


# Power asymmetries on the Senegalese Rap Music Scene: Migrants, the Mobile and the Immobile

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## Abstract

Drawing on the results of an ethnographic study conducted among artists, music producers and cultural entrepreneurs of Rap in Senegal, this article aims at exploring how migration, mobility and immobility, considered within a mobilities framework, can enlighten power asymmetries within a socially and culturally diverse 'music scene'.

The author proposes to revisit the concept of the 'music scene' in order to articulate how music is constructed as deeply rooted in a particular place, while at the same time being the site of multiple forms of mobility, revealing the dynamics between locality and mobility and the making of hierarchies of place.

**Keywords:** mobilities, power, music scene, Senegal, Rap

## The Senegalese Rap Music Scene and Mobilities: A Brief Overview

Emerging in the late 1980s, rap gained momentum in Senegal at the end of the 1990s through acts such as Positive Black Soul, Rapadio, Wa BMG 44 and Daara J. Inspired by their American counterparts, these artists have also defended their music as being rooted in Senegalese society and as being deeply concerned with Senegalese political and social issues. The production of rap in Senegal is also affected by an intricate network of physical, social, political and economic factors (Cohen 1991) that lead local artists to produce music described as 'Senegalese rap,' an issue I will not address in detail here.<sup>1</sup> One of its main characteristics is being sung in Wolof, a language spoken in Senegal and the Gambia. Senegalese rap, or as it is commonly known *rap galsen*, is the product of a 'music scene,' which I define as a group of people (rap artists, producers, journalists, cultural entrepreneurs, fans, etc.),

<sup>1</sup> These aspects are extensively explored in Navarro (2019a).

structured as a network, who collectively, but not equally, define their music in opposition to other types of music (American rap, French rap, other Senegalese music), according to norms related to the different experiences of the spaces invested in the framework of their musical practice.<sup>2</sup> Amidst the rapidly evolving geographies of Senegalese rap, notably due to mobility and the growing importance of the internet, Dakar and its suburbs still act as its core locality, being a space characterized by not only the concentration of artists, but also the means of production (studios), promotion (media) and performance (concert venues).

My definition of the 'music scene' has allowed me to take into consideration how *rap galsen* is collectively defined as deeply rooted in Senegal, while being the site of multiple mobilities, inter-

<sup>2</sup> This definition is inspired by contributions from the 'music scene': the works of Becker (1984) on art worlds as a chain of cooperation between actors, and of Bourdieu (1992) on the structure of positions in art fields.

rogating the intricacies between locality and mobility.

Studies of Senegalese rap and migration have highlighted how Senegalese rappers use their songs as a means to warn their audience, mostly young Senegalese men, against the dangers of ‘clandestine migration.’<sup>3</sup> In Navarro (2019b), I show how, in so doing, rappers silence their own desires to migrate and the ambivalent relations they entertain with the Western World, which they seek both to differentiate themselves from and to emulate. Most notably, the West remains the main model for music production standards, and mobilities to the United States and Europe have proven to be instrumental in achieving such standards. Many Senegalese rap artists have succeeded in setting up their own studios by buying instruments and machines (microphones, speakers, keyboards, etc.) abroad. Being signed by an international label has also implied that artists benefit from better conditions to produce, promote, perform and earn a living from their music. For many, ‘exporting’ Senegalese rap to the West is thus the only way to achieve some sort of success. As pointed out by Moroni (2017), geographical mobility is a valued experience in the art world, ‘to such an extent that it contributes to establishing the value of an artist or a career’ (Moroni 2017, 358).

Many of the rappers I interviewed in Senegal used to be part of a rap group whose members have gone abroad, whether as documented or undocumented migrants. Some of them have stayed abroad after touring with their group, while others have left Senegal for matters unrelated to their music, most notably by marrying Western women. As a result, Senegalese rap artists are now scattered in multiple countries (Moulard 2014).

Similarly, my entry to the field of Senegalese rap started in Switzerland, when I managed to

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Clandestine migration’ (*migration clandestine*) is the term commonly used by rappers in interviews as well as in songs. See for example the compilation “Les Pirogues du Hiphop contre la Migration Clandestine” produced by Africulturban in 2008.

