"To Skip a Step":
New Representation(s) of Migration, Success and Politics in Senegalese Rap and Theatre[1]

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Abstract

Over the last few years, Senegal saw the emergence of new representations of migration and success. These contrast with earlier representations of success, notably the "myth of the intellectual", and focus on individual effort as expressed by the "*bul faale*" movement in the late 1990s. This article describes these new representations and shows how they are taken up by two strands of cultural production, namely rap and theatre. Finally, the article discusses how cultural production is linked to politics. Drawing on the concepts of representation(s) and imagination, the article shows how these can be used to re-conceptualize the relationship between cultural production and politics.

Cultural production,[2] politics, and the effectiveness of representation(s)

All your beautiful words
All your beautiful promises
We still wait for them

You promised me I would have a job
You promised me I would have food
You promised me I would have real work and a future
But so far - nothing

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[1] This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the AEGIS European Conference on African Studies in Leiden, the Netherlands, 11-14 July 2007.

[2] Instead of "popular culture", I use the terms "cultural expression" or "cultural production". For a discussion of the concept of popular culture cf. Martin (2000a), see also the introduction to this special issue.

That's why I'm leaving, that's why I'm clearing out in this canoe[3]
I swear! I can't stay here one more second
Better die than live in such conditions, in this hell
Come what may
I still prefer to die

Toutes vos belles paroles
Toutes vos belles promesses
On les attend toujours

Vous m'aviez promis que j'aurais du boulot
Vous m'aviez promis que je n'aurais plus jamais faim
Vous m'aviez promis de vraies occupations et un avenir
En vérité, jusqu'ici, je ne vois toujours rien
Voilà pourquoi j'ai décidé de fuir, voilà pourquoi je me casse en pirogue
Je le jure ! Je ne peux rester ici une seconde de plus.
Mieux vaut mourir que de vivre dans de telles conditions, dans cet enfer
Advienne que pourra
Je préfère encore mourir
("Sunugaal", Didier Awadi, 2006)

In this song called "Sunugaal" (in Wolof "our canoe") (2006) the well-known Senegalese rapper Didier Awadi refers to the growing number of African migrants who leave for Europe in small fishing boats from the Senegalese and Mauritanian coast. He speaks from the position of a migrant who decided to "escape abroad" because of the "miserable" economic and political conditions in his country: unemployment, anxiety, lack of faith in the future, scandals, imprisonment of journalists and opposition politicians,[4] bankrupt companies, frequent water and power cuts. Awadi set the song to a slideshow, posted free of charge on his website, which shows photographs

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[3] The French term is "se casser", which means both to "clear off" and "to nearly kill oneself to get something done". The expression "se casser la gueule" means "to fall flat on ones face", in a literal and figurative sense. Translations from French are mine, unless otherwise noted.

[4] Awadi hints, on the one hand, at the journalist Abdou Latif Coulibaly whose book "Wade, un opposant au pouvoir: l'alternance piégée?" (2003) promted death threats, and, on the other hand, at the imprisonment of the former Prime Minister, Idrissa Seck, accused of fraud in July 2006 and finally released in February 2007.

of migrants crammed in a small canoe on the open sea, arriving exhausted and in serious physical conditions at the Canary Islands, at the airport in Dakar after having been sent back from Spain and, finally, a graveyard.

Awadi establishes a very clear and direct relationship between politics, migration, and death. He blames political leaders for not guaranteeing adequate conditions of living, leading to migration and death, and who, as a consequence, should resign.

> The people voted and gave him a mandate and a budget
> God does not go to urns, it is the people who votes!
> When we are elected, either we work or we resign.
>
> Le peuple a voté et lui a donné un mandat et un budget pour
> Dieu ne se rend pas aux urnes, c'est le peuple qui vote !
> Quand on est élu, soit on bosse, soit on passe la main
> ("Sunugaal", Didier Awadi, 2006)

By this, at about 10 months before the presidential elections of 2007, Awadi questions the legitimacy of a government, which he helped to get into power seven years earlier when critical Hip Hop lyrics and private radio stations played a role in the mobilisation of youth and called them up to register for voting. To be more precise, the country's first political change by way of elections constituted only one aspect of the wider *bul faale* movement (Havard 2001: 63)[5] and represents an example of a rather direct way of how cultural production can relate to politics.

So far, cultural analysis has shown that cultural expressions embrace "political representations" that can be used in struggles over political power. However, it is far less clear how culture actually achieves this effect. Thus, to address the question to what extent cultural production has the potential to influence political change implies a second, more fundamental

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[5] *Bul faale* means "don't worry" in Wolof and is the title song of an album released in 1994 by Positive Black Soul, one of the best known Senegalese rap bands, founded by Didier Awadi and Doug E Tee. From this album, a movement started that expressed claims of independence and emancipation of urban youth (cf. Havard 2001; Maraszto 2002). I will come back to the *bul faale* movement in the following section. On youth movements and their relations to politics in the 1980s and 1990s cf. e.g. Diouf (2005; 2003; 1996; 1992), Benga (2001), Biaya (2000).

question: How can cultural expression actually become effective in politics? What explains the effectiveness of culture as a link between representations and (political) practices (Martin 2000b: 126)?

To address these questions, I suggest exploring the concepts of representations and imagination. I will show that new representations of success which are closely linked to migration have emerged among Senegalese youth over the last few years that differ significantly from preceding conceptions of what success and social prestige are, and of how they can be achieved.

