Reclaiming Our Subjugated Truths—Using Hip Hop as a Form of Decolonizing Public Pedagogy: The Case of Didier Awadi
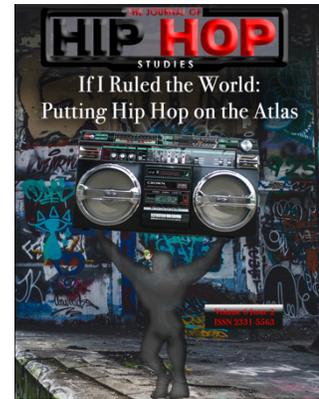
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Abstract

This paper explores how Senegalese Hip Hop pioneer, Didier Awadi, uses Hip Hop as a form of decolonizing public pedagogy that renders the contributions of Pan-African leaders *visible* to Africa and the world, contributions that are often omitted and vilified by mainstream history. I argue that Awadi's work provides a strategy for *reclaiming* oral literature, particularly *storytelling*, as a legitimate way of knowing, teaching and learning history. In his album *Présidents d'Afrique,* Didier Awadi uses rap and traditional African music to *retell* the story of our resistant past through an African frame of reference. The data is comprised of (1) a one-on-one interview with Didier Awadi and (2) one song of *Présidents d'Afrique* that best exemplifies how his storytelling narrates notions of African histories often erased in Eurocentric history. The data is analyzed using Ruth Reviere's five Afrocentric research criteria: "*ukweli* (truth), *ujamaa* (community), *kujitoa* (commitment), *uhaki* (justice), and *utulivu* (harmony)" to determine whether Didier Awadi's stories are grounded in African knowledge. [1]

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[1] Ruth Reviere, "Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology," *Journal of Black Studies* 31, no. 6 (2001): 709-728.

Introduction

In 2010, to mark fifty years of African independence, Didier Awadi, a world-renowned Senegalese rapper, political activist and producer, released his much-anticipated album *Présidents d'Afrique*. Awadi dedicated this five-year project to the "founding fathers of black consciousness" and the great Pan-African advocates who fought for the creation of a new, respected and united Africa.[2] Awadi created a timeless educational project by weaving together the speeches of leaders like Thomas Sankara, Patrice Lumumba, Cheikh Anta Diop, Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Norbert Zongo, while rapping in collaboration with other conscious African and African American artists. The end result is a pedagogical project and musical piece of art that educates, inspires and promotes African knowledge and African history through storytelling. This paper focuses on unveiling subjugated African histories and truths that have been suppressed and ignored by Eurocentric and colonial forces. I am therefore using the *voices* of African-descended people to contribute to the inclusion of Indigenous, especially African, knowledges in the recounting of human history.

The objective of this paper is to examine how Hip Hop music has been used in Senegal by Didier Awadi to publicly educate African youth about African histories and current sociopolitical realities and to encourage political activism. I examine how *Présidents d'Afrique* seeks to reveal the "missing chapters" of Africa's resistant past with the goal of redressing the narrative that portrays Africa as weak, backwards, and lacking history.[3] Awadi challenges and resists selective Eurocentric remembering of historical events, presented to students in Senegalese formal schools as history.

Awadi's revolutionary work transforms our understanding of Hip Hop and the ways in which Hip Hop artists utilize their platform to educate those left out of or conditioned by formal schooling. Awadi's work highlights African histories that have been omitted by the formal education system in Senegal and other parts of Africa as a result of colonialism and neocolonialism. In light of his work, this paper seeks to answer the following question: What are the ways in which Awadi is able to further our understanding of Hip Hop pedagogical approaches and elucidate empowering African histories? I argue that Awadi seeks to reveal, reclaim, and restore subjugated African knowledges and histories through *Présidents d'Afrique*, which privileges oral literature.

To answer this research question, I first introduce and define Pan-Africanism, the perspective from which I am approaching this research. More than an ideology, Pan-Africanism is a way of seeing and understanding the world that resists the Eurocentric

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[2] Didier Awadi, *Présidents d'Afrique* (France Sony/ATV Music Publishing, 2010), CD. Excerpts can be heard on *SoundCloud* as part of the documentary *United States of Afria* (directed by Yanick Létourneau, 2012) at https://soundcloud.com/united-states-of-africa/the-roots-didier-awadi-pr.

[3] Bagele Chilisa, *Indigenous Research Methodologies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2011), 156.

perspective that controls mainstream academia. As a result, throughout my paper I often speak of *Africa*, understood as the embodiment of African unity that rejects the artificial borders created by colonial powers. Second, I examine the existing scholarship on the intrinsic relationship between music and political activism, and more precisely, Hip Hop music and political activism. Following that, I present a brief history of the Hip Hop movement in Senegal and introduce Didier Awadi. Fourth, I explain how *storytelling* informs the actions I take to investigate the research and I position Didier Awadi as a *storyteller*. I then provide the data sources of this research and explain how I analyze the findings using Ruth Reviere's five research criteria, *ukweli* (truth), *ujamaa* (community), *kujitoa* (commitment), *uhaki* (justice), and *utulivu* (harmony).[4] Lastly, I present my findings and argue that the intersection of storytelling and public pedagogy can advance global Hip Hop scholarship. This project seeks to contribute to African pedagogy and places African ways of knowing and doing at the center of education. This means learning and teaching from African traditions, including oral literature, that have been used to educate Africans for centuries.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that grounds this paper is Pan-Africanism, an ideology and movement that seeks to unify and uplift Africans and people of African descent by recognizing their shared experiences of oppression, dispossession, discrimination and racism over centuries. Pan-Africanism was born, in action and social thought, as a reaction to slavery, Western colonialism, and the continuous mistreatment of Black and Brown people throughout the world. There is a consensus among scholars and theorists that Pan-Africanism can be broadly defined as "the acceptance of oneness of all African people and a commitment for the betterment of all people of African descent."[5] It is from this perspective that I am approaching this study.

