hop milieu also among the rappers of y en a marre:

33 “Pour moi c’est inconcevable que des artistes aillent en Europe et y reste parce que pour nous le rap que nous faisons c’est un engagement et cet engagement ne nous permet pas de rester en Europe le Sénégal a besoin de nous ici pour dire leur problème. [...] en restant là en portant leur combat.” (Thiat de KeurGui May 2011)

34 Consequently the hip-hop discourse on «illegal migration» is not the same as that of migrant activist’s struggle promoting the right to migrate however both are strategies of resisting European geopolitics of mobility and immobility. The hip-hop narrative on “illegal” migration does not reproduce the European securitization of migration in the sense of criminalizing those who chose to “exit” it is just a different combat the choice being to “voice” ones rights at home. This is either done via critical lyrics or by actively taking to the streets as exemplified by the y en a marre movement or by contributing to the development of hip-hop culture through structures like Africulturban. Both forms of practicing hip-hop agency are aimed at creating alternative spaces of empowerment for African youth as counter-discourse to national corruption and unequal north-south “cooperation”. Since the identification as a hip-hop Galsen artist is intrinsically tied to its political activism it is in this same context that the issue of “illegal” migration is discussed within the milieu. It is a conscious choice of those artists who decided to return
home when traveling abroad in order to implement their local combat for socio-political change despite the everyday hindrances.

The focal point of hip-hop activism within Africulturban is the advancement of their organization initiated in 2006 by the rapper Matador and implemented on a voluntary basis through its members that seeks to use hip-hop culture to promote self-defined development in their immediate community of Pikine, the city of Dakar and in Senegal and the West African region. This paper argues that when taking a closer look at the way how Africulturban actually live and narrate transnational mobility through their rap songs and activities their discourse on “awareness [against illegal] migration” transcend a simple reproduction of a European border regime. The songs on their hip-hop compilation “against illegal migration” do not only talk about the insecurities that accompany illegalized migration they also confront Europe’s antagonism as a self-defined normative power and example of human rights whilst violating those of “illegal” migrants. The songs deconstruct the image of Europe as an “Eldorado” by pointing out the discrimination and racism African migrants encounter in Europe whilst challenging the nepotism of their own governments as basis for so called political “cooperation” between Europe and Africa practiced at the expense of the majority of the local population.

«Le soleil se lève sur les côtes des îles du Canaris. C’est la recherche de la clé qui ouvre le cap d’une sauve ta vie. Envoyé son enfant se faire tuer sur une pirogue c’est comme tiré une balle au cœur de sa famille. Pour quoi revenir ? C’est la honte, à la recherche d’une vie meilleure en Europe sans travail, sans papier, exploiter et à cavale. À seulement dire ce qu’on fout dans un pays qui parle des droits de l’homme. […] La migration clandestine c’est le nouveau business de l’océan c’est aussi le décès de l’enfant devant le mirage de l’occident. » (Pirogue 2 2008)

Furthermore the way how Africulturban enacts hip-hop culture in translocal borderscapes via their annual festival of urban culture, FESTA2H, or other music projects such as TRANZIK are indirectly practices of countering a European border regime. TRANZIK (see figure 3) is a hip-hop project initiated by Africulturban in cooperation with Spanish and Moroccan hip-hop artists that seeks to open a creative space for a dialogue on borders, racism, illegal migration and global inequalities. TRANZIK stands for the transit migration route between the three countries and hip-hop MUZIK, three Rappers and DJs from each country have met and performed together at festivals in the three countries, thus not only exchanging on the topic of international migration but also living transnational encounters through music. In that sense Africulturban practices hip-hop culture in a way that opens alternative spaces for south-north dialogue by lyrical and musical collaborations that exchanges on topics related to Afro-European relations or migration. Furthermore their festival is used as platform to promote hip-hop “made in Africa” as well as to enable translocal encounters and exchanges. Each year underground urban artist from European and other countries are invited to participate in the workshops and perform during the concerts thus creating unique spaces of international encounter. Whereas south-north artistic mobility is a well-established phenomenon, that becomes obvious when looking at the large number of Africa related festivals taking place all over Europe, the idea of having relatively unknown European artists perform in an African festival as an opportunity of intercultural exchange but also as means of career advancement is an interesting counter-notion. Those same encounters during the FESTA2H in Senegal lead to the participation of members of Africulturban during cultural
projects in Europe. Most artists and members of Africulturban are raised in Dakar’s Banlieue Pikine one of Dakar’s poorest suburbs; a marginalized urban space that represents living conditions of the majority of Dakar’s population. Under a European visa regime that hierarchizes mobility according to a risk discourse categorizing people into legal and potentially “illegal” most members of Africulturban who travel in the working context of their association to Europe fall exactly under this racized categorization of “unwanted”. Thus, in that sense Africulturban manages to create certain forms of hip-hop mobility that provide a counter-discourse to a European border regime.