I then will turn to the question of how these representations relate to ways of representing. I will come back to "Sunugaal" and draw on two recent theatre plays dealing with migration, "Le clan du destin" by the company Les Gueules Tapées and "Partir" by the company Kocc Barma, to show how recent cultural productions do not only "reflect" these new representations but also "reflect on" and (re)create them (cf. Barber 1997).[6] In the last section, I will turn to politics, arguing that these ways of representing, based on clearly defined concepts of representations and the imagination, allow for an apprehension of "ambiguities" in politics, understood as the coexistence of apparently contradictory elements.

Yet, dealing with representations and the imagination is not an easy task as these notions are widely, but very unspecifically used in the social sciences. Therefore, I will start with a definition of these two concepts. According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, "to represent something is to describe or depict it, to call it up in the mind by description or portrayal or imagination; to place a likeness of it before us in our mind or in the senses". This process involves both "(re)presentation", as for example in theatre or art, and the elaboration of mental representations of either tangible objects or abstract concepts. Both bring to presence something that is absent; something stands for something other.

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[6] The empirical results of this article are based on a 4 months fieldwork in 2004 and 2005, in Dakar, its outer suburbs and in Rufisque. I draw on the productions itself, on non-directive interviews with Senegalese youth and with the directors of the companies who elaborated the texts and directed the plays. I replaced all names of interviewees, except from the artists, with pseudonyms. I do not specifically deal with migrants taking off in canoes for Europe but with the ways cultural productions take up the phenomenon.

Most theories of representation refer to two competing, though overlapping approaches of conceiving this process, the "reflective approach" on the one hand, and a constructivist approach, on the other. The reflective approach considers representation to function like a mirror that reproduces as truly as possible all main characteristics of the represented objects whereas the constructivist approach insists on an active process of the production of meaning (Sandkühler 2003: 49, 59, referring to Kant 1781: 376).[7]

To further develop this basic definition, Clifford Geertz distinguishes between "models of 'real time' … the picture .. of the way things in sheer actuality are", and "models for", an "ethos", "the tone, character and quality of life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood" (1993b: 93, 89; cf. 1993a). This distinction between actuality and possibility is central to most approaches to the notions of representations and imagination (cf. Ricœur 1979: 213; Turner 1977: 71; 1992: 101; Jewsiewicki 1999: 73). Yet, imagination is not mere fantasy. Werner Schiffauer clearly points out that for imagination to become "effective", it has to relate closely to reality; imagination is "what is realizable" (2006: 164-165).

However, if they differ with respect to their scope, actuality on the one hand and possibility on the other, both representations and imagination are characterised by a mechanism that involves a "direction" (*Richtungscharakter*) pointing beyond what is given, beyond the "Here" and "Now" (Cassirer 2002: 232; cf. Sandkühler 1999: 1385). Imagination then is not a synonym of, but located within what I call "representation(s)"[8]. The "direction" of "representation(s)" starts from a centre that is at the same time stable and flexible, that acts as a point of reference, and at the same time allows for different perspectives, conferring different meanings to the initial representation(s) and guaranteeing for the "elasticity" of representation(s) (Cassirer 1999: 101, 106; 2002: 157).

In a similar manner, Octave Mannoni questions the relation between reality and imagination and reveals different ways of how they can coexist, notwithstanding their contradiction. His famous phrase "I know well, but

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[7] Stuart Hall adds the intentional approach, the opposite of reflection as it exclusively expresses the intention of the speaker, writer, author, or artist (1997: 15, 25).

[8] I use the term "representation(s)" to underline its meaning of "(re)presentation" **and** "ideas" and to refer to the theoretical perspective, which I developed in my PhD (Ludl 2008). "Representations" refers to the general use of the term in the social sciences.

all the same" puts this coexistence, which allows for abandoning and at the same time preserving the initial representation(s) in a nutshell (1969: 11). Here again, the initial representation(s) appear(s) in a different perspective that gives them a new meaning. Hence, the transformation of representation(s) involves a process of meaning giving, but can not be reduced to it.

Representation(s) are "the other scene" (Mannoni 1969) where, just like in theatre, illusion and reality coexist. Here, theatre is much more than a metaphor. Creation lies at the heart of the process of representation. Symbols, emotion and "certain fundamental structural elements of our sense experience itself – .. lines, design, .. architectural, musical forms" (Cassirer 2006: 168, 171) jointly elaborate representation(s) and the imagination and assure for their (re)creation and expression.

Success, social prestige, and how to achieve them

In Senegal, until the mid 1990s, success, social prestige, and political legitimacy have been closely tied to knowledge and education, stemming from a democratic discourse formulated by the country's elite partly before, and mainly after independence. In this context, education, symbolised by diploma, French language and a western lifestyle, was a powerful sign of social distinction. It gave access to political power and to employment within the administration that was very much sought-after but limited to a small elite as it required access to the (neo)colonial educational system and a privileged position within social hierarchy (Diaw 1992: 300; Coulon 2000: 70).

From the late 1980s on, economic crisis, growing dissatisfaction with the government of Abdou Diouf and a failing educational system slowly eradicated the exclusiveness of education and knowledge as a way to success and social prestige. Religious and social movement leaders and especially economically successful, but poorly educated tradesmen (the *moodu-moodu*), all keeping their distances with politics, replaced the intellectual as the main model of success and prestige (Coulon 2000: 87).

