

**RESISTANCE STRATEGIES IN AFRICAN AMERICAN AND SENEGALESE HIP-HOP**

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**INTRODUCTION**

African American and Senegalese hip-hop are permeated with various kinds of ideological resistance strategies against racial and economic oppression. These musical forms use narrative tactics as well as cultural and political concepts that dismantle various local and transnational subjugations that have confronted African Americans or Senegalese during the past decades in the West. Subversive songs allow black musicians from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean to denounce the consequences of racism, globalization, and capitalism on their respective communities. By interpreting selected African American and Senegalese hip-hop songs, this essay reveals the drastic social and economic conditions that have led people of African descent from the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean to oppose dominance through music. Referring to specific hip-hop songs of African American and Senegalese artists, such as Dead Prez, Tupac Shakur, Xuman, and Bibson, this essay discusses their lyrics (from historical, cultural, and theoretical perspectives) as resistances against systemic forms of racial and economic oppression that have impaired the modern lives of blacks of both Africa and the West.

**RESISTANCE IN AFRICAN AMERICAN HIP-HOP**

Hip-hop is primarily an African American invention because rap (which is its antecedent) was born in the African American community where a hybrid black community of the Bronx, Harlem, and Queens, in New York City, created it. Migration was a major factor in the emergence of rap in the United States because the music was the product of a vibrant and diverse culture that Caribbean migrants had brought into New York City since the early twentieth century. Rap germinated from the blending between the rhythms of the Caribbean and African American populations in New York City in the late 1970s. In *American Popular Music: from Minstrelsy to MP3* (2007), Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman write:

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If hip-hop music was a rejection of mainstream dance music by young black and Puerto Rican listeners, it was also profoundly shaped by the techniques of disco DJs. The first celebrities of hip-hop music—Kool Herc (Clive Campbell, b. 1955 in Jamaica), Grandmaster Flash (Joseph Saddler, b. 1958 in Barbados), and Afrika Bambaataa (Kevin Donovan, b. 1960 in the Bronx)—were DJs who began their careers in the mid-1970s, spinning records at neighborhood block parties, gym dances, and dance clubs, and in public spaces such as community centers and parks. These three young men—and dozens of lesser-known DJs scattered throughout the Bronx, Harlem, and other areas of New York City and New Jersey—developed their personal styles within a grid of fierce competition for celebrity and neighborhood pride (377).

Therefore, like reggae, rap was born out of black communities that faced serious social, economic, and political limitations, reflecting the same kinds of dynamics that Ali Mazrui identifies as the recurrent exploitation and racism that have characterized European attitudes towards blacks.<sup>1</sup> As a legitimate form of literary narrative, rap reveals the dilemma of white elitism, classism, and racism that have alienated and impoverished blacks from a number of American inner-city neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> These communities from major cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, Baltimore and other metropolitan areas face rampant unemployment, lack of facilities, dysfunctional schools, poor housing, crime, and other structural inequalities that stemmed from the World War II era when whites refused blacks into their unions and later enforced subtle forms of housing, bus, and job segregations against them.<sup>3</sup> Even if they were not characterized by the open forms of de-facto segregation that shaped southern cities up-through the end of the 1960s, northern urban areas were not immune to racial bigotry against blacks. This bigotry is apparent in the infiltration of heroin and crack cocaine into black neighborhoods since the late 1960s and early 1970s, in which Vietnam War and police corruption played major roles. In *Pipe Dream Blues: Racism and the War on Drugs* (1991), Clarence Lusane writes:

<sup>1</sup> See Bate, Peter, 1986, *The Africans, a Triple Heritage. Number 4: Tools of Exploitation* (Chicago, IL: Films Incorporated), Videocassette.

<sup>2</sup> For a study of these structural injustices, see Richard Wright, 1987, *Native Son* (New York: Harper), 1-50; William Julius Wilson, 1990, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, (Chicago: University Press of Chicago), 1-60.

<sup>3</sup> For Detroit's example, see Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequalities in Postwar Detroit*, 1996 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 7-13.

