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Hip-Hop and Trivialisation of Martin Luther King Jr. in Didier Awadi's "Dans mon rêve"

Introduction

My paper sets out to illustrate how hip-hop as a medium of pop culture fails to serve the purpose of the African artist in "Dans mon rêve" (*In my Dream*). "Dans mon rêve" is a track by the famous Senegalese hip-hop musician Didier Awadi whose achievements have been very fecund in the academia so far.[1] The piece was written in a context when African presidents were about to sign the so-called Economic Partnership Agreements between Africa and Western powers and multinationals. Awadi stands against those Agreements which he refers to as "the signature of our own death's decree."[2] The track is an invitation to remember, honour and celebrate the ideas and the deeds of Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK), a well-known, influential Black-American civil rights fighter. The paper addresses deep dynamics within hip-hop and relates them to global trends of mercantile mainstreams. The ultimate purpose is to contribute to the

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[1] Didier Sourou Awadi, also known as DJ Awadi released "Dans mon rêve" in 2010, enclosed with the album entitled *Présidents d'Afrique* (Presidents of Africa). The music video was directed by Lionel Mandeix, a photographer and film director based in Dakar (Senegal). Scholars whose works relate to Awadi's discography include Patricia Tang, Damon Sajnani, Manthia Diawara.

[2] Studio Sankara, "'Présidents d'Afrique' un album de Didier Awadi", accessed 18 January, 2021, https://www.thomassankara.net/presidents-dafrique-un-album-de-didier-awadi/. My translation.

yet non-achieved negotiation necessary between Blacks and their cultural productions. Cultural theory by Stuart Hall and the determination to oppose the monopoly of the society of the spectacle by Guy Debord serve the purpose of theoretical frames for my study.[3]

Stuart Hall views culture from an essentially ambivalent perspective. Nevertheless, I particularly adhere to the second aspect of it which is the idea of culture as intrinsic to and crossing all sort of human practices such as politics, trade, architecture, history, sport, law, literature, pop culture in its varied forms such as music, film, rap and hip-hop.[4] The culture in question is conceived as each society's reservoir serving to soothe its modern, aggressive, mercantile, and brutalising urban existence.[5] Manifestations of that culture in "Dans mon rêve" as related to MLK and his legacy are reflected on and identified in this paper. The idea of "passive acceptance" by Debord as an abdication of social life due to psychological, spiritual and technological resources working to the automation of the spectacle's monopoly[6] is vital to my analysis because I firmly believe that the effective method to challenge domination is to untie its mechanisms.

The paper consists of four complementary sections. In the first section, I elaborate on pop culture in general and African hip-hop music in particular. The section also reviews the provocative trope of African rapper as a modern griot. The goal is not simply to reflect how enticing pop culture appears in academia, but also to position myself in that exciting universe. The second section investigates the context and content of the fight for civil rights that made MLK known worldwide. It gives particular attention to MLK's historic speech entitled "I have a dream." In the third section, I address Didier Awadi's context and content of "Dans mon rêve" in African

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[3] Stuart Hall, *Identités et Cultures, Politiques des Cultural Studies*, trans. Christophe Jaquet (Paris: Amsterdam, 2007); Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman and Jon Supak (Florida: Black & Red, 1970).

[4] Hall, *Identités et Cultures,* p. 38.

[5] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. xiii.

[6] Guy Debord (1931–1994) was a French Marxist philosopher whose revolutionary book *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) contributed to structuring the 1968 Mai Revolution in France. The book is a close and deep indictment of modernised capitalism operating in those days under what was then considered as the boom of mass media. Debord acknowledges the fact that the term "mass media" is often used to describe the spectacle's form, but he precisely derides its neutrality. "Rather than talk of the spectacle, people often prefer to use the term 'media'," he writes, "and by this they mean to describe a mere instrument, a kind of public service." Instead, Debord hypothesises the spectacle as capitalism's instrument for distracting and pacifying the masses on which it grows rather fat. This is the reason why he conceives of the spectacle as the "autocratic reign of the market economy." Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, p. 12 and the following pages.

society. In the last part, I deal with paradoxes and potential of hip-hop. It is here that I suggest how MLK and his legacy appear to be deceptively trivialised. The study ends with a general conclusion in which I take a position on the debate about the trope of African rapper as a modern griot.

