Mbalax: Traces of Tradition in Senegalese Hip-Hop

A MASTER’S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

BY
MIKAYLA WINNER SIMERAL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

December 22, 2017
Acknowledgements

The moment I first visited Africa in 2007, I knew I was meant to do more than visit and leave. I have dreamt of executing musical research on this beautiful continent ever since that day, and ten years later, here I am. This study would not be possible without the assistance and support of some very meaningful people in my life.

First, I would like to thank Adja and Mommy Gna Gna for opening their home to me in Dakar. Thank you for your patience and kind support through all of my ups and downs. Bisou bisou to you both. Bouna and Neesa, if it weren’t for you two I would have never gone to Senegal. Thank you for inspiring me to want to learn more about your vibrant culture and allowing me to stay with your family. You are both such a blessing in my life and I can’t imagine what this study would have been without you. Ibou and Paco, my drum teachers at Africa Tilibo, I will always have a special place in my heart for the both of you. Thank you for your patience, your persistence, your smiles, your afternoon tea and your wealth of drumming knowledge. Africa Tilibo became my second home in Senegal, and I will never forget my lessons underneath the mango tree.

I would like to thank my professors at Liberty University, particularly Dr. Morehouse and Dr. Meyer. Dr. Morehouse, words cannot express how grateful I am to have a professor, mentor, and friend as intentional and kind as you. Thank you for pushing me to be the best ethnomusicology student and strong Christ-centered woman I can be. Dr. Meyer, your summer intensive was by far one of the most
challenging and rewarding classes I have ever taken in my entire scholarly career. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to grow as an ethnomusicologist and shepherding me along the way.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. Mom, Pops, and Brookie, thank you for supporting me through this significant chapter in life. Grad school was always an uncertainty, but you all encouraged me to push through the unknown and follow my dreams. To my husband Scott, you have been by my side during this entire process. From practical budgeting to emotional stability, you have been there through it all. Thank you for being my rock and for reminding me of my strengths when I felt weak. Without you in my corner I would not have been able to pull this one off.

“Encourage, lift and strengthen one another. For the positive energy spread to one will be felt by us all. For we are connected, one and all.”

- Deborah Day
Abstract

This study will provide a glimpse into the current hip-hop culture of Dakar, ultimately revealing how up-and-coming artists are implementing mbalax. The research for this study took place in Dakar, Senegal from January 26th - February 16th, and was completed in both Washington D.C. and New York City from February 22nd - 26th. During this time multiple hip-hop artists, political activists/rappers, drummers, and sabar dancers were consulted. More knowledge was obtained than anticipated through one-on-one and group interviews while in the field. This wealth of insight will assist the efforts of this study in conveying a sense of insider perspective into the vibrant culture of Dakar, Senegal.

Mbalax is a signature rhythm of the Senegalese people, but it is also much more than a beat, a rhythm, a dance, or a succession of patterns on the mbëng- mbëng drum. Mbalax is an identity, recognized as being solely Senegambian, it is the sound of home for those who were born in that particular region. Mbalax arose from a longing; a longing for traditional instruments to be heard in popular Senegalese music. Since its rise in popularity over fifty years ago, it is crucial to examine how mbalax continues to thrive and sustain relevance amongst an ever-changing music culture.

I want to bridge the scholarly gap that presently exists amidst mbalax research as it pertains to its relevance in modern hip-hop music; revealing why this specific traditional style is becoming increasingly prevalent amongst hip-hop artists in Dakar. Senegalese hip-hop artists have become aware of the overall need for
multi-generational and cross-cultural acceptance, but more importantly, they want to convey a sense of "place" within their music, which is why traces of mbalax are essential as they record new albums.
Contents

Figures............................................................................................................................... vii

Glossary ........................................................................................................................... viii

Chapter I. Introduction ................................................................................................. 1

Chapter II. Literature Review ...................................................................................... 8

Chapter III. Methodology ............................................................................................ 18

Chapter IV. Research Findings ................................................................................... 24

Chapter V. Conclusion .................................................................................................. 52

Appendix A ..................................................................................................................... 55

Appendix B ..................................................................................................................... 56

Bibliography ................................................................................................................... 57
Figures

4.1  Transcription: Diop’s concept of timing ......................................................... 27
4.2  Vocal mnemonics used during field work ....................................................... 29
4.3  Primary accompaniment beat patterns on mbëng-mbëng ................................. 30
4.4  Sabar ensemble pattern with varying accompaniments ................................. 31
4.5  Various mnemonics used by participants ....................................................... 33
4.6  Skeletal representations of mbalax ................................................................. 34
4.7  Identity: Wolof, Senegalese, Mbalax .............................................................. 39
4.8  Toussa Senerap ............................................................................................... 41
4.9  Guiss Guiss Bou Bess ..................................................................................... 43
4.10 Mao Sidibé music video production .............................................................. 46
Glossary

ceebu jën. Dance rhythm named after the Senegalese national dish of fish and rice.

cól. Bass drum in the sabar ensemble (closed-bottom).

géwël. Wolof term for griot.

glocal. A product reflecting both local and global considerations.

griot. A traditional praise singer, musician, social go-between, counselor, or dancer.

marimba. Mbalax rhythm being played on the keyboard.

mbëng-mbëng. A medium-sized hourglass-shaped drum that plays accompaniment beats in a sabar ensemble.

mbalax. An upbeat Senegalese accompaniment rhythm used primarily on the sabar drums to facilitate dancing.

mbalax (without italics). A genre or style of Senegalese music made popular by Youssou N'Dour.

nder. A tall hourglass-shaped drum that leads a sabar ensemble.

rhythme(s). A set of standard rhythmic patterns, each of which have specific names.

sabar. A Senegalese dance or gathering which the sabar drum is played.

sabar (without italics). A traditional Senegalese drum played with one hand and one stick.

soirée. A performance in a nightclub, typically starting after midnight.

taasu. Wolof spoken-word, typically accompanied by sabar drums.

tama. A small double-headed talking drum.

tungune. Shortest drum in a sabar ensemble.

Wolof. A people group/national ethnic language of Senegal and Gambia.
Chapter I
Introduction

Since the gain of its political independence in 1960, Dakar, Senegal has been an exuberant meeting place for global fusion in numerous cultural aspects of life; fashion, art, food, and religion are a few elements that continue to flourish cross-culturally. Throughout this thesis, I hope to shed light on one of the most prominent cultural shifts that have emerged since this significant political change as exhibited in popular music, namely mbalax as a bridge between traditional and popular milieu. The cultural transformation of popular music has not only impacted everyday life in Dakar, but has also altered the traditional mindset of who should perform music, (i.e., griots), and why specific music is created or fused with non-African or pan-African musical elements, (i.e., jazz, salsa, hip-hop). Although the concept of Senegalese popular music can be quite broad, I intend to focus on a native rhythm known as mbalax and the Senegalese popular music style which is also identified as mbalax. Rhythm, is defined as a set of standard rhythmic patterns, each of which have specific names. Though mbalax is a type of rhythm, the term encompasses other ideas, such as a genre or style of Senegalese music made popular by Youssou N'Dour. Please note, for the remainder of this study, I am following the model of Patricia Tang in the orthography of “mbalax.” When mbalax appears with italics it will be referencing the rhythm or accompaniment beat. When mbalax is seen without italics, it is referencing the genre or style of popular music made famous by Youssou N'Dour.
While in the field, I worked alongside multiple Senegalese hip-hop artists, sabar drummers, sabar dancers and Senegalese-Americans who are currently involved in the cross-cultural hip-hop scene. I experienced the rising fusion that has been prevalent amongst Senegalese hip-hop artists for the past five years. How is this musical synthesis affecting the traditional aspects of mbalax?

Through the examination of varying research articles, I have discovered many historical accounts of the first generation of mbalax players; Doudou “Rose” Ndiaye is a well-known name associated with mbalax. He is revered in Dakar as one of the best sabar players of all time. Youssou N'Dour is the most distinguished leader of mbalax implementation in the mainstream music scene. “Youssou’s rise to fame in the late 1970’s was dazzling. There was already a strong movement in Senegal away from European cultural models; in musical terms, this meant going back to local musical styles and instruments, singing in your own language” (Duran 1989, 276).

Considering the establishment and historical developments of mbalax, by way of Youssou N'Dour, is crucial. However, it is also important to account for numerous up and coming artists to have a voice; ultimately unveiling their unique, emerging contributions and examining how they are revolutionizing the Senegalese music scene.

“Mbalax is listened to and adored by most Senegambians, from young school children to the elderly; it is truly a genre that cuts across generations. Whereas other genres such as hip-hop only appeal to a particular age group, mbalax appeals to all ages” (Tang 2007, 160). Because of the recent traces of mbalax in Senegalese hip-hop, I believe current artists are more aware of mbalax's mass appeal across
generations than they have ever been; therefore, artists are willing to implement mbalax into their music to expand their audience while honoring their roots.

This study hopes to document remnants of mbalax in a rapidly evolving hip-hop scene which otherwise might be overlooked and go unnoticed. In *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts*, Bruno Nettl addresses the concept of redefining the field and how popular music research is on the rise. The field of ethnomusicology is rapidly changing to accommodate research on popular music and globalized societies. Nettl describes each culture as having their own “distinct popular music,” and how these global pop music genres have taken precedence over other styles of music in the realm of ethnomusicological and anthropological studies (Nettl 2005, 187). For this reason I intend to qualitatively evaluate rhythmic, aesthetic and cultural elements that transpire within Senegalese hip-hop culture. From a qualitative stance through one on one interviews, I will examine the motives, opinions, and reasoning's behind the application of certain rhythms in Senegalese popular music culture. The conclusive result is a revelation as to why these artists aspire to express a connection to their native roots, therefore elevating Senegalese traditions to a global hip-hop platform.