I examine Awadi's work from a Pan-African lens rather than the internalized European one that has colonized mainstream academia for centuries. This paper resists academic colonization and the Eurocentric perspective that limits the way we view and understand the world. As a result, I use Pan-African scholars and sources that highlight African-descended people's voices and perspectives to analyze Awadi's work. I look at the way the world and African-descended people in the world are positioned, and I seek to value and elevate their perspective by using a Pan-African perspective. Didier Awadi

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[4] Reviere, "Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology," 709–728.

[5] W. Ofuatey-Kodjoe, *Pan-Africanism: New Directions in Strategy* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 368.

identifies himself as a Pan-Africanist and a *Sankarist⁶* and his music transcends the hopes, actions, and ideas of Pan-Africanism. [7]

Africa is the cradle of humanity and has some of the world's richest histories. According to Cheikh Anta Diop, a leading anthropologist and Egyptologist, humankind was born in Africa on the latitude of Kenya, in the region that comprises Kenya, Ethiopia, and Tanzania, and extends all the way down to South Africa. [8] He states: "It is clear that any humanity that had its birth in that sub-equatorial region could not have survived without pigmentation. Nature doesn't do anything by chance and any humanity born in that region was given melanin to protect its skin."[9] That is the reason why we can assert that the first human being had to be black. This historical fact disturbs the Eurocentric narrative that places European-descended people at the center of history. Diop argues that African history has been falsified and erased by dominant history, a crime perpetrated by Western historians for hundreds of years to continue exploiting the continent, its resources, its soil, and its people to maintain white supremacy and the status quo.[10]

The education system in Senegal has been Europeanized as a result of colonialism. In Senegal, "officials consistently depended on schools to spread the French language and affinity for France among the populace and to facilitate and justify colonial rule."[11] As a result, postcolonial Senegalese schools do not teach about African histories, but focus on the Eurocentric understanding and construction of history established by their Western colonizers. This phenomenon is not confined to Senegal but is present in the rest of formerly colonized Africa and the African diaspora. According to Shizha, "In many African schools, European education continues to distort, misappropriate, and misrepresent African realities, their lives, experiences, and thoughts."[12] In Africa, colonial schooling continues to silence and alienate Indigenous voices and realities. This racist education system perpetuates psychological colonization by discrediting and disengaging African cultures, knowledges, histories and languages.[13] Shizha argues, "the

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[6] People who politically align with the Pan-Africanist vision, work, and party of former president Thomas Sankara.

[7] Awadi, *Présidents d'Afrique*; Didier Awadi, *Ma Révolution* (Studio Sankara, 2012), CD; *The United States of Africa*, DVD, directed by Yanick Létourneau (Peripheria Productions & National Film Board of Canada, 2012).

[8] Cheikh Anta Diop, "Origine de L'Humanité et Phenotype des Ancients Egyptiens," YouTube video, 58:38, posted by "Nzwamba," April 29, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lz3O--TGQ9g.

[9] Diop, "Origine de l'humanité."

[10] Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1974).

[11] Kelly M. Duke Bryant, *Education as Politics: Colonial Schooling and Political Debate in Senegal, 1850s-1914* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 19.

[12] Edward Shiza, "Reclaiming Our Memories: The Education Dilemma in Postcolonial African School Curricula," in *Issues in African Education: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Ali A. Abdi and Ailie Cleghorn (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 71.

[13] Shiza, "Reclaiming Our Memories," 71.

aim of colonial education was to leave those who were colonized with a lack of identity and a limited sense of their past."[14] The Eurocentric understanding of what *history* is has dominated academia and formal schooling in Africa, and through this domination, there was no other history.

Africa according to Eurocentric colonial notions was not seen as having history but comprising only a state of nature. According to German Philosopher G.W.F Hegel: "At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit."[15] Many scholars, like Hegel, proclaimed that Africa had no history. Fuglestad states,

> Back in the early 1960s the distinguished Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper of Oxford University proclaimed, as every Africanist probably knows, that at least precolonial Black Africa had no history. He must have meant what he said, for he repeated his contention in 1969 by putting the label "unhistoric" on the African continent.[16]

Although Africa was considered "unhistoric," Egypt was singled out by European historians and treated as its own entity, completely separated from the African continent. Hegel notes, "Egypt; which was adapted to become a mighty centre of independent civilization, and therefore is as isolated and singular in Africa as Africa itself appears in relation to the other parts of the world."[17] Egyptian civilization, which has captured the attention of scholars because of their monumental architectures, hieroglyphs, religion, social, and political order, is the only part of African history mentioned in mainstream education. It is imperative to recognize, however, that "scholars have attempted to negate the ancient Egyptians' African identity by stating either that race does not exist or that the Egyptians are a race of their own."[18] Scholars claiming that race does not exist are in fact correct, as *race* is a social construct. Race, however, has played a pivotal role in hierarchically classifying people and in giving authority to the dominant colonizer to define and legitimize historical knowledge.

Denying the power of *race* is ignoring the reality of African descended peoples' oppression. According to Diop: "The birth of Egyptology was thus marked by the need to destroy the memory of a Negro Egypt at all cost."[19] Scholars have actively sought to separate Egyptian civilization from other African civilizations identified as Black, regardless of the fact that Egypt is part of the African continent. Citing Immanuel Wallerstein, Diop argues that "if the ancient Egyptians were Negroes, then European

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[14] Shiza, "Reclaiming Our Memories," 71.

[15] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Willey Book Company, 1900), 99.

[16] Finn Fuglestad, "The Trevor-Roper Trap of the Imperialism of History: An Essay," *History in Africa* 19 (1992): 309.

[17] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 92.

[18] Troy D. Allen, "Cheikh Anta Diop's Two Cradle Theory: Revisited," *Journal of Black Studies* 38 (2008): 813.