Contextualisation of Pop Culture and African Hip-Hop

In his seminal study entitled *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. An Introduction*, John Storey lists six definitions of the notion.[7] First of all, popular culture includes a set of cultural forms that are widely favoured or well-liked by many people. In this relation, literature, folklores, best sellers, films, music, theatre etc. are part of pop culture as far as they are widely liked by populations. From a hierarchical point of view, pop culture is referred to as any culture that is left over after it has been decided what high culture is. Popular culture, in this definition, is a residual category, there to accommodate texts and practices that fail to meet the required standards to qualify as high culture. It is at this level of pop culture that folklores, dancing clubs and striptease often fall in. The third entry about pop culture derives from the precedent and views popular culture as hopelessly commercial culture. It is mass-produced for mass consumption. Its audience is a mass of non-discriminating consumers. The culture itself is formulaic, manipulative. It is a culture that is consumed with brain-numbed and brain-numbing passivity. It is produced from pleasure and aims at sharing libidinal pleasures. Popular culture is again referred to as the culture that originates from "the people." According to this definition, the term should only be used to indicate an "authentic" culture of "the people," meaning something that is not imposed on them from above. It builds on the wrong assumption that "people" is a neutral category with no contextual or historical ties.

Another usage of pop culture is phenomenological. Popular culture is postulated here as a site of struggle between the "resistance" of subordinate groups and the forces of "incorporation" operating in the interests of dominant groups. It is often very challenging to detach pop culture from its ties to streets or public spaces where varied sorts of protest take place. The last definition is inspired by a postmodern way of thinking. In this relation,

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[7] John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. An Introduction* (Harlow, London, New York: Pearson Longman, 2009), pp. 5–12.

pop culture celebrates the blurring of the distinction between "authentic" and "commercial" culture. Pop culture, from this perspective, leads to two contradictory attitudes on its consumers. For some, it is a reason to celebrate the end of an elitist construction of culture based on arbitrary distinctions; for others, it is a reason to despair at the final victory of commerce over culture.

From the above, it is clear that to define pop culture is not an easy task. It would not even be hyperbolic to consider with Tony Bennett that "the concept of popular culture is virtually useless, a melting pot of confused and contradictory meanings capable of misdirecting inquiry up any number of theoretical blind alleys."[8] The matter with pop culture is that it can include all cultural expressions on condition that they are widely well-loved by many people.

The tune under scrutiny emerging from a postmodern context, it sounds appropriate to lay more emphasis on the postmodern agenda of the notion. Therefore, pop culture, in its hip-hop version in this paper, is considered as a theoretical field loaded with the potential to enable the crossing of all possible kinds of boundaries. I am more inclined to look at how it turns marketable by corrupting consumers' affects so as to "alienate the spectator to the profit of the contemplated object."[9] More precisely, my purpose is to examine how hip-hop corrupts the spectator's lucidity, such as to leave them with no other option than to like it; that is, to play the perfect spectator. My study focusing on "Dans mon rêve," it is worth looking closely in advance at how hip-hop does differ from pop culture, and what makes African hip-hop so particular.

Hip-hop is one among other cultural expressions of pop culture. Fundamentally, hip-hop is an art form that "traffics in hyperbole, parody, kitsch, dramatic license, double entendres, signification, and other literary and artistic conventions to get its points across."[10] Hip-hop is a sort of embodiment of what Bhikhu Parekh, relating to Salman Rushdie, terms "ethic of impurity"[11] so far as it emerges from the consequences of human

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[8] Tony Bennett, "Popular Culture: A Teaching Object," *Screen Education*, Vol. 34, (1980), p. 18.

[9] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, p. 30.