The Vietnam War created thousands of Black addicts who would eventually become some of the key sources for drugs from Southeast Asia. With roadside access to heroin, opium, and hashish in Vietnam, many Black soldiers became addicts within a few months of their tour of duty. Although there was clear evidence that drug abuse among combat and support soldiers was growing, the U.S. Armed Forces refused to implement any serious treatment program or make an effort to halt trafficking (42).

Thus, a product stemming from the fields and war zones of Vietnam, where thousands of African American men were sent in the late 1960s and early 1970s to defend American interests, became one of the most destructive forces in the African American community. Racism cannot be taken out of this equation because the FBI's CO-INTEL PRO (also spelled as COINTEL PRO) allegedly played a major part in the devastation of the African American community during the 1970s. According to John S. Friedman, the COINTEL PRO was a counterintelligence program that the Federal Bureau of Investigation launched in 1956 in an attempt to circumvent "Supreme Court rulings that limited the [U.S.] government's power to act openly against so-called dissident groups" (223). The COINTEL PRO allowed FBI agents throughout the United States to harass African American activists and poor urban blacks, beginning a deadly cycle of arrests and imprisonments of such populations during the 1960s and 1970s. In his 2005 novel *Hustle*, the African American author Melki describes this period as a time when "all my uncles are in jail under COINTEL PRO. . . They ended up selling drugs, cracked-out, or in jail. Or, just plain fucken bitter! They made sure Negus paid for their activism-pay hard. Meanwhile my moms and me starving."<sup>4</sup>

In a similar vein, Bakari Kitwana suggests in *The Hip Hop Generation* (2002) the drastic impacts that racist policing and attitudes towards blacks have had on the African American community. Kitwana writes: "High imprisonment rates due to increased policing focused on drug crimes have landed nearly 1 million Black men, many of them hi-hop generationers, behind bars. The crack explosion of the 1980s further heightened middle-class fears of Black violent crime. Despite higher rates of monthly drug use among whites, lawmakers insisted on more concentrated policing in Black communities" (40). Consequently, as Kitwana explains, a number of blacks who grew up in the alienated black inner-city neighborhoods ended up joining "street

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<sup>4</sup> Melki, 2005, *Hustle*, (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse), 163.

gangs and cliques” and/or “selling drugs” because they viewed these activities as their most viable options “in the face of limited meaningful employment” (39). By the mid-1990s, guns had also spread into these black communities, leading to rampant and chaotic levels of violence similar only to those one witnesses among African rival rebel groups with thousands of guns that are dispersed into vulnerable societies by the manipulative forces of reckless political corruption, greed, capitalism, and racism. Rap and hip-hop are music that African American artists who witnessed the above dilemma in their neighborhoods use to narrative the stories of their lives and people. In an interview with Robert Walsh, Touré captures this dimension when he says:

Crack definitely helped to shape the world in which hip-hop was born. The destruction that we saw surround us rapped about, as well as the money that the dealers were making, was to fund hip-hop, in many cases, to start an actual record label or just giving an amateur rapper money to live and floss. So, we’re seeing crackheads and that gives us something to write about and we’re also getting financed in some cases by the actual drug dealers and we also have a lot of guys mimicking or patterning themselves after actual drug dealers. Guys like Snoop Dogg, 50 Cent, Biggie, and Jay-Z said often that they came from that life, but, more importantly, they seem to be bringing the mien of the drug dealer with them into the industry. So yeah, crack has had a huge impact on hip-hop. (Walsh 777)