[19] Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization*, 51.

civilization is but a derivation of African achievement."[20] In other words, Africans are at the center of human civilization and its development, and this truth contradicts the dominant narrative that accredits Western, European descendants for almost the entire world's historical, scientific, economic, and sociopolitical discoveries. Admitting that a Black Egyptian civilization laid the foundation for world civilization disturbs the Western narrative that places peoples of European descent at the heart of history.

Music and Political Activism: An Intrinsic Relationship

History reveals that music has played a powerful role in political activism. According to Robert J. Branham and Stephen J. Hartnett, "words and melody and harmony and rhythm merge to form shimmering patterns of sound that float across the air, carrying political words that 'would be death to speak' in the form of musical messages."[21] For centuries, political activists have created and utilized music to express their political situations with the goal of, directly or indirectly, contributing to social justice. A. O. Scott states, "From 'The Marseillaise' to 'We Shall Overcome,' there has probably never been a revolution that did not use songs to give voice to its aspirations or rally the morale of its adherents."[22] Music has been intrinsically linked to protest movements seeking to end systems of oppression, including but not limited to slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and segregation.[23] Communities and individuals across the world

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[20] Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization*, p. iii.

[21] Robert J. Branham and Stephen J. Hartnett, *Sweet Freedom's Song: "My Country 'tis of Thee" and Democracy in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

[22] A. O. Scott, "Film Review: The Sounds and Rhythms that Helped Bring Down Apartheid: *Amandla! A Revolution in Four Part Harmony,*" *New York Times*, accessed November 5, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/19/movies/film-review-the-sounds-andrhythms-that-helped-bring-down-apartheid.html.

[23] Luqman M. Abdullah, "The Sounds of Liberation: Resistance, Cultural Retention, and Progressive Traditions for Social Justice in African American Music" (MA Thesis, Cornell University, 2009); Robert Darden, *Nothing but Love in God's Water: Black Sacred Music from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2014); Serge R. Denisoff, *Sing a Song of Social Significance* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1983); Ethan Goffman, "From the Blues to Hip Hop: How African American Music Changed U.S. Culture and Moved the World," *ProQuest*, accessed November 5, 2015, http://www.laguitarra-blog.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/from-the-blues-to-hip-hop.pdf; Anne-Marie Gray, "Liberation Songs Sung by Black South Africans During the 20th Century," *International Journal of Music Education* 33 (1999): 30-37; *Amandla! A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony,* directed by Lee Hirsch, Desireé Markgraaff, Sherry Simpson Dean, et al, Santa Monica, CA: Artisan Home Entertainment, 2003, Documentary Film; Andra le Roux-Kemp, "Struggle Music: South African Politics in Song," *Law and Humanities* 8 (2014): 247–268; Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Kesha M. Morant, "Language in Action: Funk Music as the Critical Voice of the Postcivil Rights Movement Counterculture," *Journal of Black Studies* 42 (2011): 71-82; Troy Murphy, "Rhetorical Invention and the Transformation of 'We Shall Overcome,'" *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication* 4 (2003): 1-8; Mary Turck, *Freedom Song: Young Voices and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009).

have utilized music as an agent for change and as a tool for resistance and liberation, particularly people of African descent.[24]

Many scholars argue that music has been a vital part of African life. [25] According to Celestine C. Mbaegbu: "Various African writers have highlighted this aspect of the cultural life of the Africans by saying that music has rooted itself in African culture so much so that it has become part and parcel of their everyday life."[26] Africans have used music as a form of communication, education, and knowledge transmission that privileges African oral traditions. Lara Allen asserts that in Africa, "communication remains aural and oral as opposed to specular and written," as in the Western world.[27] For centuries, Africans have used oral traditions to educate their children and make sense of the world. According to scholar Patience Elabor-Idemudia, "[o]ral forms of knowledge, such as ritualistic chants, riddles, songs, folktales, and parables, not only articulate a distinct cultural identity but also give voice to a range of cultural, social and political, aesthetic, and linguistic systems—long muted by centuries of colonialism and cultural imperialism."[28] Imperialism imposed Western values and epistemology in education and all aspects of African life, legitimizing the authority of written text over oral literature. As a result, African cultures and oral traditions, considered backward and "primitive," were vilified and degraded with the goal of colonizing, not only African lands, but also African minds.

An increasing number of scholars are researching the important role of popular music as a medium for thinking through politics in Africa. [29] Allen states, "[m]usic

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[24] Abdullah, "The Sounds of Liberation;" Lara Allen, "Music and Politics in Africa," *Social Dynamics* 30 (2004): 1-19; Robert Darden, *Nothing but Love in God's Water: Black Sacred Music from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2014); Gray, "Liberation songs sung by black South Africans;" Michael S. Hanson, "People Get Ready: Race, Place and Political Identity in Post-Civil Rights Black Popular Music, 1965–1975" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2002); Morant, "Language in Action."

[25] Abdullah, "The Sounds of Liberation;" Allen, "Music and Politics in Africa"; Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (London: Penguin, 1978); Darden, *Nothing but Love in God's Water*; Celestine C. Mbaegbu, "The Effective Power of Music in Africa," *Journal of Philosophy* 5 (2015): 176–183; Turck, *Freedom Song*.

[26] Mbaegbu, "The Effective Power of Music in Africa," 177.

[27] Allen, "Music and Politics in Africa," 2.

[28] Patience Elabor-Idemudia, "Participatory Research: A Tool in the Production of Knowledge in Development Discourse," in *Feminist Post-Development Thought: Rethinking Modernity, Postcolonialism, and Representation*, ed. Kriemild Saunders (London: Zed Books, 2002), 103.