Speak to one of the members of Senegalese rap group Wagëblë, called Eyewitness. He gave me the phone number of his little brother, a member of the rap group Da Blessed, who was still living in Senegal. When I met him a couple of months later, he was accompanied by his Austrian wife and told me that he was moving to Austria in a few days. The group had installed a little studio in their neighborhood of Thiaroye, on the outskirts of Dakar. From the little window of the studio, one could see the beach from where fishing boats frequently departed on their way to the coasts of Spain at the peak of the mass undocumented migrations, known as ‘Barça walla Barsakh’ (Barcelona or death). As a scholar interested in rap and mobilities, I sought to target renowned mobile rap artists or groups. When I met the group, however, I also had to immerse myself in the field and thus agreed to meet people they wanted to put me in contact with, without being sure if it had any relevance to my study, while pursuing other contacts in order not to be co-opted by a particular network. During a period of five months, I met with artists, journalists, producers and cultural promoters, who, I soon discovered, had all experienced mobility in one way or another. Between 2015 and 2017, I encountered abroad informants I had got to know in Senegal in countries like Switzerland, Germany, the United States and France, which in turn led me to meet rappers living in those countries who were continuing to make music with Senegal in mind.

It is by looking for mobilities through informants involved in a particular activity, namely the making and promotion of Senegalese rap music, rather than by starting from a particular migratory status or national belonging, that I managed to encompass a diversity of existing mobilities, real and imagined, within a ‘music scene’.

Drawing on the results of an ethnographic study conducted among rap artists, producers and cultural entrepreneurs<sup>4</sup> in Senegal, the aim

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<sup>4</sup> By ‘cultural entrepreneurs’, I refer to people involved in the development of the music scene without being involved in processes of musical creation.

of this article is to show how the focus on diverse mobilities<sup>5</sup> such as migration, mobility and immobility, has allowed me to underscore the diversity of social and artistic positions within a music scene.

After briefly discussing the literature on migration and mobility, I will define the various mobilities encountered in the field, focusing on migration, mobility and immobility. In a second section, I will present three case studies that will allow me to show the intricacies between the practices of mobility and the power dynamics within a 'music scene,' as well as revealing the dynamics between locality and mobility and the making of hierarchies of place. I will conclude by discussing how the study of the 'music scene' allows one to think critically about mobility and migration studies.

### **Looking at mobility through the prism of the music scene**

Since the 1990s, the mobility paradigm has made it possible to rethink migration, most notably by attempting to break down the distinction between 'mobility' and 'migration.' Mobility refers to the great capacity for movement of populations who benefit from reliable and rapid means of transport. It is associated with freedom, the ability to act, transgression and cosmopolitanism (Cresswell 2006). On the other hand, migration is usually associated with vulnerability and coercion. The mobility paradigm proposes to approach migration as one form of mobility among others in a field of research that 'encompasses research on the spatial mobility of humans, non-humans and objects; the circulation of information, images and capital; as well as the study of physical means of movement such as infrastructure, vehicles and software systems that enable movement and communica-

tion' (Sheller 2014: 791). Mobility is thus not only about physical practices, it also involves a dialogue between practices, perceptions and imaginary representations of movement (Ortar, Salzbrunn and Stock 2018). Nevertheless, as these authors have pointed out, research on migration and spatial mobility actually intersect very little. Furthermore, despite the desire of theorists of the 'mobility turn' to break with the dichotomy, 'mobility' and 'migration' still appear as two different and useful descriptive categories, including in my own research. I return to this topic later.

A second criticism addressed to mobility studies resides in the focus on mobility as normality, while the ability to move is still very unevenly distributed among individuals and societies (Salazar and Smart 2011). For Cresswell, inequality of access to mobility derives from 'social relations that involve the production and distribution of power' (2006: 14). Urry (2007) develops the notion of 'network capital' to emphasize the social relations to which mobility gives access. In Le Menestrel (2012), mobility provides access to different social worlds that are sources of professional opportunities. A critical approach to mobility studies also allows to pay attention to the diversity of practices and lifestyles associated with movement (Ortar, Salzbrunn and Stock 2018) and the meanings of mobility anchored in sedentariness (Adey 2006).