Yet, hip-hop artists have not historically allowed oppression to limit the conditions of their people. These artists have often drawn on African traditions to resist racism and economic exploitation. As suggested in his adopted name, Afrika Bambaataa is a major figure of hip-hop who has been credited for having started the stream of Afrocentric metaphors which permeated new-school hip-hop music such as those of Arrested Development, Black Star, and the Roots. This Afrocentric stream is also evident in Bambaataa’s own name. In “Uptown Throwdown” (2004), David Toop says that Bambaataa’s name (Afrika Bambaataa Asim) “is taken from a nineteenth-century Zulu chief” and means “Chief Affection” (233). Afrika Bambaataa’s adoption of a Zulu name is an important cultural tool that allows him to use African tradition as a means to inspire an Afrocentric community that can resist Western taste and obsession for guns which, like alcohol and mirrors, have been the deadly tools of racism, imperialism, and other exploitations against blacks. Bambaataa celebrates the idea of a united community, allowing African Americans who had been subjected to the poverty and unemployment of Reaganomics to overcome difficult times. Bambaataa’s celebration of community is apparent in the song “Zulu

Nation Throwdown” that he produced with Soul Sonic Force in 1980. This song has strong communalism which is apparent in the first part of the poem which reads:

We do a routine and put on a show  
And we dedicate it to the people we know  
We're one of a kind, we're easin the mind  
The Zulu Nation say time after time.<sup>5</sup>

This song has important African-centered elements which are evident in its celebration of a community that is united by a spirit of togetherness and dedication to one another. The poem is inspired by Chaka Zulu's resistance against British colonialism in the early nineteenth century that has earned him so much respect among intellectuals who see him as a symbol of nationalism in the Black world. This characteristic of Chaka is apparent in Thomas Mofolo's 1909 novel *Chaka* which, as Nhlanhla Maake argues, mythologizes the South African ruler as “the man who forged the Zulu nation and empire in the early nineteenth century out of disparate clans and tribal groups” (67). Yet Chaka was not just a great leader, since he also embodied unimaginable cruelty, blood thirst, and incomprehensible violence.<sup>6</sup> For instance, as Nhlanhla Maake points out, in Mofolo's novel, “He [Chaka] becomes so ambitious that he even kills the only person he loves, the most beautiful Noliwa, as a sacrifice, at Isanusi's prompting. Isanusi puts his propositions to Chaka in such a deceptive manner that Chaka thinks that he is making a voluntary choice, whereas his fate is being manipulated by Isanusi. From the death of Isanusi, Chaka becomes a beast who kills indiscriminately. After shedding much blood, perhaps worse than Macbeth, the end of his life approaches inexorably with a foreboding sense of tragedy.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Chaka's life ended in tragedy as he was murdered by three associates, including two of his half-brothers, who put an end to one of the most savage killing against the Zulu people. Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Kwame Anthony Appiah give the following example of Chaka's atrocity: “Shaka's mother died in 1826, after which Shaka became distraught. In his grief, he had 7,000 Zulu killed, and for one year no crops were planted and no milk, the staple of the Zulu

<sup>5</sup> “Zulu Nation Throwdown,” *Africa Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force*, Paul Winley Records, 1980, vinyl. Also in album *Looking for a Perfect Beat: 1980-1985*, 2001 (Claremont, CA: Rhino Records), compact disk.

<sup>6</sup> Shaka's reputation in the Black world is also apparent in the ways in which Senghor romancizes his story in his writings. As Laurence M. Porter argues, “This great nineteenth-century Zulu warrior and emperor quickly became a legendary figure and inspired at least seven [of Senghor's] retellings of his story after Thomas Mofolo's version” (891). Laurence M. Porter, “Senegalese Literature Today,” *The French Review* 66(6): 887-899.

<sup>7</sup> Maake, 69.

diet, was consumed. All pregnant women and their husbands were slain, as were milking cows, so that even the calves would share the loss of a mother” (591).

Chaka’s tragic actions show that any form of nationalism, even when it is a legitimate resistance against colonialism and racism, must be approached with caution because it may lead to reckless violence. This nationalism must be deconstructed in order to reveal the contradictions between its celebration of freedom from colonization and racism and its adoration of guns and violence which copy the same demons of Western imperialism and prejudice that it attempts to resist. A major flaw of this nationalism appears in hip-hop’s often-misogynistic, sexist, homophobic, or reversely-racist language. As DeReef F. Jamison suggests, these dynamics come from European influenced notions of masculinity to which young African American men often try to conform by developing a “reactionary masculinity” which “mistakenly identifies physicality and crudeness with masculinity; views domination, insensitivity, unconcern, willingness to injure or kill, seek revenge, as essentially masculine traits”(45, 47).