[10] Murray Forman, "Foreword," *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York, London: Routledge, 2004), p. xii.

[11] Bhikhu Parekh, "Political Theory and the Multicultural Society," *Radical Philosophy*, Vol. 95 (1999), accessed 3 March, 2020, https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/political-theory-and-the-multicultural-society.

dynamism. It is an impurity that implicitly, but strongly, warns against the rampant risk of alienation to which the society of the spectacle assiduously works to compel the people by means of placid contemplation to be offered to marketable goods and values.

Hip-hop originally emerged in 1995 in the uptown boroughs of New York as a medium adopted by teens to voice and stage the injustices they faced. Murray Forman refers to hip-hop as an innovative medium which did successfully rebel against the rap, too much tied to TV, its comfort and arrangements included, in order to spontaneously "hit the streets and do graffiti."[12] Essential to hip-hop are DJs, drum and dance. Scholars concur that the most prominent claim across writing on global hip-hop is that hip-hop represents the voice of the voiceless. Hip-hop is adopted and adapted around the world by different groups of youth, marginalised in their particular ways, and deployed so as to counter their marginalisation.[13] Despite existent dissents triggered by politics, history, and racial conscience that view it as little more than sonic pathology that blasts away all the achievement of the civil rights struggle, hip-hop needs to be seen as a popular genre that strives to accelerate the accomplishment of a better future in human lives.

In relation to African hip-hop, it is widely acknowledged that "Africa has long been defined as hip-hop's 'ground zero,' the original site of the drum and dance from which hip-hop was born."[14] As a matter of that recognisance, this justifies, at least as far as "Dans mon rêve" is concerned, why the appropriation of hip-hop by the African artist is influenced by lives of the Black diaspora. In this respect, African hip-hop, descending from the original hip-hop, does align with the ordinary purpose of freeing voiceless people from marginalisation. Never neutral as it is, the academia attempted to defeat this very stance of African hip-hop by hypothesising the African rapper as a modern griot. Catherine Appert, in this regard, claims, for instance, that "many rappers consider themselves to be griots not only in terms of performance style and delivery but also in terms of social function."[15] The problem with this contention is that while a griot

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[12] Tupac Shakur quoted in: Murray Forman, "Introduction," *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, p. 1.

[13] Damon Sajnani, "Troubling the Trope of Rapper as Modern Griot," *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol.6, No.3 (2013), p. 160.

[14] Ibid., p. 157.

[15] Catherine Appert quoted in: Sajnani, "Troubling the Trope of Rapper as Modern Griot," p. 167.

used to play a moral role in the African community of antiquity, it turns out with time to be associated with the personification of a beggar. Awadi firmly rejects any association of African hip-hopper with griot when he argues in an interview with Patricia Tang that "[a]ll of the other aspects of the griot, we don't do. From antiquity to the present, the griots have always sung for money. But we do not sing about people so that they will give us money. The role of the griot here is different from the role of the rapper."[16]

In her attempt to elucidate the ultimate rejection of reified logics of the same nature as the ones endorsed by Appert and Patricia Tang,[17] Msia Kibona Clark articulates a functional interface which has the advantage not only to capture all six entries about pop culture as discussed by Storey above but also to highlight hip-hop as maybe the most achieved version of pop culture. Kibona talks of the commodification of hip-hop culture thus:

> As a commodity the "product" is alienated from the culture that produced it (hip hop), though many consumers may be unable to distinguish the "authentic" culture from the commercial product claiming to represent it. Therefore, a concern for producers of pop music or pop rap is not skill, but rather marketability, having deep negative consequences on the culture that produced it.[18]

Kibona argues that African hip-hop is a very complex cultural category because it amalgamates conflicting trends while it records approval from male youths in particular. At the same time, African hip-hop is an aesthetic body trying to impact the society positively by insisting on the authenticity or values of African traditions. In *In Search Of Africa*, Manthia Diawara claims that hip-hop is the voice of marginalised people in modern society. According to him, the spectacular worldwide spread of hip-hop as market revolution translates a global "expression of poor people's desire for the good life […] but, also reveals the need to go beyond such struggles and celebrate the redemption of the black individual through tradition."[19]

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[16] Didier Awadi quoted in: Sajnani, "Troubling the Trope of Rapper as Modern Griot," p. 165.