By researching traces of mbalax in Senegalese hip-hop, I will be able to show that amidst high capacities of global influence, artists still desire to stay true to their Senegalese culture by featuring local instruments (such as the mbëng-mbëng drum—hand drum associated with the *mbalax* rhytme) and display aesthetics of rural village roots in an urban environment. From both an ethnomusicological and anthropological standpoint, it is imperative to document the basic rhythmic
patterns of mbalax as well as the uses of mbalax in current hip-hop music, which is continually being influenced by non-Senegalese musical styles. Identifying this accompaniment *rhythm* and examining the urbanization of Senegalese hip-hop culture will reveal clear motives of implementation, as it pertains to traditionalist values fusing with modern cosmopolitanism amongst artists. The research of mbalax's presence within Senegalese hip-hop will benefit future studies related to both African and African American hip-hop. It will also aid in the identification of diasporic cultural influences and traditional music retentions.

*Research Questions*

Does *mbalax* hold a formidable rhythmic presence in Senegalese hip-hop music, intentionally linking its identity to Wolof culture? Wolof is defined as a dominant people group in Dakar as well as a national ethnic language of Senegal and Gambia. Because of its unique ability to bridge both a generational and stylistic gap, mbalax has been able to crossover from traditional Afro-Folk uses to popular and world music genres by way of artists such as Youssou N'Dour and Doudou Ndiaye. The primary concern of this thesis is whether or not traces of mbalax are becoming increasingly prevalent in the emerging hip-hop genre, and if so why? Are these uses primarily for rhythmic familiarity amongst Senegambian listeners, or is *mbalax* deliberately implemented for cross-generational and cross-cultural purposes? What characteristics of the genre mbalax are being used in modern hip-hop? How are urbanization and village aesthetics recontextualizing the hip-hop music scene of Dakar?
Limitations

Throughout my fieldwork, numerous limitations and roadblocks undoubtedly compromised credible results, for both myself and the people I interacted with in Senegal. First and foremost, was the language barrier. The prominent languages spoken in Dakar are French and Wolof, of which I spoke neither. Fluent English speakers were a rarity in Senegal. Senegalese have learned the English language primarily through television, movies, music, school and occasionally ex-pats (Americans living in Senegal). While in the field I relied heavily on translators to provide me with authentic information from my non-English speaking participants and translations of my unanticipated questions. Not knowing the local languages while expecting the utmost proficiency from a translator was a substantial risk to take when entering the field. Ultimately, this limitation compromised the overall results of my thesis, but the music spoke for itself in many cases, as musicians demonstrated for me without spoken language, the utilization of mbalax in Senegalese hip-hop.

A second potential limitation was the lack of recent scholarly resources discussing mbalax, specifically its establishment and evolution in the hip-hop community. Although many scholars have addressed the expansion of Senegalese popular music, therefore mentioning the implementation of mbalax by way of Youssou N'Dour, few have solely focused on mbalax’s relevance in hip-hop. A lack of substantial resources steeped in the study of mbalax, from an ethnomusicological standpoint, leaves more room for interpretation in my thesis. This limitation of scholarly resources can be perceived as a positive or a negative going into the field.
In regards to this study, the lack of recent scholarly resources was a positive because of the ability to conduct research without pre-existing bias or preconceived ideas from other scholars in this particular region or time-period of mbalax development. Patricia Tang and Timothy Mangin were the two experts on Senegalese culture that I allowed to predominantly guide my research, with the exception of a current hip-hop emphasis.

Because of the short amount of time I spent in the field, I was limited to a glimpse of the culture rather than a long-term immersion experience. This study is merely a snapshot into the modern-day lives of Senegalese hip-hop artists and drummers who aspire to bridge the gap between their cultures traditions and where they foresee those traditions taking root in the future of their art form.

Lastly my race and sex were limitations beyond my control. Being a female traveling alone in Dakar and not speaking the language created significant limitations when it came to safety and freedom of mobility. The safest mode of transportation around Dakar were taxi’s. All taxi drivers spoke French or Wolof, no English, which made it extremely difficult to get to my interviews. Because of my race and sex I was unable to attend nightclub performances that featured up and coming hip-hop artists in Dakar. My host family informed me that it would not be safe for me to travel out alone at night, especially since many of these performances did not begin until midnight and ended at three in the morning. This limitation was the most difficult to overcome and accept while in the field.
Assumptions

Various assumptions can be made in regards to this study. First and foremost, my primary interactions were with hip-hop artists, dancers, and musicians of varying mbalax instruments who had moderate to substantial experience in the music industry. All participants understood the knowledge and insights shared during the interview process would be used for academic purposes only. All questions were answered truthfully in confidence between the participant and myself.

A mere text-book understanding of a culture does not adequately prepare a researcher for the sights, smells, tastes, and sounds of a foreign environment. Adapting through complete immersion was a significant factor while in Dakar. Participants were presented with a consistent interview process which involved a digital audio recorder and printed interview questions in both English and French. I adapted this process as certain circumstances changed, such as being in a group setting, illiteracy amongst participants and translator assistance.
Chapter II

Literature Review

The top scholars who have directly contributed to mbalax research during the past thirty years are Timothy Mangin, Lucy Duran, Patricia Tang, Ndiouga Benga, and Catherine Appert. Thus far, most scholarly works regarding mbalax have either been ignited by an anthropological interest in cosmopolitanism, historical progressions by way of Youssou N'Dour, or just how the Wolof ethnicity in Dakar identifies with mbalax. Finding scholarly works based solely on mbalax, as a musical accompaniment, and how it steadily transitioned from traditional uses to the mainstream, notably in hip-hop, is rare. Very few transcriptions of mbalax exist in scholarly articles and texts, placing a gap between the domain of pure academia and those who prefer a more musical vantage point when addressing a topic saturated in rhythmic properties. Most published works on West African popular music, which briefly mention mbalax's development in Senegalese culture, were written between 1989 and 2002.

Timothy Mangin of Columbia University wrote the most recent scholarly work focused on mbalax, although he approached it through the lens of cosmopolitanism, which proved to be fundamentally anthropological with traces of ethnomusicological terminology and references employed. Through his research efforts, Mangin identifies mbalax as “an urban dance music distinct to Senegal and values by musicians and fans for its ability to shape, produce, and reproduce, and articulate overlapping ideas of their ethnic, racial, generational, gendered, religious,
and national identities” (Mangin 2013, i). Mangin believed the concept of “Wolofness” was of prime importance in mbalax as opposed to the genre’s purely musical elements. I would agree that by looking at Wolof identities through the lens of mbalax would provide someone a much deeper and culturally rich emic viewpoint that may not result from other expressive art forms. Mangin himself mentions a lack of mbalax scholarship after the mid 1990’s, longing to provide a “broad social historical sketch” based on his own personal interviews with participants “who have received little attention in the historical discourse because of the overwhelming focus in the pioneers of the craft” (Mangin 2013, 99).

A majority of the scholarly works that focus primarily on Senegalese music address Youssou N’Dour’s accomplishments and contributions to mainstream mbalax, post-1970s. Lucy Duran’s article entitled “Key to N’Dour: Roots of the Senegalese Star” is one of the many scholarly articles that primarily examines N’Dour’s connection with mbalax and his rapid rise to fame throughout the world. Although this article is nearly twenty years old, it supports Mangin’s claim that most scholarly work in the realm of mbalax has primarily focused on the pioneers such as N’Dour rather than underground or local artists. Duran’s use of descriptive ethnographic language allows for the reader to truly experience Senegalese music through the life of N’Dour. Within the first two paragraphs, Duran presents Youssou N’Dour as being a purely Wolof musician who always aims to emphasize his Senegalese roots through his musical compositions and choice of lyrical content sung in only Wolof. “Perhaps no other singer personifies this Wolof ability to bridge two worlds, the old school and the new, as much as Youssou. Over the last eleven
years, since he first rose to fame, his music has swung from a derivative Cuban to a distinctly Wolof sound, later to include elements of jazz, soul, and rock” (Duran 1989, 275). Although Duran’s primary intentions were to address N’Dour’s path towards his world-renowned fame, she briefly mentions his implementation of mbalax and how this shifted his perceptions of music from adaptive Euro-fusion to Senegalese identity in rhythmic and instrumental roots. N’Dour discussed the advancement of mbalax with Duran:

This rhythm is the basis of all my music, right from the early days, and I called it mbalax. You know, that’s that rhythm you can hear all the time on the sabar and tama; it’s in most of my music. I took the word mbalax because it’s a beautiful and original word, it’s a purely Wolof word and I wanted to show that I had the courage to play purely Senegalese music. It’s a real “roots” word, and it’s the rhythm that the Wolof feel and love the most, above all it’s the rhythm of the griots. (Duran 1989, 277)

From this brief quote, the reader can gain an understanding of N’Dour’s overarching intentions by creating a pure Wolof music and identifying it as mbalax. N’Dour not only played this music and shaped its sound, but he gave it a name that was purely Wolof; allowing mbalax to attach itself forever with Wolof people and their culture. By rooting the name of this genre in the Wolof language, N’Dour was giving this music to his people who had been longing for a sound to call their own since they gained their independence in 1960. For N’Dour, the choice to perform mbalax over exclusively European or Latin music has proven to be both culturally binding and a lucrative global success during the past forty years. N’Dour continues to hold a great deal of influence and reverence within the mbalax community, and although many other musicians may have contributed to the transformative uses of mbalax in
Senegalese mainstream music, N'Dour remains the top name associated with mbalax's musical application in Senegal.

In more recent literature, Patricia Tang contributes the first ethnomusicological critical analysis of sabar drumming in the Senegambian region within the Western scholarly field. In her article “Rhythmic Transformations in Senegalese Sabar” Tang closely examines “the changing contexts of Senegalese sabar drumming with a focus on bakks, drum phrases traditionally derived from spoken word” (Tang 2008, 95). The beneficial aspects of this article are the visual transcriptions of sabar bakk techniques, different definitions and perspectives of mbalax, and the continuity of methodology and information that is also used in similar scholarly articles. Tang addresses the sabar drum’s significance with mbalax and Youssou N'Dour, much like Mangin and Duran, but from another etic vantage point. “Since the 1970s, sabar has also played an important role in mbalax music, the Senegalese popular music genre made famous by Youssou N'Dour” (Tang 2008, 86). Through this statement, Tang reaffirms previous academic fieldwork on Senegalese music, which reveals that the use of mbalax in popular music began after 1970 and that Youssou N'Dour played a major role in its implementation and development.

