

The Rise of a New Senegalese Cultural Philosophy?

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Abstract: The Senegalese social movement *Y'en a Marre* formed in 2011 in response to political stagnation and a lack of key public services. It played a decisive role in defeating incumbent president Abdoulaye Wade in his unconstitutional reelection campaign in 2012. This article considers the movement within the context of postcolonial Senegalese cultural politics. After a brief survey of the recent forms of hip-hop engagement with social issues in other African countries, this study presents *Y'en a Marre* as articulating a social identity, a collective movement, and a cultural/musical form that are distinct from these other examples of hip-hop activism because they are continuations of a specifically Senegalese hybrid of art and social engagement imagined first by Senghor. *Y'en a Marre* is a culminating articulation of various trends within post-independence Senegalese culture by bridging the divide between tradition and modernity, between the national and the local, between elders and youth. *Y'en a Marre* combatted the threat to Senegal's prized political stability, and has continued to challenge social and political stagnation, by reconfiguring, but also confirming, Senegalese cultural philosophy for a diverse, inclusive audience.

Introduction

In the summer of 2011, when President Abdoulaye Wade announced his intention to seek an unprecedented third term in the presidential office and began tinkering with the two-term limit of the constitution to assure his re-election in 2012, Senegalese society was forced into an unwelcomed and unusual position. Long a paragon for political stability in West Africa, the country now seemed to be on the precipice of social rupture. Angry citizens took to the streets to protest Wade's attempt to secure a third term, and law enforcement struck back with tear gas, arrests, and violent dispersal. As the cycle of protests and retaliation continued up to the elections it became clear that if Wade were to retain the presidency, Senegal's prized exceptional standing as a political leader among African nations would be severely threatened, if not outright demolished.

Amidst these events, a group of rappers and journalists, calling themselves *Y'en a Marre* (We're Fed Up), succeeded in arousing the dormant social consciousness of Senegalese society through community organization, written manifestoes, social media, thundering oratory, striking visual imagery, and unifying hip-hop anthems, attracting enough followers to ensure Wade's defeat and his peaceful exit from office. Originally formed in January 2011 by Thiat (Cheikh Omar Cyrille Toure) and Kilifeu (Mbessane Seck) of the rap group *Keur Gui*, and journalists Fadel Barro and Alioune Sané in the city of Kaolack in response to one of the too-frequent extended blackouts in the country, *Y'en a Marre* has sustained the tremendous momentum they won during the presidential elections to become an intractable institution within Senegalese social, political, and cultural life.

The group maintains an informal, open connection to the general public, represented most readily by the "open house" format they maintain at the collective's headquarters in

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the Parcelles Assainies neighborhood of Dakar, during which anyone may stop by on Tuesdays to elicit advice from or to propose partnerships to members of the core of the group. During one such open house I observed in July 2013, Barro and Sané first welcomed engaged citizens and civic leaders from Mali who had come to elicit their advice on raising public consciousness ahead of Mali's presidential elections that were taking place later that month. Barro and Sané emphasized the need to remain non-partisan so that they could earn the confidence of the people, the excitement and energy that the two *Yenamarristes* still feel towards such issues coming through in their increasingly animated speech. Next on their agenda was a group of teenagers who wanted *Y'en a Marre's* help in organizing a nationwide campaign to elect Mactar Seck, a Senegalese living in New York who directs an organization called Orphan Children of Africa, as one of CNN's heroes of 2013 through an online election. Barro told them that this wasn't something that the collective would take under their official aegis, but he would bring it to the entire membership to see if individuals wanted to support it. Finally, a business leader from a town on the outskirts of Dakar came to ask *Y'en a Marre* for their public endorsement of a study he had undertaken to analyze his local problems, which, in his view, would instigate solutions to those problems more quickly. Sané suggested that one of *Y'en a Marre's esprits*, or local chapters, close to his town would be the most appropriate venue for soliciting support for his project.

The variety of Barro and Sané's interlocutors, as well as the diversity of their demands and the *Yenamarristes'* suggestions, on that day pointed to the breadth of the collective's reputation and influence, extending across generational and geographical boundaries. *Y'en a Marre* has also undertaken ambitious public projects that aim to significantly reconfigure Senegalese society. Most recently, at the end of August 2013, the collective launched the *Observatoire de la démocratie et de la bonne gouvernance* (Observatory of Democracy and Good Governance), whose principle objective is to elicit widespread public engagement in politics through informing and training the public in their rights, their responsibilities, and the practice of those rights and responsibilities. The first event within the context of this program was a workshop to train young people in local leadership and governance, held over three days in late December 2013. While many observers of the 2012 presidential campaign and election questioned whether *Y'en a Marre* would last beyond that tumultuous period, the group has unquestionably demonstrated its commitment to sustain social and political reforms in Senegal.

Due to *Y'en a Marre's* rise to prominence during the flashpoint of the 2012 presidential elections and its continued productivity and visibility in Senegalese public life, the collective has drawn international media and scholarly attention. Much of the commentary in the popular media that was concurrent with the presidential campaign and elections placed the collective within transnational and global cultural contexts, most readily those formed around hip-hop culture and rap music.¹ Continental connections between rappers were easy to make at the time due to the hip-hop activism that had been recently sweeping across Africa. By the time the movement was prominently active in the 2012 Senegalese presidential campaign, rappers were a common element of recent struggles for democracy, equality, and freedom in a number of African countries. Tunisian rapper El Général, with his song "Rais lebled," was instrumental in sparking the uprisings in Tunisia against President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali.² El-Haqed, a Moroccan rapper, released tracks criticizing the Moroccan monarchy, which eventually led to his imprisonment.³

Critics were quick to place the members of *Y'en a Marre* in line with their fellow socially conscious rappers from the continent.⁴ Although such an approach to analyzing the

movement provides important insights, such as opening up lines of solidarity and community between activists that transcend national borders, and sketching out consistent ideals for democratic reform, this method also elides the essential national and cultural contexts that *Y'en a Marre* arose from, and that it continues to reference and to draw from. Hisham Aidi, writing about recent protests across Africa and media coverage of them, points to the ethnocentric views underlying such approaches that ignore national and cultural specificities: "Western journalists' focus on hip hop – like their fixation on Facebook and Twitter – seems partly because, in their eyes, a taste for hip hop among young Muslims is a sign of moderation, modernity, even 'an embrace of the US.'"⁵ Academic critics have subsequently attempted to correct this problem, providing a variety of analyses of the *Y'en a Marre* collective that take into account Senegalese dynamics, both germane to hip-hop culture and not.⁶ These scholarly correctives to the popular press's conflation of African individuals, social protests, and cultures under the umbrella of hip-hop have convincingly demonstrated that, just as the members of the group themselves insist, *Y'en a Marre* is a movement by Senegalese for Senegalese issues, and must be considered as such in any treatment of it.

The analytical thread that does connect the media accounts and the scholarly considerations of the collective and its significance for various communities, whether they be Senegalese, African, or global, whether they are based in hip-hop culture or not, is that of "newness." The journalists, writers, and academics who have worked through *Y'en a Marre's* importance have all fixated on the ways that the movement breaks new ground in various social, political, rhetorical, and cultural domains. This special issue of the *African Studies Quarterly* itself, provoked by *Y'en a Marre*, if not exclusively devoted to the collective, is dedicated to new art forms in contemporary Senegal. This critical framework of "newness" in regards to the movement follows *Y'en a Marre's* own rhetoric and objectives, as they have called for "a new type of Senegalese."⁷

The following overview of the quickly burgeoning critical literature on *Y'en a Marre* should provide adequate background for understanding the two primary lines of inquiry on the movement that I engage with in this essay: Senegal's specific historical, cultural, and social context, and the originality of the collective. In fact, this article takes the national contextualization of the movement further than it has been previously done in order to push back against the prevailing notion of *Y'en a Marre's* originality, particularly that which claims its newness is primarily due to the collective's use of hip-hop. I want to prod our readiness to view *Y'en a Marre's* actions and rhetoric as producing a rupture with what then comes to be considered anemic, conventional Senegalese society. This article places the *Y'en a Marre* movement in the historical and social context of Senegalese cultural forms. In particular, I examine the ways that the collective, for all of its calls for "a new type of Senegalese," its use of contemporary media, and its foundation in hip-hop culture, equally draws upon cultural ideology, models, and trends that can be traced back to Léopold Sédar Senghor and that have endured in Senegal since his presidency. I believe that this methodology will shed new light on the strategies of *Y'en a Marre* and reveal new dimensions of their innovation.

