Transhiphop pedagogy and epistemic disobedience in Senegal

Noella Binda Niati and Payal Pradip Shah

SCRIPTS: Cluster of Excellence, Humboldt-Universitat zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany; Educational Foundations and Inquiry, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, USA

ABSTRACT
This study situates transnégritude within discussions that consider the ways in which young people in Senegal, with a shared transcolonial narrative, bound through an ‘imagined community,’ negotiate their space, their identities, and their ways of knowing through a Hip-Hop pedagogy. Our analysis is informed by Mignolo’s epistemic disobedience and the geo- and body-politics that challenge neo-colonial epistemologies. The global scope of Hip-Hop culture and its manifestations in West Africa nuances the ways in which young people view education and its impact on their social identity. A transnégritude perspective aptly ‘straddles’ black identity, agency, and deconstructionism and allows for a fluid navigation of Hip-Hop pedagogy. Through a Hip-Hop pedagogy, young people in Senegal work towards social transformation vis-a-vis informal education as a response to imperialism. In so doing, this study intends to contribute to qualitative inquiries on the connections between Hip-Hop, identity formation, and the ‘fluidity and location of engagement’ in Hip-Hop culture. The goal is to challenge the formal schooling context and interrogate youth identity and engagement vis-a-vis social transformation.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 8 July 2021
Accepted 15 February 2022

KEYWORDS
Hip-Hop pedagogy; West Africa; Transnégritude; epistemic disobedience

Introduction
This article provides our onto-epistemological conceptualization of transnégritude as it relates to discourses of transformation as embodied by Y’en a Marre (Fed up), a civic movement organization, founded in 2011 by rappers, journalists, and students in Dakar, Senegal. Through the use of an intersecting framework of critical consciousness, culturally relevant pedagogy, and cultural modelling (Love 2013), Y’en a Marre developed projects and slogans that challenged hegemonic practices, countered the status quo and in so doing developed a new identity expression that was authentically Senegalese. The following examination discusses how Y’en a Marre (YEM) utilized a Hip-Hop pedagogy, informed by notions of ‘keepin’ it real’ and authenticity as a challenge and holding space for educative and transformative expression. We utilize Touré (forthcoming) and Niati’s (2020) conceptualization of transnégritude to consider YEM’s transnational understanding of locality, social transformation, and expression.

The ensuing precis provides a glimpse into the potential and the power of Hip-Hop pedagogy as a critical, educative tool. Hip-Hop’s ability to create epistemic assessments of lived realities propels those fellowshipping within its tenets to not only take ownership of the geo-and body-politics of
knowledge production but to its transmission. When contextualized within a West African context, we see Hip-Hop as a challenge to traditional schooling (Akom 2009, Jenkins 2013). Hip-Hop thus provides a door, a motive, and a purposeful tool to transform, challenge, and express for those who have chosen to learn outside the traditional course. What we see with organizations such as YEM, is this sense of urgency in sharing and learning within this transformative educational tool.

Transnégritude and Hip-Hop pedagogy

This study situates transnégritude within discussions that consider the ways in which young people within this shared ‘transcolonial’ narrative (Lionnet 2000), bound through an ‘imagined community,’ (Anderson 1983) or ‘multiple roots,’ (Touré forthcoming), negotiate their space, their identities, and their ways of knowing through a Hip-Hop pedagogy. This community comprises young people who espouse an aesthetic, a linguistic expression, an identity, and sound with a philosophy that is ‘guided by black nationalism and street consciousness’(Keyes 2004, p. 157). Guided not only by this shared struggle but also armed with the understanding that ‘Hip-Hop is a culture and genre of music that promotes social justice and provides an outlet for youth who have been marginalized to share their stories and experiences with the world’ (Adjapong 2017, p. 38).

Informed by Césaire’s understanding of Blackness and his expression of négritude as the ‘simple recognition of the fact that one is Black, the acceptance of this fact and of our destiny as Blacks, of our history and culture’ (Césaire 2013 as cited in Sprague [2018]), this paper delves into Ngũgĩ’s (2009) challenge of ‘Europhonism; of decolonizing the African mind and engaging in epistemologies of resistance that are authentically African. As we see from YEM, their engagement with/in Hip-Hop is very much ingrained within their push for authenticity.

To better understand this concept of transnégritude as is understood by Touré (forthcoming) and Niati (2020), we must first understand the roots and origins of the négritude movement, developed in France in the 1920s and 1930s. The three major figures attributed to the movement, were francophone intellectuals from various parts of the diaspora who met during their studies in Paris: Léopold Sédar Senghor from Senegal, Aimé Césaire from Martinique, and Léon-Gentran Damas from Guyana. These three along with other intellectuals would grapple with questions of blackness, identity and colonialism (Clark 2013, Graham 2014, Sprague 2018). Clark (2013) writes that négritude responds to two pillars of colonial discourse: the ‘power of erasure,’ which resulted in the ‘psychic disorientation’ and the ‘arrested development of the African world’ and ‘racial othering’ (74). ‘Racial Othering,’ Clark writes, ‘is a social process of demarcation where differential standards and moral codes are applied to distinct racial groups’ (2013, p. 74). As such, négritude, as it is understood, was, ‘a literary and philosophical movement that responds to colonial domination … a philosophy of black identity [that] evolved into a mode of thought that inspired blacks to reimagine African alternatives to the colonial state’ (71).