An interesting focal point of Tang's research is the bakk and how this specific rhythmic style, much like mbalax, has played a huge role in how the sabar, tam-tams, and mbëng-mbëng drums are used for various facets of Wolof culture. Although bakks can be defined or interpreted in many different ways, Tang clarifies at the core of their existence, bakks are “drum phrases, not verbal phrases. [Bakks are] musical phrases played on the sabar drum” (Tang 2008, 88). Throughout this
article, Tang challenges the reader to question the relation between Senegalese spoken word, *taasu*, and rhythmic patterns that are used in typical sabar ensembles, such as *bakks* or *mbalax*:

In looking at the relationship between spoken word and drum phrases, one must consider the close interaction between speech and drumming, not only how the drum mimics speech, but how speech first becomes stylized before it is transformed into a drum phrase (Tang 2008, 90).

Throughout her text, *Masters of the Sabar: Wolof Griot Percussionists of Senegal*, Tang provides transcriptions of sabar ensemble patterns, including the accompanying vocal mnemonics. This helps provide visual data points to the reader who may require an extra-musical element to firmly assess the relationship between spoken word and instrumental rhythmic patterns. Much like Tang during chapter five of her text entitled "If a Snake Bites You, You will think of Death," (2008) I intend to use rhythmic transcriptions during my research to provide my readers with intentional musical evidence of *mbalax’s* structure and consistency on the sabar drum. As Tang points out “the *mbalax* [which she refers to as ‘basic accompaniment’] is played on the mbeng-mbeng, a medium-sized hourglass shaped drum” (Tang, 87). After being in the field, I can confirm Tang’s statement of *mbalax* accompaniment rhythme being primarily associated with the mbeng-mbeng drum. I further discovered that this does not mean *mbalax* is exclusively performed on the mbeng-mbeng, but other instruments such as the keyboard. When *mbalax* is performed on a keyboard it is referred to as *marimba*. The topic of *marimba* is a much larger rhythmic and culturally historic concept than what this study allows for.
Catherine Appert of Cornell University has contributed the most recent published research on Senegalese hip-hop. Appert’s primary focus is to assess Senegalese hip-hop by “critically considering the legacy of hybridity in African popular music studies” (Appert 2016, 279). Through a brief mention of historical accounts, Appert discusses the concepts of music, hybridity, and place as they relate to the developments of Senegalese hip-hop:

Since the early days of the colonial encounter, indigenous instruments, languages, aesthetics, and formal elements have been combined with imported ones to create new popular genres that served alternately to ground musicians and their audiences in local place (Erlmann 1999), to create an image of a cohesive, bounded nation (Turino 2000; White 2008), and to represent them to global audiences in terms of global imaginings of Africa (Meintjes 2003). The Senegalese mbalax music that developed in the immediately post-Independence period is one example of such a new musical genre (Appert 2016, 280).

In congruence with the historical accounts made by many additional scholars, such as Mangin, Tang, and Duran, Appert also identifies mbalax as a style of music that is purely Senegalese which arose from a longing for local identity amongst Wolof people. Before this article, hip-hop had rarely been the focus of Senegalese ethnomusicological study, nor had it been the focus of anthropologists. Hip-hop has previously fallen under the broader category of “popular music” within modern urban studies. Not only does Appert address hip-hop’s position and growth in Africa, but importantly acknowledges how this genre relies on global, particularly Westernized, development; therefore, Senegalese hip-hop contains deeper diasporic roots which connect the modern genre to a larger traditional sense of identity.

“African music’s maturation in the United States is therefore central to hip-hoppers’ reimagining of griot orality in/as hip-hop” (Appert 2016, 285).
Appert makes a final claim with regards to the previous statement: “they [Senegalese hip-hoppers] convert hip-hop from a globalized US music into a historically local one that has circulated through diaspora and returned to them” (Appert 2016, 286). This claim may be interpreted as hip-hop roots being based in West Africa, but what I believe Appert is attempting to convey are the cyclical ties that lie between African and Afro-American hip-hop. Without the implementation of African folk music during the early American settlements, a platform for hip-hop would not have existed for later African American generations who carried the oppression of cultural displacement into their music. Eventually, this genre made its way back to West Africa, i.e., Senegal, and began to readapt itself to a culture it had been distantly related to for generations.

The methodological and ethnographic techniques used throughout Appert’s research reveal how it is essential to the ongoing study of Senegalese popular music, by briefly addressing historical developments and interlacing this information with significant events that have taken place during the immediate study. I commend Appert in her attempt to maintain focus on how hybridity, music, and place all blend together through the lens of hip-hop as an art form. I intend to adapt this centralized focus of cultural identity as I write about traces of mbalax in Senegalese hip-hop.

Ndiouga Benga contributes a musically rich chapter to the collective text entitled “Playing with Identities in Contemporary Music in Africa.” Benga’s main focus is on Senegalese Urban Music from the 1950s to the 1990s in Senegal: Variete, Jazz, Mbalax, Rap. In alignment with Mangin, Duran, Tang, and Appert, Benga first mentions the “post-war years” in Senegal and how this was a crucial time for local
identity through the rise of modern Senegalese music. "Until the mid-sixties, the
instruments, repertoires, lyrics, and costumes featured in Senegalese urban music
had little to do with indigenous cultural values" (Benga 2002, 75). This style of
historical writing is anticipated with a title that includes specific dates of music
maturation.

Benga discusses the historical rise of mbalax through the ideologies of
Senghor, the first Senegalese president after independence, and addresses his
concept of negritude. “It was aimed at helping Africans to be aware of their culture
and assume their own identity. This excitement for cultural identity also affected the
artists” (Benga 2002, 78). Unlike his fellow Senegalese popular music scholars,
Benga may be the only scholar of Senegalese pop who mentions the rise of mbalax
stemming from the ideology of negritude via Leopold Senghor; this could be a purely
emic insight that many outside researchers unintentionally overlook.

Benga does not focus largely on Youssou N'Dour’s contributions to the
mbalax scene but rather briefly mentions his interactions with mbalax in the 1980’s,
followed by a short paragraph on N'Dour’s compelling presence in the mbalax scene.
Benga is the first author to address N'Dour's relation to mbalax in such a casual
manner leading to my belief that he holds a more emic relation to the topic than
most Western scholars. Benga discusses the beginning of mbalax during the 1960s,
in the context of Senghor's ideologies: “Despite the support of president Senghor,
mbalax remained marginal on the music scene, overshadowed by salsa, rock, soul,
pop, and reggae” (Benga 2002, 79). Benga defines mbalax in a slightly different way
than previously mentioned scholars. Mbalax is “an accompanying tempo; performed
with local hand drums: nder or sabar with treble sound, goron-yege used by the soloists, mbeungue- mbeungue, equivalent to bass and ndeund, the instrument of the drum-major” (Benga 2002, 79). Benga’s definition of the rhythm “mbalax” is not to be confused with the alternate non-italicized “mbalax” also being used throughout this study, which is defined as a genre or style of popular Senegalese music.

An essential element to Benga’s writing style is his ability to relay scholarly data straightforwardly without minimizing the information. For example, when he addresses the start of the hip-hop movement in Senegal, he is able to convey a sense of insider knowledge and yet provides the reader with enough qualitative points of reference to be interpreted as accurate field data:

In Senegal, the hip-hop movement took ten years to free itself from American and French patterns. The Senegalese Touch lies in the specific use of idioms that are drawn from “the cultural soup” of the suburbs. The young rappers use French, Arabic, English, Wolof and other languages to transform the words, and create a new lexicon which destabilizes the conventional literary order. On this basis, their unique and spontaneous way of expression is formed somewhere between modern poetry and oral tradition (tassou) (Benga 2002, 81).

Benga expresses the significance of Senegalese hip-hop musicians maintaining cultural ties to the music and localizing its creation, composition, performance, and production while inviting global fusion to enhance the overall musical styling.

After reviewing these valuable sources, it is evident that a significant amount of work has already been done in regards to the historical and anthropological realm of mbalax. Both Mangin and Appert share their recent insights to the current state of the popular music field in Senegal; yet, neither of them explicitly focus on mbalax’s function in hip-hop and how precisely this rhythm culturally and musically break down. Only recently has Patricia Tang provided a Westernized staff
notation of mbalax’s most popular beat, “Kaolack,” which is traditionally performed on sabar drums.