Among the body of scholarship that places *Y'en a Marre* within national and local contexts, fine research has been produced that offers up analyses of the role of socially-engaged hip-hop within the movement, drawing upon much previous work on the Senegalese hip-hop scene generally.⁸ While these studies inform my research, I extrapolate their conclusions out to a broader object of study. For example, Marame Gueye argues that

the role of viable, important rap produced by the rappers of *Y'en a Marre* in instigating social change has been undervalued in most considerations of the movement.⁹ Following her perceptive critique of the need to consider *Y'en a Marre's* cultural productions, but expanding this approach beyond a focus on hip-hop, I consider *Yenamarristes* primarily as cultural actors. I view the movement as composed of individuals and groups working with cultural forms in a manner specific to postcolonial Senegal to convey important national ideals and values, to intervene in the public and political spheres. The members of *Y'en a Marre* are part of a lineage of Senegalese cultural producers who have worked within the cultural context established by Senghor through an institutionalization and propagation of a uniquely Senegalese cultural ideology. Senghor believed that specifically Senegalese cultural products could produce political stability and social cohesion within postcolonial Senegalese society, and carve out a role for the country, politically and culturally, on the global stage. As we will see, due to the manner in which Senghor implemented his cultural philosophy in early postcolonial Senegal, the concept has had and continues to have currency within Senegal, which compels both the political and cultural elites who are dictating the sanctioned limits of Senegalese cultural forms, and those cultural actors and consumers who are redrawing them, to acknowledge and to address it. I will show that, while the cultural actors and movements since Senghor have not always conceived of the specific dimensions of Senegalese cultural production in the same manner as Senghor, and have attempted to redefine those characteristics, they have nevertheless been fully invested in Senegal's cultural ideology initiated by Senghor—that homegrown culture is the primary means to reconfigure the country politically and socially. This includes *Y'en a Marre*.

I show that by grounding its actions and rhetoric in recognizable Senegalese cultural patterns, in the ideology of Senegal's cultural uniqueness, *Y'en a Marre* is able to subtly and carefully introduce transgressive political and social ideas, including ones rooted in hip-hop culture, to a broad spectrum of people. Yet the group is not using Senegalese cultural ideology simply as a cover to smuggle in radicalism. Their tactics, music, and rhetoric reveal their investment in enacting a redefinition of Senegalese politics, while continuing Senegal's postcolonial cultural continuum. However, the cultural philosophy offered by *Y'en a Marre* is more approachable and inclusive than its iteration within the official cultural institutions. In their cultural interventions the members of *Y'en a Marre* carve out a middle ground between Senegalese historical trends and contexts, on one side, and global, progressive, inclusive innovation, on the other. The movement is ultimately able to offer a new political vision for the nation by existing in that interstitial space. They successfully mold hip-hop values to Senegal's cultural history, giving birth to a concept of Senegalese culture that appears wholly new and groundbreaking, but which ultimately harkens back to its original form as conceived by Senghor.

The article therefore begins by tracing the progression of the entwined political and cultural landscape in Senegal from the dawn of independence to the current day, analyzing the enduring intersections between politics and the arts in the attempts by artistic creators to transform their country. This provides the historical foundation for the cultural philosophy that I am referencing, as well as shows the enduring cultural negotiation between Senegalese cultural policy and ideology. Such historical work has not been adequately done with *Y'en a Marre*. As journalist and academics have rushed to capture the movement's effervescence and to reflect the group's own articulation of "the new," they have neglected the essential Senegalese historical progression that *Y'en a Marre* is a part of.¹⁰ Therefore, I proceed to consider *Y'en a Marre* within this historical cultural context, drawing on interviews with the

members, observations of their meetings, and analysis of their rhetoric, ultimately proposing the movement as the culmination, in many of ways, of Senegal's postcolonial cultural trajectory.¹¹ I show that the rhetoric, strategies, and actions of the group articulate various moments and tendencies within post-independence Senegalese cultural philosophy, while tacking back and forth between tradition and modernity, between the national and the local, between elders and youth, between the new and the old. This approach is not meant to dismiss the claims of original strategies, rhetoric, and results that have been emanating from the movement and its observers. Instead, it will allow us to better comprehend the group's newness. To begin this process of better understanding the nature of *Y'en a Marre*, I argue, we must begin with Senghor and his own sense of being fed up.

Senghor and State-Building

As a student, writer, philosopher, and statesman in Paris during the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, Senghor began to articulate his vision of black culture, a philosophy that would guide his cultural policy during the years of his presidency in Senegal, in the face of seemingly indomitable French colonialism. Dialoguing with his fellow intellectuals of The African Society of Culture and publishing in the group's journal *Présence Africaine*, Senghor was part of a community that placed artists and cultural producers at the fore of the struggle for independence and its aftermath. Elizabeth Harney describes this time in the following way:

The very establishment of a society of intellectuals and activists, a publication house, and a set of organized forums that could nurture burgeoning political and cultural philosophies afforded the arts and artists central roles in the processes of postcolonialism. At conferences, art was envisioned to be in the service of a variety of pressing pursuits, acting as a means of exploring and expressing newfound senses of cultural nationalism, shared racial consciousness, and philosophy.¹²

Here we see the germination of the cultural ideology that would come to fruition in independent Senegal under Senghor and that would come to define cultural production up to the present day, including *Y'en a Marre's* cultural interventions. At the second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in 1959 Senghor declared, "writers and artists must play, do play an essential role in the struggle for decolonization."¹³ Once African countries were free from the cultural strictures of colonialism, they would be able to produce "true" black art and culture, which, in Senghor's view, would provide a unique dimension to the cultural hybridization in which all countries could now freely participate. For centuries world culture had been lacking the characteristics inherent to Africa due to colonial suppression. Now Africa could offer those aspects—in particular rhythm and emotion—to all countries and allow them to appreciate and assimilate them. This process, in Senghor's view, would result in the civilization of the universal.

With the arrival of decolonization and independence, Senghor was able to put this philosophy into meaningful practice through his cultural policy in Senegal. Harney writes:

Senghor became a great patron of the arts in his newly independent nation. He viewed art and politics as handmaidens in the struggle toward economic development and, by extension, the artists as cultural workers...He believed that Negritude, acting as the people's cultural repository, could illustrate the rich potential in Senegalese society and thereby motivate individuals to strive

for greater production. Its promotion was not simply a luxury but crucial to the success of Senegalese state building.¹⁴

Funds—as much as 25 or 30 percent of the state’s budget—were allocated to the Ministry of Culture and were used to build presses, theaters, museums, art schools, archives, and workshops.¹⁵ Senegal “hosted annual salons, sponsored internationally traveling exhibitions, and provided a generous system of bursaries and civil service jobs” within the visual arts community.¹⁶ The National Dance Company and The National Ballet were formed in the year after independence, drawing from different ethnic groups and regions to foster a sense of national unity and identity. Troupe members quickly departed on overseas tours, acting as ambassadors of Senegal. In 1966, Senghor organized The First World Festival of Black Arts, whose purpose was to promote Senegalese art to the world, as well as to further the articulation of a pan-African aesthetic.