[29] Allen, "Music and Politics in Africa;" Eric Charry S., *African Expressive Cultures: Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012); Graeme Counsel, "Popular Music and Politics in Sékou Touré's Guinea," *Australian Review of African Studies* 26 (2004): 26-42; *African Underground: Hip Hop in Senegal*, DVD, directed by Magee McIlvaine, Chris Moore, Ben Herson, and Howard Wolpe (New York: Nomadic Wax/Sol Production, 2008); Anne Schumann, "Popular Music and Political Change in Côte d'Ivoire: The Divergent Dynamics of *zouglou* and Reggae," *Journal of African Media Studies* 1 (2009): 117–133, accessed November 5, 2015, doi: 10.1386/jams.1.1.117/1; Christopher A. Waterman, *Jùjú: A Social History and Ethnography of an African Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

functions as a trenchant political site in Africa because it is the most widely appreciated art form on the continent."[30] In many African countries, people engage with their political circumstances through music. Musicians creating political music use everyday life experiences to challenge dominant ideologies and power structures. Mbaegbu states, "[o]ften times African music re-echoes the state of injustice done to any oppressed section of the Africans, either by the white man or by some wretched and dictatorial African leaders."[31] Hip Hop music in Africa is no exception.

Hip Hop has become a political force that emerged as a tool of *resistance* to the status quo and to authority.[32] According to Dr. Todd Boyd, also known as Notorious PhD, "[h]ip-hop is inherently political, the language is political. It uses language as a weapon— not a weapon to violate or not a weapon to offend, but a weapon that pushes the envelope that provokes people, makes people think."[33] Hip Hop has become a global phenomenon where groups of marginalized youth have adopted and adapted Hip Hop according to their realities and cultures.[34] According to Marcyliena Morgan and Dionne Bennett, "[a]s hip-hop's cultural beliefs became more widely understood, global hip-hop began to take on a character of its own, reflecting the culture, creativity, and local styles of the youth who embraced and produced it."[35] Like other social and political movements, Hip Hop was propelled by dynamic youth with the goal of provoking societal change.

Hip Hop gives a legitimate space to voices that have often been disregarded, ignored, and omitted. Jeff Chang states, "[a]lthough hip-hop is mainstream in many places today, it is still considered a voice for the oppressed."[36] Young people across the world use Hip Hop as a tool for self-expression in order to question and critique conventional aspects of society while promoting political activism with the goal of transforming and contributing to a better and more just society.[37] Charity Marsh and Sheila Petty argue, "[h]ip-hop continues to be a constructive and contested space in which marginalized young people around the world 'both resist and challenge social ideologies,

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[30] Allen, "Music and Politics in Africa," 1.

[31] Mbaegbu, "The Effective Power of Music in Africa," 181.

[32] Jeff Chang, "It's a Hip Hop World," *Foreign Policy* 163 (2007): 58-65.

[33] Scott Simon, "Hip Hop: Today's Civil Rights Movement?," *NPR*, March 1, 2003, accessed October 2, 2015, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1178621.

[34] Charry, *Hip Hop Africa*; Chang, "It's a Hip Hop World;" Marcyliena Morgan and Dionne Bennett, "Hip-Hop and the Global Imprint of a Black Cultural Form," *Daedalus* 140 (2011): 176–196, accessed September 20, 2015, doi:10.1162/DAED_a_00086; Paul Khalil Saucier, ed., *Native Tongues: The African Hip Hop Reader* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011).

[35] Morgan and Bennett, "Hip-hop and the Global Imprint," 141.

[36] Chang, "It's a Hip-Hop World," 62.

[37] Chang, "It's a Hip-Hop World"; Msia K. Clark, "Hip Hop as Social Commentary in Accra and Dar Es Salaam," *African Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (2012): 23–46; Rosalind Fredericks, "'The Old Man is Dead': Hip Hop and the Arts of Citizenship of Senegalese Youth," *Antipode* 46, no. 1 (2014): 130–148; Charity Marsh and Sheila Petty, "Globalization, Identity, and Youth Resistance: Kenya's Hip Hop Parliament," *MUSICcultures* 38, (2011): 132–143; Craig S. Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* (Boston; Westminster: Beacon Press, 2006).

practices, and structures that have caused and maintained their subordinate position.'"[38] Hip Hop is a form of rejection of colonial structures. While the culture has spread all over the world, Hip Hop has recently become one of the most important musical and cultural movements in Africa.[39]

Hip Hop in Senegal

Hip Hop music surfaced in Senegal in the 1980s with the emergence of Positive Black Soul (PBS), the first African rap group to gain international success, of which Didier Awadi was part. When Hip Hop first appeared in Senegal, it took form with a strong Western and American influence.[40] This changed when many Senegalese Hip Hop artists—including Didier Awadi, Duggy Tee, Xuman & Pee Froiss, Ndongo D, Daara J, Djiby Daddy, Bakhaw, Da Brains, P-Blow & Jah, Tigrim-Bi, etc.—realized that they had a responsibility to respect and represent Senegalese and African cultures by addressing Senegalese realities and staying away from commercial Hip Hop glorifying gangster life.[41] Rapper Xuman states, "[i]n our culture, we must be conscious, we must think about the future."[42] According to Greg Thomas, "[a]rtists such as Daara J, Fou Malade, and Dakar All-Stars, along with Awadi and Radical, make music that mesmerizes, aesthetically and politically, voicing genius, opposition, and pleasure in black resistance to neocolonial and economic injustice."[43] The authenticity of Senegalese Hip Hop has become measured by the commitment demonstrated to political activism. Furthermore, Hip Hop artists anchor themselves in their African identity by using African traditions, languages, religions, values, and knowledges to, as Didier Awadi states, "express what is deeply in their heart and to fight for noble objectives."[44]

Hip Hop exploded onto the Senegalese music scene in the following decade. In the 1990s, the environment created by unfavorable socio-economic circumstances, unemployment growth, acute economic crisis, political stagnation, and the crisis of the education system, was the perfect climate for the birth of Hip Hop music in Senegal.[45] Hip Hop provided young artists with a platform to passionately express their frustrations and desire for change. As a result, artists soon recognized rapping as a form of expression

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[38] Marsh and Petty, "Globalization, Identity, and Youth Resistance," 135.

[39] Clark, "Hip Hop as Social Commentary," 23.