Through additional scholarly resources and intentional relationships with artists, producers, performers and musical activists in Dakar, I plan to provide the field of ethnomusicology further insight to the emerging Senegalese hip-hop scene of Dakar. This includes the contextualization of mbalax within the cross-culturally progressive hip-hop genre and how a growing cosmopolitan mindset is altering the trajectory of Senegalese hip-hop artists both locally and globally. Because a sense of “glocalized” marketing, customizing a product to appeal to its local environment, is now shaping the production and creation of African hip-hop, which is causing local artists to insert ethnic musical attributes, it is imperative to address these unique infusions and analyze why musical and cultural elements, (i.e., mbalax, sabar), were chosen to emanate regional identity. These academic resources do not directly exemplify mbalax’s ability to maintain a presence in the rapidly evolving mainstream hip-hop community. My research throughout this study will be set apart from that of Tang and Mangin because of my ability to draw attention to forward thinking artists who are currently creating mbalax infused music in Dakar, Senegal.
Chapter III

Methodology

In her text, *Globe-Trotting in Sandals: A Field Guide to Cultural Research*, Carol McKinney confronts a plethora of fieldwork methodologies that assist social science researchers amidst their pre, post, and present stages of data collection. At the beginning of the chapter entitled “Beginning Fieldwork” McKinney addresses necessary fieldwork procedures that need to take place immediately upon entering the field, especially when a researcher’s presence in the field is only for a short period (i.e., under one year). These initial procedures include, “establishing trust relationships with individuals in the research community, engaging in participant and process observation, setting goals for ethnographic research, and handling the everyday pragmatics of field research” (McKinney 2000, 37). I made use of these practical steps to engage with the local community during my four weeks in Senegal to gain trust, ultimately enriching the cultural experiences for both myself and the participants. Beyond building trustworthy relationships, many one-on-one interviews helped me to achieve an insider’s perspective of mbalax and how it has permeated into the current hip-hop music culture. Group performances and recording sessions enabled me to see and hear how a group of Senegalese hip-hop artists collaborate and create music while making use of mbalax rhythmic elements. Taking in sufficient and authentic data collection during these interviews and performances was crucial.
A primary research tool I used throughout my field-work was a hand-held Sony digital audio recorder which allowed me to continually re-engage in all of my field interviews and listen to music performed during individual and group performance sessions. These audio recordings were transferred daily via USB to my iTunes library and converted into mp3 files. While conducting one-on-one interviews, the Sony digital audio recording device was discrete and non-threatening to participants. By creating a comfortable, non-invasive environment during the interview process, I believe researchers can gain a more authentic and genuine response. With a recording device that is no more than four inches long and one and a half inches wide, participants don’t feel as if they are being recorded, but instead having a relaxed conversation about the subject matter.

A compact hand-held Cannon camcorder was used for capturing the visual aesthetics of group performances, face-to-face interactions, and numerous drum lessons. The Cannon camera was equipped with a 32GB SanDisk which directly inserted into my Mac Book air for quick data transfer, therefore providing easy access to audio-visual field experience for rapid analysis. Videos were reviewed based upon the need for re-immersion into the performance or interview scenario. Real-time visualizations were crucial during the analysis and revision process of sabar gatherings, especially as it pertained to the sabar drum ensemble and identifying familiar rhythms being collectively played by the group.

Transcribe, a musical transcription software allowed me to examine the musical elements of mbalax thoroughly. This software enables the user to slow down the tempo of numerous live performances while normalizing the original
audio quality and timbre. Accurate transcriptions of sabar ensemble performances and mbëng-mbëng lessons experienced in the field were a crucial element to the overall study. Transcription software was a necessary research tool for post-field study immersion. Without the proper use of these devices in the field, my research would be inconclusive and contain many gaps.

“An essential component of beginning fieldwork is the establishment of good working and trust relationships of mutual respect with individuals in the research community” (McKinney 2000, 44). I acquired thirteen interviewees to work with while in Senegal. Two female and eleven male participants consented to be interviewed and share their knowledge of mbalax as it pertains to this study. Various forms of communication and connection were made with participants via Facebook, personal email, texting via WhatsApp, and face-to-face networking connections in Senegal. Facebook offers a new efficient method of multi-lingual interaction. Non-English speakers in Senegal can directly translate text into French for appropriate responses and vice versa. These communication tools, like Facebook, have proven to be much more than mere social media platforms because near strangers can communicate without strain or misinterpretation. I look forward to making more connections via social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Of course, all communication through these avenues will intentionally be concealed and kept private unless further approval is granted for public information sharing or exposure.

Each interview participant was handed a set of eleven questions that pertained to mbalax (both the rhytthme and the genre), hip-hop, and Senegalese
music culture; see Appendix A for bilingual interview questions. Participants were given a choice as to whether or not they wanted to receive these questions in English or French, followed by whether they preferred to read through them and answer at their leisure or if they'd rather have me read them aloud. Most participants chose the latter. During the interview process, I decided to record our dialogue with my Sony digital audio recorder and took handwritten notes in a data notebook as well. “When in a field situation, you should plan on spending time daily writing up your field notes. This time becomes a regular part of your research day. This write-up consists of expanded notes which you transfer from your data notebooks into a topical database” (McKinney 2000, 82).

McKinney’s advice became naturally applicable as I took time every day to transfer my digital data from the device to one shared hard drive. I also chose to review and retype all of my hand-written field notes daily, once I returned to my room in Dakar. This style of note taking kept me organized while in the field and created less work and forgetfulness once I returned to the states. After returning from Dakar, I began to compile all interview answers in an excel spreadsheet by topic, which was a much more analytical format. I placed the interview question in the leftmost column; the next column contained direct quotes or paraphrased answers followed by the interviewee’s name. The furthest column to the right remained open for my comparative note taking. Many of these comparative notes contained key themes or common words used by participants as it pertained to that specific question. I chose not to use all thirteen interviewee’s answers throughout this comparative analysis spreadsheet. It was evident that certain drummers,
dancers, artists or activists knew more about particular questions than others. This post-field process allowed me to quickly view similarities and difference across varying participants based on which question they were answering as opposed to solely focusing on interviews as if they existed in a vacuum.

“Participant observation is ‘experiential learning’ at its best. You do not ‘fade into the woodwork’ when engaging in participant observation, but become a participant engaging actively in the local social scene” (McKinney 2000, 47). I examined a significant amount of mbalax performances, acquired multiple and varying points of view from first person interview encounters, and increased my understanding of group performance formalities used in Senegal by utilizing ethnographic data collection methods focused through the lens of participant observation.

Engaging in mbalax performance via mbëng-mbëng lessons displayed my level of commitment to “understanding and adopting local gestures and posturing” while in the field (McKinney 2000, 47). Without displaying a level of intentional cultural appreciation through the act of participant observation and process observation, it would have been difficult to gain trust quickly during this short-term field research period. I chose to begin drum lessons within the first five days of arriving in Dakar and also conducted my first one-on-one interview on my second day on the ground. By actively reciting vocal mnemonics I was able to internalize the rhythmic patterns I was being taught during my drum lessons. My drum teachers displayed patience graciously as I explored the complexities of group performance. Group performances involved following the leader through his cyclical rhythms
being played, not by his words or hand gestures. Ibou, my head drum teacher, took the time to use his words and signal when it was time to return to the top of the beat pattern. Because of this persistent teaching, I was able to perform in a group setting without the leader using words, but merely using his rhythms.

As McKinney states, “Musical appreciation serves to endear you to members of the local community. The extent to which you can participate in local performances depends on you, your musical skills, and on the acceptability of your doing so by the community” (McKinney 2000, 272). Another instance in which I was able to engage in participant observation occurred during a tur event; a women’s association meeting (Tang 2007, 135). A group of twenty to thirty women were gathered in an outdoor courtyard and dancing to the rhythms of a traditional sabar ensemble. As I squeezed through the crowded doorway to catch a glimpse of the ensemble I was immediately instructed to sit down amongst the sabar players. Within minutes I found myself sitting in between two mbëng-mbëng players striking their drums vigorously. It didn’t take long for the gentleman playing the tama to direct me to the dance floor, but I declined politely and signaled that I would much rather watch. While observing the drummers and dancers interacting I captured the moment by taking video, writing notes by hand and conducting audio recordings. I made sure to actively participate by making eye contact with the sabar ensemble and show them I appreciated their musical abilities by smiling and clapping along with the rhythm on my lap.
Chapter IV
Research Findings

Musical Elements of Mbalax

After numerous interviews in the field, the definition of “mbalax” became more complex than anticipated. A vast majority of participants referred to “mbalax” as a beat, a genre, a tradition, and a substantial part of Senegalese culture. “Waaw [common Senegalese expression of agreement], Mbalax is only in Senegal and Gambia. Nowhere else” (Mamadou Diop, 2017). The term “mbalax” is unanimously used to describe both a *rhythme* and a genre of popular music in Dakar. Within this section, I will be addressing various musical elements of *mbalax* which are crucial to the overall comprehension and analysis of its inclusion within the greater popular music genre.

A distinction must be made when it comes to the instrumentation of a traditional sabar ensemble and an mbalax ensemble. Conventional sabar ensembles are comprised of five various drums; *nder, cól, mbëng-mbëng, tama, tungune*. Of these drums, it is the mbëng-mbëng that is directly associated with the *mbalax rhythme* amongst the larger sabar ensemble. Much like the traditional sabar ensemble, the modern mbalax group comparatively values and *features* the medium ranged voicing of the mbëng-mbëng drum.

“The core instrumentation of mbalax groups includes a vocalist, sabar drums, trap drums, and electric keyboard, a guitar, and a bass. Additional instruments may include a saxophone, trumpet, flute, violin, accordion, kora, xalam, Fulani flute (tamblin), jembe, tama, and/or bougarabou drums.” (Mangin 2013, 130)
Patricia Tang beautifully captures the importance of *mbalax rhythm* in the Sabar ensemble through her interview with Lamine Touré:

“The most important part in *sabar*, the best part, is *mbalax*. *Mbalax* is the basis of the *sabar*... I love playing *mbalax*... That’s how you know if a percussion is good or not: [from how they] *mbalax*, play *cól*, and lead (with *nder*).” (Touré/Tang, 99)

The previous section identifies the multifaceted layers of mbalax as a *rhythm*, a genre and as an ensemble. Although the same term is used to describe multiple aspects of a music culture, the context of its utilization differs.

**“Off of the One”: Feeling Mbalax**

“Mbalax is off of the ‘one’. ” This expression was the most common rhythmic description amongst American-Senegalese men I interviewed in regards to *mbalax*. They conveyed that within the Western music culture, “*mbalax* does not make sense” and “people would not be able to feel it as naturally.” These definitive statements are the result of exposure to, and the utilization of, Western music theory and notation. Although American music is prevalent, particularly hip-hop in the urban Dakar region, most Senegalese musicians do not use any form of Western terminology to describe *mbalax*. As I interviewed Senegalese-American musicians I was told how *mbalax* cannot be fully understood or “felt” within a Western musical context.