Yet, despite its imperfections, the nationalism in hip-hop is still important because it is an outcry against socio-economic injustices. Hip-hop’s denunciation of these injustices is apparent in the song “Wolf Howls” in which Dead Prez uses a narrative about a wolf that licks its own blood from a hunter’s blade without knowing it as a metaphor of the unconscious ways in which blacks undergo mental slavery and socio-economic exploitations without realizing it. The song describes a wolf that relishes his own blood from a blade which has cut his tongue without realizing that he has been hurt.<sup>8</sup> Later, the song establishes a parallel between this wolf and young African Americans who blindly follow the capitalistic lifestyle of white Americans without realizing the consequences of their choices.<sup>9</sup> A segment of the song which is addressed to “these young brothers out there who think they are getting something” reads:

white people have a house, why can't i have a house?  
and they actually think that theres something thats bringing resources to them,  
but they're killing themselves just like the wolf was licking the blade,  
and they're slowly dying without knowing it.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Dead Prez, 2000, “Wolf Howls,” *Let's Get Free*, New York: Loud Records, compact disk.

<sup>9</sup> Dead Prez, “Wolf Howls.”

<sup>10</sup> Dead Prez, “Wolf Howls.”

The song reveals the significant influence of black folklore on hip-hop where it serves as an indirect and suggestive way of denouncing the oppression that has limited the life chances of blacks on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean since the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade. By using a folktale to represent this injustice, Dead Prez attests to the power of oral tradition as a means of disparaging the negative effects of capitalism and racism on blacks whose communities are poisoned with guns, cracks, and other items and substances which create a new form of enslavement that resemble the ignoble human trafficking of the old slave trade era. Dead Prez is conscious about this tragedy because it develops a nationalist ideology that resists its effects in the lives of blacks living on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. This resistance is visible in Dead Prez's song "Propaganda," also released in *Let's Get Free*, which raises serious issues about the mysterious fate of major African American and Caribbean denouncers of racial injustice. In this song, Dead Prez says:

I don't believe Bob Marley died from cancer  
 31 years ago i woulda been a panther  
 They killed Huey cause they knew he had the answer  
 The views that you see in the news is propaganda.<sup>11</sup>

The passage clearly establishes a linkage between Huet Newton and Bob Marley who both remained faithful denouncers of a global capitalism that tolerated a reckless materialism which paid no respect to the poor and suffering people around the world. This is the same kind of recklessness that Arrested Development berates in their famous song "Mr. Wendal." As the song suggests, mainstream society sees poor, vulnerable, and homeless people like Mr. Wendal as the "uncivilized."<sup>12</sup>

A segment of the song reads: "Uncivilized we call him but I just saw him eat off / the food we / waste. / Civilization are we really civilized? yes or no / Who are we to / judge?"<sup>13</sup> This song reverses the meaning of civilization that mainstream society often uses to describe blacks who live in harsh conditions as damaged populations. Opposing this prejudice, "Mr. Wendal" shows that the struggling blacks who come from underprivileged neighborhoods and are unfairly

<sup>11</sup> Dead Prez, 2000, "Propaganda," *Let's Get Free*, Loud Records, compact disk.

<sup>12</sup> "Mr. Wendal," *Arrested Development*, Chrysalis Records, 1992, audio-cassette

<sup>13</sup> "Mr. Wendal," 1992, *Arrested Development*, Chrysalis Records, audio-cassette

perceived as “uncivilized” actually are sensible and cultured persons who know how to protect the environment by using the important resources that society prefers to waste.