[40] Magee McIlvaine, Chris Moore, Ben Herson, and Howard Wolpe, dir. *African Underground: Hip Hop in Senegal* (New York: Nomadic Wax/Sol Production, 2008), DVD.

[41] McIlvaine et al., *African Underground*.

[42] Appearing in McIlvaine et al., *African Underground*.

[43] Greg Thomas, "Conclusion: Hip-hop Pan-Africanism," in *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Cultures, Volumes 1–3*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 536.

[44] McIlvaine et al., *African Underground: Hip Hop in Senegal.*

[45] See for instance *100% Galsen: A Hip Hop Documentary Made in Senegal*, directed by the pioneering Sengalese rapper Keyti (Cheikh Sene) and filmed entirely by Senegalese crews. It is part of a transnational African collaborative project called Redefintion: African Hip Hop.

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that could educate people with the goal of creating meaningful change in Senegalese society.[46]

Didier Awadi: A Hip Hop Artist with a Political Message

Didier Awadi was born on August 11, 1969, in Dakar, Senegal. According to Radio France Internationale (RFI), "Didier shared his father's passion for music, but in the early '80s, the young teenager was drawn to a totally different sound: rap."[47] Inspired by American Hip Hop artists, including Grandmaster Flash and Public Enemy, Didier Awadi formed his first Hip Hop group in 1984, Syndicate. It was in 1989, however, that Didier Awadi and his friend Doug E. Tee founded PBS. As the first Hip Hop group in Senegal, PBS struggled to get their new genre of music heard and be respected by elders, who thought they were trying to be American.[48] "When we started to rap in our own language and talk about what was going on in our country" states Awadi, "their visions of what we were doing changed, and people listened, not just the youths, but also the elders."[49] PBS's politically engaged lyrics and beats spoke to the Senegalese population because the group addressed important issues of poverty, corruption, and education, realities experienced by the Senegalese people, especially the youth.

After seven albums and thirteen years of collaboration and music tours, Didier Awadi started his solo career in 2001 with his first album *Parole d'honneur*, without ever officially bringing PBS to an end.[50] Radio France Internationale states, "[r]ight from the start of his career, Awadi used his rap as a vehicle for his protest message, raising his voice in support of the anti-globalization cause."[51] For the fiftieth anniversary of African independence, Awadi released his much anticipated album *Présidents d'Afrique*, which resulted in a documentary entitled *The United States of Africa*, produced by Yanick Létourneau, which facilitated important discussions with organizations like UNESCO concerning the issues of learning and teaching African history.[52]

Présidents d'Afrique repositions important Pan-Africanists, including Nkrumah, Sankara, Malcolm X, Zongo, Mandela, Lumumba, Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta, Diop, Aimé Césaire, and Samora Machel, since they, along with their meaningful messages, have been erased, and some assassinated, from history with the support of Western

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[46] Ania J. M. A. Bassene, "Hip Hop and Politics in Dakar, Senegal," (MA thesis, Howard University, 2013); Charry, *Hip Hop Africa*; Fredericks, "'The Old Man is Dead;'" Elena Oumano, "Words and Deeds: Senegal's PBS Forges African Hip-Hop," *Billboard*, September 4, 1999, 30–31; *100% Galsen: A Hip Hop Documentary Made in Senegal*, directed by Keyti (Cheikh Sene), Senegal: Africanhiphop.com and Optimiste Produktion, 2012, documentary film.

[47] Radio France Internationale (rfi), "Didier Awadi," *RFI Music*, accessed October 19, 2015, http://www.rfimusic.com/artist/rap/didierawadi/biography.

[48] Oumano, *Senegal's PBS*, 30.

[49] Oumano, *Senegal's PBS*, 30.

[50] Radio France Internationale, "Didier Awadi."

[51] Radio France Internationale, "Didier Awadi."

[52] Yanick Létourneau, *The United States of Africa*, 2012.

powers. This repositioning is crucial in reclaiming an African identity and dignity. In *Présidents d'Afrique*, Awadi chooses to include the speeches of diasporic influential leaders, like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. As a Pan-Africanist, Awadi believes that their messages and legacies not only impacted African Americans but also globally influenced African and Afrodiasporic communities. Michael Onyebuchi Eze argues, the "stories and historical events that we memorialize as people of African origins share equal constitutive character worthy of pan-African status insofar as they offer a contemporaneous historical memory for African peoples."[53] Historical events and stories that speak for and to Black and Brown experiences can be powerful for the recognition and the fight of all people of African descent, who share a similar history of dispossession, oppression, and racism.

Storytelling as Methodology

This paper argues that storytelling is a valid form of knowledge that delves into the lived experiences of people to make sense of the world. Storytelling, as part of oral literature, has always been part of African cultures. According to Bagele Chilisa, "[s]tories are central to the lives of the colonized Other. They have been used to collect, deposit, analyze, store, and disseminate information and as instruments of socialization."[54] This conveying of events in words, sounds, and images has created the historical narrative of most oral societies. Jan Vansina states, "[n]o one in oral societies doubts that memories can be faithful repositories which contain the sum total of past human experience and explain the how and why of present conditions."[55] In short, storytelling is history.

Oral literature and storytelling "provide some of the missing chapters on the histories and experiences" of historically oppressed African descended peoples. [56] Vansina observes, however, that members of the hegemonic Euro-Western, "literate societies find it difficult to shed the prejudice of contempt for the spoken word, the counterpart of pride in writing and respect for the written word."[57] Written history, however, has been given the authority to tell the stories of *all* societies through the eyes of the victorious colonizer. Reviere states, "Eurocentrics have continuously assumed the right to tell their own stories and everyone else's—and from a solely one-dimensional perspective."[58] This one-dimensional colonial perspective of history, however, is the one that students learn in formal schooling in Senegal, and in the rest of formerly colonized Africa. Schooling is directly related to the maintenance of written and colonial

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[53] Michael Onyebuchi Eze, "Pan-Africanism and the Politics of History," *History Compass* 11, no. 9 (2013): 678.