"Music in general in Senegal, rhythm is so heavy. If you are not Senegalese you won’t know where the ‘One’ is. If you use less rhythms, it will be more inviting to outsiders (Westerners). *Mbalax* is hard to explain to make people feel it." (Pape Diouf, 2017)

"The timing is a bit bizarre. [In] mbalax, you always ignore the first beat; the Western world has a hard time hearing it." (Mamadou Ba, 2017)
Both of these men were born in Senegal but have since been living and performing in America for over fifteen years. Pape Diouf is an accomplished drummer who frequently plays with an Afro-Fusion band in the greater Washington D.C. area. Mamadou Ba is an electric bass player and has lived in New York City for the past twenty years. He performs with various local jazz bands and occasionally “lays down tracks” for Senegalese fusion bands. Although I learned how to play mbalax on the mbëng-mbëng drum during my lessons at Africa Tilibo, I understood what Pape Diouf meant when he said, “If you are not Senegalese you won’t know where the ‘One’ is.” Of course, I felt an internal “One” while I was playing mbalax in an ensemble setting, but this does not mean that I was “feeling it” or comprehending it in a way that Senegalese musicians or dancers might.

Senegalese drummers are graciously willing to share their music and rhythms with the world, but many firmly believe that to genuinely “feel” or embody their music, you must be born in Senegal. I had the privilege of interviewing Mamadou Diop over the phone once I returned from Senegal. Mamadou is a Senegalese guitarist and bandleader now residing in Massachusetts. He was able to convey how Senegalese “feel” their music through his cross-cultural rhythmic perspective. “In sabar, you feel it, you don’t count it. When the ladies [dancers] jump, they are on the Senegalese timing” (Mamadou Diop, 2017). He proceeded to vocally express two various timings, referring to them as “International timing,” and “Senegalese timing,” which are transcribed in figure 4.1. I want to clarify that the term “International timing” was Mamadou’s choice to utilize in this instance. The “da’s” are not meant to represent vocal mnemonics, which will be discussed in the
following section. These are simply the syllables Diop chose to use during our interview.

I found it interesting how Diop chose to use the same numerical verbiage across both timing representations. Since Diop has been exposed to Westernized music theory, it is natural that he chose to assign numbers 1-4 for each quarter note beat he described. When he verbalized “Senegalese timing” he continued to use numbers 1-4 to represent every beat accounted for, although they would have been more appropriately represented, in Western theoretical terms, by using the word “and.” For example, instead of saying “1-2-3-4,” someone thoroughly trained and immersed in Western music theory would have said “1-and-and-and.” Figure 4.1 provides an emic perspective with etic elements. The emic perspective comes from Mamado Diop who fully internalizes the “off the one” approach of Senegalese timing. The etic elements stem from Diop’s Western music training as he applies numerical devices to each rhythm he is vocalizing.

Figure 4.1. Transcription: Diop’s concept of “International Timing” and “Senegalese Timing.”
Mnemonics: Rhythmic Vocal Representations

Vocal mnemonics are a critical element to the musical structure and etic comprehension of mbalax within sabar drumming. “Mnemonics should be seen as a way of vocally representing drum patterns that are inspired by speech” (Tang 2007, 103). I was fortunate enough to find two highly accomplished drum teachers on the outskirts of Dakar that would assist me in my development and understanding of sabar and mbalax. Not only was I instructed on the mbëng-mbëng by Paco Diaw, but djembé and bass drums as well from my main instructor, Ibou Sene. Ibou spoke fluent English and was able to translate a lot of information in regards to the drumming culture he has been a part of since he was born. Although Ibou was a master on djembé, he made himself available to translate my lessons with Paco Diaw, who specialized in sabar. They both used vocal mnemonics to verbalize *rhythmes*, a set of standard rhythmic patterns, before we played them on the drums.

The main purpose of vocal mnemonics is to signify “what playing technique is used to produce the sound. Géwël’s (Wolof term for griot), commonly use vocal mnemonics to represent drum strokes and combinations of drum strokes” (Tang 2007, 100). I will be drawing from Patricia Tang’s “Key to Vocal Mnemonics” to assist in the generalization of mnemonics used while I was in the field; realizing there is no standardized set of mnemonics utilized by all Senegalese musicians. As I began to analyze and transcribe my mbëng-mbëng lessons with Paco, the possibility became apparent that uniformity of mnemonics might not exist, even within a single teacher’s repertoire. While voicing the same rhythmic pattern, Paco would interchangeably use two to three variations of mnemonics for the same bass
resonating tone as well as the left-handed resonating slap. Figure 4.2 helps to display the different vocal mnemonics Paco and Ibou used during my drum lessons at Africa Tilibo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocal Mnemonics</th>
<th>Description of Drum Stroke</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kin/gin/pin</td>
<td>Left hand strikes center for low resonating bass tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pax/bä/rwa</td>
<td>Left hand strikes edge of head and bounces off, open mid-range resonating sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ta/na</td>
<td>Right handed stick stroke, hits head and bounces off, open resonating sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tet/chet</td>
<td>Right handed stick stroke while left hand dampens head, high-pitched sharp sound</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.2. Breakdown of vocal mnemonics used during field work.

Additional mnemonics exist amongst Senegalese drummers, but these were the only ones I experienced during my lessons with Paco and Ibou. The specific mnemonics represented in figure 4.2 will be utilized for the duration of my transcriptions. I chose to represent the *rhythmes* learned at Africa Tilibo using two different methods of notation; TUBS notation, time box unit system, and a horizontal line system to show a non-metronomically precise interpretation of the polyrhythmic beats I encountered in Dakar. I originally transcribed all of my lessons using variations of Western notation and quickly discovered that method was merely convenient while rapidly transcribing by hand in the field. A fixed staff and meter are not the most effective way to transcribe *mbalax rhythms* and sabar accompaniment beats.
These are the first four primary beats I learned on the mbëng-mbëng. They are essential to sabar ensemble performances. Although I learned/played them all separately, they are meant to be played together by four separate sabar drummers. Paco Diaw and I would rotate playing two differing beats simultaneously so I could get a feel for the conflicting rhythmic interaction amongst these four beat patterns. The end result was always a polyrhythmic experience as some of these beats were felt as duple and others as triple.

I chose to position these beats on horizontal lines to represent their overall interaction and vertical alignment as a whole. This graphed depiction shown in figure 4.3 also allows for a non-metrical analysis and interpretation so as to stay true to the openness of the rhythms being performed together in a live setting.
teaching rhythms it is particularly challenging to put their rhythms in a confined Westernized metric system.

Figure 4.4 represents the first ensemble beat pattern I learned on mbëng- mbëng which encompassed an intro/outro, two accompaniment beats. While I played one of the accompaniment patterns, Paco would play a variation of the
skeletal *mbalax rhythm* in order for me to hear how my part interacted with his part. After a few minutes of continually playing this pattern, Paco would yell out “go!” which meant to return to the intro. This cycle would repeat until Paco yelled “finish!” which meant perform the outro in unison and end the beat pattern altogether.

During the interview process, I asked participants to vocalize, play, or display the musical elements of *mbalax* as they understood it. I would specifically ask, “what are the musical characteristics of *mbalax*?” More participants looked perplexed rather than reassured after I asked about this question, which reminded me how much of an outsider I truly was. I later realized this was the equivalent of asking a professional percussionist in the states to play a basic paradiddle on a drum pad. After further explanation, and with as little enactment as possible, at least half of the artists I interviewed shared *mbalax’s* musical characteristics during the interview process. This took a different form during each interview. Some chose to use their hands and tap out an *mbalax rhythm* on the table we were sitting at; others used vocal mnemonics to vocalize the *mbalax* beat while simultaneously snapping out an accompanying rhythm with their fingers. Figure 4.5 displays various examples of common rhythmic mnemonics that were used during the interview process to describe the rhythmic characteristics of *mbalax*. In addition to this question, Ibou Sene also clarified that “whenever you play *mbalax*, you have to sing it. If you cannot sing it, then you cannot play it because you have to get it in your mind” (Ibou Sene 2017). This comment from my drum teacher made it clear that *mbalax*, to a
Senegalese drum expert, is something you feel, sing, and embody, not a rhythm you can simply sit down and play at a standard drum circle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Mnemonics Used</th>
<th>Rhythm Represented</th>
<th>Miscellaneous Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sophie Sabar</td>
<td>Rwa-ja-tet-kin</td>
<td><em>Mbalax</em></td>
<td>Snapped steady accompaniment rhythm on fingers while using vocal mnemonics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rwa-ja-tet-kin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibou Sene</td>
<td>Ra-tam-ba-tam-kin</td>
<td><em>Mbalax</em></td>
<td>Used two varying mnemonics on the final beat ‘kin’ and ‘hun.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ra-tam-ba-tam-hun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paco Diaw</td>
<td>Ta-da-kin</td>
<td><em>Ceebu jên</em></td>
<td>This part is played on the mbëng-mbëng drum. It is a very rapid accompaniment beat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ta-da-kin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.5. Various mnemonics used by participants during field interviews.

As I interviewed Mamdou Diop over the phone, he verbalized complex Senegalese rhythms using mnemonics, clarifying that “we [Senegalese drummers] play *mbalax* like we talk and speak Wolof” (Mamadou Diop 2017). Not only are these rhythmic mnemonics tied to the intricacies of performance style amongst a sabar ensemble, but they are also tied to the Wolof language. “To play mbalax well, you need to grow up in Senegal, listen to the people talk, and accept it” (Mamadou Diop 2017). As I observed varying sabar ensembles during my field research I began to recognize rhythmic similarities across all groups. The more intently I listened and applied this knowledge to my observations, the more I found myself picking out rhythmic elements of *mbalax* and could identify which drummer was playing which *rythme* within the ensemble.