Resisting the negative stereotyping of disadvantaged black communities in the United States, the legendary hip-hop artist Tupac Shakur shows the structural and economic origins of the forces that oppress such neighborhoods. Tupac develops an ideological resistance that is similar to those of Dead Prez and Arrested Development by documenting the negative consequences of socio-economic alienation which inspired his music. For instance, in his song “My Block,” Tupac signifies the drastic impact of drugs and guns in various African American communities. He says:

Now shit's constantly hot, on my block, it never fails to be gunshots  
 Can't explain a mother's pain, when her son drops  
 Black male slippin in hail when will we prevail  
 Fearin jail but crack sales got me livin well  
 And the system's suicidal with this Thug's Life  
 Stayin strapped forever strapped in this drug life.<sup>14</sup>

In another song, “Better Dayz,” Tupac prays for the time when the dysfunctional cycle of drugs, guns, and violence that racism and classism have created in the lives of disadvantaged black communities could end. Tupac imagines a utopian and alternative world in which peace and life replace the chaos of structural injustices. He sings:

Too many murders, too many funerals and too many tears  
 Just seen another brother buried plus I knew him for years  
 Passed by his family, but what could I say?  
 Keep yo' head up and try to keep the faith  
 And pray for better days.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, like the traditional slave narrative, African American hip-hop imagines a world in which black people themselves are the agents who end the oppression of the racist and prejudiced hegemony. Tupac conceptualizes this change as the act of “clean[ing] up the streets,” invoking a resistance motif that Arrested Development had initiated in 1992, in their album *3 Years, 5 Months and 2 Days in the Life*, ten years before Tupac’s *Better Dayz* came out. The fourth track of *3 Years*, entitled “Raining Revolution,” describes a sudden rain that soaks an

<sup>14</sup> 2Pac, 2002, “My Block,” *Better Dayz*. [Disc 2], Interscope Records, compact disk.

<sup>15</sup> 2Pac, “Better Dayz.”

African American neighborhood as a spiritual cleansing of the evils of drugs, guns, poverty, and classism, and the beginning of a new and natural revolution.<sup>16</sup> The second segment of the song reads: “I feel the rain enhances the revolution, and reminds us / of a spiritual solution, and reminds us of a natural / yet unnatural / solution.”<sup>17</sup> Arrested Development’s narrative develops a spiritual and cultural approach to the challenges facing blacks in the United States. Their song is not devoid of meaning because it signifies the community-centered work that needs to be done in the United States before historical socio-economic ills that plague the African American community can be resolved. Resolving these issues will require an understanding of hip-hop as a music that describes the sociological realities and values of ingenious and creative young blacks in the United States.

### RESISTANCE IN SENEGALESE HIP-HOP

Yet, hip-hop is not a local culture only, because it has branches around the world, specifically in Senegal where other young black artists use it to resist socio-economic domination. Senegalese hip-hop is permeated with both direct and indirect denunciations of poverty, political corruption, and neo-imperialism, revealing radical and subversive ideologies that resemble those of Jamaican reggae and African American hip-hop.

The radicalism of Senegalese hip-hop has roots in the music of Positive Black Soul, one of the first Senegalese rap groups which spread a genre which was mainly confined in the United States, England, and France in the early 1990s. Extending this global culture to the West African city of Dakar, Positive Black Soul drew from the groundwork that had already been established in the Black Diaspora. In their first Senegalese rap album, Didier Awadi and Doug E Tee, who founded Positive Black Soul, launched a new cultural revolution which incorporated the rhythm of the American rap icons NWA and Run DMC with those of Senegalese superstars such as Omar Péne, Aby Ndour, Baba Maal, Pape Niang, and Yaye Aminata Fall in a groundbreaking cassette entitled *Boul Falé*. The latter term is an expression which suggests the same kind of Senegalese audacious and rebellious attitude towards authority and the police that the Jamaican term “rude boy” also identifies.

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<sup>16</sup> “Arrested Development, 1992, “Raining Revolution,” *3 Years, 5 Months and 2 Days in the Life of...*, Chrysalis Records, compact disk.

<sup>17</sup> “Arrested Development, “Raining Revolution.”