[54] Bagele Chilisa, *Indigenous Research Methodologies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), 138.

[55] Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), xi.

[56] Chilisa, *Indigenous Research Methodologies,* 156.

[57] Jan Vansina, "Once Upon a Time: Oral Traditions as History in Africa," *Daedalus* 100, no. 2 (1971): 442.

[58] Reviere, "Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology," 717.

knowledge. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "[w]e have often allowed our 'histories' to be told and have then become outsiders as we heard them being told. Schooling is directly implicated in this process."[59] This essay seeks to privilege *education*, understood as a social and community-based pedagogy, over *schooling*, defined as colonial conditioning. Furthermore, this article legitimizes oral literature as a valid form of knowledge and attempts to tell part of Africa's story through the African eye, mind, and heart.

Didier Awadi as Storyteller

Didier Awadi is a rapper and I am arguing that rapping and singing are forms of storytelling. Being a rapper is a way of telling a story. While some scholars have contested the connection between *griots* and rappers, who have been referred to as *modern griots*, I believe that something needs to be said about the *essence* of *griotism* and rapping—telling stories through music. [60] Chilisa argues, "[s]ongs, dance, and poems are an integral part of the oral literature that communicates historical information on events, public experience, and practice, especially experiences of the formerly colonized."[61] Awadi's songs should not be merely looked at as musical pieces, but a form of storytelling that carries important messages of history and hope.

Awadi's music provides some of the missing chapters of the history of the colonized African. According to Chilisa, "[t]here are countless missing chapters on what the world needs to know about the postcolonial and indigenous people's histories and their resistance to colonizing ideologies of the former colonizers."[62] Awadi's songs share the stories of Africans who resisted colonial actions and principles, a chapter of history that has been erased by the dominant historical narrative.

Data and Analysis

I had the honor and privilege of conducting a face-to-face interview with Didier Awadi. The interview was audio-recorded and conducted in French, as Awadi grew up speaking French, the national and colonial language of Senegal. My data sources are:

a) One-on-one interview with Didier Awadi; and

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[59] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books, 1999), 33.

[60] A *Griot*, also known as *Jeli, Jali* or *Gewel*, is a hereditary West African poet, storyteller, and historian who preserves African oral history through music. For discussion of a continuity between *griot* tradition and contemporary rap, see Damon Sajnani, "Troubling the Trope of 'Rapper as Modern Griot,'" *Journal of Pan African Studies* 6, no. 3 (2013): 156–180; and Patricia Tang, "The Rapper as Modern Griot: Reclaiming Ancient Traditions," in *African Expressive Cultures: Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World*, ed. Eric Charry (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012) 79–91.

[61] Chilisa, *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, 145.

[62] Chilisa, *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, 146.

b) One track of *Présidents d'Afrique*, namely, "Oser inventer l'avenir."

I chose this specific track because it best exemplifies how Awadi's storytelling narrates notions of African histories ignored in Eurocentric and dominant notions of history. Furthermore, this track demonstrates how Awadi connects the past to the present to create *history* that aligns with African notions of history.

I evaluate the findings of my research by using Reviere's five research criteria, which are based on the African principles of *Ma'at* and *Nommo*.[63] In ancient Egyptian religion, *Ma'at* was "the personification of truth and the cosmic order."[64] *Nommo* means "the productive word"[65] and "describes the creation of knowledge as a vehicle for improvement in human relations."[66] Molefi Kete Asante uses and expands on these notions to demonstrate the ways in which African concepts can inform the foundation of knowledge.[67] While using Reviere's five research criteria, I was informed by a professor at the University of British Columbia, a Kiswahili native speaker, that some terms were incorrectly translated. According to the *Swahili-English Dictionary* and Donovan McGrath and Lutz Marten's course for beginners in Swahili, the definitions of the principles *utulivu* and *uhaki* have been reversed and mistranslated.[68] As a result, I use the definitions provided by the *Swahili-English Dictionary*.[69] The five Afrocentric criteria are

- Ukweli: defined as the groundedness of research and the concept of truth. According to Chilisa, *ukweli* "requires researchers to establish whether the conclusions reached are representative of only their own position or whether they represent a consensus of the researched and other opinions."[70]
- Ujamaa: calls for the recognition and maintenance of the community.[71]
- Kujitoa: emphasizes the need for the researcher to recognize how "knowledge is structured and used over the need for dispassion and objectivity."[72]
- Utulivu: "requires a research procedure that is fair to all participants."[73]

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[63] Reviere, "Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology."

[64] Wendy Doniger, "Ma'at," in *The Britannica Encyclopedia of World Religions* (Singapore: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2006), 674.

[65] Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 88.

[66] Reviere, "Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology," 711.

[67] Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea.*

[68] Cf. Charles W. Rechenbach, *Swahili-English Dictionary* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of American Press, 1968); and Donovan McGrath and Lutz Marten, *Colloquial Swahili: The Complete Course for Beginners* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003).

[69] Rechenbach, *Swahili-English Dictionary.*

[70] Chilisa, *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, 191.

[71] Reviere, "Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology," 719.

[72] Reviere, "Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology," 716.

[73] Reviere, "Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology," 720.

- Uhaki: the concept of justice required for legitimate research.[74]

These meaningful criteria of research evaluation serve as counterpoints to the Eurocentric notions of objectivity, validity, and reliability that ground the authenticity of analysis within the Afrocentric epistemic framework. I will examine both the stories told in Awadi's songs—by analyzing the themes, lyrics, and emotions awakened through the combination of oral literature, rap, and music—and his one-on-one interview.

In order to produce a *truthful* paper that unveils the injustices experienced by African communities, I need to explicitly state that my background, values, perspectives, race, lived experiences, and knowledge affect the way I approach the data and the outcome of this research paper. I resonate with Reviere when she states, "as a Black academic, I do have a tremendous personal stake in the manner in which Black intelligence is theorized."[75] I have the responsibility to include the personal as it affects every aspect of my research, including the analysis process.

