
Rap and Social Communication in Senegal: An Interpretative Analysis of Rappers' Aliases

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Abstract: This article aims to inventory a number of aliases or "otherwise called or known as" of Senegalese rappers, to analyze, to decrypt, to highlight their informative nature and to release their semantic content in relation to social considerations. The article clarifies some aspects of anthroponyms in the Senegalese rappological universe, newly integrated into the social communication of the population. Here, communication is interpreted from the oral discursive angle in concrete circumstances. For this reason, the study proposes a deciphering and interpretative approach so as to bring out the semantic content and communicative value that hide from such names in connection to the Senegalese social and communicational realities. It also uses a pragmatic view to well reinforce the analysis by bringing out the implicit and implied informative character of the Senegalese rap music artists' aliases. The article tries to show that the anthroponyms of the Senegalese 'rappology' participate first of all in the process of knowing and identifying the rapper. As a result, choosing a nickname or other name different from the one in the civil register must be sadistic to use their jargon. In other words, the alias name must be, from the semantic point of view, shocking, and from the social point of view disturbing and controversial source, to draw the attention of each other and then to convey a message. Disobliging nicknames are the first beginning of revolt and protest. They are the first milestone to prepare the ground for his refusal to accept the vision of political authority. The method used for the interpretation of the collected data focuses on the communicational approach based on logos, ethos and pathos to discover the identification and construction of these communicational features of Senegalese rap music artists. This method helps understanding that the rapper's communication approach has its forms and practices which, requires a careful study, starting from the way of dressing to the language performance. And the conclusion to draw from this analysis is that in the anthropological terminology of Senegalese Hip Hop, there are pathetic nicknames because of their semantic content and which participate to making easier the delivering of rappers' messages to the population in general to rap music lovers in particular.

Keywords: Rap, Hip Hop, Communication, Alias, Interpretative Analysis, Senegalese Rapper

1. Introduction

Of American origin, the Hip Hop movement, finds its primitive roots in the Harlem City. Its birth is dependent on the brutal, vexatious, racial, and discriminatory trials that the black race suffered mainly. Hip Hop was meant to be the verbal weapon of a destitute, non-gunslinged social class to be heard, respected and accepted as American legal citizens, who have rights like whites. Language is, for this purpose, an adequate tool of liberation, of claim and of existence. The expression of Hip Hop has always distinguished itself from the ordinary, to weigh with all its weight in the ear of authority. To this, add the denominatives or alias of the anthropology of the "rappological" universe. The names of

Hip Hop actors both speak and communicate. Time passes; this movement is loved and spreads at the speed of cruising the world in various forms, certainly according to the birth contexts from one country to another.

In Senegal, political movements, trade unions, and the hip hop movement, among others, are legion after independence. This proliferation of movements reflects, in one way or another, visions or at least divergent objectives according to the field of activity of each. The political movement, in essence, seeks to conquer power by offering people a political vision or a project of society that meets their aspirations or to stay in power; the trade union movement, for its part, defends the rights and interests of workers, and negotiates with the employer or the state to revalue the job

function; the hip-hop movement, of which rap is an integral part, is, by nature, a movement of protest, revolt, awakening of consciousness, or awareness, etc. The Hip hop artists denigrate the most deepened gangrenes, defects and loss in value of the society. For instance women's violence is frequently denounced by rappers: "misogynistic music also serves as a means to desensitize individuals to sexual harassment, exploitation, abuse, and violence toward women" and "legitimizes the mistreatment and degradation of women" [1] Hip Hop was noticed in Senegal under the regime of President Abou Diouf (second President of the Republic of Senegal) and "was accentuated in the course of the year 1988 characterized by the very controversial legislative and presidential elections. But there is especially the "white year" (an invalidated academic year, all students repeat the year) that threw thousands of young people on the street" [6]. He adds that "for this desperate and helpless youth, the only way forward was the expression of their bitterness through rap" [6].