[17] Patricia Tang, "The Rapper as Modern Griot: Reclaiming Ancient Traditions," *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World*, ed., Eric Charry (Indiana University Press, 2012), pp. 79–91.

[18] Msia Kibona Clark, "The Struggle for Hip Hop Authenticity and Against Commercialization in Tanzania," *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 6, No.3 (2013), p. 8.

[19] Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa* (Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 238.

From the various perspectives of pop culture and African hip-hop above, it is evident that both notions are addressed by scholars in a way that reflects their complexities and their connections to global trends of mercantile values. While hip-hop is mainly favoured by youths, pop culture appears as the mainstream out of which hip-hop is derived. Hip-hop is often criticised as women-intolerant. Despite the fact that costume, performance, DJs, and studios constitute valuable elements in the hip-hip or pop culture industry, this paper is not about the iconography of hip-hop. It rather investigates whether the MLK celebrated in "Dans mon rêve" is (or can be) perceived by its ideal recipients exactly as Awadi dreams of.

The Legacy of MLK

Hip-hop has been presented in the previous section as an attempt by young African Americans to connect back to Africa, the original site of the drum and dance from which hip-hop descended. African hip-hop appeared on its part as a medium that takes the opposite path by taping inspiration from African American Civil Rights Fighters and their achievements in the USA. From this perspective, the fact that Awadi's "Dans mon rêve" saves MLK from oblivion by reproducing his eloquent voice and excerpts of his famous speeches, highlights the tune itself as a vibrant testimonial of MLK's significant legacy.

Influenced by the tradition of human rights fighters led by forefathers such as Frederick Douglass, Ida Wells-Barnett, and W.E.B. Du Bois, MLK's prominence in the fight for civil rights emerged in Alabama thanks to the famous Rosa Parks incident. MLK's major contribution to the American socio-political life was the successful implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that brought about a major improvement in the practice of democracy in America.

In America, MLK's transformation from political activist to national symbol culminated in the establishment of the national holiday honouring the date of his birth on January 15, 1929. Its induction took place immediately after his death on April 4, 1968. In the world, MLK is a monumental figure for civil and human rights. The Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded MLK the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1964 to celebrate his contribution to human history. The portrait which the former president Ronald Reagan paints of MLK is interesting to cite because it displays why

he merits to be considered as an atemporal personality and a dependable source of inspiration:

> In his own life's example, he symbolized what was right about America, what was noblest and best, what human beings have pursued since the beginning of history. He loved unconditionally. He was in constant pursuit of truth, and when he discovered it, he embraced it. His nonviolent campaigns brought about redemption, reconciliation and justice. He taught us that only peaceful means can bring about peaceful ends, that our goal was to create the love community.[20]

Even though in their majority Africans seem not to have measured the complete size and weight of MLK's legacy, two reliable pieces of evidence in the survival of MLK's legacy in Africa need to be mentioned. First is the 1994 triumph of justice over the barbarity of Apartheid in South Africa. Nelson Mandela acknowledges in his autobiography having been inspired by the humanist values of non-violence by Gandhi and MLK.[21] The second is the rising signification of the role played by civil rights movements in forcing African political leaders to pay due attention to the civil rights of the populations they legitimately represent. They succeed in obtaining the acknowledgement of the numerous violations of human rights by their respective governments so far as they get support from responsible international NGOs.[22]

However, there is a sense of disenchantment to be scored regarding the input of MLK's legacy within the African population because of its existing disparities. It is due to the fact that the majority is illiterate and naturally adopts ready-made ideologies, unable to disapprove, decide or conceptualise on their own. This majority lives under appalling conditions in abandoned villages and slums subjected to the flow of fake news and rumours. The disparities above in consequence highlight the gap regarding which category of people are qualified to take advantage of MLK's legacy in

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[20] Administration of Ronald Reagan, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, Vol. 19, No. 46 (1983), p. 1512.