Like its Jamaican parallel, the term *Boul Falé* describes an entire generation of young Senegalese who were disillusioned by the poverty, unemployment, despair, and corruption which confronted them during the 1990s. Identifying themselves as the voice of this generation, Positive Black Soul aimed “to represent Senegalese young urban People as well as they can” and to help them “understand what’s behind False media & check at the real Face of a contemporary Africa.”<sup>18</sup>

In his essay, “(Re)Imagining an African City: Performing Culture, Arts, and Citizenship in Dakar (Senegal), 1980-2000” (2008), Mamadou Diouf describes the meaning of the term *Boul Falé* as follows: “As one Senegalese journalist puts it, ‘*Boul Falé*’ (*T’occupes!*) is the *ras-le-bol* expression of a youth [which is] in desperate straits and [is] left to itself to face a socio-economic crisis that gets worse every day’ ” (371). Such a dire straight is visible in the “Boul Falé Youth mix” version in which Doug E Tee says: “*Sama thiaya lakana / Xoslubi metinaa!*” (My pants are catching fire / life is getting harder and harder.”<sup>19</sup> For this young generation, modern Africa was destabilized by a corrupt political leadership of its nations and uncaring foreign financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, who talked only to make-believe leaders who cared less for the people who elected them. Consequently, most young Senegalese who had no “*bras longs*” (connections), and therefore could wield no influence for the leadership in their country, saw the latter as pariah rather than as a step towards development.

Deprived of means of survival, most Senegalese youths migrated abroad to France, Italy, and the United States in search of a better life. By the early twenty-first century, these migrants had been subjected to so much oppression in their host countries that the hip-hop stars of that generation captured in their songs. One example is the song “Kay Jel Ma” [Come Take Me Away] (2002) featuring Bibson and Xuman.<sup>20</sup> This song’s beginning is interspersed with a famous refrain from Youssou Ndour’s “Pitche Mi” [The Bird] (1988) and reads:

*yaye booy kaye jel ma*  
*balamaa demm gueej.*<sup>21</sup>  
dear mother, come get me

<sup>18</sup> See “Liner Notes” of Positive Black Soul’s *Boul Falé*, 1993, Vision Sud, audio-cassette.

<sup>19</sup> Positive Black Soul, “Boul Falé Youth mix,” *Boul Falé*.

<sup>20</sup> Bibson and Xuman, 2002, “Kay Jel Ma,” *Africa Raps*, Trikont, compact disk.

<sup>21</sup> Youssou Ndour, 1988, “Pitche Mi,” *Immigrés*, Virgin Records, compact disk.

before I am taken to sea<sup>22</sup>

This hip-hop song, which is about a bird that searches for its lost mother and a crocodile that attempts to console it, suggests the trauma that slavery and other kinds of forced migrations create in the lives of individuals. “Immigrés” is a song about the modern forms of such migrations. According to the liner notes of the song, “Immigrés” was first released in France in 1984, “the year that Youssou was first noticed in Europe. When he saw Paris for himself he was so affected by the plight of his fellow countrymen and women living away from home that he wrote the title song to remind them that, even if circumstances had forced them to make a living abroad, they could always come back home.”<sup>23</sup> Some of these circumstances include blatant racism in the French capital that Bibson and Xuman call “Babylon” where the “*sans papiers*” [illegal immigrant] is called “Negro” or “Bougnoule” even if he / she is able to support himself with his / her own labor. As “Kay Jel Ma” suggests, in Paris the Senegalese immigrant lives a day-to-day life of “hide and seek [,] traveling thousands of kilometers in search of work.”<sup>24</sup> The song revisits Peter Tosh’s resistive use of persistence as a way to create “something out of nothing,” as is evident in the narrator’s statement, “*Je vais me battre à Babylon*” [I will stand strong in Babylon]. The narrator’s statement reflects a resolve to succeed in the Western world that Ndour’s “Immigrés” considers with caution. Recognizing that surviving in the West is impossible without the succor of home, Ndour counsels the Senegalese immigrant to remain connected to his / her homeland. He sings:

*no mana men  
lo mana am  
ñibissé lawar*  
[no matter who you have become  
no matter what you have  
you must come back home].<sup>25</sup>

As the liner notes of “Immigrés” suggest, Ndour tells African immigrants in the West: “Don’t forget where you belong, don’t cut yourselves off.”<sup>26</sup> Bibson and Xuman strongly heed

<sup>22</sup> Bibson and Xuman, 2002, “Kay Jel Ma,” *Africa Raps*, Trikont, compact disk.