However, the major change in representation(s) of success came from youth. During the late 1990s, the *bul faale* movement became their major vector to contest social hierarchies and to express claims of individuation, emancipation, and political change. Mainly in rap and sports, particularly

wrestling (*la lutte sénégalaise*), political and social discontent and "new figures of success" like Mohammed Ndao, called "Tyson",[9] one of Senegal's most prominent wrestlers, emerged (Havard 2001; Biaya 2000). In Senegal, wrestling is a closed milieu, structured by traditional hierarchies and based on family relations and support from political and religious leaders (Havard 2001: 67; Biaya 2000: 19). Tyson could not rely on any of the ingredients that bring a wrestler to success. He nevertheless succeeded – by his own and by training alone. He symbolises a model of success that relies on individual effort and hard work and therefore can do without social hierarchies and money, which used to limit access to social prestige to a small elite. In other words, the *bul faale* movement "democratised" success that now was within everyone's reach.[10]

Meanwhile, disappointment followed the high expectancies the election of Abdoulaye Wade had raised. Some of the rappers took their distances with politics. Others, like Awadi still denounce social and political injustices. The *bul faale* movement declined, though, at first, some of its "values, attitudes, and aspirations" seemed to survive and even to spread out (Havard 2001: 68).

However, new representation(s) of success and of the ways to achieve it emerged over the past few years, to which migration plays a central role. They modify both representation(s) of success gained through individual effort and the preceding conception based on education and knowledge. At the same time, they partly restore the elite-centred approach of the latter.

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[9] Adapting this name and beating his main rival named "Muhammad Ali" confers a special symbolic to the new generation of boxers "Tyson" represents – just as the victory of Mike Tyson over Muhammad Ali did; "Tyson" also used to appear wrapped in an American flag on scene. The *bul faale* movement referred frequently to the U.S., in particular to sportsmen and prominent figures of the Civil Rights Movement like Martin Luther King or Malcolm X.

[10] This conception also rejects fatality as part of a "popular understanding of Islam" (Havard 2001: 67) and the body cult that came with sports and with rap (clothes, haircuts etc.), drawing on multiple references, was perceived as contrary to an Islamic sense of decency. At the same time, the *bul faale* movement showed a high political commitment. A political opposition party, Jëf Jëf, led by Talla Sylla, emerged in its realm. Another example is "Tyson" who appeared in public with Abdou Diouf at a meeting in Rufisque – and immediately was denounced as a traitor (Havard 2001: 68-69; Bloom 2003: 62).

To accede to a respectful social position basically requires "to earn one's own living", which means financial independence in order to support one's parents and family members, usually symbolised by building one's own house. In addition, consumer goods, mainly clothes and cars are very much in demand. These aspirations are only indirectly economic as they aim at a social position that guarantees for prestige and allows for the passage from youth to adulthood. Thus, the reason most frequently cited by the youth why they want to leave – "there is nothing here" – refers not only to a difficult economic situation, but also to a lack of conditions that allow for acceding to social emancipation and prestige (cf. Timera 2001; Bardem 1993). The same is true for the slogan "Barça ou Barzakhe" – "Death or Barcelone".[11] Death here has of course a literal meaning, but also signifies "social death" (Hage 2003: 78).

In general, people do not think anymore that the local economic and social conditions allow their aspirations to come true. Aïssatou, a friend in Dakar, when asked how it was going, answered "ça va sénégalaisement" – and immediately added, "cela veut dire qu'on ne peut pas avoir ce qu'on veut" (Aïssatou, interview, Dakar, 13.04.2004). Thus, "on est obligé d'aller le chercher ailleurs " (Sira, interview, Paris, 21.11.2003). Indeed, travelling and migration for long have been a way to spend the time between youth and adulthood away from home to earn money, to escape from social constraints and, on return, to take up the position of a respected elder (cf. Manchuelle 1997: 92, 209).

Then, what constitutes the novelty of representation(s) of migration and success with respect to both these historic and more recent models of "the intellectual" or of individual effort, as put forward by the *bul faale* movement?[12] To explore this question, I will start with three observations from fieldwork that turned out to be the main indicators of a transformation of representation(s) of success and, in particular, of the ways to achieve it. Firstly, people conceive of both their aspirations and what they think their actual situation offers to realise them, as extremes. As the director of Kocc

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[11] Slogan of the migrants leaving for the Canary Islands and largely taken up by the Senegalese media in 2006. On the multiple references of this slogan, see Schmitz (2008: 6-7).

[12] On new representations of success in other African countries, cf. e.g. Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (1998), as well as the contributions in Banégas and Warnier (2001).

Barma, one of the theatre companies to which I will come back later, observes,

> "actuellement les gens ici se découragent de plus en plus … C'est des gens qui sous estiment leur mode de vie. Leur façon de vivre. Ils veulent vivre vraiment la grande félicité, vraiment être riche, avoir vraiment tout ce que tu veux" (Director, Kocc Barma, Interview, 27.04.04, Dakar).

Secondly, people aim at achieving these high-end goals very quickly and at all costs. As a Senegalese student and member of one of the small rap bands in Dakar put it: "Les jeunes, ils veulent tous très tôt coûte que coûte réussir" (Madické, interview, outer suburb of Dakar, 25.04.04). This means to conceive of success as an absolute must and, what is even more important, as something to be reached "very early". As he further explains, migration is the only way to succeed within this tightened relation to time.