Many similarities exist within *mbalax*, but much like the various discrepancies amongst vocal mnemonics—it is acceptable for artists to use the
differing vocal mnemonics when addressing the same drum stroke—there are slight nuances that exist in the *mbalax rythme*. Below are four transcriptions displaying these differentiating embellishments based upon the skeletal structure of *mbalax*. Initial similarities are easy to visually identify, such as the “X” representing the accent within the third box or the U-shaped notation that signifies a flam-like grace note before the first beat. Emically, the transcriptions below are the same, but from an etic stand-point they appear to be contrasting.

![Figure 4.6. Skeletal representations of varying interpretations of mbalax with tonal consideration.](image)

The first pattern is the skeletal structure of *mbalax*, as performed by Paco Diaw during my lessons at Africa Tilibo. Both Paco and Ibou reassured me this was the most basic level of *mbalax* as it pertained to the *rythme*. The second transcription represents *mbalax* from the perspective of Sophie Sabar, a Dutch
woman who has dedicated her life to sabar dance. Notice her addition of a vocalized “ch” in between the initial triple beat and “kin.” She also chose to snap her fingers, being represented by the “X,” on the “tet” beat in order to give the rhythm more stability as she sang it aloud.

Mara Seck’s interpretation, a well-known sabar drummer and mbalax fusionist, is represented in the third transcription. Similar to Sophie, Seck chose to emphasis the “ja” beat by accenting it with his voice as he spoke the beat aloud. He also ended each beat pattern with “gin” which signifies the left hand hitting the center of the mbëng-mbëng. The “gin” or “kin” always produces a lower tone which is rightfully represented in the four interpretations in figure 4.6. The final transcription represents a gentleman who simply used his hands to play mbalax on a wooden table. He was the drummer of the Tussid Brother’s band who performed weekly at the Dizzy Club in one of the largest hotel’s in Dakar, King Fahd Palace. Much like beats two and three, this drummer accented the third beat within his pattern and also made use of the grace note ornamentation at the beginning of the rhythm. Although he chose not to make use of vocal mnemonics tonal differentiation was present as his hands stroked the wooden surface, imitating the high and low pitches that would be heard on a sabar drum head.

After reviewing these patterns, I realized the general rhythmic structure of mbalax was parallel, especially when considering the initial three-beat stroke pattern with a flam-like pick up beat. Although varying mnemonics were used to describe this pattern, mbalax can be seen as a uniform rhythm, open to personal ornamentation within the overall skeletal pattern.
Cultural Connections

While in the Dakar, I quickly discovered that I could not mention “mbalax” without it being tied to Youssou N'Dour. His name had become unanimous with mbalax. “N'Dour's rhythmic innovation became a defining characteristic of mbalax as a modern Senegalese music valued for its representation of Wolofness at a time when many bands played afro” (Mangin 2013, 115). N'Dour began the advancement of the mbalax genre in Senegal during the early 1970’s, despite the major influence of nightclub music being driven by Latin American culture, particularly Cuban culture. “In the 1970’s, Cuban musicians began to regularly tour Senegal as part of Fidel Castro’s cultural and political initiative in Africa” (Shain 2002, 97). Latin rhythms and instrumentation dominated the popular music scene in Senegal's nightclubs, making Cuban culture a major part of Senegalese modernity. “Dakar arrangers began adding traditional African drumming to Cuban material” (Shain 2002, 97). By the early 1970’s, N'Dour saw a need for popular music to claims its African roots.

“While heavily influenced by Cuban music, N'Dour’s music represents a significant departure from it. Where the Senegalese Cubanists featured guitars in their arrangements, N'Dour brought tama drums to the forefront. Besides adding more drumming to his ensembles, N'Dour even had his guitarist and pianists play drum lines; The result is a more percussive sound, better suited, according to N'Dour, to Dakar dance styles and contemporary Senegalese sensibilities. In addition, N'Dour's singing drew far more on indigenous Wolof, Tukolor, and Serer traditions that Cuban, rejecting the languid in favor of the urgent.” (Shain 2002, 98)

Timothy Mangin confirms Youssou N'Dour’s dominant contribution to the mbalax style stating “it was Youssou N'Dour’s focused integration of the mbalax rhythms of the sabar with electric keyboards and guitars—a style he coined “mbalax”—that
generated the most popularity among patrons” (Mangin 2013, 97). Through his music, N'Dour reinforced localized sound during Senegal’s postcolonial era, which gave a voice to upcoming Wolof musicians, reaffirming their place and identity within the globalized music scene.

**Wolof and Senegalese Identity**

To fully understand the complexities of “identity” amongst modern day Wolof speaking Senegalese residing in Dakar, it is crucial to examine historical events such as the négritude, or blackness movement, initiated by Senegal’s first President, Léopold Sédar Senghor, who was attempting to promote a postcolonial Senegalese modern identity. Steering the application of this historic movement towards a firmer comprehension of mbalax, Mangin writes:

“When Sénghor challenged the assimilé [person of equivalent grade] ideal through négritude, he defined and promoted a Senegalese modernity that was part of Western modernity. It was in this context that the pioneer mbalax musicians drew upon the ideas of blackness, African culture, and Senegalese connections to a global community to shape mbalax.” (Mangin 2013, 91)

During my interviews in Senegal, I made sure to have an equal balance of ethnomusicological questions that explored the musical elements of mbalax while attempting to capture the anthropological essence of what it truly means to be “Wolof” and “Senegalese.” What, if any, are the differences and similarities within these identities and how do they connect through the genre of mbalax? Upon the retrieval of many analogous answers, I began to rethink my perceptions of “ethnicities” and “people groups” in Dakar; therefore, reframing my perception on what it truly means to be Wolof as opposed to simply being able to speak the Wolof
language. A challenging question that I asked all participants dealt with the discrepancies of what it meant to identify as Wolof, Senegalese, or both:

“Would you agree that *Senegalese* identity is rooted in mbalax? How about *Wolof* identity?”

The results of my comparative analysis demonstrated mbalax as being rooted in both Wolof and Senegalese identities because the two are inseparable. When I asked Thiat, a very influential political activist and rapper, about his opinion on identity in regards to mbalax and how it relates to “being” Wolof or Senegalese he responded, "Mbalax is both Wolof and Senegalese identity" (Thiat 2017). "*Mbalax* is Wolof. They have different ethnic groups in Senegal, everybody [has] their own music and culture" (Ousseynou Mbaye, 2017). At the beginning of postcolonial Senegal, “the majority of urban Senegalese were Muslim, spoke Wolof, and practiced Wolof values and traditions as an important way to assert their new selves—even though their ethnic heritage might be from a different group such as Tukulor, Mande, Socé, or Diola. To be Wolof in urban Senegal was to be a Wolof speaker and to practice Wolof customs regardless of one’s ethnic heritage” (Mangin 2013, 92).

After interviewing artists such as the young female rapper Toussa, I discovered that each ethnicity represented in Dakar contains their own signature *rhythme(s)*. "Other ethnic groups have their own typical kind of music also; *mbalax* is Wolof *rhythme*" (Toussa, 2017). Mamadou Diop answered this question by claiming “mbalax is from the Wolof ethnic group. Wolof is a mix of all the ethnic groups.”

*Mbalax* is not the only *rhythm* that people in Senegal identify with, but it is the most ubiquitous and cascades between ethnicities. "We have many different ethnic *rhythmes*, and *mbalax* is one of them" (Pape Diouf, 2017). A myriad of
ethnicities conjugate within the city limits of Dakar: Wolof, Serer, Pular, Jola, Toucouleur, Soninke, Mandinka, and Lebu. The Lebu people are known as fishermen in Senegal; their *rhythme* is known as the *gumbé* beat. My sabar teacher, Paco Diaw, performed a short Lebu dance to the *gumbé* beat, aesthetically demonstrating how this *rhythme* helps motivate the fishermen to pull up their nets with vigor and strength in unison throughout the day.

Figure 4.7 depicts the connection and inseparable cyclic relationship between Wolof and Senegalese identities as it pertains to language, *rhythme* (i.e., *mbalax*), and music. This depiction of identity is merely an overarching representation of the analogous relationship between Senegalese, Wolof, and mbalax culture that exist in Dakar. What this is not meant to be is a generalization of the vibrant people whose identity in their culture permeates through their language, *rhythme*, and popular music.
To speak Wolof is to be from Senegal, and therefore, one is identified as Senegalese. But this does not mean your ethnicity stems from the Wolof people group, rather that you merely speak the Wolof language since it is the lingua franca in Dakar. *Mbalax* is the dominate *rhythm* of the Wolof people, Wolof is the dominate ethnic language of Senegal. Therefore, mbalax is the most recognized popular music of those who identify as Senegalese. “The truth is, to play mbalax, you need to speak the language. Because mbalax, it is an expression of the Senegalese people” (Mamadou Diop, 2017).

**Cultural Recontextualization**

“People can equally use music to locate themselves in quite idiosyncratic and plural ways” (Stokes 1994, 3). As I took my lessons at Africa Tilibo I couldn’t help but recognize a sense of cultural recontextualization within the urban setting— the recreation of villages within the urban environment. Located on the edge of Route du Front de Terre, an extremely bustling road on the north end of Dieuppeul, is the Centre Socio-Culturel de Derklé. This cultural center is home to Africa Tilibo and numerous Afro-folk dance groups, which Africa Tilibo supports by providing live music via drum ensembles. Once you walk through the concrete open aired cultural center, you arrive in a lush organic garden that would seem to be no place for a drum hut, nor the setting that would exist within an urban space. Ibou Sene took pride in his location and overall setting; sabar and djembé ensembles rehearsed directly underneath a large mango tree, as did all of my lessons. Many of Ibou’s drumming colleagues claimed to not be from the Dakar region, but from more rural
parts of Senegal, which were East of Dakar. By creating a village aesthetic amidst the chaos of traffic, shops and nearby mosques, Africa Tilibo became a haven for those who longed for a natural connection to the traditional aesthetic of drumming. Krims mentions the representation of “place” being studied in an ethnomusicological setting as it pertains to aesthetic changes in the urban context.