From these early manifestations of Senegalese postindependence culture I want to identify and look more closely at two principles that run through all of them, proving to be defining and enduring characteristics of Senghorian cultural policy, of enduring Senegalese cultural philosophy, as well as dimensions of *Y'en a Marre's* deployment of cultural productions. The first is the expression of an inherent identity through culture, and the second the engagement of this expression with an international audience. Souleymane Bachir Diagne shows that the “natural” state of African cultures was inscribed in the cultural policy as a counterpoint to colonial nation formation, making postcolonial culture an essential component to postcolonial national identity: “the primary goal of cultural politics was to forge a national consciousness for nation-states that had inherited borders that rarely followed ethnic and cultural coherency established by precolonial history.”¹⁷ Writing in 1973 for a study prepared for UNESCO on cultural policy in Senegal, Mamadou Seyni M'Bengue, an adviser in the country’s Ministry of Culture, emphasized the importance of organizing new cultural forms and institutions around “authentic” African civilization:

It was, indeed, in this heritage of the past, embodying our most authentic values of civilization, that the new cultural system had to be rooted. It was in the heart of this parent-stock full of life-giving sap that the future grafts of modernity and enriching new contributions had to be implanted...Our new cultural system was, therefore, to reflect our vision of the world, our constant preoccupation with man, our desire to organize life according to our own criteria with regard to the beautiful and the useful, so as to revive in the world a sense of aesthetic values, to make it hear the profound message of Africa, conveyed by the regular rhythm of the tom-tom.¹⁸

Such ideology had a profound impact on the practices, products, and success of those actually creating artwork shortly after independence. For example, Ndiouga Adrien Benga reveals the expectations placed on urban musical forms, writing: “Senghor determined precisely what suited him and what was important therefore to support. Urban music was not exempt from this. It was supposed to protect national languages through appropriate compositions and adaptations. In addition, it was supposed to be concerned with the creation of an authentically local music.”¹⁹ In the visual arts, this “life giving sap” took the form of recognizably pan-African images: masks and carved statues, for example.

These “authentically” African art forms were then sent out to the world, demonstrating the inherent characteristics of African society and arguing for Africa’s place among the

world's leading nations. This second component of postcolonial Senegalese cultural ideology was essential in order to harness the nationalism that had been provoked by cultural productions within the country and to use it to elevate Senegal's global standing. Again, examples abound of cultural producers who were developed under Senghor's cultural policy to be eventual representatives of Senegalese culture and society for a worldwide audience. Benga cites the example of Lamine Konté who came from a family of griots and wrote songs based on African or Afro-Diasporic poems and texts with traditional instruments like the balafon and the kora. His music was supported and promoted by the government's cultural institutions and was embraced by primarily European listeners. In regards to visual art, Harney notes, "the arts infrastructure remained essentially export-oriented, promoting an image of the nation and its aesthetic abroad."²⁰ The promotional value of cultural products for Senegalese national identity was facilitated by the fact that the State controlled every facet of the art world, from production and selling, to curation and criticism. Due to the government's active development of consistently identifiable cultural productions and its insistence on exporting those productions outside of Senegal for nationalist and political ends, creating an aura of cultural exceptionalism around the country, during Senghor's presidency it was difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between the art world and the political sphere. Culture became the *de facto* tool in Senegal for engaging with global, national, and local political issues. Diagne emphasizes the overwhelming influence that Senghorian cultural strategies have had on Senegal up to its present day:

Senegal's emphasis on the idea of *cultural politics* since its independence, which differentiates it from many other African nations, is well known. This emphasis is so significant that the idea itself must be understood to mean that true politics can only exist *through* culture and *for* culture. The immense shadow of President Senghor, of course, hovers over this perspective."²¹

Despite Senghor's obvious dedication to the arts and his continuing influence over that domain of Senegalese society, the cultural policy that he instituted contained within it some obvious contradictions and tensions. His desire for artists to emphasize authentically African motifs in their work has led to criticism that Senghor was, in fact, accommodating and reinforcing French colonial ideology. Harney notes that masks and statues were "commodified signs of *l'art primitif* within the European marketplace and imagination."²² Senghor's focus on the exportation of Senegalese cultural products and knowledge has also been criticized for leaving Senegal's own general populace bereft of these art forms and know-how. Politician Abdoulaye Bathily has said that Senghor "acted more internationally than nationally...his cultural policy really did not have an impact on the mass of the people."²³ Harney argues that Senghor's tactics left "a larger Senegalese public with little guidance or incentive to acquire the kind of 'cultural capital' needed to serve as an active consumer or patron class for these new arts."²⁴ State patronage itself, whatever the preferred motifs and targeted audience, was problematic as it pressured artists, whether directly or indirectly, to conform to expectations. As a result, a diluted body of national artwork was created due to the patronage system giving the same support to all artists who were willing to meet stylistic demands, regardless of their differences in skill and technique. Benga details the dilemma faced by urban musicians during Senghor's presidency. In order to earn the meager living that was available through music during that time period, musicians had to base their songs on "praises for some marabout or member of the establishment."²⁵

Musicians who bridled against such exigencies were faced with censorship. Filmmaker Ousmane Sembène, an outspoken critic of many aspects of Senegalese politics and society under Senghor, received funding from the Senegalese government, yet also had to endure censorship of some of his films.

Senghor's cultural policy, then, unquestionably birthed a concept of cultural exceptionalism in Senegal that has infused the country's various postcolonial cultural scenes, producers, and productions. Yet, just as certainly, it promulgated a cultural philosophy riven with tension between politics and the arts, between the cultural elite and the general populace, between national leaders and artists. Cultural exceptionalism is thus not an inherent, authentic trait of Senegalese society, easily accessible to all, but it is a program carefully and purposefully constructed, implemented, and maintained by Senghor to further specific political ends. Nevertheless, it has created a rhetorical and ideological space that cultural actors and producers, and their work, in Senegal must pass through, even those who strive to subvert normativity within the cultural and political spheres. Even these firebrands must work within the framework of Senegal's cultural ideology instituted by Senghor, acknowledging it in order to distort it.

Artists Against the State

This section traces the lineage, from the beginning of independence to our current day, of artists and cultural producers who have pushed against the boundaries of Senghorian cultural policy, but whose work is still defined by it. Doing so will foreground the ways *Y'en a Marre* can be read as a continuation of Senegal's postcolonial cultural context—another example of this negotiation between innovation and convention—and to bring to light the new approaches they do in fact bring to such a negotiation. Cultural actors have consistently interrogated Senghor's articulation of Senegal's cultural exception through their creations, even immediately following the institution of Senghor's cultural policy, which will be the time period focused on in this section, and within its bulwarks. Analyzing the state-sponsored *École de Dakar*, the assumed epicenter for normative, dictated visual arts during Senghor's presidency, Harney argues, "artworks grouped therein did not always follow a strictly prescribed artistic vision and ... the visual artists who chose to engage with the philosophy of Negritude were not necessarily governmental dupes but actors in shaping what could, at times, be a highly syncretic postindependence vision."²⁶ The following two sections will group together a variety of research on disparate artistic and cultural communities in postcolonial Senegal in order to emphasize the syncretism that has consistently defined Senegalese cultural work as it has responded to the explicit and implicit directives from Senghor's cultural policy.

Even as Senghor's administration pushed symbolically, purposefully "Senegalese" music upon the public, the musicians and listeners themselves engaged in a creative symbiosis in which the bands and songwriters would bring to the public compositions forged from a mix of traditional and foreign styles, to which the audiences would respond favorably, giving the musicians further impetus to advance their hybrid musical creations. These dynamics fostered a space of contestation for both the listener and the musician to normative directives inscribed in purely traditional musical forms: "Urban music enthusiasts demonstrated their ability to mix disparate elements, to produce modernity. They refashioned the attempts of the historicizing State to totalize, to inscribe a single memory, a single story in their playful space."²⁷ From these intimate musical negotiations

between creator and consumer emerged a heterogeneous public music scene much different than the one envisioned by Senghor's cultural policy: "No one style emerged to define the musical scene. Instead, it was marked by a constant renewal in which mixed both innovative and conservative characteristics, originality and experience, movement and stability; in short, it was part of a *dynamic* urban culture."²⁸

Surveying Senghor's entire tenure as president of Senegal, we find several examples of artists working in such a space of flux between sanctioned and personalized modes of creation, artists who were rethinking the relationship between politics and the arts, while still addressing aspects of Senghorian ideology and models of culture. In 1974, an actor by the name of Youssouf John established the *Laboratoire Agit-Art*, which denounced the institutionalized nature of the arts in Senegal due to state patronage and the centrality of Western paradigms. The Senghor-sanctioned artist, according to members of the Laboratory, was divorced from Senegalese society and history. In response to this situation, the artists in this group focused on disruptive cultural activity in the country, particularly in theater, which, as they saw it, was a site for the intermingling of the visual, musical, and literary arts. In their performances, the Laboratory eschewed written scripts, instead relying upon improvisation and gesture. They equally rejected Western forms of theatrical space, preferring open-air models that allowed for free interaction between the actors, the surrounding environment, and the audience. Their work, however, did not completely escape Senghorian practice and theory, as the participants in the Laboratory just as strongly emphasized the importance of "traditional" forms, albeit alternative ones to Senghor's. Worldwide engagement also eventually became an important possibility for the members, finally exhibiting their visual and performance art in London in 1995. The perplexed reaction of many critics, however, spoke to the dangers of de-contextualization for the group and, perhaps, all exported Senegalese art. Harney ultimately declares the Laboratory's alternative to Senghorian cultural ideology as "a replacement of one synthesis of ideas with another," revealing the difficulty cultural producers, even ones as vociferously anti-Senghorian cultural policy as those of the Laboratory, would have in pulling out of Senghor's cultural compunctions.²⁹