> "Si un gars ici étudie jusqu'à par exemple 25 ans ou 28 ans, au terme des études, le temps de trouver du travail et de réaliser de l'argent pour fonder un autre foyer, construire une maison, acheter une voiture, subvenir à ses besoins en quelque sorte, on voit que le gars qui a fait deux ans par exemple en Europe, dès qu'il rentre, il peut réaliser en l'espace d'un an ce que celui-là qui a étudié durant par exemple 10 ans n'a pu réaliser. C'est souvent pourquoi les jeunes, tous aspirent à aller en Europe" (Madické, outer suburb of Dakar, 25.04.2004).

The director of the theatre company cited above confirms this statement:

> "Tout de suite, ils se disent, 'non je veux avoir des millions [snaps his fingers] avant la fin de l'année. Et pour ça, si je fais du commerce, c'est sûr que je les aurais pas.' Donc, la seule chose, c'est l'Europe. Parce que là, tu peux gagner des millions en moins d'une année … Donc ça veut dire, on est pas **obligé** [stressed] de partir. Mais si on est pressé, il faut partir" (Interview, Dakar, 27.04.2004).

This different conception of time not only applies to economic success, but also to specific skills. The director of Kocc Barma confirms that actors often wanted to realise their masterpiece immediately. Likewise, a producer and owner of a studio in Dakar observed that the rappers with whom he worked

did not only want to get rich, but also to know singing from one day to the other. Finally, there is the example of young sportsmen who immediately wanted to accede to leading positions in their local club without ever having received an appropriate training (Interviews, Dakar, 27.04.2004, 30.04.2004, 02.05.2004).

This contrasts with conceptions that underline the effort and time needed to acquire knowledge and skills, leading step by step to success.

> "Parce qu'il y a pas quelqu'un qui s'est levé un beau jour et, comme ça, il réussit sa vie. C'est pas possible. C'est de fil en aiguille. Tu fais doucement, doucement, doucement … il y a pas chercher midi à quatorze heures!" (Interview with the director of Kocc Barma, Dakar 27.04.2004).

Finally, when confronted with difficulties, migration seems to be the first and only solution. For example, when a neighbour in Dakar lost her apartment and alternatives were rather expensive, she immediately thought of her husband going to France and asked me about visa formalities and employment possibilities for craftsmen (Aminata, conversation, Dakar, 23.04.2004). This contrasts with a conception that focuses on confronting and overcoming obstacles in life with courage.

> "Parce que souvent aussi, l'individu doit mener une lutte, tu vois. Parce que dans la vie, on dit qu'il y a toujours des obstacles … Et j'ai comme l'impression que les gens, quand ils rencontrent ici un obstacle, au lieu d'essayer de contourner [sic!] l'obstacle, ils disent 'non, je vais partir en Europe'. Comme si en Europe il y avait pas d'obstacles. … Moi, je suis pas d'accord. Moi souvent, je sais que ça va pas. Mais à chaque fois, je me sens un courage de faire! Je me dis, 'non, ah, il faut que je me mesure'. Donc, je vais lutter. Souvent, j'y arrive et voilà, c'est un bonheur" (Interview with the director of Kocc Barma, Dakar 27.04.2004).

These findings indicate that Senegalese youth increasingly imagines success in terms of money and skills to be reached very quickly and by avoiding obstacles instead of confronting and overcoming them. As Michel Foucault expressed it, "on imagine toujours le décisif, le définitif, le désormais clos; ce qu'on imagine est de l'ordre de la solution, non de l'ordre de la tâche; le

bonheur et le malheur s'inscrivent sur le registre de l'imaginaire, non le devoir et la vertu" (1994 : 112-113). In this perspective, migration to Western countries seems to be the only solution as the media reflect an image of wealth and abundance and migrants are generally better-off in shorter time than those left behind. Migration allows for "skipping one or several steps", "sauter une ou plusieurs cases" (La Cie Des Gueules Tapées 2006: 4) as one character in "Le clan du destin" states. This refers to obstacles and efforts, but also to risks. The author of the play explains,

> "tu ne réfléchis pas, tu vois un objectif qui est là, devant toi, tu mets des œillères, tu regardes pas ce qu'il y a à côté! Tu fonces quoi … Ils voient le but, l'objectif [stressed]. Et les conséquences, 'oui on peut crever, je m'en fous' … Ils ne voient pas la traversée ou les obstacles qu'il y a" (Interview, Dakar, 15.09.2005).

Accordingly, the migrants in "Le clan du destin" mistake a coffin for a boat.

> "ils sont tellement obsédés par le fait de traverser qu'ils ne voient pas que c'est un cercueil. Parce qu'ils ne voient pas les obstacles qu'il y a, mais ils voient l'objectif" (Interview, Dakar, 14.09.2005).

Hence, these new imaginations of success clearly contrast with success through individual effort as expressed by the *bul faale* movement and the preceding conception focussing on education, as both require time and hard work – a step that youth nowadays imagine simply to skip. Yet, this new conception partly restores the elite-centred approach of the "myth of the intellectual" that the *bul faale* movement had called into question. As one might expect, to succeed very quickly and literally out of nothing involves some kind of mystery, and where mystery is involved, success is hard to control. At the same time, people are attracted by the mystery surrounding success and failure in Western countries that the youth wants to discover by and for themselves (Interview with Madické and group interview, outer suburb of Dakar, 25.04.2004). Accordingly, in the play by Kocc Barma, a civil servant says to one of the main characters: "'Toi, tu veux partir. Tu ne sais même pas ce qui t'attend de l'autre côté.' Elle dit, 'mais du moins, quelque chose nous attend. Et c'est cet inconnu qui m'attire'" (Interview with the director, Dakar, 27.04.2004; cf. Roblès, 1986, 305).