These various reasons make the hip hop movement create a communication register, which adapts itself, better to its posture, in order to reach its objectives. The world of Senegalese hip hop is identified by its acrimony, revolutionary, warlike communication, judged by some, rightly or wrongly, vulgar and filthy. So the Hip hop music and communication have been considered as to "increase hostile and aggressive thoughts" [14]. The misogynous attitudes and thinking are strongly denigrated in rap music in many countries "because women are often the targets of misogynistic rap lyrics" [4]. Senegalese rap has developed a very distinctive communicative image because it is made, more or less, with stereotyped expressions, socially misinterpreted before being accepted by force. The Senegalese rappers, in general, use a foul, abusive language. This communication cliché of the Senegalese rapper is explained by his citizen commitment to denigrate any behavior that he considers unfair, dishonest, irresponsible, both on the side of the rulers than on the side of the governed. However, the governors are the most criticized. Senegalese rap is thus born of a feeling of frustration of the young people who are the main performers or practitioners of this art. This is what makes rap "the expression of an oppressed, forgotten generation" [3]. This oppression and forgetfulness of which the young people who make the rap think to be victims, make them discontented, unconfident and middle of a weir of anger and claims. This emotional feeling of their precarious situations is reflected in their nicknames and way of denouncing, that is to say, to communicate. Being aware of their linguistic slippage, according to the social norms and values of the Senegalese society, rappers seek, in an implicit and skilful way, to forgive themselves to the public, to clear themselves or to minimize the derogatory effect of their speech acts, by claiming denominatives or aliases that paint them as outlaws, or simply as deviants.

Thus, are forged alias such as *New bi (The corpse)*, *Fou malade (Crazy-sick)*, *Dix mille Problèmes (Ten-thousand-*

problems), *Pacotille (Rubbish)*, *Ñaggas (Rough)*, *Ngaaka Blindé (Armored idiot)*, among others. The kinds of anthroponyms that Senegalese rappers give themselves are of immense interest both linguistically and sociolinguistically. Their informative nature offers a glimpse into the discursive nature of the actors and facilitates the knowledge of this musical art in Senegal. The alias names analyzed in this article have a very strong communicational connotation and reflect a certain way of denouncing, fighting, claiming, to rise up against authority. This work will be done from a pragmatic angle to try to identify some rappers' nicknames and to decipher their semantic continuum to finally highlight their implied or presupposed communicative value.

2. Methodological Approach

Communication is a worldwide known and practiced fact in connection to the social and cultural realities of each society. Culture determines communication. "Culture not only communicates, but also serves as a reinforcement of social control and a vehicle for the transmission of moral values including aesthetics appreciation from person to person and from generation to generation" (such as: [2]).

Acting on the other through a speech act, whatever it may be, can take place through a multitude of forms of influence that try to undermine or affect the receptor's psychological or mental state. Taking into account all the constituent elements of the mechanism of influence of the public or the audience is at the origin of the birth of the sciences of the language, towards the sixties. Composed of several related disciplines, the language sciences have as their main study the language in a general way the language in a particular context of enunciation in particular. The language sciences have set up a plurality of approaches such as those proposed by sociolinguists, pragmatists, anthropologists, ethnologists, discourse analysts, etc., to better understand the problematic of language.

The communication of rappers fits into the scheme of the identification and construction of the logos, ethos and pathos of the latter. The rapper's communication approach has its forms and practices which, in our opinion, requires a careful study, starting from the way of dressing to the language performance. "Numerous traditional means of communication are engendered to enhance eloquency in communication such as folksongs, proverbs, traditional marriage ceremonies, mode of dressing" [7]. All communicates among rappers, their dressing, gestures and names constitute communicative codes. "These artists do not see themselves as reaching against any external distortion of their identities. Rather, they are free to focus on producing the creative definition of their identities as citizens for an emergent nation. They regard their art as an exploration of the important issues of the times in which they live. Most of these artists began to explore their cultural heritage without the need to demonstrate to Europeans or anyone else that they could pant in realism" [11]

The anthroponyms of the Senegalese 'rappology'

participate first of all in the process of knowing and identifying the rapper. As a result, choosing a nickname or other name different from the one in the civil register must be sadistic to use their jargon. In other words, the alias name must be, from the semantic point of view, shocking, and from the social point of view disturbing and controversial source, to draw the attention of each other and then to convey a message. Disobliging nicknames are the first beginning of revolt and protest. They are the first milestone to prepare the ground for his refusal to accept the vision of political authority.