In conjunction with the Laboratory, one of its members began squatting in an abandoned military camp, inviting other artists to occupy the buildings and eventually naming it *le Village des Arts* in 1977. It quickly became a viable and popular alternative site for workshops and studios. There, artists could experiment with materials and methods in ways that were not always possible when housed in government subsidized locations. Inhabitants of the Village could interact openly, establishing an environment of communal inspiration and creation that often included the surrounding community. Art exhibitions, musical performances, theatrical productions and literary readings were all held at the site, encouraging a free exchange of ideas. This artistic community, though created as a rebuttal to state-codified art, does not appear to be that different from Senghor's early vision of art in Senegal as he describes it: "each manifestation of art is collective, is made for the participation of all with the participation of all...[Art] engages the *person*—and not simply the individual—through and in the collective."³⁰ Once again, we note the liminal nature of oppositional artists who strive for innovative forms of cultural engagement while still echoing the rhetoric and ideology of culture that Senghor instilled in the country. The true mark of distinction between the two spheres of culture comes from the use of power in reinforcing one's cultural domain. Senghor never made a show of the forces available to him with regard to the Village, though his government acknowledged its existence while

avoiding interference in its operation. However, Senghor's successor held no such compunction. The peaceful co-existence between the Village and the government came to an end in 1983 when government tanks, under President Abdou Diouf's orders, rolled into the Village, subsequently chasing off residents and crushing artwork and documents.

Public Art Under Presidents Following Senghor

For some observers such actions taken by the new president marked the shift, if not the complete rupture, in cultural and political policy in Senegal from Senghor, a poet, to Diouf, a technocrat.³¹ Underlying tensions between the state's conception of the arts and artists' need for independence under Senghor became more overt under the new administration of Diouf. Faced with increasing economic instability, Diouf significantly decreased the government's support of the arts, as well as basic governmental services. The federal government completely abandoned the areas of health, education, culture, and sanitation, leaving them to be provided by under-prepared local governments. Cityscapes became dirty and decrepit. Rural inhabitants streamed into the city, looking to escape the droughts that were ravaging their livelihood. Riots marked the national elections of 1988 as the opposition claimed corruption and vote rigging. University strikes led to an entire academic year being canceled in Dakar.

Despite this bleak social context and the concrete state cuts in cultural funding, however, it would be inaccurate to claim the state's cultural ideology was no longer propagated or accepted in Senegal. As Diagne explains, "the *political* expectations of Senegalese are much more impregnated with this Senghorian culturalist mindset than they would like to admit, convinced that they are part of a cultural 'exception' that defines their country. And they expect those who lead them to act and to *speak* in a manner that conforms to the expectations that come from this belief."³² This mentality among the general populace towards its government that Senghor had planted and cultivated allowed the state to maintain its cultural influence, despite its limitations in maintaining its cultural infrastructure: "the State...continues to hold symbolic weight from the culturalist philosophy."³³ A cultural policy, though altered and limited in practice, persisted ideologically within the country under Diouf, which in turn provoked artists to continue to engage with official conceptions of culture, attempting to bend it closer to their desires for their society.

While musicians during the presidency of Senghor had to struggle with the normalizing impetuses of the cultural policy, outright censorship, and the severe financial restrictions on supporting oneself through music, musicians under Diouf found their horizons slightly opening up and expanding. Musicians working within the genre of *mbalax*, established and popularized during the 1970s, had to face the question now, with increased international exposure and popularity, of how this "national" music would continue to reflect Senegalese reality: "*Mbalax* was looking for a direction between the tradition of the griots, their propensity to manipulate identity markers (the excessive references to the Mouride brotherhood and to traditional values that predate Wolof ones) and the opening towards the outside world, to foreign, international styles."³⁴

Two youth movements that emerged in the late 1980s within the interstitial space of culture and politics serve as particular harbingers of, but also counterpoints to *Y'en a Marre*. First, a community of young people, known as *set/setal*, dedicated themselves to cleaning up their streets and neighborhoods, revivifying dilapidated buildings, and beautifying the areas

with murals. Ideologically, the group hoped to cleanse its society of government corruption, immorality, and social division. The members painted the walls of the city with figures from Senegalese history and culture—including Senghor—but also from Western culture. Art, affixed prominently on walls and buildings throughout Dakar, became a part of daily life, echoing Senghor's early claims that "Literature and art are not separate from the generic activities of man... There is the people, the anonymous mass that sings, dances, sculpts and paints."³⁵ As the group gained increasing attention, politicians, primarily those of the SOPI ("change" in Wolof) opposition, tried to lay claim to the work and philosophy of *set/setal* in order to capitalize on this socially engaged cultural movement for political ends.³⁶ Again, we can note the constant negotiation through cultural productions between opposing notions of Senegalese politics, society, and governmental rule, with Senghorian cultural ideology underlying both positions.

Succeeding *set/setal*, the *Boul Falé* generation brought a near-nihilistic perspective to Senegalese society and employed rap music for its soundtrack during the 1990s. Taking its moniker from the title of an album by the hip-hop group Positive Black Soul, the young people who aligned themselves with this philosophy principally came from poor urban areas that were struck hard by the failing economic and social policies of the Diouf administration. Whereas the participants in *set/setal* turned to the public use of cultural creations to fight against similar problems, those of the *Boul Falé* generation "offer[ed] and test[ed] out the only goods available to them, their bodies."³⁷ Through dress, dance, drinking, and drugs, youth of *Boul Falé* confronted and expressed their dismay with "bodies assailed and traumatized by the violence of economic attacks, of hunger and of the stress of work. But also bodies weakened by the idleness of an endemic unemployment."³⁸ Young people's bodies became sites of expression for an increasingly globalized, heterogeneous, marginalized cultural outlook since turning to accepted Senegalese society only offered destitution and disenfranchisement: "The fashioning of an evasive identity makes sense of an unstable life whose immediacy is revealed in this expression produced by a process of channel surfing through the global market. A culture of collage. The cobbled together expression testifies to the cultural mixing and transactions that take place in the marketplace of Senegalese leisure activities."³⁹ *Boul Falé*, perhaps, is the most concrete attempt of those outlined in this article to break from the cultural heritage of the early years of nation-building—choosing the body over artwork as the medium of expression; adopting without mitigation globalized or Western cultural forms. Yet the marginalized end result of this philosophy that was largely limited to the individual and that ignored the greater community attests to the entrenchment of Senghorian cultural philosophy as the lens through which social and political change must be projected in Senegal for it to have a chance to be widespread, meaningful, and lasting.

While *Boul Falé* was an aimless, disenfranchised group of young people using the body as its *cri de coeur*, as opposed to *set/setal*, which was an amorphous movement that strived for concrete social change through public art, both are manifestations of the frustration that continued to rise during Diouf's terms in office, which finally resulted in his ouster from power. Even as the presidency transitioned from Diouf to Wade, however, many of the sanctioned dynamics between politics and the arts that marked Senghor and Diouf's administrations endured. Wade's administration viewed official cultural projects as the most evident ways the new government could manifest its dedication to safeguarding the myth of Senegalese exceptionalism by breaking from the policies undertaken by Senghor's and Diouf's socialist party, ignoring the irony in how fully this undertaking implicated them in

Senghorian cultural ideology. In 2002, Wade modified the constitution to inscribe the president as the “primary protector of arts and letters.” He announced ambitious *grands projets culturels*, planning to construct seven cultural sites, including museums, a national theater, a national library, a national archives, and an architectural school. Wade’s eager public engagement with Senegalese culture demonstrates once again the inevitability of Senghorian cultural ideology being the process to even evoke political change.