My doctoral dissertation (Navarro 2019a) attempted to address these criticisms while applying mobility studies to a less studied field of research: music studies and the concept of the 'music scene.' In music studies too, research has kept apart the study of mobility, as an integral part of the professional life of artists and cultural professionals, from the study of music produced in the context of migration or by migrants. In contrast, I have chosen to highlight the diversity of movements and explore them together in order to show that they can result in different outcomes in terms of prestige, power and resources. They therefore (re)produce social inequalities among individuals belonging to a 'music scene,' who already have different access

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<sup>5</sup> I have chosen to speak about 'mobilities' in order to avoid the confusion between mobility referring to the ability to move, and mobility studies that seek to encompass other types of movement or absence of movement. Furthermore, the plural of 'mobilities' more significantly underlines its diversity.

to mobility. The concept of the music scene, first used in the work of Will Straw (1991) in relation to the study of 'popular music' in the American context, focused on the relationship between a definition of 'locality' and the production of a specific music (Bennett and Peterson 2004), allowing it to shed light on how musical universes 'originate within, interact with, and are inevitably affected by physical, social, political and economic factors which surround them' (Cohen 1991: 342). Probably because of this attachment to locality, the concept of music scene has also carried the potential to examine how art worlds (Becker 1984) exist beyond their local roots and to question their ramifications in other spaces (Le Menestrel 2012).

### **Migrants, the Mobile and Immobile**

Distinguished according to the specifics of movement and of the time spent outside Dakar rather than in destination countries,<sup>6</sup> the mobilities considered in my research derive their meaning from the dynamics between spatial anchorage and displacement, between the sedentariness of some and the mobility of others, and produce transnational formations located between locality and mobility (Dahinden 2010). The three types of mobilities further distinguished in this article are migration, mobility and immobility. In the next part, I aim to define each of these mobilities as they made sense in the field, since these categories are neither natural nor permanent. Each category serves to describe the moves of a particular informant at the time of the study. Needless to say, mobilities often vary in the life course of the same informant as does his place in the music scene.

Of relevance to this study were therefore those who could be considered migrants because they did not have a permanent residence status in the core localities of *rap galsen*, namely

Dakar, its suburbs, or more generally Senegal as a whole. As such, migration involves a different status compared to the other types of mobilities that are considered: the identification of the individual with migration is accompanied by a different relationship to otherness (feeling like a foreigner) and an assignment to a legal status (residence permit, student permit, etc.) (Ortar, Salzbrunn and Stock 2018).

Unlike migrants, mobile people move without changing their status as residents. Therefore, the category of mobility has been applied to informants who frequently travel abroad while keeping their residence status in Senegal. Among the mobile informants, I encountered some who travelled frequently between two states, which I call 'pendular mobility.' Others, more rarely, were involved in circular mobilities, travelling from place to place, frequently as part of a world music tour. The majority of my mobile informants were involved in 'star mobility' (Moret 2020), travelling back and forth between Senegal and diverse destinations. These diverse mobility practices imply different anchors both in Senegal and abroad, as well as different resources and outcomes. Moreover, mobility does not always imply the same freedom and ease of moving. Despite their artistic status, variously acknowledged by different visa-issuing offices, and mainly because of their nationality, these mobile informants strongly relied on the support of foreign institutions (governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations) to fulfil their travel requirements and find them accommodation.

Finally, it has not been straightforward to label certain artists as 'immobile.' Indeed, all those interviewed for this research could be considered 'mobile' in one way or another, if not through physical movement on an urban, regional, national, African or international scale, then at least through their imaginaries. Furthermore, just as no one can be perpetually in motion, some people also choose to remain immobile for a period of time. Some of my otherwise mobile informants sometimes refused to

<sup>6</sup> Mobilities at the local (Dakar), regional (Dakar region), national (between Dakar and other urban settings) and finally international levels, whether continental or intercontinental, were also considered, but are not the focus of this study.