[21] Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, *The Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston: Brown and Company, 1994), pp. 164–165.

[22] "Y'en a Marre" in Senegal, "Le Balai Citoyen" in Burkina Faso, "REDHAC" in central Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular are few examples from the francophone Africa to be mentioned as evidence. There is no need retelling here the decisive role played by the two organisations first mentioned toward the political transition in their respective countries.

Africa. Though hip-hop has the potential to challenge this gap, I am trying to show in what condition it could fail to do so, based on Awadi's "Dans mon rêve."

"Dans mon rêve": The Content and Meaning

Awadi's "Dans mon rêve" is a 4'2" track[23] in which the hip-hop star embodies a charismatic character that can ideologically be located at the intersection between MLK and President Obama. These two figures work as symbolic rails because, contrary to MLK and Obama, the character has control of languages as varied as French, Wolof, English, dance, acoustic and rhythm. This composite condition stages Awadi as someone that taps his optimism from the necessary diffusion of what gives boundaries their exclusionist stance. It is therefore not surprising that Awadi locates his narrative at the prolongation of the humanist ideal embodied by MLK and Obama. The narrative opens with Obama's voice articulating his well-known phrase which reads as follows: "We know, the battle ahead will be long, but always remember that no matter what obstacles stand in our way, nothing can withstand in the way of the power of millions of voices calling for change." Immediately after Obama, MLK takes the floor in order to shout his famous "I have a dream." The dream of MLK is that "one day, this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

It is only after this geographical, ideological and aesthetic background has been set that Awadi starts to speak. He delivers a message that carries the listener/viewer into a dream world where all kinds of constructed boundaries exist no more but rather natural variations which need to be accepted as such:

> Dans mon rêve c'est des Noirs et des Blancs
> Dans mon rêve c'est des Jaunes et des Rouges
> Dans mon rêve tout est plein de couleurs
> De Jaunes et des Rouges, et des Noirs et des Blancs

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[23] Transcribing the lyrics in this study would mean valuing one constituent of the musical plot more than another. No single element matters more than another in a piece of art. Lyrics have the same interpretative value as characters, rhythm, visual narrative or settings. However, as written as this study is, it would be at the same time unfair not to pay attention to transcribed language as a medium.

In that world, ignorance, selfishness and arrogance that lead to aggression upon which civilisations built, are made speechless because they have been defused. Awadi translates this situation when he sings:

> Dans mon rêve il n'y a pas d'homme qui est dominé
> Dans mon rêve pas de peuple qui est dominé
> Dans mon rêve oui pas de terre qui est dominée
> Dans mon rêve des colons éliminés
> Dans mon rêve colonies éliminées
> Dans mon rêve le raciste éliminé,
> Dans mon rêve xénophobe éliminé
> Dans mon rêve homophobe éliminé
> Antisémite et Kamite éliminés

These postures and categories that configure and refine mental or mentally-erected boundaries are disapproved by Awadi. The hip-hop artist goes as far as to draw up the geographical constellation of the world at a time when his dream will come true. In that world visa regulations are alleviated, enabling people to move freely just like goods do nowadays. It is a world in which wars over natural resources exist no more.

> Dans mon rêve on annule les visas
> Tous les pays de l'Afrique sans visa
> Même l'Europe élimine le visa
> L'Asie, l'Amérique abolit le visa
> Dans mon rêve plus de guerre pour le pétrole
> Dans mon rêve plus de guerre pour le diamant
> Dans mon rêve plus de guerre pour de l'or
> La guerre subie ne fait plus tant de morts.