At the current stage of the works on Senegalese rap art, it is clear that they put more emphasis on the history, on the meaning, on the forms and functions of this art and its artist. Studies conducted towards what is called here "rappological anthropology", in other words, the alias names of Senegalese rappers are rare, compared to those realized on the oral and / or written text of rap artists in Senegal. However, one could not deny the informative nature of the names of Senegalese rappers. This is probably the feeling that motivates this reflection on such a fascinating subject.

3. The Senegalese Rappers' Aliases: Quest for Freedom and Identity

Traditionally Hip Hop is a movement of neo-opponents of a race that used it to claim its dignity, its rights and the recognition of its essence and existence. A movement worn, hands down, by hieratic and uninhibited young to cope with the authority and so infatuated with their philosophy and their fight they do not let medium fight on the sidelines. The wearing of clothes, the adornments (tattoo, braids), the alias they bear, constitute an arsenal of informative symbols to chide and to make their own way in a multiracial society like the United States of America.

The respect for the rappological genesis still remains. It is a question of knowing how to identify oneself and to distinguish oneself from the laymen with the rappology: the populations. In Senegal, this operation of identification passes, ingeniously, by the way or approach to communicate in general the names that the Senegalese rappers are attributed in particular. Their excessive and obsessive commitment makes the Senegalese rapper an "out of the norms and laws" that allows himself to say everything. The alias *New bi* is a form of deviance from social norms established in and by the society. The item *New bi* means the corpse. Such a nickname hurts the popular conscience to the extent that in the popular oral literature, everything related to death is taboo and scary. In traditional imagery, the dead should not be the subject of controversy, or sterile debate. Death, as for it, by the mystery which surrounds it, is circumvented when one wants to speak about it. This verbal circumvention results from the man's fear of death.

As a result, to see someone claiming himself as a name, a statement or term that refers to such a thing so hated, and so conjured, such as a corpse or a dead, goes beyond the bounds

of the popular consciousness and therefore arouses questioning the psychologist or even psychic nature of the bearer. For this purpose, *New bi* is a form of demarcation to the classical belief that will make the rapper a peer to follow and listen to. A denominative alias such as *Ñagas* is a strategy for seeking freedom of expression. The term *ñagas* means in Wolof rough, scabrous; *tur bu ñagas* refers to a name that, semantically and / or socially, suffers from a mild audibility. Through the nickname *Ñagas*, the rapper displays the nature of his language which insinuates a rasping language, harsh on hearing. This nickname acts as a signal which, from the discursive point of view, is assimilated to a request for acceptance of a register of language, usually offensive, and a quest for freedom of expression. This nickname is a real foretaste of what could be called "the language insolence or insolent communication" that the rapper intends to appropriate.

The name *Fou-malade* (Crazy-sick) plays the same function of announcer of type of language. Madness, from a psychoanalytic point of view, is already a disease that refers to mental alienation. The fool, therefore, benefits from special medical treatment. From a sociological point of view, the mad man is an "outlaw" individual, a character who is forgiven for almost everything, his linguistic excesses (insults) and his behavioral slippages are tolerated. The rapper bears this alias seeks to claim a certain freedom of expression in the image of the real madman. The nickname of the rapper fulfilled, therefore, a plurality of functions among which the quest for freedom of expression and social identification.