engage in mobility until they had achieved something in Dakar. Mobility and immobility can thus appear as transitional phases that can replace each other. According to Mincke and Kaufmann (2017), the criteria according to which individuals are qualified as 'mobile' or 'immobile' often remain uncertain because the notion of mobility is based on a conception of space as a material entity, where space is above all the result of a spatialization process, understood as 'the attribution and characterization of positions to the objects under consideration'. Mobility is often conceived as involving the crossing of borders. However, borders are only the result of a certain spatialization of space among other possibilities. In other words, the conceptions of the 'mobile' actor and the 'immobile' actor are rooted in hierarchical representations of movement and spaces crossed among the actors concerned, while embodying two sides of the same coin. For Frello (2008), the meaning of immobility also raises questions about differentiated forms and hierarchical meanings of movement, involving representations of 'good' and 'bad' mobilities. Immobility, however, remains an important category of mobilities that grasps the obstacles people must face in their desire for mobility: it embodies feelings of being stuck, unable to achieve what could be achieved, in their eyes, through mobility. In other words, raising the issue of immobility is not only about criticizing the focus on mobility as normality, it is also about addressing desired and undesired mobilities and the consequences of these social dichotomies in the field.

On the basis of these definitions, migration, mobility and immobility are further exemplified by the trajectories of three informants: Gladiat'Or, a Senegalese rapper living in France; Keyti, a 'mobile' rapper; and the 'immobile' rapper Fla the Ripper.

### The 'Migrant': Gladiat'Or

Like most rappers in Senegal, Gladiat'Or began his artistic journey in Dakar as a member of an underground rap group at the end of the 1990s. The group separated after one of the members

left for Italy and Gladiat'Or's own departure for France in 2006. For Gladiat'Or himself, migration did not imply the end of his rap career, and he imagined that his new resources (provided by a job in France, could help him produce the group's first album. In Paris, he linked up with various Senegalese rappers, such as Nitdoff (who later returned to Senegal and is now a renowned rapper) and Mao Sidibé (a producer and singer who also returned to Senegal). They all collaborated in the making of Gladiat'Or's first solo album, called *Niax du feñ ci taw* (Under the rain, sweat is invisible). In order to promote his album, which was rapped mostly in Wolof, the artist returned to Senegal for the first time in 2010, but he didn't manage to convince Senegalese media to broadcast it. He explained why during our interview in Paris in 2017:

When I released my single in 2010 with the video clip, I went to promote it. It was very difficult, there were a lot of TV stations that didn't even want to take the clip, or they didn't want to book me for a show because I wasn't known and I came from somewhere else. They said, here's another guy from Europe who thinks he's allowed to come from anywhere else, so there's already this barrier, this prejudice, which is unfavorable to entry.

Gladiat'Or gave me two reasons for his inability to promote his single in Senegal: a lack of recognition (he wasn't known – indeed, it was his first time promoting an album), and the fact that he came from 'somewhere else.' His experience shows how the status of 'migrant,' with its implications of him being an outsider, affects his ability to be accepted in Senegal. Furthermore, Gladiat'Or, like other migrant artists, points out how the Senegalese music industry, which mostly relies on social networks, favors those who remain in Senegal. In order to make sure that their music is broadcasted, most artists rely on interpersonal relationships with DJs and program hosts, or, in the absence thereof, on bribes. Both strategies are more efficient if one is present in Senegal long-term.

In addition, he explained how his music was perceived differently because of his migrant status. Following a definition of rap in Senegal as

a means of expression addressing social issues, Gladiat'Or used his music to talk about the difficulties of being a migrant in France, a message which was conceived differently:

The audience is much more demanding with us because they say we are here [in Europe], we are making demands, but are we really rightful? Since when I say that life is hard, etc., people think you make a lot of money, even if it is not always the case, they say, are they really rightful? (...) We have a rather ungrateful position just because we are no longer there [in Senegal], so our work is undervalued, and there is a de facto intransigence.

Thus, Gladiat'Or's status as a migrant not only makes it difficult for him to promote his music, it also plainly disqualifies his music in the eyes of the Senegalese rap audience.