Though developed in France in the 1930s, what Touré (forthcoming), Miano (2008, 2012), Constant and Kahiudi (2009) and Adusei-Poku (2016) glean from the négritude movement are aspects of visibility and ownership. It is from this shared ‘struggle’ and the current sociopolitical dynamics that impact the diaspora, that a reimagining of this francophone movement and its relevance today brings us to Touré’s (forthcoming) ‘transnégritude.’ Just as Clark (2013), Sprague (2018), Graham (2014) and Thompson (2002) analyse the origins of négritude, Touré also considers the ‘shared colonial oppression’ in former colonies. Transnégritude, he writes, is informed by Françoise Lionnet’s (2000, Lionnet and Shi 2011) concept of transcoloniality, ‘which translates the shared experience of colonial oppression in all former French colonies and those of other major European countries’ (Touré, forthcoming, p. 1). Because of this transnational and transcolonial basis, the experiences, philosophies, and writings of the Négritude thinkers vary according to their geographies, histories, colonial encounters and freedom struggles; a dialectical understanding of transformation, communally and individually.

In a nutshell, Touré continues:
Transnégritude also accounts not only for the silenced, oppressed, and invisible but also Afrodisporic individuals whose living conditions entail no, single, dual and multiple roots, ranging from the physical to the digital spaces. It probes and articulates the conditions of the people trapped in the errant circuits between bodies of water and landmasses in search of freedom or alternative existence. It concomitantly deconstructs and reenacts the ongoing co-construction of an ostracized self and fearless other. (Touré forthcoming, p. 1)

Because one of the central questions that early négritude thinkers grappled with was how to be both Black and French within a colonial context, négritude offered what Clark (2013), citing what Benedict Anderson (1983, as cited in Clark [2013] and Lambert [2016]) calls the ‘imagined community.’ Clark (2013) writes, ‘a community where there is a mental and emotional affinity among blacks that transcends nationaliy, language and economic circumstances’ (74).

As a civic organization, YEM and yenamarristes (YEM members), promote a panafrican transcultural expression, espousing a mission that is centred on transformation, transparency, and ownership (yenamarre.sn). Discussions with members of Y’en a Marre led us to see how they approached and conceptualized their identities and mission. In order to achieve this ‘social transformation’ the organization would develop citizen training, advocate education through ‘urban cultures,’ and increase the involvement of young people in taking ownership of their trajectory (mission statement- yenamarre.sn). What we witnessed was that members evoked a sense of consciousness that urged adherents to ‘heal themselves’ as YEM co-founder Fadel Barro told me 26 July 2017. Additionally, their cultural philosophy, form of schooling, and call for transformation, were seen as a means of ‘personal presentation, verbal artistry, and commentary on life’s circumstances’ (Keyes 2004, p. 22). These are all concepts that we wish to complicate within discussions of Hip-Hop, transnégritude, and epistemic disobedience.

Hip-Hop like Transnégritude speaks to the delinking and expressive actions of those othered. Clark (2018) and Haupt (2008) write that Hip-Hop is connected to the ‘notion of a global black experience of oppression and resistance’ in the construction of a black nationalist identity (Haupt 2008, p. 145). Hip-Hop pedagogy speaks to its healing power and its ‘ability to give voice, shape, and dimension to the often ignored and disregarded sources of pain’ that Black people negotiate (Bridges 2011, p. 327). Much like Césaire (2013) and Lambert (2016) evoked Benedict Anderson’s (1983) imagined community, Hip-Hop was the imagined community personified. Hip-Hop, Neal (1999) wrote, was representative of a ‘concerted effort by young urban blacks to use mass-culture to facilitate communal discourse across a fractured and dislocated national community’ (Neal 1999, p. 136).

Hip-Hop pedagogy is a ‘way of authentically and practically incorporating the creative elements of hip-hop into teaching,’ that is rapping, djing, mcing, breaking, graffiti, and the philosophies of consciousness and social justice, and inviting students to ‘have a connection with the content while meeting them on their cultural turf by teaching to, and through, their realities and experiences’ (Adjapong and Emdin 2015; Johnson 2017). Hip-Hop pedagogy is rooted in three intersecting frameworks; the principles of culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings 1994, Gay 2000), critical pedagogical frameworks of (Freire 2000, Kincheloe 2008), and cultural modelling methods (Lee 1995). These three intersecting roots ensure that Hip-Hop pedagogy ‘positions the culture, social context, learning styles, and experiences of students’ to the center of the curricula’ (Petchauer 2009).