Other denominatives have a descriptive value. They imply the language insolence and impoliteness that rappers show in their language behavior. The world of rap in Senegal is illustrated more or less by the filthy language, which is its main label. The communicative philosophy of the rappers is opposed in this sense to that of the population that advocates the use of decent and courteous language when speaking to someone or to public. Senegalese Hip Hop actors are aware of their language which is socially depreciated and to be restive in the face of popular morality and decency, they demonstrate their linguistic intemperance through the nicknames they give themselves, by themselves. It is this approach which shows to the satisfaction that they have no contrition of their language which shapes and validates their existence.

The nicknames or alias play the function of what we call "anticipated reproach-wipes of a language" mostly depreciated by the population. The alias *Dix mille problems* (Ten thousand problems) is revealing, the author is already making a serious case for the population, he associates his own problems and those of the population and then appropriates them. The appellative *Ten thousand problems* is a kind of warning to the public about the author and his discursive behavior, the author is said to be a problem, him in person, and a source of problems for society.

The alias *Nit dof* (Madman) and *Ngaaka Blindé* (armored idiot) consist in wanting to get rid of their speech and / or

language by claiming the status of marginalized person who is the insane person. In Wolof, *Nit dof* is somehow the contraction of *nit bu dof* (a man who is crazy), *Ngaaka* refers to stupid, idiot, associated with the French term *Bilndé* (armored, protected by armor), to give *Ngaaka Blindé* which would mean a Beast or stupid Armor. This is a way for artists to show the public their indifference to what they say about them, like the madman who is considered as a marginalized, an outlaw, an individual who feels unaffected by or unconcerned with social norms. It is a communicative strategy to create a platform for denouncing and decrying without language the flaws of society in general. The population would simply say, "these people are as their nicknames indicate and we cannot do anything against them". This is the source of the power to hypnotize retractors with such nicknames.

The alias *Déggati* means in Wolof to be undisciplined; restive; disrespectful of instructions; insubordinate. The bearer of this alias attributes all the qualifying of this term and paints for himself a blackboard against it, a way of letting nothing say to the population about him. He carries on him and accepts all the negative charge of the statement that serves as his nickname. He exhausts almost all the negative qualifying that the public would have used to vilify him to make his own moral portrait. His nickname is in this sense a way of shutting up the public. The artist who bears this nickname has no social barrier, he expresses himself as he wants, and whatever the language used.

4. Typological Analysis of Aliases of Senegalese Rappers

It will be question in this section to make a kind of classification of names of Senegalese rappers and then to make an analysis and interpretation to highlight their occult, informative and communicative force. The lexical choice of an alias is not fortuitous; it is based on socio-cultural and political parameters; and even sometimes circumstantial. Some anthroponyms in the world of Senegalese rappology are oriented more towards or rely on the values and moral representations of society while others serve as qualifying with descriptive value and anticipation of facts. There are alias that express a disinterestedness of the actor in life, in every respect; there are also alias of rappers that depersonalize the personality of man in society or here below.

4.1. Names in Connection to the Traditional System of Social Organization

The self-attribution of such an alias results from the knowledge of the socio-cultural realities and the control of the sociological framework of the concerned. Alias such as *Kilifa* and *Caat* testify to some knowledge of the rappers of the functioning and organization of traditional Wolof society. In popular Wolof imagery, *Kilifa* refers to the moral leader, the chief, usually of a house or family; as for the item *Caat*,

that is the name given to the last-born of the children of a family. The interpretation of these alias will inevitably be based on sociological facts, specific to our traditional realities which frame and regulate the norms of family life. The *kilifa* is the most respected and listened person in the family. His point of view or his opinion is absolutely paramount when it comes to decision making in the family and is almost never questioned. The family relies on him because of his wisdom.