A close analysis, however, of one of the two completed *projets*—*le Monument de la Renaissance africaine*—exposes the ways that the praxis of Senghorian cultural policy had continued to decompose within governmental power and institutions in its ability to engage authentically with the lives of the Senegalese people. The Monument, constructed for the exorbitant cost of 27 million US dollars, provoked protests and the outcries of political opposition leaders at its unveiling. Depicting a shirtless man cradling a toddler pointing toward Africa’s glorious future in his left arm, while seizing a scantily clad woman around the waist with his right arm, the Monument received a gamut of criticism for its artistic worth. Some denounced its “Stalinist” style, while others claimed that the figures do not resemble Africans in the slightest. Local imams objected to the fact that the Monument depicted human figures at all, as representation of the human form is forbidden in Islam. To compound the problem, those human forms were immodestly dressed. Wade, not helping his cause, responded by comparing it to the depiction of Jesus Christ in Christian churches. Not surprisingly, this remark offended Senegalese Christians who make up 6 percent of the population. Even the conception and construction of the Monument was fraught, as claims that it was designed by a Senegalese architect proved to be false. The architect was Romanian, a North Korean company fabricated the sculpture, and Wade claimed a 35 percent stake in the monument’s earnings.

Wade’s very public, bungling cultural leadership in constructing the Monument, contrasted with his insistent public claims as to the significance of the Monument for Senegal’s, and even Africa’s, political, social, and economic standing in the world, represents the bifurcation of Senegalese cultural philosophy, with the persistence of the ideological importance of culture for politics and social issues on one side and the deterioration of official practice of Senegalese culture on the other. *Y’en a Marre* has positioned itself within this bifurcation. While opposition, tension, negotiation, and confrontation between the state and artists have been an enduring part of Senegal’s cultural and political atmosphere since Senghor, this conflict becomes more pointed throughout the presidencies of Diouf and then Wade, with the state’s role regressing from censoring advisor to corrupted exploiter. Nevertheless, Senghor’s cultural philosophy has endured. This means that current cultural actors are questioning this cultural paradigm like no time previously, searching for a way to seize the rhetoric of culture from those with power and to give it to the people. They wonder to what extent they can blaze new trails and how much they need to work within cultural frameworks that are recognizable and understandable to Senegalese citizens if they have any hope of someone finally listening to their cries of “enough is enough.”

Fed Up

In its hybridity of convention and innovation, *Y’en a Marre* is the culmination of both of the historical trends traced in this article that have defined postcolonial Senegal: the incessant influence of Senghorian cultural policy in Senegalese society and the constant attempts by cultural actors to renegotiate the characteristics and practical implications of this cultural

ideology. This section explores the manner in which *Y'en a Marre* taps into the symbolic meaning in Senegalese society of both of these components to reinforce the social and political significance of Senegalese culture, but also to reform it as the domain of the people instead of those in positions of authority. As the previously cited work of Diagne shows, the "all-encompassing culturalist philosophy" instituted by Senghor looms over politics and culture in contemporary Senegal, shaping the manner in which citizens understand their political leaders and their cultural creators, and the interactions between the two.⁴⁰ *Y'en a Marre* is not wholly original then, as the movement is anchored in previous conceptions of the intersection of culture and politics. What they are attempting to innovate is the potential of culture to impact society away from historically sanctioned political spheres in the Senegalese imaginary and to render Senegal's cultural philosophy a matter of daily life and the people rather than of memory and the powers that be. With their own cultural interventions, the collective adopts aspects of Senghorian cultural ideology in order to refashion it for their own political and social ends. Through this endeavor, the collective has become the apogee of a rising youthful urban culture that Mamadou Diouf recognized at the beginning of the century, a culture that participates in "an undertaking of disorganization that is also an adventure of reorganization and of recomposition of several historical lineages...It is at the heart of the creation of a new historicity...It is, at the same time, an undertaking of reorganization in the sense that it operates, through a given reserve of images, towards a task of permanent mobilization, selection, translation, and alteration."⁴¹ As I have shown, it is inevitable for cultural actors in Senegal to engage with Senghorian cultural ideology. However, I would argue that *Y'en a Marre* more knowingly and purposefully engages with Senegal's culturalism than did their cultural predecessors. This specific strategy is what has allowed them to make meaningful, lasting social change.

As noted in the introduction, this article focuses specifically on *Yenamarristes* as cultural actors because, as I will show, they conceive of social change in Senegal as happening largely, if not exclusively, through cultural productions; often ones based in hip-hop culture, but not exclusively. This conceptualization of the pairing of politics and the arts itself is a testament to the adherence *Y'en a Marre* has shown to Senghorian cultural ideology. At first glance, however, it appears that the group itself would reject such an assessment. The members of the collective, speaking about its origins, emphasize the breaking point they reached, when they felt compelled to do something about the problems Senegal was suffering from, rather than just to complain and to denounce.⁴² Djily Bagdad, one of the rappers of the group who joined later on, recounts the impetus for forming *Y'en a Marre* during a blackout:

It was Fadel [Barro]...He was sitting around with Thiat, Kilifeu, and some other people. They were just in a room discussing why the lights were off. And they were like, "Are we going to sit here and watch this situation?" The rappers were saying to the journalists, "You only write the papers. It's not concrete work to change things." And the journalists were saying to the rappers, "You only protest in your songs and when the songs over you put it away. You guys aren't doing anything to change things." From this discussion they were like, "Let's create a movement."⁴³

From this origin myth it appears that the members of *Y'en a Marre* have attempted to abandon the impotent stance of the artist in favor of the powerful persona of the activist to combat Senegal's social and political ills. Indeed, Thiat emphasizes exactly this sort of

division in his own personal progression. On the balcony of his modest home overlooking the beaches that extend from the Parcelles Assainies neighborhood of Dakar, he says, “I’m not a rapper, I’m an activist...Being a rapper means being, like, someone who is a star... I’m not an artist like Kilifeu [his musical collaborator in their group *Keur Gui* and fellow *Yenamarriste*]. For me, the message is the most important. I keep the message strong.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, *Y’en a Marre*’s collective actions and the politically engaged endeavors of its members betray the group’s devotion to social and political change through cultural productions.

Without a doubt, *Y’en a Marre*’s calls for action, the protests they have organized, their stays in jail, and the socially- and politically-engaged programs they have launched—in short, their political actions—have had an important impact on transforming Senegalese society. For example, along with the protests against Wade during the 2012 presidential election, *Y’en a Marre* organized voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, which, to reiterate, significantly contributed to Macky Sall’s defeat of Wade’s. When severe floods hit a number of Dakar neighborhoods during the rainy season of 2012, the group was there to assist with clean-up. Thiat spent significant time in prison during the tumultuous presidential campaign and election cycle, leading him to question, “In Africa, an artist who calls himself engaged, revolutionary, a message, and he’s never been in jail? Pffft!”⁴⁵ Certainly the members of *Y’en a Marre* have put their words into action, and that action has produced change.

In the political action itself and the way the members conceive of and articulate it, however, there is an inseparable relationship between the political actions of *Yenamarristes* and the cultural forms that they use to express, to instigate, and to organize their actions. *Y’en a Marre*, for each of its acts of protest or social organizing, has included a cultural component to reinforce its message, to engage a larger and more diverse population, and to sustain the momentum of its actions. Fomalade, the artistic director of the movement, says of Senegalese, “We are a population that is deeply interested in culture, in the arts.... Art is something that is in our veins,” citing the call of the muezzin, the song-like recitation of the Koran, and the popularity of rap as examples.⁴⁶ Due to the calcified manner that politicians communicate with the population, he notes, *Y’en a Marre* strives to communicate through culture: “Artistically, it was necessary to find a much more simple comprehension for the population.”⁴⁷ Exemplifying this objective, when it was engaged in the presidential campaigns and election the collective released three group tracks, one for each of the stages of the election: “Faux ! Pas force!” (“fake! forced step!” or “don’t push”) to warn Wade early on about the anger that his unconstitutional candidacy was stoking; “Daas Fanaanal” (“sharpening your weapon in preparation”) for the voter registration drive; and “Doggali” (“finishing a killing”), which expressed the desire of the group to finish the job of keeping Wade out of office by voting for Sall in the final run-off of the election. When *Y’en a Marre* launched the Observatory of Democracy and Good Governance they simultaneously released another group track, entitled “Dox Ak Sa Gox” (“walking with your community”).