In this sense, YEM forces us to reconsider schools and learning. What is school? What does it mean to learn? And, who is a student? Jenkins (2013) provides a broad and objective interpretation of what it means to acquire knowledge. A school, she writes, is, any purposeful learning community, whether for children or adults, public or private, compulsory or voluntary. I include formal institutions and voluntary gatherings, from pre-kindergarten to universities, community colleges and home-based learning… When I use the word “student” I mean anyone who is engaged purposefully in learning, whatever their age and whatever their setting. (Jenkins 2013, p. 12)
We can therefore situate Hip-Hop as a critical space to study transformative education, and liberatory knowledge production (Porfli et al. 2013). The classroom must be contested in order for it to truly evolve so that we might reshape the act of learning, from a ‘structured, mechanized experience into a creative, imaginative, and socially conscious endeavor’ (Jenkins 2013, p. 14). This will allow for a ‘critical pedagogy of imagination and humanism, which concerns creating educational spaces where the educational content matters to students’ (Jenkins 2013, p. 14).

By focusing on young people as an asset, expanding our understanding of Hip-Hop pedagogy, and reframing how we view youth engagement in West Africa, this study contributes to decolonial discussions on ownership and autonomy and the ‘apparatuses of enunciation’ used to counter dominant narratives. Young people are seen as without agency, easily malleable, and a potential threat (Porfli et al. 2013, Bryson 2014). Hip-Hop too, has been derided and labelled as ‘nihilistic, destructive’ and a cultural pollutant (Love 2013), yet this same cultural expression is used as a means to resist, empower, and challenge dominant narratives. What we saw with Y’en a Marre in Senegal, was Hip-Hop pedagogy in practice; intersecting culturally responsive teaching, critical pedagogy, and cultural modelling to encourage young people to ‘engage in thoughtful discourse and meaningful classroom work that critiques society and its fixed representations of what is considered normal and what is deemed “the other”’ (Love 2013, p. 26).

We look to epistemic disobedience to nuance our understanding of engagement and the shared struggle for liberation. Epistemic disobedience, much like transnégritude embraces a transformative approach to ways of knowing and sits at the crux of Y’en a Marres’s ethos. YEM above all, pushes for a new way of becoming that is unfolded through a transcolonial and transnational narrative that emphasizes agency and awareness. This is evident with new slogans calling for un nouveau type de sénégalais, a New Type of Senegalese; a senegalese who claims their rights and is aware of their civic responsibility (Gueye 2013, p. 24).

**Epistemic disobedience and self-determination**

Young people are pushing for self-determination and transformation as they figure out their socio-political role on the global stage. Given a history of single-party systems, civil war, coup d’états, economic instability, young people today are enjoying the liberties of democracy, social media, and interconnectedness never before seen (Spencer 2012, Kazeem 2020). And for many, they are choosing to speak up, tired and overwhelmed by the seeming stagnation of their communities. Though recognizant of the obstacles facing them, young people are also becoming more and more vocal (Gueye 2013, Lambert 2016, Clark 2018). They are beginning to recognize their power and the role they can play as ‘stakeholders in the reconfiguration of society and the political project of a nation’ as more and more seek to ‘claim [their] rights and representation’ (Abbink and Kessel 2005, p. 23).

Building on Touré (forthcoming), Mignolo (2003, 2009), and Ngugi’s (1986) understanding of a shared oppression, we focus on the fact that epistemic disobedience as exemplified by Mignolo (2003, 2009), Medina (2013) and Ngugi (1986) also calls for acts of resistance. Epistemic disobedience, or resistance, charges one to ‘undermine and change oppressive normative structures and the complacent cognitive–affective functioning that sustains those structures’ (Medina 2013, p. 2). When talking to Yenamarristes in July 2017, they reported that their call to engagement was embedded in these ideas of democracy, politics, oppression, and decolonial epistemologies. As Medina notes, resistance begets contestation, that is the ‘political mechanisms and activities that make democratic interaction possible’ (2013, p. 3). This involves a collective self-determination for citizens to protest and participate even if it can be complicated and divergent (Medina 2013, Celikates 2016). From this epistemic oppression, comes an obligation to resist as Ngugi (1986) and Medina (2013) assert or ‘de-link’ as Mignolo (2009) affirms from majoritarian narratives. In order to do so, one must assume several ‘epistemic duties:’ to fight against ignorance, to know oneself and others, to learn and teach others, and to work towards social justice (Medina 2013, p. 17).
Smith (1999) notes that when self-determination is present in the goals of a movement, it becomes more than a political goal. It becomes a goal of social justice involving the processes of ‘transformation, of decolonization, of healing and of mobilization as peoples’ (Smith 1999, 115). Young people have an urgency, a unique tactic, and a motive that underlies their push to engagement and social justice. Throughout our interactions with yenamarristes, it was clear that they were not just resisting sociopolitical and economic structures but too, as shown on their website, they also disobeyed or resisted social and pedagogical norms; emphasizing ‘urban cultures,’ (such as street art, rap, style, dance, etc.), promoting youth civic action, calling for transparency through involvement and critical observation, and explicitly encouraging social transformation (GRET 2019). What YEM is doing, echoes what young people are doing all over the African continent, resisting hegemonic practices and promoting local cultural expressions while making sense of their world.