Two years later, Gladiat'Or went back to Senegal with the finished album, led by the single 'hip-hop galsen made in Paname,' a declaration of love to *rap galsen*. According to the lyrics of the song, *rap galsen* allowed the artist to 'grow wings' (*ba ngi saxi laff*) and to pull him out of 'the pot where he was conceived' (*jeul nak cibir cin bi nga dëppé*) 'until he became number one' (*ba nga doon pé*) and was able to cross international borders. However, the aim of the song is not only to assert superiority in the rap game by proclaiming oneself the best, in line with the 'rhetoric of excess' that characterizes rap according to Diallo (2014). As the chorus suggests (Gladiat'Or 2012), the song is also a call for unity:

hip-hop galsen/made in Paname/  
*galsen hip-hop made in Paris*  
 Lep ngir push up/for sunu rap jem ci Kanam/  
*All this to move our rap forward*  
 And nodi doon keen/fexe bokk funiu jeum/  
*Unite together and go in the same direction*  
 Noopi don ben jeum/rek lanu wara jeem/  
*We should try to keep our mouths shut and unite*

In the second verse of the song, he proclaims that rap should not know any borders, a reference to two districts in Dakar that are only separated by a road: Castor and Front de Terre, thereby addressing the territorial boundaries present in *rap galsen*. In continuation of the demarcations at work in Senegal, it is the demarcation between 'rap galsen made in Dakar' and 'rap galsen made

in Paris' that the artist wants to overcome in view of the recognition of *rap galsen* artists living in Paris<sup>7</sup>. In this context, the artist's self-glorification discourse in the song serves to assert his respect for the conventions of *rap galsen*, and even to celebrate them. Thus, the song was his response to the processes of exclusion and marginalization of migrants and artists such as himself in the rap music scene in Dakar.

Stemming from the example of Gladiat'Or and other artists who have migrated, it appears that the status of migrant makes it difficult to continue pursuing a career in *rap galsen* for reasons concerning both their new lives abroad (a lack of resources, of social networks, of the time available for music for artists who have to both work at regular jobs and spend time with their families), but also, as shown here, because of their tenuous relationships with other actors who have remained in Senegal. Their marginalization on the music scene as outsiders, which parallels the marginalization of migrants in Senegalese society (Timera 2014), leads them to be called out in order to demonstrate their attachment to the music scene despite migration, for example, through development projects, and does not allow them to speak on certain themes. Few are the artists who can maintain their activities in Senegal from abroad in the long run. If most artists in migration have given up on their careers, many others have made the choice to return to Senegal, albeit with different results (Navarro 2019a). The prolonged absence of migrants from Senegal, unlike the absences of mobile actors, renders them unable to benefit from the opportunities provided by being abroad, which they seek to invest in Senegalese rap.

### The 'Mobile': Keyti

Despite not having released new music since 2005, the rapper Keyti, a former member of the legendary group Rap'adio, is still one of the most

<sup>7</sup> There are a handful of musicians in Paris who know each other and participate in the same events. We could mention Neega Mass or Pul Art Bi, as well as Mao and Nitdoff, who both returned to Senegal.

renowned Senegalese rap artists in Senegal and one of the few to earn a living as an artist.

Between 2005 and 2007, together with fellow Senegalese rap artists Didier Awadi, Xuman and Moona, he took part in A.U.R.A (United Rap Artists for Africa) and went on a tour to promote respect for children's rights in collaboration with UNICEF. This took them to France and to many countries in West Africa. Starting in 2013, together with Xuman, he co-hosted *Journal Rappé*, a YouTube series (JT Rappé 2013) with rapping of both national and international news in French and Wolof.<sup>8</sup> The *Journal* was conceived as an alternative source of media to counter how the information is processed by the government, the opposition and international western media. The *Journal* was a great success and was soon supported by OSIWA (Open Society Initiative for West Africa), part of the network of the Open Society Foundations founded by philanthropist and financier George Soros, which, according to their website, give out grants, 'towards building inclusive and vibrant democracies'. Keyti is also a frequent collaborator of *Africulturban*, an association that works for the promotion of 'urban cultures', namely rap and other related practices, in Senegal. He is a notable teacher for their program Y.U.M.A program (Youth Urban Media Academy), also undertaken with the support of OSIWA, which works for the reintegration of former prison inmates through the practice of Djing, writing, language (French, English) and various other courses. In 2015, a year when I followed him thoroughly on social media, Keyti undertook a number of short trips that exemplify the scope of his activities in Senegal and his importance on the 'music scene.' I first met him in Munich, Germany, in March 2015, with other artists and members of *Africulturban*, as part of an event called 'Dox Dajé'.<sup>9</sup> Sponsored by the Goethe

Institute and the Siemens Foundation, the event showed how *rap galsen* acted as support for the expression of different registers of meaning created between the artists and the audience (in this case mainly German) while showcasing the importance of social networks for mobility (Navarro 2018).