<sup>23</sup> See liner notes, Ndour, *Immigrés*.

<sup>24</sup> The original French version of this passage is: “De faire des milliers de kilomètres pour des boulots merdiques / Condamné sans verdict Je joue à cache-cache avec les flics.”

See Bibson and Xuman, “Kay Jel Ma.”

<sup>25</sup> Ndour, “Pitche Mi.”

this advice, as is apparent later in “Kay Jel Ma” in which they say, “*Bul faté muuk, ño doon fananal / Yaye boye bul joy ndakh lima fa guëch*” (Do not forget those with whom you shared beds / mother, please don’t let my absence make you weep.”<sup>27</sup> These advices are similar to those that Ndour gives to Senegalese migrants in “Immigrés.”

Another important feature of “Kay Jel Ma” is its reflection of the resistive strategy of an underground man who reminds us of the major protagonist in Ralph Ellison’s novel *Invisible Man*. Like Ellison’s “Invisible Man,” the “Underground Man” in “Kay Jel Ma” lives at the margins of society and is permanently haunted by the gate-keepers of the city who force him to run incessantly and absurdly before he can earn a minimal living. Such entrapment of the Senegalese immigrant in France is apparent in the section of “Kay Jel Ma” in which Bibson and Xuman say:

I want money and fame, with or without degree  
 I go through Morocco, Spain, and the Suez Canal  
 I end up in Paris, France, 16th *arrondissement*  
 Paperless, I sleep in an empty 4 square meters spot  
 I decide to stay even if I see a trap.<sup>28</sup>

This passage reflects the harsh conditions in which the Senegalese and other Francophone African immigrants live in France. Senegalese migrants in France have historically been subjected to such discrimination. In an 1974 article entitled, “Prisoners in Exile: Senegalese Workers in France,” Adrian Adams writes: “Black Africans [in France] are usually listed under ‘other’, at the foot of the page, after Spaniards, Italians, Algerians and Portuguese. They seem marginal; slightly more incongruous, slightly more lost-looking, not otherwise worthy of note. It is seldom asked why they are there” (157). The marginalization of African immigrants in France is apparent in the segment of the song of Bibson and Xuman in which the rappers say:

I am called *negro, bougnoule*, and seen as more suspect than the hooded ones  
 I wake up early and stay up late  
 Traveling miles to take distressing jobs  
 I hide from the police to avoid sentence without conviction  
 The wealth I now have brings me the worst nightmares.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See liner notes, Ndour, *Immigrés*.

<sup>27</sup> Bibson and Xuman, “Kay Jel Ma.” Unless noted otherwise, all the segments of this song that are quoted in this chapter were translated from French by the author.

<sup>28</sup> Bibson and Xuman. “Kay Jel Ma.”

While these “Black Africans” such as the Senegalese continue to be seen as ‘the other’ in France, they are also seen in the same ways in which Maghrebians are perceived in Europe. In his groundbreaking chapter, “From Red Belt to Black Belt” (2003), Tyler Stovall says that “France now has its own version of African Americans” (357).

According to Stovall, “The children of African and North African immigrants [in France], who were usually either born in or grew up in France, are routinely portrayed as delinquents or social misfits” and are “at home neither in France nor in the homelands of their parents.”<sup>30</sup> This marginalization of Africans and Maghrebians in France suggests the drastic ways in which the children of the Africans that were colonized by the European empire now leave in the metropolises of their former “mother country” as postcolonial subjects who can’t easily return home even if they are not wanted in their host societies.