Informed by the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy and critical pedagogical frameworks, Milu’s (2018, p. 96) study on Kenyan Hip-Hop rappers, illustrates how Hip-Hop plays a significant role in emerging youth identities, evolving linguistic practices, and transcultural sharing. Using discourse and sociolinguistics analysis, Milu (2018) shows how Kenyan rappers resisted Kenya’s hegemonic ethnic, racial, and linguistic practices and instead engaged in trilingualism and transculturalism. Dowsett’s (2017) work in South Africa, informed by Freire’s (2000) critical consciousness and cultural modelling, considers how Hip-Hop can be used as a tool to empower local culture, language and social practice. Dowsett looks at the ways in which Hip-Hop provides a ‘means of remaking localized identities,’ transforming and living authentically (2017, p. 255). Epistemic disobedience, or resistance, charges one to ‘undermine and change oppressive normative structures and the complacent cognitive–affective functioning that sustains those structures’ (Medina 2013, p. 2). This ‘de-linking’ that Mignolo (2009) suggests and as evidenced by Dowsett (2017), Milu (2018), and Love (2013), involves the promotion of local experiences and needs ‘rather than from local imperial experiences and needs projected to the globe’ (Love 2013, p. 19). This transformative delinking is what constitutes epistemic disobedience and we will further examine this process as we discuss the themes of authenticity and transformation.

Researchers’ positionality and data collection

As a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo to the U.S., Hip-Hop culture spoke to me, the first author, when I was a teenager consumed by a cultural duality and internal conflict I could not name. Those who spoke to me most were young, loud, and angry protesters such as Tupac, Queen Latifah, and KRS-One, who embodied the spirit of Patrice Lumumba and Thomas Sankara. Though my equally religious parents forbade the music, I could proudly express my truth and authenticity through the spirit of Hip-Hop, that is, the attitude, the awareness, and a way to view the world (KRS-One 2001).

For a lot of young people, Hip-Hop reflects the social, economic, political and cultural realities of their lives speaking to them in a language and manner they understand; or as Bridges puts it, Hip-Hop is a ‘term used to describe the collective experience, modes of thinking, epistemologies of urban youth’ (2011, p. 326). Due to its longevity and its pertinence to youth worldwide, Hip-Hop cannot be dismissed as ‘merely a passing fad’ or something that will run its course. Hip-Hop can be a critical pedagogical tool that builds on what Bridges calls a ‘critical cultural movement,’ that is, ‘a critical epistemology or a theoretical tool that challenges our beliefs about teaching, shapes our conception of the function and informs our understandings of the qualities of effective educators’ (2011, p. 327). bell hooks (1994) calls this an ‘engaged pedagogy,’ to teach in a way that nurtures the soul of the student; what Freire (2000) called conscientização. As such, Hip-Hop as a pedagogical tool, can be used as a challenge to schooling, an epistemic disobedience, and a source of transformation.

Data for this project was collected within a 23-month time frame, between 2016 and 2018, utilizing a Comparative Case Study (CCS) approach (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017) to examine how young people in Senegal use Hip-Hop as an educative tool for social transformation. Fieldwork for this research was conducted at the headquarters of Y’en a Marre (YEM) and the Université Cheikh
Anta Diop (UCAD) in Dakar, Senegal. Data collection was possible through the rich connections I, the first author, made during my work with UNESCO-Dakar, UCAD and the West African Research Center (WARC) in Dakar. CCS was used as a tool to examine the multiple scales and structures that shape lived experiences. Comparative Case Studies encourage comparison across three axes: horizontally, across space or locations; vertically across scales; and transversally, across time. The CCS approach allows for a comparison that goes beyond time and space; it compares and contrasts between and within various social, political and economic contexts over time and through it. The approach allows scholars to examine the ‘interconnections across dispersed locations’ (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, p. 14 & 102).

We interviewed six members of Y’en a Marre; five men and one woman aged between 30–40 years old. The interviews were semi-structured – lasting between 45 and 90 min – and each participant was interviewed three times, to gain answers concerning the role of Hip-Hop in their engagement, school and schooling, the use of language, and the sociopolitical realities young people are facing. The questions were designed to underline the transversal, that is the macro and micro structures influencing the organizations; the comparative policies that inform their activism, and the historical ties that marry Hip-Hop, Engagement, and schooling.

Our interviews also focused on ‘counter-stories’ (Solórzano and Yosso 2002, p. 32). As Solórzano and Yosso affirm, ‘oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation’ (2002, p. 32). As such counter-stories can be a method used to ‘exposing, analyzing, and challenging’ majoritarian narratives on racial privilege, young people, their agency, and methods of engagement (Solórzano and Yosso 2002, p. 32). What better way to challenge dominant ideals than by using a tradition that is intrinsically familiar? Storytelling has a rich and continuing tradition and due to storytelling’s intimacy and naturalness, one can probe and gain valuable biographic, sociopolitical and economic information. In my analysis, my goal was to forefront YEM member stories in order to engage in what Corbin and Strauss and (1990) call ‘theoretical sensitivity,’ which refers to the insight and capacity of the researcher to interpret and give meaning to their data. And, ‘cultural intuition’ as discussed by Bernal (1998) to recognize the complex processes that impact participants and colours both participants and researchers in the research process.