Prior to Munich, Keyti had travelled to Washington, D.C., and other countries, while his partner in the *Journal Rappé* had gone to Switzerland and Ivory Coast. Later that same year, Keyti and Xuman were invited to the *Banlieues Bleues* festival in France to promote *Journal Rappé* and made a short trip to Japan. I met him again in September in New York, where he had been invited to speak about Y.U.M.A at the United Nations. A large number of Keyti's trips are based on his ability to 'represent' Senegalese rap by taking part in conferences where he testifies to its history of political mobilization. The excellence of his performances at these conferences, which take place in both academic and cultural spheres, prompted further invitations to various conferences, although he claimed he does not 'like to do that' (personal fieldwork notes, 21.03.2015) and would prefer that someone 'more competent' (personal fieldwork notes, 21.03.2015) would take over. Nevertheless, he still accepted such invitations because they allowed him to 'do the organizer a favor' (personal fieldwork notes, 21.03.2015). Keyti's mobility is thus partly based on his belonging to social networks that work by 'recommendation' (personal fieldwork notes, 21.03.2015).

I have described mobility such as that undertaken by Keyti as 'star mobility,' consisting of trips between Senegal, where he resides, and countries in which he is called to perform a particular activity, whether speaking during a conference, as it is often the case, or promoting the *Journal Rappé*. The predominance of this type of mobility among actors who make a living from their activities in the rap scene illustrates the mostly subsidized nature of rap careers in Senegal. These mobilities are mostly financed by foreign foundations, NGOs, governments or individuals that

<sup>8</sup> After four seasons, the *Journal Rappé* has changed its formula and has seen fellow rapper Xuman more invested in the show.

<sup>9</sup> *Dox Dajé* evokes the cultural exchange which was supposed to take place between German rappers and Senegalese rappers and could be translated by 'get together'.

pay for the costs of travel and act as guarantors for acquiring a visa. Depending on different projects, which are part of different networks, conditions for mobility can vary: sometimes adequate (hotel accommodation, remuneration), mobility arrangements are more often tenuous (administrative problems in obtaining visas, problems with hotel reservations or other accommodation arrangements) depending on the resources of the networks that are mobilized to organize these trips. For some actors, these mobilities are frequent enough to ensure regular funding. The more frequent they are, which stems from the number of networks in which these actors are inserted, the more social prestige these mobilities have, with consequences for their social status. For artists such as Keyti, mobility enables them to be the only ones who can earn a living by engaging solely in their artistic activity, and to escape the constraints linked to making rap music in Senegal. Finally, for the mostly 'immobile' actors of *rap galsen*, examples such as Keyti showcase the opportunities and prestige associated with mobility.

### The 'Immobile': Fla the Ripper

Fla The Ripper is a Senegalese rap artist who is relatively unknown in Senegal. He nevertheless gained some appreciation after the release of three solo albums in the last ten years, which can be considered quite a feat in Senegal: *The Renaissance* in 2012, *Kanka Musa* in 2016 and *B4 Playlist* in 2019. At the time of my fieldwork, he was able to produce his music thanks to his work as an employee in a telecoms enterprise.

Fla The Ripper started his career by rapping mostly in English, which is the language through which he discovered rap and developed his rapper abilities. However, not using Wolof, rapping about subjects deemed foreign and exhibiting a materialistic attitude can cause Senegalese rap artists to be condemned as 'imitating Americans' and as not being true to the conventions of Senegalese Rap (Navarro 2020).

When we met in 2014, he strongly defended his choice of language as illustrating his desire to speak outside the barriers of Senegalese Rap:

If you rap in Wolof, who will understand? Only the Senegalese. And you say you want to talk to the world? It doesn't make sense. (...) Now, you want your message to get out of Senegal so that it can touch, so that it travels, you have to give it a visa.