Awadi makes sure that he persuades his audience that MLK but, mostly, his memorable achievements are celebrated in the song. He therefore recalls MLK's words and frequently parallels his dream with that of MLK who dreamt that one day people of America "will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character."[24]

While the hybrid character captures MLK's humanism as evident in the need to realise a world without racism in all its versions, Obama's

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[24] The statement is articulated in the narrative through MLK's voice.

optimism is frequently mobilised to play as a source of motivation that keeps stakeholders focused on the battle for that dream to come true. Obama's well-known "yes we can" is uttered ten times in "Dans mon rêve" after the goals of the battle for the dream to come true have been set. This is maybe a technique by Awadi to highlight MLK as a significant drive to Obama's achievements.

Any alert listener of "Dans mon rêve" cannot avoid the assumption that the song is a sort of palimpsest of MLK's "I Have a Dream" in the sense that it takes MLK's speech from its socio-historical context and adapts it to African realities. Awadi also adds to it issues like Asia and antisemitism that MLK's surroundings and context did not allow him to address. "Dans mon rêve" is, so to speak, an appropriation by Awadi of MLK's commitment to social justice given its scarcity in current African affairs and global condition.

At the level of visual organisation, the intergenerational atmosphere of the narrative and its interwoven settings are significant elements to take note of. At least three generations are displayed in the video. The first generation is epitomised by the drummer Doudou N'diaye Rose[25] (1930–2015) whose mastery of drum grants the tune its magical enticement. N'diaye was culturally influenced by Cheikh Anta Diop (1923–1986). He borrowed from the great Senegalese scholar his commitment to the perpetuation of traditions and cultural values of African descent. The second generation is embodied by Awadi himself. It is a generation at the junction between the past and the future, a generation that witnesses the metamorphosis of capitalism into the modernity of globalisation overestimating marketability and movements of goods on a global scale over the quality of human life. It is a generation experiencing how the spectacle plotted by capitalism "alienates the spectator to the profit of the contemplated object (goods)."[26] The third generation is represented by the children participating in the narrative. They appear as either listening, watching the elders, or dancing to the rhythm played by them. Their passivity suggests their innocence since, like any other children, they are yet unable to take control of themselves. At the same time, this passivity outlines their presence as substantial. In fact, it highlights them as the focal recipients of the message uttered in the

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[25] Born Mamadou Ndiaye.

[26] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, p. 30.

narrative. Awadi sensitises the youths to their responsibilities and provides them with valued benchmarks which they could decide to follow or to betray. The essence is that they get their own share in the fight for a better world.

The visual plot in "Dans mon rêve" is built in a way that interweaves slums with quality quarters. Possibly, by opting for such a disclosure, Awadi tries to avoid discrimination about the central recipients of his message. Awadi wants to address all classes in the society, irrespective of their social location, either in slums or in wealthy suburbs. But this does not explain why Awadi stages children predominantly in their ghetto locations while children from wealthy locations are not featured. In fact, Awadi refers to children from wealthy quarters using the aesthetic of ellipse which Gerald Prince refers to as the *disnarrated*. Prince understands *disnarrated* as being "a model that allows texts better to define themselves, to specify and emphasize the meanings they wish to communicate and to designate the values they develop and aspire to."[27] Following Prince, it would not be exaggerated to claim that the presence of children from the wealthy quarters is featured through their absence in the visual plot insofar as wealthy people do procreate too. Young generations will have to carve their own values out of cultural heritage made up of values from African descent, MLK and achievements of today's generation. The condition of "Dans mon rêve" as actively blurring existing social classes leads me now to a theoretical field about pop culture and its paradoxes.

Paradoxes and Potential of Hip-Hop in "Dans mon rêve"

The content and meaning of "Dans mon rêve" above point out that the ideological path followed by Awadi is the one started by MLK and to which Obama gave a remarkable profile. It is a path at the end of which social justice for all human beings stands. That is the reason why the ideal recipients of the message of this tune are people either withdrawn or free from their social categories or locations. The message aims at achieving a fairer human society which truly protects minorities, autonomy, diversity, and which works for their evolution. As such, this very premise of "Dans mon rêve" has ambivalent socio-cultural implications.

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[27] Gerald Prince, *Narrative as Theme* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 38.