In the following, I will turn to the question of how these representation(s) are (re)presented by cultural productions to unveil different ways of how reality and imagination relate to each other.

Ways of representing: "To denounce facts" and "to pass the ball to the public"

In Senegal, migration to Europe and later to the U. S. and other countries has been a common phenomenon since the early 1970s[13] and cultural production, mainly music and in particular *mbalax*, frequently referred to migration by praising the courage of the migrants and stressing their hard lives in Western countries.[14] Within the last few years, as migrants taking off in canoes for Europe became a matter of public interest, cultural productions increasingly took up the issue of migration and death, "staging" and (re)creating the new representation(s) of success.

Firstly, to come back to "Sunugaal", the migrant whom Awadi lends his voice gives an account of the country's situation; he is very much concerned with reality: "This is nothing but the sad account of reality". On the one hand, this situation marks the continuity – instead of the expected break – between the governments of Abdou Diouf and Abdoulaye Wade. On the other hand, the actual situation contrasts with Wade's electoral promises, which give an idea of what youth aspires to: a job, food, a future. However, apart from these very concrete aspirations, Awadi does not much develop on what the migrant's future could consist of, and on what he is aiming at by "fleeing abroad". He concentrates on the representation(s) of the here and now as the line "you propose us your university of the future, but we worry about the actual one", makes clear. Hence, imagination is not the main matter of interest and not very much developed. Rather,

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[13] Labour migration, mainly to France, of Soninke and Haalpulaar migrants from the Senegal River valley started before and continued after independence to grow significantly from the early 1970s on. Mouride traders from other regions of Senegal followed them and explored further destinations. Cf. e.g. Quiminal (1991), Adams (1977), Gonin (1997), Gonin and Lima (2004), Timera (1996), Daum (1998), Bava (2002), Riccio (2006), Diouf (2000).

[14] Popular examples, among many others, include "Dem", "Immigrés" and "Solidarité" by Youssou N'Dour,"Baol Baol" by Ismaïl Lô or "France" by Thione Seck (on some of these songs, cf. Riccio 2005).

representation(s) of reality on the one hand and death on the other overwhelm the imagination: The "flight" induced by "this hell" involves a fatal risk and the migrant does not care about it: "Come what may. I still prefer to die".

Les Gueules Tapées: "Le clan du destin ou Mbëk mi"

Les "Gueules Tapées" are one of Senegal's best known popular theatre companies. The company was founded in 1995 by two final year classes of the Conservatoire National Douta Seck. In 2006, they created a play on migration called "Le clan du destin ou *Mbëk mi*", "The community of destiny". The French title plays with the word "clandestin", the Wolof title means "to tear down frontiers". The play had its premiere at the National Theatre Daniel Sorano in November 2006 and was performed in May 2007 at FEST'ART, Senegal's main annual theatre festival. In the play, three main characters, two men and a woman, who want to leave Africa wait for a refugee smuggler on a beach. They meet a religious leader who had been sent by his village with a coffin to take home the body of one of the village's members who lost his life on his journey to Europe. At first, the migrants, in their hope to leave, mistake the religious leader for the refugee smuggler and the coffin for a boat. When they realise their mistake, they baptise the coffin as a boat. The religious leader and a border policeman, the fifth character of the play, try to prevent the migrants from leaving. The play ends with the border policeman killing one of the migrants. The two others manage to leave in the coffin – and prepare themselves for death. To give a voice to the main characters, the script draws on "La reclusion solitaire" by Tahar Ben Jelloun, on Salim Jay's "Tu ne traversa pas le détroit" (2001) and on "Le ventre de l'Atlantique" by Fatou Diome (2003).

Contrary to "Sunugaal", "Le clan du destin" develops more on how "the other side" is imagined by drawing a picture of wealth and abundance:

> "J'ai piétiné la terre noire de l'ouest au nord, je vais traverser l'océan pour atterrir sur cette terre blanche qui brille de mille feux… Aller voir cette herbe qu'on dit tellement plus verte là où s'arrêtent les dernières gouttes de la mer, là-bas, là où les mairies payent les ramasseurs de crottes de chiens, là où même ceux qui ne travaillent pas perçoivent un

salaire. Partir donc là où les fœtus ont déjà des comptes bancaires à leur nom et les bébés des plans de carrière".[15]

However, a kind of "social determinism" clearly limits the migrant's imaginations. In a commentary on the play, the author states: "L'homme dans la plénitude, cherche, fouille, tout au long de sa vie, à trouver des solutions aux maux que la vie lui impose" (La Cie Des Gueules Tapées 2006: 3) and in the play, as the migrants baptise the coffin as a boat, one of them declares: "Puisque l'eau de la mer épouse la forme et la couleur du récipient qui la reçoit, l'objet doit lui aussi s'adapter aux circonstances que la vie lui impose".

Consequently, the migrants won't escape their fate; they form a "community of destiny". Either death awaits them or, as the title of the play indicates, they will end up as "clandestins" in Europe, as illegal aliens dispossessed of their identity: They give up their names for anonymous substitutes like "he", "she", "it", tear up their ID papers (as usually required by refugee smugglers) and take off their jackets, piling them up together with their "souvenirs, émotions, lassitudes, espoirs, rancunes, nostalgies, confiances, audaces, découragements" (here, the play quotes from Jay 2001: 7). By this, they knit together their community, then wearing all three of them the same clothes and performing a kind of a dance, holding their hands together in the middle. To this question of a predetermined destiny the metaphor of a coffin mistaken for a boat is central. Whereas the coffin clearly symbolises death in a literal sense, the boat, crystallising the migrants' hope of a better fate, carries one to the other end only to end up as an illegal alien. Thus, the "boat" stays what it is, a coffin, symbolising death in a figurative sense that is death of one's identity.