Other elements pointed to this desire to 'talk with the world' in his album *The Renaissance*: a production, for example, that combined the speeches of historic figures with rap beats, or the frequent collaborations with the Senegalese group Alien Zik, with which he shares some aims, and with the Norwegian amateur singer Lillian Iversen, whom he met through the Internet. For artists like Fla the Ripper, 'talking to the world' also means escaping from musical constraints that render the music they want to make invisible in Senegal. Deprived of positions of power and the social and geographical mobility which gives access to them, these artists find other ways to be mobile, even if only through their imagination, by portraying a kind of cosmopolitanism they can convey through attitudes and language alone.

The production of his first album by his childhood friend Mistamase, who lives in France, reveals the efforts undertaken by these actors to live up to international standards that are difficult to achieve, and that lead to minimal results in the artists' careers:

The album *The Renaissance* I did it here. In this studio [Alien Zik Studio, located in Dakar, where we conduct the interview]. We had to master the album to have a standard quality, but we encountered difficulties somewhere because here most studios don't have mastering equipment, it's very expensive and they master with software. And at the end the product has losses. So the sound is not at its best. So we said to ourselves, we can't have that here, we have to go where we can find it. So, to tell you [the truth], we're stuck. We are not going to say, 'Yeah we are Africans, we are going to be 100% African.' If we can get the right things, we will go elsewhere. So we left to master the album in France, and we saw that there are studios internationally, if you burn the CDs and you copy, you print photos and you paste them, and you go out like most artists do here, you don't play on the radio internationally. So we said we're not going to do all this work and be disqualified just by our equipment. [...] We didn't have a record company behind us to make an album of this quality. There wasn't



anyone behind it. So we worked, we recorded here, we paid, we ... how should I say, we collected the maximum of money, mastered in France and pressed our album in France to have this standard quality that allowed us to be at the same level as international artists.

Like most artists of *rap galsen*, Fla the Ripper only relies on his own means and networks to compete with both national and international artists. As the artist puts it, artists in Senegal feel 'stuck' and are compelled to 'go where we can find it.' Thus, mobility appears as a resource, and the lack thereof presents itself as a disadvantage. Apart from the lack of equipment, Fla the Ripper points to a lack of support from an organization like a record company, which he uses to maintain his independence, but which once again explains his lack of resources besides his own. It is telling that the only resource that finally allowed him to publish his album in the format he wanted was through a relationship he has with someone who has migrated, his friend the producer Mistamase. The example of Fla the Ripper further demonstrates how African artists without access to mobility cannot compete with international artists in a global music industry.

In 2017, in the midst of promoting his new album, *Kanka Musa*, Fla The Ripper explained to a journalist with Senegal's daily *Le Quotidien* that he had revised his marketing strategy after the poor sales of *The Renaissance* by working with Rock Izar Records, a Spanish independent label and recording studio. However, he soon ended this collaboration for his next album, which he produced using his own independent label Right Handz Music. His shift from English to Wolof as the main language for his raps could also signify his current willingness to build a Senegalese audience, rather than directly pursuing his ambitions on the international stage.

### **Discussion: mobilities and the 'music scene'**

If the practice of Senegalese rap music has given rise to mobilities, the analysis cannot be satisfied with considering them as another illustration of how integral they are to the professional life of artists and cultural professionals. While

most studies emphasize the key importance of mobility in the making of artistic careers, relatively to immobile artists that are deprived of it, no study in music has, to my knowledge, considered it in relation to migrant artists.<sup>10</sup> As Martiniello (2015) states, the migrant artist is still an underdeveloped subject of study that has been mainly limited to 'conceptions of the migrant as an immigrant and of circulation as immigration' which 'still conceal the diversity of the migratory reality of world music actors' (Gilles 2009: 13).

Studies of the circulation of African artists have also been interested primarily in understanding processes of cultural globalization. They discuss the role of the circulation of objects and ideas, and to a lesser extent of African artists themselves, in the transformations of artistic practices and contemporary identity productions (Andrieu and Olivier 2017; White 2002, 2011). This literature has also focused more on inequalities between North and South (Andrieu 2012; Despres 2011; Marcel 2012), rather than on inequalities produced on the local level, between artists who move and those who do not.

Considering migration, mobility and immobility within a 'music scene' has allowed us to understand how different mobilities work differently to sustain power dynamics.