Findings

Young people play a crucial role in the politics of history and of hegemonic struggles of ‘subjectification and power distribution’ (Abbink and Kessel 2005, p. 119). They are a ‘powerful instrument’ in encompassing a privileged role in the rupture, inclusion, and exclusion of social power dynamics (Abbink and Kessel 2005, p. 119). Yet, How do we define young people? How much of what we consider ‘youth’ is socially constructed? Our definition of young people is drawn from Lambert (2016) and Spencer’s (2012) fluid understanding of young people, that is not ‘bounded by age parameters.’ Lambert envisions young people, as an ‘imagined and gendered category, much in the spirit of Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities’ (Lambert 2016, p. 35). Spencer approaches youth as a ‘relational, historically constructed social category that is context specific’ (Spencer 2012, p. 132). Recognizing the political and epistemological weight inherent within the term, Lambert wishes to decenter the category; to extrapolate on the dynamics and lived experiences of a shared identity. Young people in this context, are those who are navigating the social markers of ‘adulthood’ in emerging social, political, and economic contexts. This is the definition we will employ to contextualize young people in Senegal.

TransHip-Hop

For young people who feel ‘lost’ or marginalized, Hip-Hop provides a discursive space for them to cultivate and reinforce their identity, advocate for social change, and a way to participate in a
glocalized world (Gueye 2013, Ntarangwi 2010, Dowsett 2017, Park et al. 2019). If Hip-Hop speaks on the socio-political aspects of marginalized people, then critical pedagogy from a Freirean perspective, builds on the notion of students viewing education as a practice of freedom, a place to build critical consciousness and social mobility – a place ‘where we learn to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality’ (Akom 2009, p. 56). Akom (2009) reorients and furthers the narrative on Hip-Hop pedagogy in academia utilizing Freire’s problem-posing method to carry a community-based case study through youth participatory action research to promote and dissect the meaning, purpose, and function of Hip-Hop. Freire’s problem-solving methodology uses a five-step approach to challenge the dominant status quo. The steps, from identifying a problem, analyzing a problem, developing a plan, implementing the plan, evaluating the plan, is where, according to Akom, the intersection of Hip-Hop meets critical pedagogy in the ‘creation of a pedagogical space of resiliency and resistance developed to challenge the dominant mindset, increases engagement and achievement, and builds new understandings of the strength and assets of youth of color and the communities from which they come’ (2009, p. 57).

When interviewed by Gueye in 2013, Fadel noted that the creation of the movement was a ‘cathartic idea, which emerged’ as they sat in his apartment waiting for electricity to return after a ‘twenty hour blackout’ (Gueye 2013, p. 25). They had had enough and after debating, journalists versus rappers, it was clear that both sides needed to do something. As Fadel recalled to me in 2017, of what use were they, rappers, journalists and students, denouncing things when they didn’t even have electricity? It only made sense, then, that given a platform to speak out on these injustices, a Hip-Hop based method of organizing would be utilized.

Petchauer (2009), Hill (2009), and Low, Tan and Celemencki (2013), argue that Hip-Hop is a pedagogical form wherein youth ‘interpret, represent, and negotiate aspects of their sociocultural identities …’ and YEM provides a space that affirms this pedagogy (Low et al. 2013, p. 19). When we spoke with members of Y’en a Marre, it was noted that Hip-Hop was simply who they were and how they came to know. In order to spread the word on then President Wade’s presidential bid and citizenship rights, they decided, as Fadel Barro told me 26 July 2017, to develop ‘pedagogic concerts.’ Pedagogic concerts utilized popular artists to encourage and incorporate discourses of awareness, citizenship, and political engagement. YEM members were sure to note that these pedagogic concerts developed naturally, because, according to Fadel, it was not so much about doing Hip-Hop but also about being Hip-Hop as well that generated these concerts.

Fadel and Thiat told me that Hip-Hop spoke to them as young children growing up in Kaolack (a town 191 km southeast of Dakar), as it related to the lived experiences of their surroundings. Fadel, along with the other founding members of YEM, much like Hip-Hop’s fifth tenet, espoused the notion of knowledge of self as a step towards transformation and self-determination, so too did YEM envision a movement that would not only decry and denounce, but also reveal and instigate change. Alluding to Ngugi’s concepts of decolonization (1986), what Mignolo (2003, 2009) calls epistemic disobedience, and Medina’s (2013) discussion of
an epistemology of resistance, YEM pushes for both an epistemic and physical delinking. Their engagement stems from a shared epistemology; one that challenges and separates from the status quo. For young people who had grown disillusioned with politicians, Hip-Hop was the antidote.

Hip-Hop culture not only speaks to the lived realities of its adherents but encourages action towards self-determination (KRS-One 1989, Akom 2009, Seidel 2011). During our discussions, Fadel, along with the other founding members of YEM, much like Césaire and KRS-One, spoke of self-awareness and promoted pan-African unity. YEM envisioned a movement that would not only decry and denounce, but also reveal and instigate change. Alluding to Ngugi’s concepts of decolonization (1986), what Mignolo (2003, 2009) calls epistemic disobedience, and Medina’s (2013) discussion of an epistemology of resistance, YEM pushes for both an epistemic and physical delinking. Their engagement stems from a shared struggle and an epistemology that challenges corruption and dependency and promotes self-awareness and civic action; markedly separating from the status quo. Utilizing Hip-Hop as a pedagogical tool became an antidote to counter social ills and creating a space for authentic expression.