This feeling "to be stuck between two impossibilities" is the central theme of the play and the characters express it in a variety of forms. On the one hand, they "lost their land"; they are "orphans" and "prisoners of a land once blessed". They ask themselves where their "place in this order is" (here, the play quotes from Ben Jelloun 1995: 11, 35) and thereby express the widespread feeling among African youth of having lost their leading role in

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[15] This quote from the play draws literally on Diome (2003: 189). Quotes from the play are taken from a video recording realised by the Canadian association *La Traversée* and, where noted, from a small documentation on the play (2006).

the reconstruction of their countries (cf. Diouf 2005: 32). On the other hand, the future is uncertain and may involve fatal risks. As one character states, "je cherche mon pays sur une page blanche" ; "que l'autre rive soit notre tombe".

However, going one step further than "Sunugaal" where death is the senseless consequence of a desperate, though evitable, situation, "Le clan du destin" gives a clear meaning to it; death is conceived of as sacrifice. The play aims at restoring the dignity of those who do not return successfully and who are treated disrespectfully by European authorities, but also by their families (La Cie Des Gueules Tapées 2006: 3). Whereas returning wealthy and making generous gifts usually guarantees for a migrant's prestige, here it is absence and "le chemin inanimé du retour", which provides for dignity and respect:

> "Partir, c'est beaucoup plus une façon de demander autre chose qu'un moyen sûr d'obtenir quelque chose. Naufragés, nous représenterions quelque chose, pour une fois, nous occuperions l'attention, nous nous regarderions nous-mêmes avec surprise, avec intérêt, avec compassion. Nous sommes l'autorité que nous conserverions sur nous-mêmes. Nous sommes rien que l'autorité du désespoir … Un jour, nous trouverons terre en vue. Ce sera le jour où notre dignité deviendra évidente à autrui … Nous aurons échappé à nos poursuivants … Nous ne serons plus regardés comme des créatures dangereuses, inadéquates, incomplètes. Nous ne serons plus surveillés comme des évadés repris de justesse" (La Cie Des Gueules Tapées 2006: 4).

Hence, both in "Sunugaal" and "Le clan du destin", reality is entirely abandoned. The migrant in Awadi's song just wants to leave and there is nothing worth to take with him, to regret or to remember. Accordingly, one character in "Le clan du destin", again drawing on Diome (2003 : 189), states: "Partir sans se retourner. On ne se retourne pas quand on marche sur la corde du rêve". On the other hand, imagination of a positive future is overwhelmed by representations of a negative reality, that is death or death of one's identity. In this case, imagination does not start from representation(s) to take a specific direction, as Cassirer (2002: 232) would say. Rather it starts from (social) death, only to be thrown back to death (of one's life or identity). Reality clashes with imagination, but there is no process of transformation that would allow for abandoning and at the same

time preserving imagination (Mannoni, 1969: 11). In "Le clan du destin" there is redirection and transformation of the initial representation(s). Death is seen as sacrifice to attain dignity but as in the case of the boat and the coffin, the outcome of this transformation is fragile.

This conception comes with an explicit way of representing, of passing clear messages and of making political statements. Both Awadi and The Gueules Tapées denounce the actual conditions, their consequences and name those they consider responsible for the situation: the Senegalese government and (neo-)colonial relations to France and "the West" in general (Interview with Awadi in *Le Soleil*, Mbaye 2006; Interview with the director of Les Gueules Tapées, Dakar, 14.09.2005). As the director of the Gueules Tapées confirms, "je dénonce des faits ou je parle des faits tels qu'ils se sont déroulés ou tels qu'ils pouvaient se [dérouler]" (Interview, Dakar, 14.09.2005). In the end, the play highlights the fatal risks of migration, both in a literal and a figurative sense. It draws on comedy, but ends in tragedy,[16] confronting the public with a clear statement.

Awadi delivers an equally clear message. He intended "Sunugaal" to be an "'electric shock'" (Simondet 2006) and uses the means adapted to this aim: sombre sprechgesang, angry rapping and very elaborated and touching photographs accompany the lyrics that clearly name social and political injustices. In the song "Djow sa gaal" from the same album he explicitly calls up the youth to stay and to join efforts to build up the country.

Kocc Barma: "Partir"

Kocc Barma is a company from Rufisque, which mainly works in the domain of Forum Theatre.[17] The director of the company graduated from the Conservatoire National Douta Seck and is now an actor at the National Theatre Daniel Sorano in Dakar. Some of the members of the company have been trained as actors while a varying number of students participate regularly in its activities. In early 2004, they realised a play on migration called "Partir", which is an adaptation of "L'île déserte", a play written by the Moroccan author Emmanuel Roblès's in 1941. "Partir" was performed in February 2004 at the

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[16] Music changes from happy tunes to a requiem to underline this shift.

[17] Forum Theatre is a participative mode of theatre that, inspired by Augusto Boals "theatre of the oppressed", actively involves the spectators in the performance.

> Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor in Dakar. It tells the story of a couple, who lives on a small island and whose whole life centres on the idea to leave. They put money aside for 30 years, sold everything they possessed and are at about to undertake their last administrative formalities to leave. However, emigration is restricted: There is only one boat per month that takes 10 passengers and arbitrary administrative formalities are intended to prevent the inhabitants from leaving the island. The couple goes through the official channels by seeing four civil servants, one after the other, one sending them back to the other, and so on and so forth. In the end, they realise that they will not be able to leave.

"Partir" conceives both the starting point and the aim of representation(s) and the imagination as entirely flexible. On the one hand, the author asks: What makes people really leave? Is it poverty? What makes them believe that they can only succeed by leaving? What makes them believe that success is only found with the white people? (Interview, Dakar, 27.04.2004). To this purpose, he introduced a song by Youssou N'Dour called "Dem" (Leaving) (1994) in the play, which points exactly to theses questions:

Dem dem	Leaving	Partir
Dem fan?	Leaving for where?	Partir pour aller où?
Dem ndax lan?	Leaving for what?	Partir pour quoi?

("Dem", Youssou N'Dour, 1994)

On the other hand, he takes into account both risks **and** possibilities of migration. This implies that success is not granted and that things "can be worse elsewhere" (Interview, Dakar, 27.04.2004) but also that people can indeed succeed in Western countries. For this reason, one was not allowed to stop them, as one had not the right to intervene in someone's future that no one could predict (Interview, 27.04.2004). Consequently, the play does not explicitly denounce any fact or situation, but aims at raising awareness on potential pitfalls of migration.

Here death comes into play. The title, "Partir", refers to a Wolof saying that alludes to death by joking: "'Ceux qui sont partis ne sont pas encore revenus; mais toi, tu pars !'" (Interview, Dakar, 27.04.2004). However, death is neither primarily understood in a literal sense nor as sacrifice. Rather it

stands for suffering in general that exists everywhere, although it may differ from one place to another. This leads the director to the more philosophical reflection that there always remains a deficiency. "Parce que souvent, il y a un manque ; souvent le manque, c'est l'individu lui même" (Interview, Dakar, 27.04.2004). Correspondingly, in the play, the civil servants state:

> "N°4 … Pourquoi cette rage d'aller ailleurs? Ils sont tous pareils! Ils croient tous que changer de place suffit à tout changer! Ce que vous voudriez, c'est sortir de vous-même!" … "N°3. – Vous étouffez, vous étouffez … Mais qu'est-ce que vous espérez trouver ailleurs ? Jérôme, dans un cri. – Moi!" (Roblès 1986: 306, 309).

Therefore, in "Partir", it is far less external factors like difficult economic, social or political conditions which make people leave than an inner malaise and search for oneself.[18]

Thus, the play takes sides. At the same time, imagination is conceived of as something "flexible" that can take different directions and meanings (Cassirer 2002: 232). The open message of the play becomes clear at the very end when, by means of contrasting tragedy with comedy, the actors give the public its cue: The couple realises that it will never leave. Instead of being disappointed, the man suddenly cheers up, starts to kick its heavy suitcases like balls, and passes them to the public.

Hence, "Sunugaal", "Le clan du destin" and "Partir" represent different ways of how artists take up new representation(s) of migration and success and their (re)creations, by dealing with the theme of death, reveal different ways of how representation(s) relate to reality. Awadi and The Gueules Tapées paint a rather dark picture and conceive of actuality and of the outcome of migration as rather closed, mutually exclusive, though causally linked entities that do not leave much space for imagination. They denounce both the actual situation and the consequences of migration and suggest that youth should stay and join efforts to rebuild the country (Interview with the director of the Gueules Tapées, Dakar 14.09.2005).

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[18] This allows for inverting perspectives and taking into account that Europeans come to Africa in search for something they cannot find at their place (Interview with the director of Kocc Barma, Dakar, 27.04.2004). A Senegalese filmmaker complained about the fact that the current debate on migration overlooked this perspective (Interview, Dakar, 15.09.2005).

In "Partir", neither actuality nor migration is entirely negative. Representation(s) and reality relate to each other in a very flexible way. Migration entails risks – death and suffering included – but also can lead to a better future. Also, migration is not necessarily conceived of as a consequence of political, social or economic difficulties but as a search of humans for themselves. Consequently, no definite prescriptions can be made. The play wants to raise awareness of the risks of migration but leaves it up to everyone to take one's decision. Accordingly, it is up to the public to take the ball and to make up its mind, based on information that may be contradictory.

Disillusion with politics and civic commitment

These different ways of how cultural productions consider the relations of reality and representation(s) allow for an understanding of how they can become effective in politics. With respect to Senegalese politics and society, they demonstrate not only how representation(s) and cultural productions jointly can lead to mobilisation and political change but also how ambiguities between representation(s) and practices work in politics.

Generally speaking, major shifts in representation(s) of success and migration coincide with changes in Senegalese politics over the past ten years: In the early 1990s, the *bul faale* movement was very popular among Senegalese youth, expressing their desire of emancipation, questioning an elite-centred model of success and developing new ways to succeed that relied on hard work and individual efforts accessible to everyone. In this climate of social and political change and individual emancipation, Senegalese rap played a role in the mobilisation of youth to register for voting in the 2000 presidential elections and thus to play their part in political change.