Figure 3: TRANZIK photograph by JIF 2011

Deconstructing the Eldorado: A Geopolitical Critique

In conclusion both examples of hip-hop Galsen agency portrayed through the y en a marre movement as well as Africulturban are forms of socio-political performance that come to life in a context where re-bordering practices “fold inward and outward” as analyzed by the borderscapes literature (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007: xi). In that sense the hip-hop discourse against “illegal migration” does not represent a simple reproduction of a European securitization rather it entails also a geopolitical critique towards Europe. The way how cultural activism is practiced by the hip-hop milieu is twofold since it correlates a pan-African focus with moments of international mobility and exchange through the global medium of hip-hop culture reactivated in specific spaces. As a consequence of this form of hip-hop agency they create an alternative space in their community that neither Europe nor their African leaders cares to create for them. Even though their discourse does not directly represent the same claim of migrant activists for a borderless world as promoted during the World Charter of Migrants during the WSF 2011 in Gorée, they live hip-hop activism in a way that seeks to trans-pass territorial, juridical, social and mental boundaries.

Hence, hip-hop narratives on migration do not share the same ambition as migrant activist’s discourses for the right to migrate however both discourses share notions of a borderless world and confront Europe’s antagonism. Even though the hip-hop discourse
does not support the choice to “exit” at the risk of one’s life they do not judge this choice either, rather they engage in the advancement of strengthening local conditions and by doing so create ways of traveling against odds to Europe but under “legal” terms. The deconstruction of the Eldorado cannot be simply located as a reproduction of a European securitization of migration, instead it needs to be understood as a critical geopolitical reaction towards a European border regime with aggravated visa requirements and strengthened surveillance of illegalized routes. Rather than engaging in the autonomous choice to “exit” but under conditions that also entail various aspects of victimization as illegalized or criminalized aliens in a hostile environment, the general narrative of hip-hop Galsen is to engage in the local fight for self-defined development and citizenship in order to create alternative spaces for the next generation at home and to a larger extent also in international discourse. According to this perception Europe categorizes people into wanted and unwanted whilst simultaneously pursuing neocolonial interests in Africa. Europe is able to pursue these contradictory policies because governments such as Wade’s do not work in the interest of the majority of their citizens. Thus, the local fight of the hip-hop milieu - be it in context of bringing about political change or encouraging local development in marginalized urban spaces - can be understood as a geopolitical critique stating that there is ‘no inside’. The increased merging of what is constructed to be “inside” and “outside” of the border on a political level between Europe and Africa has left a young African generation “in waithood” increasingly confronted with re-bordering practices installed in context of ongoing globalization processes. Thus, the choice of the hip-hop Galsen generation to “voice” their rights is also a way of countering European re-bordering discourses that leave ‘no inside’, no way of escaping re-bordering practices be it in Europe or in Africa. At the same time hip-hop Galsen activism through its entanglement with translocal bordescapes offers different forms of living globalization among a young generation “fed up” with what is going on high level politics be it in Africa or in Europe.

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In contemporary concepts globalization is understood as a process interconnected to dynamics of re-bordering that develop in relation to political dynamics of fear. In this context the application of migration management is practiced as an externalization of European border controls to places like Senegal. Such practices are severely criticized by migrant activist who blame EU agencies and states ‘in cooperation’ with African states to violate basic human rights and the right to mobility. The campaign of the Senegalese hip-hop movement against “illegal” migration seems to stand in opposition to this migrant activists discourse. This paper argues that the way how the hip-hop scene imagines mobility and performs socio-political citizenship is not a reproduction of a European securitization of migration rather it can be understood as a geopolitical critic of European political relations with Africa.

En tant que concept contemporain, la globalisation est comprise comme un processus d’interconnexion entre des logiques de re-territorialisation et des dynamiques de peur. Dans ce contexte, la gestion des frontières européennes peut être considérée comme une externalisation en direction d’États comme le Sénégal. Ces pratiques sont sévèrement condamnés par des migrants activistes qui accusent les agences européennes et les États africains coopérants de violer les droits humains et notamment le droit à la mobilité. La campagne du hip hop sénégalais contre la migration illégale semble s’opposer à ce discours activiste. Cet article considère que la façon dont la scène hip hop se représente les mobilités et joue un rôle citoyen au niveau politique et social doit plutôt être comprise comme une critique géopolitique des relations européennes avec l’Afrique.

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Mots-clés: gestion des frontières, Borderscapes, Translocal, Hip Hop sénégalais, Migration

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