Y’en a Marre’s use of counter-hegemonic curricula, through the development of ‘urban cultures’ in their civic education classes, ethnic identity, through citizen training, social transformation in the adoption of un nouveau type de sénégalais, a new type of Senegalese, and counter-narratives, illustrates the theoretical and practical application of a critical Hip-Hop pedagogy that insists that young people are active agents and pose a formidable force in the future of learning (Akom 2009).

Akom (2009) and Jenkins (2013) encourage us to revisit how Hip-Hop cultivates ‘organic intellectuals’ who bring theory and practice together (Akom 2009, p. 53 & 55). Hip-Hop as a pedagogical tool goes beyond lyrics and rhymes but instead is embraced as a critical pedagogy of ‘imagination, humanism, agency, and becoming’ allowing us to reshape the act of learning, from a ‘structured, “mechanized” experience into a creative, imaginative, and socially conscious endeavor.’ (Jenkins 2013, p. 14). This evidenced in Love’s (2013) discussion on Black males resisting and challenging Eurocentric notions of Blackness within Hip-Hop and mass media. Using critical dialogue to investigate how young Black men made meaning of Hip-Hop and popular culture’s embedded racism, Love found that young men she interviewed, ‘possessed the ability and knowledge making skills to achieve Freire’s highest level of critical consciousness, but were stifled at semi-transitive consciousness because they viewed racism as a fixed aspect of their daily lives as young Black men’ (2000, p. 37). As such, pedagogical and theoretical frameworks that challenge the status quo, such as a Hip-Hop pedagogy is crucial in engaging in critical dialogues aimed at ‘fostering critical consciousness so that it becomes a fundamental aspect of all students’ educational experience’ (Love 2013, p. 37). Epistemologically, a critical Hip-Hop pedagogy creates spaces for organizations such as YEM to create counternarratives, delinking from majoritarian structures and encourage young people to ‘turn their sociological gaze back toward the community and begin to solve everyday problems …’ (Akom 2009, p. 55).

Keepin’ it real

Y’en a Marre’s push to be ‘authentically’ Senegalese in their manifestation of Hip-Hop was evident not only in how they chose to use Hip-Hop pedagogy to engage young people but also how they utilized ‘street knowledge’ (Keyes 2004, Jenkins 2013, Grewal 2020) to reach the country. GRET’s website notes that through community led projects like Sunu Gox, ‘our community’, or Dox ak sa gox, ‘walk with your community,’ yenamarristes, developed critical and culturally relevant projects that mobilized young people within their communities to improve their living environment, enhance public spaces, and raise awareness. Drawing on young people’s modes of expression, these projects centre young people’s knowledge and leadership to develop a new type of senegalese (NTS) one who, as YEM’s website notes, and Sophie Sow described to me on July, 20, 2017, is
socially aware, civically active, and self-aware. Hip-Hop pedagogy as practiced by Y’en a Marre ‘becomes a political forum for the sensitization of the population on their rights and duties’ (Ngom 2016, p. 13). Also, by organizing civic activities throughout the country, rappers and journalists of the movement ‘vie with professional politicians for the public space’ (Ngom 2016, p. 13). Recognizing that their shared struggles are echoed throughout the continent, Yenamarristes want to dismantle and reorganize. This is at the crux of the nouveau type de sénégalais, ‘a new type of Senegalese’, a slogan and concept embodied by YEM to denote a person who leads by example and who promotes citizenship and transparency as told to me by Fadel Barro in 26 July 2017 and again in November 2018.

In their expression of a New Type of Senegalese (NTS), Y’en a Marre uses Hip-Hop culture and the social and the political roots of négritude to disseminate their message in the community, in public transportation, and via social media (YouTube videos, Facebook posts, WhatsApp messages). Bryson argues that by grounding their actions and rhetoric in ‘recognizable Senegalese cultural patterns,’ such as calls to hybridity and Senegalese cultural expressions, YEM was able to ‘subtly and carefully introduce transgressive political and social ideas, including ones rooted in hip-hop culture, to a broad spectrum of people’ (2014, p. 36). In so doing, members urged their countrymen and women to serve as ‘catalysts for social and political reform.’ A New Type of Senegalese for Yenamarristes is one who helps themselves and ‘seiz[es] the opportunities that are offered to them’ (Bryson 2014, p. 4).

Hip-Hop can provide counter-narratives that promote authenticity and self-determination. This was expressed to us when talking with participants about their reasons for joining YEM and the benefits of YEM’s anti-dominant adherence. When we spoke with YEM members about their work and their push for a new identity formation, we were constantly told of the nouveau type de sénégalais, a new type of Senegalese (NTS) that expected more from themselves and their elders. This NTS that the members emphasized is mentioned several times in the Plan Sénégal Emergent (2014), the Senegalese economic development plan which highlights this notion of the NTS. However, when envisioned and discussed to me by YEM members, this seems to run counter to what the government is actually doing.