One component of its ambivalence has to do with what I call potential of pop culture. In fact, pop culture has the power of unifying its audience. As "Dans mon rêve" merges traditional African values with Western ones, generations, languages, or artistic forms, the same happens at the level of its audience. Images, characters, sounds, or narration subtract people of all social classes from their sense of belonging to locations made alive by constructed boundaries within "Dans mon rêve" dimension of time. Left without cultural reference, they end up aligning with the magic appeal of the tune. Pop culture, Storey argues, "blurs the distinction between [...] arbitrary distinctions of culture [...]."[28] Pop culture in general, hip-hop specifically, from this perspective, is loaded with the prodigious power to obtain what Debord terms "passive acceptance"[29] from people, or from any cultural nuance. It is so because pop culture speaks to their senses, such as hearing and sight, and raises excitements common to all human beings. Pop culture, and specifically hip-hop, appears in this relation as a cultural medium with the exceptional power to defeat all kinds of resistance and get total adhesion from the population.

By merging images, sounds, written and spoken words, techniques of storytelling, generations, races, genders, genres, cultures and geographies, "Dans mon rêve" highlights hip-hop as one medium of pop culture that ambitions its most achieved formula. In this relation, it would not be hyperbolic to argue that hip-hop is, within pop culture, an updated version based on flaws either left aside or triggered by another medium of it, like film for instance. Film, which the Senegalese writer and later filmmaker Sembène Ousmane believed to be of more impact on the myriads of uneducated people his books were directed to, is, unlike hip-hop, unable to fill the air with melodious decibels. As film appears so far unable to turn its audience into dancers or sportspeople, hip-hop accomplishes this. Hip-hop is, so to speak, a new form of pop culture derived from the relics of its existing and outdated forms. As such, hip-hop can easily serve the interests of capitalism.

In fact, because of its potential, hip-hop can be accused of being a factory of cultural uniformisation. Hip-hop bears the same procedural principles as what Debord terms "domination of the economy over

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[28] Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture,* p. 12.
[29] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle,* p. 12.

social life."[30] In reaching the consent of all people, irrespective of their differences, it is possible that hip-hop does more harm to the society than its good-minded pretensions. The Senegalese spectators from the many slums might be tempted to reject the message by Awadi on a chauvinistic basis. They might ask themselves: why should they celebrate or imitate MLK instead of Cheikh Anta Diop or Léopold Sédar Senghor, their famous president and writer who taught the French language to French people in France? In this relation, it is clear that hip-hop participates in imposing values from an outsider to Senegalese spectators. It is a powerful medium of uniformisation. Put differently, hip-hop blurs tangible boundaries by setting new psychological ones. Hip-hop destroys, in fact, the seed that holds society alive: individuals in their nuances.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault unveils how imposed conditions generate resistance and subsequent creativity from the victims in penitentiaries. Foucault points out the causality in the creative dynamism between the persecutor and their victim, which led the French judiciary system he focused on to constantly modernise rules and regulations in its penitentiaries.[31] As hip-hop corrupts African feelings erasing or adjourning the sentiment of monopoly that ordinary people would have felt in different contexts, it is legitimate to fear that hip-hop works toward the withdrawal of Africa from the field of creativity in Foucault's perspective. A convincing reason for optimism seems not to exist regarding the MLK's ingenuity, which Awadi tries to inculcate among Africans. If all Africans were to be ruled by hip-hop, there is no doubt that MLK, who is celebrated in "Dans mon rêve," would have come to mean nothing to them. The African audience of hip-hop in these conditions are nothing more than spectators of the modern spectacle. They have ceased to *live* and only *appear*, granting, by doing so, more flesh to the "monopoly of appearance"[32] which as Debord points out, "expresses what society *can do*, but in this expression the *permitted* is absolutely opposed to the *possible*."[33] A clear illustration to the above is, for instance, the fact that, although Awadi aimed at sensitising African Heads of States not to sign the EPAs, those Agreements were effectively signed

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[30] Ibid., p. 17.

[31] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

[32] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, p. 12.