Findings

One-on-One Interview

Didier Awadi grew up in a Pan-African environment, with his Beninese father and Cape-Verdean mother. Due to his diverse background, Awadi was naturally drawn to students coming from different francophone West African countries. As a result, he befriended students of different African nationalities who became his *grands frères*.[76] Discussions with his *grands frères*, who identified as anarchists, communists, and refugees, further awakened his Pan-African consciousness. With their guidance, Awadi started reading the works of Diop, Amadou Hampâté Bâ, Franz Fanon, and others. In his senior year of high school, Awadi had an English teacher who introduced him to the speeches of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, which broadened his horizon of Pan-African ideas. Awadi expresses that all these Pan-African leaders, from Sankara to Diop to Senghor to Malcolm X, speak to the same *emotions* felt by all people of African descent across the world, forging a sense of African unity. These deep *feelings* of hurt and hope are present because, as Senghor stated, they are ingrained in the memory of our genes and connect us to one another and to our ancestors, who lived through slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism.

Awadi's personal journey transformed him into a politically engaged artist. Awadi claims, "I did not *choose* to be a politically engaged artist, no. I became one through my

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[74] Reviere, "Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology," 717.

[75] Reviere, "Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology," 714.

[76] *Grands frères* is French for *big brothers*.

personal journey."[77] Awadi's process of growth allowed him to define his Pan-African and political values and beliefs more clearly. This consequential change was naturally reflected in his music, forging his political identity as an artist. Awadi states, "[w]hat you're thinking and feeling is reflected when you make music."[78] The music one produces reflects what is in one's mind and heart, and as a result, Awadi's music can only be conscious and politically charged considering that is who he is as an African citizen and a human being.

By reading, listening to his elders, and learning from Pan-African leaders, Awadi educated himself about Africa's resistant history and wanted to share this knowledge with African youth not only in Africa but across the world. One person who truly influenced Awadi on his personal and musical journey is the "Upright Man" of Burkina Faso, Thomas Sankara. Even though Awadi was only a teenager when Sankara became the president of Burkina Faso, Awadi witnessed how a man changed a nation with his Pan-African beliefs and practices. While Awadi does not want to idealize an individual man, for him, Sankara embodies the upright man and the Pan-African ideal.[79]

When Sankara became president, he continued to live a simple life while he sought to transform his country. His policies revitalized the Burkinabe economy and Burkina Faso was able to achieve self-sufficiency in just four years. At the same time, Sankara lived as the poorest president in solidarity with his people. He intelligently and passionately spoke with African pride to the international community against colonialism and neocolonialism. In addition to dramatically improving health care, Sankara also reinserted African values and promoted women's rights and roles in society. Knowing this about Sankara, one can only recognize the greatness of this man who believed in his country and most importantly who believed in Africa. Awadi expresses, "[w]hen you see the projects he created and the *mindset* he created among his people, you tell yourself that it [the Pan-African ideal] is possible."[80] Thomas Sankara holds a particular place in *Présidents d'Afrique*, which can be witnessed by the three songs Awadi has dedicated to him.

Sankara called for the self-determination of Africa, a belief reflected in *Présidents d'Afrique*. In my interview with Awadi, he explained that the purpose of the album was educational and pedagogical: "*Présidents d'Afrique* is a pedagogical project with the objective to educate."[81] As a student enrolled in formal education in Senegal, Awadi "never" learned about African history and African (r)evolutionary leaders. [82] Awadi states, "[i]n fact this is the reason why we created the album *Présidents d'Afrique*, because

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[77] Didier Awadi, (rapper, producer and political activist), in discussion with Joanna Da Sylva, August 6, 2015.

[78] Awadi, in discussion with Joanna Da Sylva.

[79] Awadi, in discussion with Joanna Da Sylva.

[80] Awadi, in discussion with Joanna Da Sylva.

[81] Awadi, in discussion with Joanna Da Sylva.

[82] Awadi, in discussion with Joanna Da Sylva.

there was nothing about African history."[83] While students in Senegal learn about Charlemagne, Bismarck, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, WWII, etc. they do not learn anything about their own history and their own revolutions. Awadi states, "[w]ho cares about the Russian revolution, [in Africa] we have our own revolutions that continue to *affect* us."[84] He believes that, without knowing one's history, one cannot develop and grow. Awadi's motivation behind *Présidents d'Afrique* is therefore to educate the youth about African histories understood, expressed, written, and told by Africans, with the goal of contributing to Africa's transformation.

Présidents d'Afrique is founded on the concept of *uhaki*, or justice. *Présidents d'Afrique* **is** *uhaki*, as it seeks to bring justice to Africans by addressing and exposing the injustices Africa and Africans continue to endure as a result of slavery and colonialism, and the need to redress these injustices. His album calls for an African struggle *for* Africans *by* Africans. Through *Présidents d'Afrique*, Didier Awadi also *embodies ukweli.* As a rapper, he is speaking the truth *on behalf of* and *to* the African peoples and to the world community, urging us, Africans, to stand up for our continent, for our people, for our dignity, for our right to prosper and for ourselves. Awadi is committed to *tell* the truths that were not taught to him as a young man in school. He speaks as an African part of the African community, not as an outsider, rejecting the division between himself and his African brothers and sisters. More than attempting to maintain the African community, Didier Awadi wants to *create* stronger, more unified and harmonious bonds among the African community by embracing our *Africanity* and our African knowledges. In this sense, not only does Awadi reflect the concept of *ujamaa* or community in his musical achievements, but also *utulivu*, the concept of harmony. The ultimate goal of Pan-Africanism is to create a more harmonious world that respects, recognizes, values and legitimizes the lived experiences and knowledges of Africans and other historically oppressed communities.