As the examples of Gladiat'Or, Keyti and Fla the Ripper have shown, different mobilities result in different positions within the music scene: from the marginalized status of the 'migrant' to the prestige and opportunities associated to being 'mobile' to finally, the feeling of being 'stuck' associated with being 'immobile.' Power asymmetries within the 'music scene,' defined as a group of people structured as a network, mostly stem from unequal access to important actors, which work hand-in-hand with access to mobility. Indeed, as many mobility scholars have stated, unequal access to mobility derives from unequal access to social relations that involve the produc-

<sup>10</sup> Such is also the ambition of an issue of the Journal *Ethnologie française* on transnational music worlds, published with Alice Aterianus-Owanga and Armelle Gaulier.

tion and distribution of power. The example of Keyti has shown how he manages to be mobile by being inserted in specific social relations. In turn, mobility gives Keyti the means to build a 'network capital' (Urry 2007) that allows him to stay mobile. On the other hand, examples like Fla the Ripper show how resources can be out of reach without resorting to mobility. Obstacles to mobility and unfulfilled desires for international exports, or in other words immobility, are an aspect of the daily lives of most Senegalese rap actors. Gladiat'or, as a migrant, has trouble being accepted and having access to the resources possessed by key actors, not knowing in whom he can confide to help him promote his music. These difficulties underline the role of networks in the realization of artistic activities in Senegal, networks into which migrants, even when they are former local celebrities, are no longer inserted when they return to Senegal after too long an absence. These examples also show how the status of migrant implies the status of outsider, not only in one's new country of residence, but also in one's country of origin.

Addressing mobility not only in contrast to immobility but also to migration also leads us to acknowledge how mobiles gain power from their unique position between mobility and locality. As intermediaries between the music scene in which they are imbedded and their foreign networks, these actors can invest the capital gained from mobility where it matters most – in Senegal. The perception of mobiles as actors who use mobility in order to invest in the 'music scene' is precisely why mobility is considered 'good' while migration, seen as the action of leaving behind, or breaking up with the 'music scene,' is considered as 'bad.'

I have stressed elsewhere (Navarro 2019a) how my results indicate that access to social networks is closely related to the acquisition of prestige and professionalism. The professionalism that appears to be derived from mobility is a source of prestige, and the prestige associated with mobility makes artists who have travelled appear more professional. On the other hand, it

is the notoriety and the recognized professionalism of actors like Keyti and others that allow them to position themselves within networks that work 'by recommendations,' which in turn enables them to increase their reputation as professionals. Access to mobility is therefore a producer of social inequalities in that it determines access to social positions and resources. Nevertheless, while mobility allows rappers to earn a living and to achieve and consolidate a certain social status, permanence in Senegal is necessary to maintain links with the networks of the rap scene.

Another enquiry in the analysis of various mobilities within a music scene, so far neglected, could start out from the observation that mobility reveals itself as a resource to establish and maintain a definition of the music. Because mobile artists mainly travel by virtue of their recognition as social rappers, mobility participates in enforcing a certain vision of *rap galsen*, which in turn benefits artists who are already mobile while bearing on the artistic livelihoods of migrant and immobile artists.

To make a space for their artistry, migrants challenge the processes of inclusion and exclusion from *rap galsen*. This is the case, for example, when Gladiat'Or proclaims he still does *rap galsen* although it is made in Paris. Considering how belongings of *rap galsen* are reimagined outside Senegal interrogates the making of a 'translocal music scene' built as a 'translocal social space' defined as 'the result of new forms of delimitation which consist in part of, but also go beyond geographical or national borders' (Salzbrunn 2004), being composed of both local and global references. Moreover, through translocal practices, other mobile actors reconfigure the territories and actors involved in the making of *rap galsen*. Through musical practice, transnational and translocal practices can be grasped beyond the manifestation of national and religious affiliations, which dominate the study of Senegalese transnationalism (Bava 2003; Kane 2011; Mbengue 2008; Riccio 2003, 2006; Salzbrunn 2005), while reflecting the same

dynamics of economic and social transfers, as well as political, economic, and religious transnationalism.

Asserting that a 'music scene' is translocal has worked as a way of resolving the apparent paradox between the definition of a scene in relation to a territorialized locality and the increasing globalization of the processes of the production and reception of music, allowing music that refers to a particular locality to be produced outside this territory and to arouse feelings of belonging beyond its borders.

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