[33] Ibid., p. 25.

by almost all African Presidents, including that of Senegal, postponing by doing so the advent of true social justice in the African continent in particular, and on the earth in general.

Hip-hop, from this point of view, fails to protect individuals in their nuances, whereas protecting them could have helped diffuse the antagonism between the *permitted* (control) and the *possible* (freedom) fused in the expression *can do*. Protecting individuals in their nuances grants them resistance which is basic to effective creativity as Foucault calls it or to the *possible* in the terminology by Debord. Nevertheless, the paradoxes of hip-hop seem somehow to support the trope of African hip-hop artist as modern griot insofar as, applied to MLK, they underline how this historic figure could end up meaning nothing to the ideal recipients of "Dans mon rêve." In the conclusion that follows, I attempt to sketch out this situation clearly.

Conclusion

I sought to disclose how hip-hop serves as an agent of the trivialisation of MLK as a historic figure. For the sake of clarity, I opted to focus on "Dans mon rêve," a track by the Senegalese hip-hop musician Didier Awadi that invites his listeners to celebrate MLK. I recorded an obvious dynamism about defining pop culture in general, and hip-hop in particular. My use of Hall's perspective of culture as essentially ambivalent enabled me to objectively address pop culture and to avoid its enticing appeal to exclusively look at it from the reductive and perhaps revisionist trope of the rapper as a modern griot. Fortunately, Patricia Tang maintains that the idea implicitly highlights its narrowing propensity. She concludes thus her study on a prudent note which she discloses by italicised terms in her following statement as follows: „African rappers *may* indeed *be* modern griots."[34] Based on the paradoxes of hip-hop, it seems as if my study emphasises Tang's above carefulness as sensible. In fact, seen from the perspective of its paradoxes, hip-hop tends to trivialise MLK, his inspiring legacy included. This very situation is reminiscent of the negative connotations of the term griots Tang highlights in her study.[35] This is so because, in its negative sense, the griot is often regarded as a useless beggar.

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[34] Tang, "The Rapper as Modern Griot," p. 90.

[35] Ibid., p. 87.

However, my negotiation of Debord appeared productive insofar as it enabled me to relate processes of hip-hop with the globe as a factory of/for passive consumers. Debord's method to undo monopoly of the spectacle by dismantling its mechanisms helped, maybe implicitly, to display pop culture as such practice like others, with relative autonomy from economic, social, and political realms aiming at pleasure.[36] Thanks to Debord, it has also been possible to highlight hip-hop as participating in the materialisation of the same monopoly of spectacle which Debord attempts to challenge. Consequently, one merit of the study is the emphasis it lays on hip-hop as a very complex medium of pop culture that could either serve or deserve human causes. Given the potentials and the paradoxes of hip-hop, relevant questions that finally arise are: what can be done for hip-hop to become a real medium of mega, but decent impact on social transformation? In what condition is that projection achievable?

Ives S. Loukson

Hip-Hop and Trivialisation of Martin Luther King Jr. in Didier Awadi's "Dans mon rêve"

As far as hip-hop is concerned, it is a truism that, Didier Awadi counts as one of its influential leading figures. The famous musician from Senegal takes advantage of hip-hop as medium and participates in disseminating its values in the world. Awadi's creativity aims at conscientising Black people whose misery, according to him, is due to an internalised negativity about themselves. The artist pursues this objective in "Dans mon rêve" by staging MLK as a historic benchmark and source of inspiration to Africans. My paper attempts to highlight why the use of hip-hop as medium of pop culture does not effectively serve that creditable objective by Awadi. I also review the provocative trope of African pop-artist as a modern griot, raised a decade ago by the United States-based scholars. Theoretically, Stuart Hall's conception of culture and Guy Debord's theoretical complexity in his attempt to dismantle the monopoly of the spectacle inform the study.

Keywords: MLK, pop culture, hip-hop, spectacle, Africa
Słowa klucze: MLK, popkultura, hip-hop, spektakl, Afryka

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[36] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. xii.