SOPHIE: … oui … un nouveau type de Sénégalais, c’est celui qui refuse de se laisser, qui refuse d’être un fardeau par exemple, un Sénégalais qui se prend en charge, qui se bat pour les mêmes choses, qui se bat pour son pays, qui n’attend rien du gouvernement … il faut être honnête, il y a un moment dans les écoles, manque de civisme et tout ça qu’on n’apprend plus à nos jeunes frères, voilà, et … Au lieu d’attendre que … voilà … de se dire que Dieu va changer les choses, Dieu va changer … c’est à eux même de changer les choses, le changement ne peut venir que d’eux-mêmes …. Ils ne doivent pas attendre à ce que les autres le fassent pour eux, ou espérer à ce que les politiciens, les hommes au pouvoir le fassent pour eux. C’est une façon de leur inculquer cela …

SOPHIE: … yes … a new type of Senegalese is one who refuses to let himself go, who refuses to be a burden for example, a Senegalese who takes care of himself, who fights for the same things, who is fighting for his country, who does not expect anything from the government … you have to be honest, there was a moment in the schools, lack of civic [education] and all that we no longer teach our young brothers, that’s it, and … Instead of waiting for … to say that God will change things, God will change … it’s up to them to change things, change can only come from themselves … They should not wait for others to do it for them, or expect politicians, men in power to do it for them. It’s a way of instilling that in them …

What Sophie Sow brought up to me during our meeting on 10 November 2018, was not only Y’en a Marre’s push for self-determination but also their insistence to promote ownership, pride, and leadership. This, she maintains and continues to do so, is necessary to instill ‘a change’ in mentality and in action. Gone are the days of waiting for leadership to change or improve your life, the onus, in an NTS mentality, is on the self. Fadel Barro echoed this sentiment and build on Sophie’s testament by noting that this change in mentality is not just a Senegal problem but an African one. This prise de conscience is made explicit in their vision and their mission statement in their promotion of NTS, social transformation, and youth involvement.
As someone who embodies Hip-Hop and promotes a counter-hegemonic stance on leadership, for Fadel and yenamarristes in general, the NTS ideal is an essential tool to advocate panafricanism and decolonization. If, as Mignolo (2009), Fanon (1963) and Tuck and Yang (2012) assert that the goal of decolonization is physical and epistemic sovereignty, then the NTS as envisioned by YEM is an articulation of this ownership. This is not a Senegalese struggle but rather a continental one and YEM is a necessary leader and example towards this end.

This new type of African is evident of the growing pan-Africanism that informs YEM’s activism and engagement and through social media, has extended beyond Senegal (Gueye 2013, Porfílio et al. 2013). It is not just about instilling a decolonial thinking that challenges borders and nationhood, it is also about ‘build[ing]’ a new Africa; and with the help of YEM, young people can have those tools. In examining YEM and their use of Hip-Hop as a pedagogical tool for engagement, educators and policymakers must contend with the macro and micro queries that inform local, lived experiences of Africa’s most powerful demographic, young people. What then, can the education and political sector offer to promote peace education, youth engagement, informal learning, and advance civic activism? In looking at its appeal, transformative nature, and engaging aspect, a critical Hip-Hop pedagogy may be an answer. Hip-Hop pedagogy builds on Touré’s (forthcoming) transnégritude and Mignolo’s (2003, 2009) epistemic disobedience and the intersecting critical consciousness, culturally relevant pedagogy, and culture modelling frameworks. It considers the lived experiences of those coming from a shared struggle, it affirms and weaponizes Blackness and authentic Senegalese expressions as tools for resistance, and finally, it forefronts Senegalese ways of knowing, promotes transformation and authenticity.

**Concluding discussion**

When considering the ways in which YEM has used Hip-Hop to organize and engage young people, what we see is an ideology that centres social transformation and ownership. Harkening back to Césaire’s (2013) ‘cultural bridge’ and Anderson’s (1983) conception of the ‘imagined community,’ what we perceived with Y’en a Marre (YEM) was what Touré expresses in his discussion of transnégritude, that it ‘deconstructs and reenacts the ongoing co-construction of an ostracized self and fearless other’ (forthcoming, 1). YEM continuously pushes to challenge/resist what they see as neocolonial socio-economic and political structures and in so doing look to the multiple roots within and outside Africa to deconstruct the former.

Though often we tend to hear of an ‘easily duped’ youth population (Lambert 2016), what this study has shown is that young people ‘struggling against the neo-colonial stage of imperialism’ (Ngugi 1987) have chosen to mobilize and engage in an authentic, Hip-Hop pedagogy that espouses leadership and transformation. The influence and notoriety of organizations such as Y’en a Marre, illustrate the impact of a critical Hip-Hop pedagogy delinking from neocolonial realities, and promoting a new shared identity that encourages leadership and autonomy.