The releases of most of these tracks have been accompanied by videos that artistically represent the anger, the call for action, and the desire for change expressed in the songs. For example, the video for “Faux pas! Forcé” depicts a diverse group of Senegalese citizens—male and female; young and middle-aged—taking to the streets.⁴⁸ In the video for “Dox Ak Sa Gox” the various rapping members of *Y’en a Marre*, backed by a large contingency of local inhabitants, confront the mayor of a neighborhood in order to put him on notice that they are watching him, ready to vote him out of office if he isn’t governing properly, and to lead

him through the neighborhood, pointing out the various problems that need to be fixed.⁴⁹ During the presidential elections, the members also took to using their cultural forms in public spaces, making music more than just an angry soundtrack to a revolution but instead, a direct tool of public, collective action. To raise the public's consciousness of issues and to recruit participants in protests, rappers would jump on buses or take up spots in a populated neighborhood to start rhyming about social problems. Younger people would pay attention to the political lyrics, recognizing in the rapper's flow a musical form they already knew and loved, while older people would be pulled into a genre due to its politicized content that they might have dismissed out of hand. *Y'en a Marre's* use of rap was able to unite young and old alike in political action because it participated in Senegal's postcolonial cultural ideology.



Figure 1: The courtyard murals at Foumalade's hip-hop center in Guediawaye

Foumalade has toured prisons with his own rap group *Bat'haillons Blin-D*. During their first such tour they would hear from prisoners about the harsh conditions in the prisons and the severity of the sentences they received. Subsequent tours of the prisons by *Bat'haillons Blin-D* have continued to spark dialogue with prisoners, but have also been designed and promoted to draw public attention to the problems the members of the group were hearing from the prisoners. Culture and activism inform one another in this work. He has also established a hip-hop cultural center in the suburb of Guediawaye that provides social forums to a spectrum of Guediawaye inhabitants through events as diverse as hip-hop dance classes and concerts, workshops on youth civic engagement, and discussion circles for illiterate women. Colorful murals that decorate the walls of the center's courtyard include the likenesses of political heroes—Thomas Sankara, Sékou Touré, Malcom X., Kwame Nkrumah—as well as directives above the concessions window that state “Here, we eat hip-hop, we drink hip-hop, we sit with hip-hop” with the menu offering Name Dropping, Dirty South, Gangsta, BBoy, Graff, and D.J. among other hip-hop delicacies (see Figure 1 above

and Figure 2 below).⁵⁰ In Fomalade's view, this hip-hop nourishment is important for the Guediawaye neighborhood: "We want hip-hop to have an impact on the social and economic life of the population."⁵¹

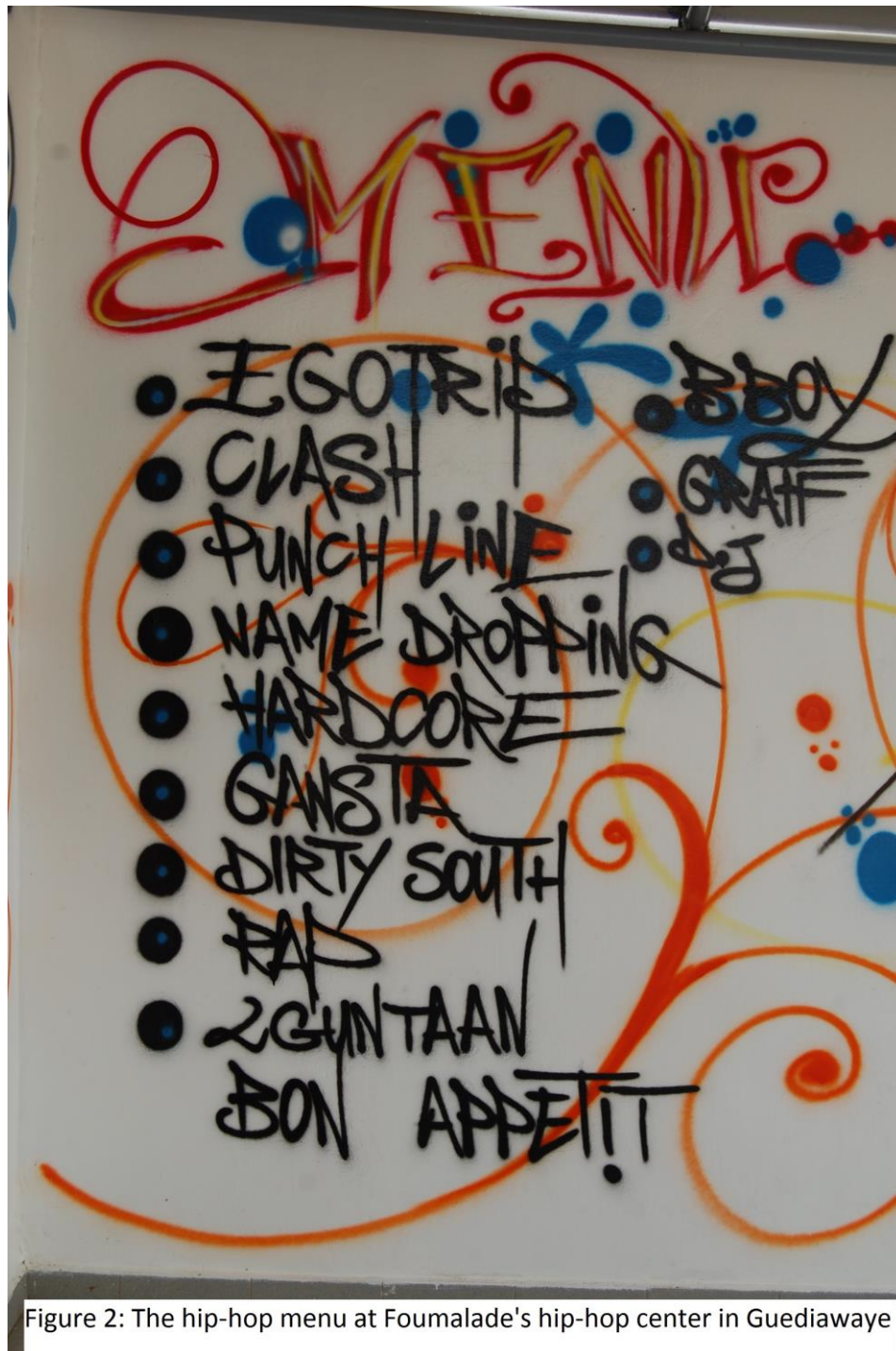


Figure 2: The hip-hop menu at Fomalade's hip-hop center in Guediawaye

Even as he claims that he is an activist and not an artist, Thiats underlines the essential role that art and culture play in his activism: "I do hip-hop just, like, a way for me to give my message. ... Every concert is an opportunity for me to give a message. Activist who uses hip-hop to give a message. I'm going to use hip-hop like my car, to get me to where I want to go."⁵² Utilitarian as his view of it might be, Thiats cannot separate art from social and political engagement. Just as he cannot conceive of an artist without tangible manifestations of his activism, Thiats uses culture as the lens through which he understands his own

activism and envisions its impact. Thiat's comments, in fact, echo Senghor's pronouncements on African art and culture, and their capacity for social engagement: "Because they are functional and collective, Black African literature and art are socially engaged...They engage society in a future that will be present from then on, an integral part of its identity."⁵³

Thiat received a Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellowship to work in Washington, D.C. from October 2013 through February 2014. This fellowship program is designed to support, as described on its website, "democratic activists, scholars, and journalists from around the world to undertake independent research on democratic challenges worldwide."⁵⁴ Of course, his particular project reflects Senegal's cultural exception and the way it is elemental to the work of *Yenamarristes*. He is creating a network called "100 Percent Democracy by Youth" that would facilitate cooperation among socially-engaged African artists:

How to make connections across the continent with youth of different countries, mostly engaged artists...The topic is, "find a way to make the connections between the artists." Have a big tour across the continent—a pedagogical tour....To push youth who are engaged to move forward and to get people involved in their country...From the population, for the population...I know a lot of engaged rappers...rappers who are close to the population and not very famous.⁵⁵

Along with the network giving an opportunity to these engaged rappers to connect with one another and to tour together, Thiat wants it to provide the lesser known rappers with introductions to producers and with the financial, logistical, and technological means to record their music in a studio and to distribute it as widely as possible. Besides creating the platform for this network of socially-engaged artists during his fellowship, Thiat is also continuing his personal artistic work with *Keur Gui*, recording a new double-album in D.C. and New York that, he says, will reflect the duality of the group, with their cultural identity as rappers, on one of the album sides, and their social engagement with the public as *Yenamarristes* on the other. One disc, entitled *Règlement de comptes (Reckoning)*, will be a traditional hip-hop battle album in which they take down fellow rappers, while the other disc *Opinion public (Public Opinion)* will focus on political and social issues. All of these examples of the projects undertaken by *Yenamarristes* embody the cultural ideology instituted in Senegal by Senghor that culture is intimately related to social change; that if one wants to improve Senegalese society, it must come largely through the arts.