In the traditional system of family organization in Senegal, the *Caat* of the family assumes a freedom to do and say without negative interpretation against it. Sometimes, he is attributed the substantive *reewaande* (rudeness, impoliteness) related to his social status of spoiled child of the family. The *Caat's* linguistic rudeness is often tolerated because of his position as the youngest in the family. His verbal aggression or his offenses, his excesses and language slippage are easily digested within his family that is to say by the members of his family. These two characters, who contrast, enjoy a social favor when it comes to communication. They are freer than others during family's conversations. *Kilifa* and *Caat* are members of the family called *Kêrgi* (the house). The *Kêrgi* group follows an acceptable social logic since the rappers *Kilifa* and *Caat* are the creators of the group. From a communicative point of view, their nicknames are real calls for listening. A communicative strategy that aims to draw the public's attention to the message conveyed.

4.2. Aliases of Trivialization: An Assimilation of Man to Thing

In this naming scheme, the bearers of such nicknames resort to the strategy of trivialization of the human in favor of the inhuman. They choose themselves in order to take a particular look at society. The alias *Pacotille* (rubbish) is a perfect illustration of this state of the anthroponyms of the Senegalese rappology. The item means "goods of poor quality, of little value, rubbish". Considering himself as a "worthless individual, an individual of little value, a rubbish", one could say, through his nickname, the rapper already displays his recklessness and indifference to criticisms, negative judgments, among others, that the society would have to follow his logic of communication. This strategy of dehumanizing offers a boulevard to express himself as he sees fit, with no limit or social constraint. The rapper *Pacotille* identifies and defines himself in relation to his citizens in someone's cap "worthless", an ingenious way to lessen the diatribes and convey his messages to society, without major problems.

4.3. Aliases of Disinterestedness: A Depreciation of Life

The alias *New bi* leads us directly to another world, that of death. The death which is the cessation of life, considered as an inherent phenomenon in the human or animal condition, is unknown and even exceeds the limits of man. In the tradition of the different ethnic groups of Senegal, everything related

to death is a taboo and frightening. Seeing a normal person calling himself, deliberately, *New bi* which means the corpse, with all that death and the dead represent in the popular perception of the universe, would raise questions about the mental state of the bearer. This option of bearing a frightening nickname that runs counter to popular consciousness is tantamount to a kind of demystification of death that involves a depreciation of life. The alias *new bi* can also be seen as a sign of deviance from social realities relating to the phenomenon of death. From the social point of view, the rapper is already frightened and communicatively, he anticipates the nature and theme of his speech, which would be part of a logic not appreciated or not wanted by her breasts, that is to say that of death. The rapper who bears the alias *New bi* focuses most of his musical themes on death and his wearing is also identical to that worn of a corpse. He covers himself with a white or black shroud in his clips. His way of doing things is completely contrary to social considerations and visions. Such an alias is a real act of language both challenging and scary, that catches the eye of the public towards the bearer and creates a kind of curiosity of people to listen to the rapper of such a nickname in order to know the reasons why to claim this nickname. It is this curiosity aroused by the nickname *New Bi* that the rapper seeks, and which at the same time justifies his lexical choice focused on the terminology of death. The desire of the public to get an idea about the motivations of the artist who calls himself the corpse, the dead, obliges people to listen to him. And this will be a boon for the latter to convey his messages and / or his speeches. The alias *new bi* is therefore only a simulative that suggests a sort of disinterestedness of the actor in life, which would be unusual. This diminution of the value of man's existence on earth and his fear of death is just a communicative strategy that encourages the audience (population) to listen to the rap music artist *New Bi*.

5. Conclusion

At the end of this study, one has seen that there are, in the anthropological terminology of Senegalese Hip Hop, pathetic nicknames because of their semantic content. It has been also noticed that the alias of Senegalese rappers are not under the anodyne nor fortuitous, they are part of logic of identification and demarcation of a group of individuals who claim their existence in the arts and Senegalese music dominated by the "mbalax" (folkloric music, of Senegal origins). The rappers' aliases are in perfect phase with the protest, and awareness mission that the rappers set their sights on. Their denominatives adequately demonstrate their mastery of the environmental setting in which they live and their knowledge of the socio-cultural realities that drive the public to which they are dealing. And that allows them to set up a rather special communicative device to succeed in their mission or

to achieve their goals.

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