As we have seen, the use of Hip-Hop pedagogy by YEM builds on Touré (forthcoming) and Niati’s (2020) transnégritude and Mignolo’s (2003, 2009) epistemic disobedience to illustrate how young people are utilizing their shared struggle as a form of resistance, to unify, to call out, and to exist in their authentic selves. What we see in the utility of Hip-Hop as pedagogy when utilized by YEM is a call for self-determination and autonomy that speaks to the neocolonial struggles they must navigate within this current stage of imperialism (Ngugi 1987). The multiple roots of identity, sociopolitical context, and music are ‘concomitantly deconstruct[ed] and reenact the ongoing co-construction of an ostracized self and fearless other’ (Touré, forthcoming). By doing so, a Hip-Hop pedagogy considers the lived experiences of those coming from a shared struggle, it affirms and weaponizes Blackness and authentic Senegalese expressions as tools for resistance, and finally, it highlights Senegalese ways of knowing, promotes social transformation and civic action.
It is therefore imperative we forefront the voices and experiences of youth and activists as one of the tools to determine policy changes and international aid. We should, as Bishop says, position our approach to policy to ‘operationalize self-determination,’ to encourage optimism, leadership, and entrepreneurship (2011, p. 21). This is necessary if we are to consider how these ‘diasporic educational spaces’ disrupt notions of identity and provide spaces for counter-narratives and knowledge-making that go beyond accepted norms (Shirazi 2019). Engaging with processes of identification and civic education in West Africa provides nuance to the field of comparative and international education and may provide a glimpse to understand how ‘educational practices and spaces are implicated in articulating’ identification, belonging and agency (Shirazi 2019, p. 498).

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge support by the Open Access Publication Fund of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Research for this contribution is part of the Cluster of Excellence “Contestations of the Liberal Script” (EXC 2055, Project-ID: 390715649), funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany’s Excellence Strategy.

ORCID

Noella Binda Niati http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7577-2828

References

Abbnink, J., and van Kessel, I., 2005. Vanguard or vandals youth, politics, and conflict in Africa. Leiden: Brill.
Adajapon, E.S. 2017. Bridging theory and practice: using Hip-Hop pedagogy as a culturally relevant approach in the urban science classroom. PhD diss., Columbia University.
Adajapon, E.S., and Emdin, C., 2015. Rethinking Pedagogy In Urban Spaces: Implementing Hip-Hop pedagogy in the urban science classroom. Journal of urban learning, teaching, and research, 11, 66–77.
Adusei-Poku, N., 2016. Post-post-black? Journal of contemporary African art, 38 (39), 80–89.
Akom, A.A., 2009. Critical Hip Hop pedagogy as a form of liberatory praxis. Equity & excellence in education, 42 (1), 52–66.
Anderson, B., 1983. Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. London: Verso.
Bartlett, L., and Vavrus, F.K., 2017. Rethinking case study research: a comparative approach. New York: Routledge.
Bernal, D.D., 1998. Using a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research. Harvard Educational Review, 68 (4), 555–583.
Bishop, R., 2011. Freeing ourselves. Rotterdam: SensePublishers.
Bridges, T., 2011. Towards a pedagogy of Hip-Hop in urban teacher education. The journal of Negro education, 80 (3), 325–338.
Bryson, D., 2014. The rise of a new Senegalese cultural philosophy? African studies quarterly, 14 (3), 33–56.
Celikates, 2016. Rethinking civil disobedience as a practice of contestation: beyond the liberal paradigm. Constellations (oxford, England), 23 (1), 37–45.
Césaire, A., 2013. The original 1939 notebook of a return to the native land: bilingual edition. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
Clark, A., 2013. Against invisibility: négritude and the awakening of the African voice in theology. studies in world christianity, 15 (1), 71–92.
Clark, M.K., 2018. Hip-hop in Africa: Prophets of the city and dustyfoot philosophers. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.
Constant, I., and Mabana, K.C., eds. 2009. Négritude: legacy and present relevance. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.
Corbin, J.M., and Strauss, A., 1990. Grounded theory research: procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. Qualitative sociology, 13 (1), 3–21.
Petchauer, E., 2009. Framing and Reviewing Hip-Hop educational research. Review of educational research, 79 (2), 946–978.

Plan Senegal Emergent. 2014. Republique du Senegal. https://www.sec.gouv.sn/sites/default/files/Plan%20Senegal%20Emergent_0.pdf.

Porfilio, B.J., Roychoudhury, D., and Gardner, L., 2013. Ending the "war against youth": social media and hip-hop culture as sites of resistance, transformation and (re) conceptualization. Journal for critical education policy studies, 11 (4), 85–105.

Seidel, S.S., 2011. Hip Hop genius: remixing high school education. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Shirazi, R., 2019. Somewhere we can breathe: diasporic counterspaces of education as sites of epistemological possibility. Comparative education review, 63 (4), 480–501.

Smith, L.T., 1999. Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples. London: Zed.

Solórzano, D.G., and Yosso, T.J., 2002. A critical race counterstory of race, racism, and affirmative action. Equity & excellence in education, 35 (2), 155–168.

Spencer, S.N., 2012. The use of pop songs by Sierra Leonean youths in enjoying the space created for freedom of expression after the civil war. Africa Today, 59 (1), 71–86.

Sprague, K., 2018. From Aimé Césaire to Black lives matter: the ongoing impact of Négritude. Africology: the journal of pan African studies, 11 (4), 242–246.

Thompson, P.S., 2002. Négritude and a new africa: an update. Research on African literatures, 33, 143–153.

Touré, V.A. forthcoming. Transnégritude: Black identity politics in African Francophone literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. PhD diss., The Pennsylvania State University.

Tuck, E., and Yang, W.K., 2012. Decolonization is not a metaphor. Decolonization: indigeneity, education & society, 1 (1), 1–40.