Obviously, hip-hop has been the branch of culture that *Y'en a Marre* has most directly deployed in their social and political actions. Due to the seemingly inherent politicizing power of hip-hop, it could be tempting to explain *Y'en a Marre's* pairing of culture and social engagement as a product of the hip-hop thread of their identity. Sujatha Fernandes undertakes a global study of the binary of hip-hop and politics in her book *Close to the Edge: In Search of the Global Hip Hop Generation*, exploring hip-hop cultures in locations as diverse as Havana, Sydney, and Caracas. Based upon her travels, she concludes that a generational shift has occurred: "there is something that connects a global generation of young people, born in an era when corporate-led globalization undermined their basic standard of living yet deprived them of the tools to protest. Whereas their parents' generation took to the streets, they took up a microphone."⁵⁶ Of course, what differentiates the rappers of *Y'en a Marre* from their peers in the global hip-hop community is that they are grabbing the mic while occupying the streets. In her epilogue, appearing disabused of the concept of hip-hop

globality, Fernandes states: “The sheer diversity of voices and politics that emerged across the hip hop globe made any attempts at a unitary protest culture impossible. And maybe even undesirable. For all its emancipatory promise, music couldn’t substitute for politics.”⁵⁷ *Y’en a Marre’s* use of culture to intervene in politics has shown, though, that music and politics do not have to be mutually exclusive. Through the juxtaposition of *Y’en a Marre* against the other hip-hop activists around the world and Fernandes’ conclusions about their ability to bring culture to bear on politics, it becomes clear that *Y’en a Marre* is not simply an outlier. Instead, the collective draws on resources that are not as immediately available to socially-engaged hip-hoppers in other countries; resources, I argue, that come directly from the cultural philosophy that has played such a prominent role in Senegalese public life since independence.

Y’en a Marre’s cultural interventions in Senegalese society echo Senghorian cultural ideology not simply in the way they embody a linkage between culture and politics, but also in the manner in which they evoke Senegalese national identity. Just as Senghor’s cultural policy cultivated the concept that certain characteristics and values were unique to Senegal—the “life-giving sap” that M’Bengue wrote about—and that they had to be expressed in cultural productions, the cultural forms of *Yenamarristes* project a communal understanding of what it means to be Senegalese. Their investment in Senegalese national identity and communalism became obvious to me when I attended the ceremony organized by *Lead Afrique Francophone*, a non-profit organization that provides support for individuals and institutions working for change in their communities, to award *Y’en a Marre* their “Model Leader” prize at the end of June, 2013. After a number of laudatory introductory speeches by the director of the organization, academics, and social activists, Fadel Barro took the microphone and asked everyone to rise and sing the Senegalese national anthem. This act strikingly demonstrated that one of the collective’s objectives in crusading for social and political change was not to deform Senegalese tradition and identity, as some of their critics have claimed, but was to strengthen the ability of Senegalese citizens to feel responsibility towards and pride for their national community. In their words and actions the members of *Y’en a Marre* also emphasize the importance of local community, making their work important on both a macro and micro level in terms of Senegalese identity. From very early on in the group’s history it has established *esprits*, literally, “spirits,” but understood as local chapters, in Dakar neighborhoods and suburbs, and now internationally, to deal with local issues. Projects and plans of the various *esprits* are decided by their respective membership, independent from the national leaders. In conversation Thiat proudly states that “I am a country boy,” coming from the town of Kaolack.⁵⁸ He insists that part of his desire for activism is due to where he is from, the town being an important location for independence leaders and activists. Foumalade created his hip-hop center in his hometown of Guediawaye, wanting to engage with its local problems. The objective of the Observatory of Democracy and Good Governance is designed specifically to assist citizens to engage in local politics, to take ownership over their communities, and to make those local elected officials responsible to them. Senegalese identity, both national and local, is at the heart of the *Y’en a Marre* movement.

Their cultural forms express and are based in the characteristics and understanding of this identity. When the group launched their voter registration drive they chose to call it by the name of “Daas fanaanal,” a common Wolof expression that literally means “to sharpen one’s knife” and figuratively “to be prepared.” Within the context of the song and the group’s public use of that expression, *Y’en a Marre* transformed the knife, the weapon of

Senegalese tradition in the phrase into a voting card, the weapon of the contemporary. Of this expression, as well as “Fanaane daas,” which is the name they gave to the phase during which they encouraged citizens to vote, Djily Bagdad says, “We are playing with Wolof words.”⁵⁹ Fomalade elaborates upon the group’s use of language and its significance: “We played a lot with words that gave the population a sense of pride.”⁶⁰ This strategy to take cultural forms that are familiar and important to Senegalese, but to invest them with a new meaning that unites Senegalese in a different way than the original, extends to when the movement was creating its hymn. As told by Fomalade, the group borrowed from culture that had significance for young people, especially:

When it came to think about the movement’s hymn, we noticed that wrestling was extremely popular. How to use wrestling for positive ends? Because young people aren’t interested only in rap; they are interested much more in wrestling. A wrestling match draws a lot more people than a free rap concert...And each time a wrestler wins, the fans, the young people would sing [he sings the melody]. And in *Y’en a Marre*, we said, “That’s an interesting melody that we have to use positively.” I said to the guys, “In the chorus for *Y’en a Marre*, we have to use this exact melody.” This melody is used to make people pay attention to what we are saying.⁶¹

Y’en a Marre is not interested in creating a schism within Senegalese society by deploying cultural productions that clash with Senegalese identity, values, and tradition, but rather, like Senghor and others before them, the group wants to tap into the reservoir of cultural knowledge, practices, and forms that already express communal characteristics of the Senegalese people. As Fomalade insists, “What is culturally valuable in my country might not be in France or elsewhere.”⁶² The Senegalese specificity is essential to *Y’en a Marre*’s cultural productions having meaning and impact.

While the group has conveyed Senegalese-ness through their cultural productions, however, they have equally directed their use of culture towards a global audience. In this we find another reflection, but also a refraction of Senghorian cultural philosophy. Senghor wanted Senegal’s cultural creations to be meaningful at the international level because it would confirm the country’s importance and allow them entry into participation in global relationships, whether cultural, political, or economic, which he largely achieved. However, Senghor’s government, as well as those that have followed, as their critics have pointed out and as outlined previously in this article, had a problematic relationship with the international community in terms of economic exploitation, artistic appropriation, and cultural impoverishment of the Senegalese people. Despite these pitfalls of global engagement in previous Senegalese cultural contexts, *Y’en a Marre* has not shied away from seeking out international connections with the work they are doing and balancing them with national focus. During their campaign to combat Wade’s candidacy, members took to SoundCloud, Facebook, their own website, and YouTube in order to post songs, music videos, messages, and clips of the demonstrations.⁶³ This fomented activism among those Senegalese who had not yet taken to the street, but who were interested in the music. The mixture of documentation of lived events and distribution of artistic productions through on-line culture also served to extend the bounds of the movement, allowing *Y’en a Marre* to invite directly a global audience to participate through culture. Importantly, the group controlled the means of distribution and communication for these productions. The *esprits* have also provided an important platform for *Y’en a Marre* to engage globally. The group

has established chapters in Mali and France, and organized forums in Paris and Bordeaux for *esprits* throughout Europe in June, 2013, with the objective to engage Senegalese of the diaspora, to make them viable participants in the reformulation of Senegalese identity and social actions. Members of the collective, in their own personal projects, reveal their investment in international cooperation. Thiat's "100 Percent Democracy by Youth" project, as we previously saw, will be a pan-African network. His and Kilifeu's new album will be recorded in Dakar, New York, and Paris to capture the cultural connections between these three cities that are essential to Senegal and its diaspora. *Y'en a Marre* has been able to enter the global stage on its own terms, maintaining its Senegalese uniqueness and its focus on issues relevant to Senegal in a particular manner, while still allowing international connections to happen. Articulating his own philosophy on relating to global culture, Thiat says, "Take from your roots, but open to the rest of the world. Take the good things from somewhere else, bring in your good to make a cocktail with the rest of the world."⁶⁴