Yet, instead of letting the oppressive forces in France overwhelm them, the Senegalese immigrants in France refuse to leave the country and prefer to struggle for survival at all cost. These Senegalese immigrants persist in their fight against racism and xenophobia, revealing the influence that Peter Tosh’s resolve to “multiply zero to zero to get something” has on modern Africans. Revealing this strong determination to creatively resist oppression in the West, Bibson and Xuman say: “Life is fooling me, I need to fight/ In Babylon, I will get all the strength of this cyclone”.<sup>31</sup>

This song is a perfect example of how young Africans are able to create their sense of modernity by using the available means of survival at their disposal to create a minimal extent of sanity and success. This modernity relies on the use of wits, courage, and persistence as subaltern tools against police harassment, racism, poverty, and alienation that immigration and other forms of contemporary historical forces create in their lives. Many of these young Africans cross the blood-stained Atlantic and Pacific oceans to go to metropolises in Europe, America, Asia, and Australia in search of a better life. Yet, these African immigrants often experience disappointment as they join the ranks of a long file of poor francophone blacks who live in these nations. In *Minority Within a Minority: Black Francophone Immigrants and the Dynamics of*

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<sup>29</sup> Bibson and Xuman. “Kay Jel Ma.”

<sup>30</sup> Stovall, 354.

<sup>31</sup> See Bibson and Xuman, “Kay Jel Ma.”

*Power and Resistance* (2006), Amal I. Madibbo gives the example of Canada where “Some studies show that Blacks endure a low socio-economic status and that Black Francophones are among the groups which are at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder in Canada” (23). According to Madibbo, the factors contributing to this disturbing situation include disparities in the annual income among black and white Francophones, alarming poverty, underemployment, and under-funded organizations in black francophone communities (composed of Africans, Haitians, Franco-Canadians, and other black Francophones) (23-24).

African immigrants in France face a similar situation because they are caught in unprecedented streams of racism, prejudice, and intolerance that Didier Gondola calls “*lepénisation*” after the infamous conservative and xenophobe French political leader Jean Marie le Pen, who persistently opposed the flexible immigration policies that France used to extend to the populations of its former colonies. According to the critic, today’s France is far from the heydays that drove many African Americans to the Hexagone between the 1920s and the 1960s, because the French are horrified by the growing populations of Africans (70 000 in 1975, 700 000 in 1995, and perhaps 7 millions in 2015) and have confined most of them in dilapidated housing.<sup>32</sup>

Disillusioned by these harsh conditions in France, many African immigrants soon shatter their past mirage of the *Hexagone* while refusing to go back empty handed. Hustling and bustling are then these Africans’ only means of survival in France. This predicament is apparent in the refusal of one of the narrators of “Kay Jel Ma” to turn his back to an urban Paris where he barely found a place to sleep and was frequently chased by the police.

## CONCLUSION

African American hip-hop and Senegalese hip-hop are commentaries on the effects of harsh social, economic, and political limitations in the lives of blacks from various parts of the world. These hip-hop songs vividly tell stories of individual black men struggling in the United States and Senegal against racial and economic predicaments.

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<sup>32</sup> See Ch. Didier Gondola. “Regard rétrospectif sur l’immigration afro-américaine et africaine au cours du 20e siècle en France et aux Etats-Unis. Et comment au 21e siècle, la France terre d’asile est devenue terre d’exclusion,” (accessed May 24, 2013).< [www.africultures.com/index.asp?menu=affiche\\_article&no=4579](http://www.africultures.com/index.asp?menu=affiche_article&no=4579)>

In addition, these musical forms are permeated with oratorical and ideological resistance strategies that allow black musicians to denounce past and modern economic and cultural colonialisms, including the consequences of drastic policies of globalization and capitalism on formerly enslaved or colonized blacks. Such resistive strategies and the hybrid music through which they are conveyed need to be validated in academic institutions and discourses and properly studied so that the complex history of black modernity, anti-neocolonialism, and multiculturalism can be understood.

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