“We may, of course, ask ourselves (or the people whom we study) how they value locality, observing how they symbolically tag their cities as being a certain way, listening to their music for representations of “place”- but all of these things, as valuable as they may be in themselves, do not explain to us the musical consequences of these profound, and profoundly aesthetic changes in urban life.” (Krims-Clayton, 2012 144)

An example of this cosmopolitan idealism intertwining with traditional rural imagery within modern Senegalese hip-hop can be seen in the music and video production of artists such as Toussa, Mara Seck and Mao Sidibé. The image labelled as figure 4.8 was removed because the rights were not obtained by the video producer. The video depicts Toussa, an up and coming female rapper based in Dakar, Senegal, surrounded by two sabar drummers wearing modernized clothing while two ladies in the foreground are dressed in traditional Senegalese clothing. This formal attire is most commonly worn by Senegalese women when they are attending a traditional sabar soirée event.

Figure 4.8. Toussa Senerap. Music Video By: USafrica Entertainment.
What is interesting about this visualization is although the sabar drummers are present during this brief section of the music video, sabar drums are not audibly featured within the song ‘Caracteré.’ Toussa prides herself on featuring elements of Senegalese instrumentation and visualization as a way of honoring her culture, but it is apparent that both do not need to be present in order for her vision to be executed. She also believes it is beneficial for Senegalese hip-hop artists to collaborate with artists from African American cultures, since “America is where hip-hop first began,” according to Toussa.

This particular song and music video feature a male rapper from the United States and studio engineered beats that are comparable to American hip-hop. “Today, we are at the point where music looks like who you are. [In Senegal] hip-hop music is growing up and changing with every generation it passes through” (Toussa, Interview 2017). Toussa was the only artist I interviewed who personified the sound of hip-hop. She is a young artist who is a part of the new generation that hip-hop is passing through and prides herself on being linked to this time in hip-hop’s cross-cultural development. She believes it is vital for upcoming Senegalese hip-hop artists to weave their culture into their music. “The better way to create marketable music is to use what you have on your side” (Toussa, 2017). Many hip-hop and rap artists are beginning to execute this process of fusing traditional musical elements with modern popular music, creating a sense of homage to their people and giving Senegal an identity within the grander global hip-hop community.
Catherine Appert discusses a localized change in the Senegalese hip-hop scene, addressing the gradual insertion of Senegalese cultural elements within rap music:

Musical localization therefore not only leaves fundamental characteristics of hip hop such as layering, sampling, and referentiality unaltered but in fact depends on these intertextual practices. While these could be—and have been—read as grounded in West African musical aesthetics, the musical repetition that results when deejays or beatmakers use fragments of preexisting music in new ways differs from repetition in say, Wolof sabar drumming. (Appert 2016, 291)

Thus far, Toussa and Guiss Guiss Bou Bess—duo group discussed in the following section—are two exemplary artists that have gradually integrated elements of mbalax into their musical compositions and overall visual productions. Toussa’s track “Mbaye Dieye Faye” featuring Jaymdel Sims begins with the familiar sound of multiple sabar drums performing mbalax as Jaymdel sings a melodic hip-hop riff over top of the drums. Toussa enters thirty seconds later, rapping in a tactfully aggressive manner using her native Wolof language. Soon after Toussa enters, a low bass frequency drops accompanied with Westernized drum loops to fill out the track.

Figure 4.9. Guiss Guiss Bou Bess. Photo By: Guillaume Bassinet. See Appendix B for copyright permission.
When I asked Mara Seck how long he had been playing mbalax? He answered in French, “Je suis né avec. [I was born with it].” Mara Seck is the son of a well-known griot, Alla Seck who is most famous for his collaborations and performances with Youssou N'Dour. His family stems from a noble line of griots known as the Sing-Sing family (one of the three major percussion families in Senegal). Patricia Tang addresses the significance of these percussion families during her work Masters of the Sabar.

The perpetuation of the sabar tradition within family lines has led to the dominance of several specific géwël families in Dakar. Although there do exist other géwël who are active percussionists, sabar (in both traditional and popular music) is dominated almost exclusively by three extended géwël families. These are the families of Doudou Ndiaye Rose, internationally known percussionist of the older generation; Mbaye Dièye Faye (Youssou N’Dour’s percussionist, whose family is commonly referred to as “Sing-Sing,” named for one of their ancestors, Sing Sing Faye); and finally, the family of Thio Mbaye, also referred to as Mbayène. (Tang 2007, 59)

Mara Seck has recently begun collaborating with French musician Stephané Constantini, who specializes in electronic music techniques. Their duo, Guiss Guiss Bou Bess, which translated from Wolof to English means “new way of seeing things,” is a shining example of hybridization and musical acculturation currently taking place in Dakar, Senegal. In numerous promotional materials on the internet, Mara Seck and Stephané market their music as “live electro sabar.” The pair has been fusing sabar drumming via mbalax rythmes and electronic techniques to create a unique cultural hybridization that launches Senegalese traditional elements into the twenty-first century. The duo has recently been featured on various blogs and Facebook pages to include Electrafrique.

Electrafrique is a premier series show that brings together a worldwide network of artists championing Afro-electronic and futuristic sounds as a

Much like Youssou N’Dour’s motives to create a more glocalized sound — appealing to the local culture-- with mbalax, by replacing the congas with sabar drums, Mara Seck and Stephané are now replacing the mbalax ensemble with synthesizer’s and Westernized electronic beats, creating an openness to the global popular music market. Guiss Guiss Bou Bess strives to include musical digital fusion with traditional sabar drumming, highlighting live instrumental rhythmic interactions with Westernized electronic dubstep characteristics. Not only do the sounds of familiar sabar drums meet the needs of multi-generational Senegalese listeners, but the electronic beats create a bridge for the Western music consumer, ultimately exposing both cultures to a neo-fusion of world music. Mara and Stephané are true pioneers in the electro sabar hybridization realm. Much like the meaning of their name, they are creating a space within their music to invite people to look at things in a new way. Guiss Guiss Bou Bess’s most recent works can be heard via soundcloud.com at soundcloud.com/guissguiss/tracks.

As shown in figure 4.9 this neo-fusion is being visually represented with the two sabar drums directly in front of both artists. A digital Korg synthesizer rests on top of the sabar directly in front of Stephané, signifying he is the DJ of the group. This is not the first-time Mara Seck has been in an mbalax fusion group. His first fusion band mixed styles such as jazz, funk, reggae and mbalax which he claims to be
fairly common collaborations in Dakar. When I finally asked Seck how he would feel about *mbalax* being used in other global music, such as African-American hip-hop he responded, “music has no boundaries; everybody has the right to use *mbalax*” (Seck, 2017). Mara Seck welcomes and embraces cross-cultural musical fusion and continues to exemplify this willingness in his own musical compositions.

Figure 4.10. Mao Sidibé music video production. Photo by: Author

Figure 4.10 was taken during the filming of a rap music video on Ngor Island. I was fortunate enough to join Mao Sidibé, as he directed and filmed this music video for his friend who was attempting to promote his rap music cross-culturally. Mao is a Senegalese-folk artist and does not identify strongly with the Senegalese hip-hop scene, at least not as an artist. He suggested that I attend the filming of a rap music video to catch a “behind the scenes” glimpse of what the current Senegalese hip-hop industry is attempting to convey locally and globally.
The native Senegalese rap artist being filmed (positioned in the center of the sabar percussionists) lives half of the year in Dakar and the other half in New York City. The artist being featured in the music video is considered to be an international rap artists amongst his Senegalese colleagues. Figure 4.10 is a striking visualization of cultural and traditional fusions being portrayed in Senegalese hip-hop. Each represented percussionist is wearing modern clothing, primarily black t-shirts, and dark jeans. Other than their sabar drums, the Senegalese elements detected in their overall clothing ensemble are bright yellow hoods, which was simply a piece of thick fabric wrapped around each drummer’s head. Many variations of male head coverings are traditionally popular in Senegal because of the strong Muslim influence. Numerous prints of famous Senegalese cheikh’s, religious leaders, wearing similar head coverings, can be seen in various shops, restaurants, and homes in Dakar. The featured rap artist in the center of the sabar ensemble is also wearing a mixture of traditional and modern clothing, but rather than covering his head with a yellow cloth he chose a black brimmed hat to set himself apart from the accompanying group.

Catherine Appert addresses the varying opinions of local and international Senegalese rappers as it pertains to the hip-hop genre as a social practice:

Both international and local rappers connect local performance practice (perceived and described as “tradition”) and hip-hop (as a globalized music of the African diaspora), although they do so in markedly different ways. In the case of international rappers, this sense of connectedness is rooted in histories of forced migrations from West Africa to the Americas and their study of African philosophy, but it also depends largely on the seemingly more concrete stylistic connections that emerges from the actual sound of griot verbal performances. (Appert 2016, 293)
I was unable to audibly hear the song that was being featured in the music video, but the visualizations of an international rap artist who identified with Senegalese traditional elements via clothing and instrumentation while wanting to appeal to a larger global market proved to reveal the artist's overall marketing strategy. As Appert addresses in the above quote, this particular artist I witnessed being filmed was willing to connect to his local culture but largely desired to produce this video for the greater global market.

**The Future**

Forward-thinking questions were asked to all participants to gain crucial insight into the current path of hip-hop and where they believe the future of this genre is heading, both locally and globally. By way of local and global artist's opinions, originating from the Dakar region, I was able to discern what is currently influencing the Senegalese hip-hop genre. I prompted each participant asking if these influences were social, political, global, technological, etc. Each interviewee had different answers, although many admitted to hip-hop having strong political and social influences. Thiat, a well-known political activist and rapper said, “I use my music to deliver my message. I am not in the imagination of something you never lived... I am telling you what you live; day by day. When you have a culture, you can’t deny it” (Thiat, 2017). Thiat does not consider himself an artist, but rather an activist. He uses his musical talent to create and extend a more publically relatable platform for his political opinions.