By adopting culture that is already recognizable to Senegalese, both in form and meaning, while opening the movement up to global connections, *Yenamarristes* are more easily able to alter the mentality and actions of citizens towards their community, their society, their government, and, even the world. It is in this area of *Y'en a Marre's* cultural practices and rhetoric that I locate their true innovation: they work within Senegal's cultural philosophy in order to render it more democratic and inclusive. The group has purposefully placed itself within the lineage of Senegalese artists. They have then reworked that heritage from within in order to emphasize "*plurality* against a dense and unchanging conception of cultural identity that has often prevailed throughout discourses on culture. In pursuing a culture of identity in fact, one risks losing sight of the fact that the true meaning of culture comes from movement; not from indefinitely drawing boundaries of belonging around oneself, but by crossing those boundaries."⁶⁵ These values of identity movement and boundary crossing are embedded in the inner-workings of the group itself and the relationships among the members. Thiat recalls how worried they all were to bring together that many rappers under one umbrella due to geographical tensions and prejudice. But the unique organizational and communicative nature of the group resolved those issues. Thiat states, "The amazing thing is how we were doing to get them together for the same cause...One day Foumalade said to me, 'You know, I can't believe that one day I take care of Simon...It's amazing. Because Simon is a downtown boy and I'm from the suburbs.'"⁶⁶ Foumalade then locates the strength of the movement specifically in this diverse composition: "the different personalities allow the movement to stay close to the people."⁶⁷ The group has then worked to convey these values of diversity and inclusiveness to the population through recognizably Senegalese cultural contexts. As shown in the section of this article focused on Senghor's creation and implementation of his cultural ideology, it became the privilege of the cultural elite and those approved by the government to participate in Senegal's cultural exception. The fact of the exclusionary nature of Senghorian cultural policy puts the lie to any concept of Senegal being culturally exceptional. I have already shown how many Senegalese cultural actors have attempted to exploit this failing of Senghor's cultural philosophy, but have ultimately failed to escape its influence or to significantly alter its social significance. *Y'en a Marre* have finally begun that process by situating themselves ambivalently, even ambiguously towards the country's cultural lineage, taking up many of its qualities and forms, but resignifying them from within. Foumalade says, "It is important, from time to time, to create cultural syncretism....One must never be a cultural narcissist."⁶⁸ Through their rap songs that use primarily Wolof

lyrics, their campaign expressions that are *détournements* of common Senegalese phrases, their videos that depict young, old, male, and female *Yenamarristes*, the cultural spaces they have created for networking and community building, and their international efforts, *Y'en a Marre* have invited through their hybrid cultural work all who want to change Senegal for the better to join them, to become full participants in the cultural work of improving the country. This is a call that all Senegalese recognize from the continuing postcolonial influence of Senghorian cultural philosophy, but it is one that they only now finally feel like they can answer.

Notes

- 1 I use “hip-hop” throughout my paper to refer to a constellation of urban cultural practices, including rap music, graffiti art, tagging, dancing, and fashion. See Nossiter 2011 for one early example of the American media’s reporting of *Y'en a Marre*’s hip-hop dimension.
- 2 See Peisner 2011.
- 3 See DeGhett 2012. El Haqed, né Mouad Belrhoute, was released from a year’s imprisonment on April 2, 2013.
- 4 See Fernandes 2012.
- 5 Aidi 2011.
- 6 See Dalberto 2011, Fredericks 2013, and Gueye 2011.
- 7 “*Nouveau type de Sénégalais*,” NTS, became one of the catchphrases and popular acronyms of the movement, seen on placards and t-shirts at rallies, mentioned in press releases and interviews, and referenced in rap songs.
- 8 See Gueye 2013 and Fredericks 2013 for analyses of hip-hop within *Y'en a Marre*, and Appert 2011, Herson 2011, Moulard-Kouka 2004, and Niang 2006, 2010 for considerations of hip-hop more generally in Dakar and Senegal.
- 9 See Gueye 2013.
- 10 Rosalind Fredericks, for example, in her study of *Y'en a Marre* focuses on “rap and its history,” which doesn’t extend before the 1980s.
- 11 I draw extensively from fieldwork done in Senegal in June-July 2012 and June-August 2013. I wish to thank the West African Research Association for a Post-Doctoral Fellowship that made the second trip to Senegal possible.
- 12 Harney 2004, p. 43.
- 13 Senghor 1959, p. 279. All translations of work originally published in French are the author’s unless otherwise noted.
- 14 Harney 2004, p. 49.
- 15 Estimates and documentation vary on the percentage of state funds. See Harney 2004 and Snipes 1998 for discussions of how these figures have been reached.
- 16 Harney 2004, p. 49.
- 17 Diagne 2002, p. 252.
- 18 M’Bengue 1973, pp. 13-14.
- 19 Benga 2002, p. 294.
- 20 Harney 2004, p. 78.
- 21 Diagne 2002, p. 243.

- 22 Harney 2004, p. 10.
- 23 Snipe 1998, p. 59.
- 24 Harney 2004, p. 79.
- 25 Benga 2002, p. 297.
- 26 Harney 2004, p. 52.
- 27 Benga 2002, p. 294.
- 28 Ibid., p. 298.
- 29 Harney 2004, p. 115.
- 30 Senghor 1956, p. 56.
- 31 See Snipe 1998, pp. 61-62.
- 32 Diagne 2002, p. 244.
- 33 Ibid., p. 254.
- 34 Benga 2002, pp. 295-96.
- 35 Senghor 1956, p. 56.
- 36 See Diouf 1992 and SET SETAL 1991 for more detailed analysis of the movement.
- 37 Diouf 2002, p. 278.
- 38 Ibid., p. 279.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 278-79.
- 40 Diagne 2002, p. 246.
- 41 Diouf 2002, p. 262.
- 42 See Savané and Sarr, p.69: “‘Guys, are we going to sit here, with our arms crossed?’ From this quasi-existential question the core group of close friends that would become Y’en a Marre decided to do something.”
- 43 Djily Bagdad 2012, International Faculty Development Seminar presentation.
- 44 Thiat 2013, interview with author.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Foumalade 2013, interview with author.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCuKAN-T0pk>
- 49 See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4i1Ot1jypDc>
- 50 Both photographs are by the author.
- 51 Foumalade 2013, interview with author.
- 52 Thiat 2013, interview with author.
- 53 Senghor 1956, p. 56.
- 54 Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellows website: <http://www.ned.org/fellowships/reagan-fascell-democracy-fellows-program>. For Thiat’s fellowship, see <http://www.ned.org/fellowships/current-past-fellows/thiat-mr-cheikh-oumar-toure>
- 55 Thiat 2013, interview with author.
- 56 Fernandes 2011, p. 23.
- 57 Ibid., p. 187.
- 58 Thiat 2013, interview with author.
- 59 Djily Bagdad 2012, International Faculty Development Seminar presentation.
- 60 Foumalade 2013, interview with author.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Ibid.

- 63 See <https://soundcloud.com/yenamarre>; <https://fr-fr.facebook.com/pages/Y-en-a-marre/173373102703740>; <https://www.youtube.com/user/Yenamarresenegal/featured>. Their website is no longer maintained.
- 64 Thiat 2013, interview with author.
- 65 Diagne 2002, p. 258.
- 66 Thiat 2013, interview with author.
- 67 Foumalade 2013, interview with author.
- 68 Ibid.

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