Secondly, deception and disillusion followed the enthusiasm of the 2000 elections as the reforms undertaken by the government of Abdoulaye Wade focussed on prestigious constructions and foreign policy (people also name him "G9" to hint at his international ambitions), leaving the daily economic and social conditions of most Senegalese unchanged. At the same time, migration constantly increased and even became an "obsession" as the desire to leave the country is now very widespread. A second major change in representation(s) of success took place, challenging both the "myth of the

intellectual" and the focus on individual effort and hard work of the *bul faale* movement. Success now seems able to be reached very quickly by skipping the phase of effort and learning. In this perspective, migration appears as the ideal solution.

However, on the one hand, the connection between a difficult economic, social and political situation and taking high risks to leave the country is less automatic than "Sunugaal" and the frequency of the argument suggest. Even if the majority of the Senegalese express the wish to leave, only few of them actually will do so, mainly because of the high costs of the visa and the trip. The majority of those who leave for Europe purchase a faked visa and rely on the help of friends and relatives.

What is more, despite the widespread disappointment following the election of Abdoulaye Wade, he was comfortably re-elected for a second mandate in the first round of the presidential elections in February 2007. Among the factors, which explain the re-election of Wade,[19] is his election "by default". Voting for Wade did not necessarily mean to support him. People voted for him because of "lack of anything better", because "we had no choice" but also to give him a second chance (McIlvaine et al. 2007: episode 3 and 4). Hence, disapproval coexists with acceptance (cf. Balandier 1995: 49; Martin 2000a: 177) – including explicit contestation as the rather violent riots of street vendors in December 2007 indicate. What is at stake here is the relation between explicit contestation and disillusion with politics. There is a fine line between acceptance and disapproval, between disillusion and the potential for explicit contestation.[20]

However, despite disillusion and disappointment prevailing over the past few years, people are highly committed to civil rights and duties and consider themselves as Senegalese citizens. On the one hand, they expect the government to work. As a taxi driver claimed, "le gouvernement ne fait rien. Ils font pas leur travail… Ils s'intéressent qu'à prendre l'argent pour eux. Ils vont bouffer l'argent, mais ils font rien pour le pays. Nous sommes des citoyens sénégalais ! On veut des choses pour le pays !" (Conversation, Dakar, 01.03.2004). On the other hand, political participation is high. In

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[19] On the pre- and post-election period, see e.g. Dahou (2004), Diop (2006), Magrin (2007).

[20] A BBC correspondent in Dakar referred to the situation in Senegal as "stable but fragile" (McIlvaine et al. 2007: episode 4). A representative of a German foundation expressed a similar point of view (Interview, Dakar, 17.02.2004).

2007, participation in the elections attained 70,6% the highest score in the history of Senegal.[21] As one of the members of the rap group Sen Kumpë makes clear: "Why vote? To fulfil our duty as citizens. Because we are citizens. We are Senegalese… Us, we are artists. There are things we say all the time regarding politics. Because the country interests us. It is Senegal. We love it. We want the country to move forward" (McIlvaine et al. 2007: episode 3). In the same line of argument, rappers states that it is now time for Senegal youth to create their own opposition parties and that one has "to get into the system in order to fight the system" (member of the Wagëblë group and Jojo (Yatfu), McIlvaine et al. 2007: episodes 1 and 6).

These developments point to an imagination where, as in the sentence "I know well but all the same", confronted with persisting political and social injustices, people had to give up large parts of the hopes that the election of Wade had raised. However, they start again from this clash between reality and imagination to transform the latter, to give it a new direction and meaning, that is to say a high commitment to the country's future by relying on the means of the system.

Thus, on the one hand, people took the ball. On the other hand, they passed the ball to Abdoulaye Wade. As a rapper explained, people gave him a second chance. Wade understood that people were disappointed. Therefore, he had to go to work now. Depending on the outcome, things will either go better – or worse. In this case, "we won't wait till the end of the term" (McIlvaine et al. 2007: episode 3). Hence, Senegalese society currently embraces several ambiguities; namely of disapproval and acceptance, of explicit contestation and disillusion, of disillusion and strong civic commitment, of pragmatic activity and the idea of skipping a step.

The concept of representation(s) gives insight in how these simultaneities work and how they can function as the effective link between cultural productions and politics. Cultural production takes up new representation(s) of migration and success, places them in a wider context, and elaborates on them further. On the one hand, explicit messages and

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[21] Participation in the parliamentary elections in June 2007 was low (34,75%), rather high, both in the presidential elections in 2000 (62%) and the parliamentary elections in 2001 (67,4%). In the 1993 elections participation turned around 50% (51% in the presidential elections in February and 40,98% in the parliamentary elections in may). The number of registered voters increased significantly from 2000 on.

direct relations between a deteriorating economic and political situation, migration, and death can lead to mobilisation and political protest. On the other hand, to conceive of representation(s) as a movement that follows different directions, leaving the point of departure and the aim entirely flexible by considering a process of transformation of abandoning and at the same time preserving specific representation(s), allows for an understanding of how ambiguities can hold together and lead to the coexistence of seemingly contradictory elements.

Résumée

Au Sénégal, de nouvelles représentations de la réussite et de la migration ont émergé qui contrastent avec des représentations antérieures, notamment avec le "mythe de l'intellectuel" et la réussite par le travail et l'effort du mouvement *bul faale* des années 1990. Cet article montre en quoi ces nouvelles représentations et imaginaires de la réussite consistent et comment elles sont reprises et développées par des productions culturelles, notamment le rap et le théâtre. L'article propose plus largement une relecture des relations entre productions culturelles et politique en insistant sur des concepts clairement définis de représentation(s) et de l'imaginaire.

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