Although Youssou N'Dour's name is not associated with hip-hop, his music maintains considerable influence in Senegal to this day. About Youssou N'Dour’s
societal impact, Sophie Sabar said, "He has sung about everything that relates to
daily life" (Sophie Sabar, 2017). Examples of social topics addressed in N'Dour’s
music are: treating your wife fairly, respecting your elders, buying mosquito nets to
stay healthy and do not cheat on your spouse. Sophie also claimed that because
N'Dour is a true “local” and understands his people, he knows not everyone is
entitled to a rich education, so he decides to teach positive morals and values to help
educate the listeners of his music in Senegal. Pape Diouf, a Senegalese drummer who
now resides in the Washington D.C area, said current Senegalese hip-hop artists are
“doing a great job informing people through hip-hop music. Uneducated people
learn morals through music” (Diouf, 2017). Again, Youssou N'Dour began a trend
that now saturates the hip-hop culture of Senegal; educating people through music,
whether it is social or political.

On the other side of this discussion are artists who believe current rap and
hip-hop artists are simply “angry kids in Senegal. Most of the time [their influences
are] political" (Anonymous, 2017). A few participants agreed that some rappers and
hip-hop artists are merely “chasing the money and lifestyle of pop culture.”
Monetary success drives only young hip-hop and rap artists who are dominantly
influenced by Western hip-hop culture. Many artists are more concerned with the
message and what type of influence they have on their culture, while others are
distracted with making money. Unless you are griot, it is challenging to make hip-
hop your full-time job, i.e., mainstream hip-hop. These artists are typically not the
ones who are adding mbalax and sabar drumming to their music. They are mainly
influenced by Western hip-hop and do not desire to reach out to their own culture
by way of adding traditional rhythmic elements. This does not mean they are not lyrically centered on social or political issues, but their ultimate goal is unlike N'Dour’s which is to give back to your people through your musical abilities.

Abiodugen, an African American man who has been mentoring Senegalese rap artists in Dakar for the past decade, said that artists are, “talking about real issues over there. Hip-hop is a platform to bring about a major change in the world; it’s a cry that is being made. Hip-hop’s voice will become a more important voice; saying something more conscious. There is so much space in the genre of hip-hop to teach” (Abiodugen, 2017).

After gaining an understanding of what is currently influencing the hip-hop scene in Senegal, I wanted to know where artists foresee hip-hop advancing in the next ten years. Many agreed that global recognition is in the future of Senegalese hip-hop. But many artists believe that will only come when artists are true to their culture and include traditional instruments such as sabar, and *rhythmes* such as *mbalax*. “A rappers goal is branching out internationally, to make money and get their music out there” (Mara Seck, 2017). The main concern of artists I interviewed was to market Senegalese hip-hop to a globalized music industry properly, they need to gain a more stable identity in their sound. Toussa agrees that Senegalese hip-hop will begin to branch out globally in the next ten years, but the problem is rappers in Senegal are “following American music” (Toussa, 2017). She believes that *mbalax* is “more intelligent” than rap music because it contains rhythmic complexities that are tied to traditional cultural elements. Therefore, it should be used as a tool to differentiate their music in the global market.
On the other hand, Ousseynou Mbaye, a Senegalese drummer residing in New York City, does not believe that Senegalese hip-hop will be globally marketable. “It’s not our culture. We picked it up and brought it to our country. Mbalax will spread more [globally] because it is our culture” (Ousseynou Mbaye, 2017). It is statements such as these that allow anthropologists and ethnomusicologists to observe where traditional musical elements will be preserved and utilized, globally advancing through various popular music channels. To gain the global recognition they desire in the next ten years, Senegalese artists are actively engaging in musical hybridity, cross-generational and cross-cultural rhythmic fusions all while promoting their localized identities via mbałax and their native languages. My drum teacher Ibou Sene, truly captured the heart of Senegalese musicians and their ultimate motives regarding their music; “[In] our culture, we share to everyone; that’s why we are teaching you guys. Everybody needs money, but to share your culture with people who don’t live in your country, to me-- this is the best” (Ibou Sene, 2017).
Chapter V
Conclusion

During one of my final days in the field, I met a German woman who has been married to a Senegalese drummer and artist for over fifteen years. I explained to her what my research was all about and how I was intrigued with a traditional *rythme* such as *mbalax* being integrated into Senegalese hip-hop songs such as “Mbaye Dieye Faye” by Toussa featuring Jaymdel Sims. She laughed at the idea of *mbalax* being in current hip-hop and claimed that she had never heard sabar drums nor the fusion of traditional drumming with hip-hop ever before. Even Gambian hip-hop artists such as NOVA are making use of *mbalax* features in his music. “Star on Da Mic” featuring Cess and “FIRR” featuring Bai Babou are a few examples of NOVA’s artistry and incorporating traces of *mbalax* within his music.

So why did this German woman, who has lived in Dakar for over 18 years and married to a Senegalese musician, claim that hip-hop does not use *mbalax? It is evident that traces of *mbalax* in Senegalese hip-hop may be a newer musical concept, explaining the overall validity for more research within the realm of ethnomusicology. Upcoming scholars must recognize the contributions of researchers such as Nettl, Stokes, and many others who convey a sense of urgency when it comes to researching evolving globalized music genres, (i.e., Senegalese hip-hop).

Knowing that a lack of awareness exists even amongst those who interact with the Dakar hip-hop culture on a daily basis, it is crucial to examine what further research needs to be conducted in order to broaden the scholarly field from a
traditional understanding of mbalax into a forward-leaning exploration of its post-1980’s application to all genres of music being played in Dakar. The area of ethnomusicology needs to recognize the necessity for recording traditional musical elements being purposefully retained in popular music, i.e., mbalax in hip-hop. It is imperative to acknowledge the phrase “purposefully retained” because this is the exact reason for mbalax’s implementation in Senegalese hip-hop today; it brings cultural identity to a genre that may otherwise blend into a globally oversaturated market, whose primary differentiations exist through language. By applying a beat that is recognized solely as Senegalese, artists are purposefully retaining a rhythm that cannot be claimed nor identified with by any other artist. Although Senegalese artists are willing to share their rhythmes and music with different cultures, they still want their voices to be recognized globally through distinct traditional drum patterns and sabar voicings. This inclusion is currently being accomplished by the purposeful retention of mbalax in the modern day hip-hop music of Dakar, Senegal.

In order to continue this trajectory of ethnomusicological research in Dakar, Senegal, an in-depth analysis of the hip-hop genre needs to be pursued with the intentions of recording musical elements and cultural connections, long-term. Some relevant questions that should be considered in future research regarding Traces of Tradition in Senegalese Hip-hop are; Why do certain hip-hop artists choose to use traditional sabar drums and others do not? How many Senegalese producers encourage artists to use traditional rhythmic elements in their hip-hop tracks? What percentage of hip-hop artists prefer Westernized electronic tracking elements, and why? Will the use of traditional musical elements have any effect on the retention of
the Wolof language being used in the genre; therefore, preserving both the language, and mbalax through music?

The sole purpose of this study has been to comprehend what mbalax is, how to quickly recognize its rhythmic elements, and ultimately determine the prominence of those elements within current hip-hop music in Dakar, Senegal. Although I was unable to fully engage with the hip-hop scene while in Dakar, I gained a general understanding of the history of mbalax and how its historical developments have led to its implementation within the hip-hop scene. All interview participants were able to guide me through an individualized journey of what mbalax meant to them in their lives and how it has seeped into the everyday culture of Senegalese drummers, dancers, and music consumers.
Appendix A

Interview Questions in English and French

1. What is mbalax?
   Qu’est-ce que le « mbalax » ?

2. What are the rhythmic characteristics of mbalax?
   Quels sont les rythmes qui caractérisent le mbalax ?

3. Can mbalax be performed on instruments other than the sabar drum?
   Est-ce possible d’interpréter le mbalax sur d’autres instruments que le tambour « sabar » ?

4. How long have you been playing the mbalax style?
   Depuis quand jouez-vous le style mbalax ?

5. Why do you think it is used in current hip-hop music?
   A votre avis, pourquoi emploie-t-on ce style dans la musique hip-hop actuelle ?

6. Would you agree that Senegalese identity is rooted in mbalax? How about Wolof identity?
   Seriez-vous d’accord pour dire que l'identité sénégalaise trouve sa racine dans le mbalax ? Qu'en est-il de l'identité wolof ?

7. Do any other genres of current Senegalese music utilize mbalax?
   Est-ce que le mbalax existe dans d’autres genres de la musique sénégalaise actuelle ?

8. What is Senegalese hip-hop’s greatest influence currently? (Social, political, technology, global influences, local influences...)
   En ce moment, d’où vient la plus grande influence du hip-hop sénégalais ? (La vie sociale, la politique, la technologie, la scène internationale, les influences locales, etc.)

9. How long, if at all, have you been a hip-hop artist?
   Depuis quand êtes-vous artiste du hip-hop (si vous l'êtes) ?

10. In your opinion, where do you foresee the Senegalese hip-hop scene in the next ten years? The global hip-hop scene?
    A votre avis, qu’est-ce que l’avenir du monde hip-hop sénégalais dans les dix prochaines années ? Et l’avenir du monde du hip-hop international ?

11. Would you be opposed to mbalax being used in African American hip-hop?
    Seriez-vous opposé à l’emploi du mbalax dans le hip-hop Afro-américain ?
Appendix B

Copyright Permission

Bassinet, Guillaume. 2016. *Guiss Guiss Bou Bess*. Figure 4.9. p.43.

Greetings!
I am contacting you because I would like to ask permission to reproduce your instrument/graphic/chart/survey in my Dissertation/Thesis. After defending my Dissertation/Thesis, my program requires me to submit it for publication in the Liberty University open-access institutional repository, the Digital Commons, and in the Proquest thesis and dissertation subscription research database. If you allow this, I will provide a citation of your work as follows:
Thank you for your consideration in this matter!

Hi
For me there is no problem
References