In my understanding, Awadi does not seek to produce objective truth, as positivism encourages, but instead focuses on revealing and uncovering African historical knowledges through the voices and visions of our ancestors, reflecting *kujitoa*. Awadi reveals how Eurocentric global systems have dictated the oppressive fate of African peoples. In this sense, I argue that Awadi challenges and rejects the idea of Eurocentric objectivity altogether, supporting Reviere's argument that objectivity is essentially a "collective European subjectivity."[85] Historical objectivity is an impossible goal when history, as a study of the past and a discipline, is written and recounted by the victorious colonizer, who purposely leaves out the voices and experiences of the historically oppressed Other. As a revealer of African historical truths, Awadi embraces *kujitoa* and shows through his transformative songs that he continues to engage in a process of self-reflection and growth.

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[83] Awadi, in discussion with Joanna Da Sylva.

[84] Awadi, in discussion with Joanna Da Sylva.

[85] Reviere, "Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology," 716.

Track 11: "Oser Inventer L'Avenir," Honoring Thomas Sankara

"Oser inventer l'avenir" is a song that troubles the image and understanding of Africa as "backwards" by presenting a modern Africa experienced by Africans, not distorted through dominant media.[86] This song, whose title reflects one of Sankara's most famous sayings, "dare to invent the future," highlights the intellectual and imaginative ability of Africans to be inventors, innovators, and creators in their African future. Furthermore, it affirms that Africans participate in the new global era as active agents of change. The song starts with the celebrated words of Sankara spoken at the United Nations General Assembly on October 4, 1984:

Nous avons choisi de risquer de nouvelles voies pour être plus heureux.	We chose to risk new paths to be happier.
Nous avons choisi de mettre en place de nouvelles techniques.	We chose to apply new techniques.
Nous avons choisi de rechercher des formes d'organisation,	We chose to look for forms or organization:
Mieux adaptées à notre civilisation rejetant de manière abrupte et définitive toutes sortes de diktats extérieurs, pour créer ainsi les conditions d'une dignité à la hauteur de nos ambitions.	Better suited to our civilization, Flatly and definitively rejecting all forms of outside dictates, in order to lay the foundations for achieving a level of dignity equal to our ambitions.
*Refuser l'état de survie, desserrer les pressions, libérer nos campagnes d'un immobilisme moyenâgeux ou d'une régression, démocratiser notre société, ouvrir les esprits sur un univers de responsabilité **collective** pour **oser inventer l'avenir**.*	Refusing to accept a state of survival, easing the pressures, liberating our countryside from medieval stagnation or even regression, democratizing our society, opening minds to a world of **collective** responsibility in order **to dare to invent the future.**

Awadi chooses to open the song with Sankara's powerful words that radiate a true sense of hope, African pride, and dignity. Sankara, Awadi's hero, states that the people of Burkina Faso took the risk of creating their own path "to be happier," a different path

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[86] Translation of title: "dare to invent the future."

than the one forged by colonial powers to maintain Africa in a state of servitude. His first words speak to our *humanity* and to our desire, as Africans, and consequently as human beings, to find happiness in Africa through *our* own ways.

Sankara continues by stating that the Burkinabé people *chose* to apply new techniques that are better suited to African civilizations. This statement affirms the need for Africans to develop their continent by adopting policies, forms of organizations, and ideas that are grounded in African knowledges, cultures, and values. At the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Conference held in Addis Ababa on July 29, 1987, Sankara argued that, "*nous devons accepter de vivre Africain, c'est la seule façon de vivre **libre** et de vivre **digne***" [We should undertake to live as Africans. It is the only way to live free and to live with dignity].[87] In order to live freely and happily with dignity and pride, as Africans, we have to embrace *our* ways of living and knowing. This is the only way to liberate the motherland from its colonial chains and allow her and her peoples to prosper.

In the song, Sankara continues by affirming his commitment to "flatly and definitely" reject dictatorial commands from colonial powers in order to attain African dignity that equally represents African ambitions. [88] This statement negates the colonial image of the African "man/woman" as "lazy," "stupid" and "infantile," and restores it by defining the African as an intelligent man/woman possessing great knowledge that will propel Africa on her rightful path. Sankara then states that Africans refuse to live in a state of survival and emergency and instead seek to prosper through democracy and innovation. He argues that we, Africans, need to open our minds and our spirits to the African principle of *ujamaa*, or community, by accepting and embracing a collective responsibility that will give us the power to invent the future in a way that respects and honors African ways of living. Sankara asserts that it is the effort of the community, or the African, that will contribute to the liberation and prosperity of Africa. By using this particular speech to open his song, Awadi takes an important anticolonial and anti-imperialist stance that troubles the Eurocentric understanding of Africa and reclaims African identity by asserting our ability to transform Africa's future by adopting African knowledges.

When Sankara utters his first words, he is soon accompanied by the *kora* of born griot Noumoucounda Cissoko. [89] Noumoucounda Cissoko is a griot vocalist and *koriste* and the son of world-renowned griot Banna Cissoko, *le Baobab,* and *balafon* player Fatoumata Goundo Kouyaté.[90] He is known as a revolutionary griot who has used the essence of his magical *kora* to weave his traditional music with Hip Hop.[91]

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[87] Sankara, *Thomas Sankara Speaks*, 381.

[88] Awadi, *Présidents d'Afrique* (France: Sony/ATV Music Publishing, 2010), CD.

[89] The *kora* is the West African instrument of the *griot*.

[90] Noumoucounda Cissoko, "Bio," *Noumoucounda Cissoko Professional Website*, accessed March 30, 2016, http://www.noumou.com.

[91] Julien Le Gros, "Noumoucounda: Une revolution nommée Kora," *Africultures,* accessed March 30, 2016, http://www.africultures.com/php/?nav=article&no=11708.

Noumoucounda Cissoko has collaborated with PBS and Didier Awadi for over twenty years, creating music that connects traditional African sounds with modern ones.[92] Within African contexts, traditional instruments are an extension of the musician and are more than material objects, frequently taking on human features and characteristics.[93] According to Ruth M. Stone, "[f]or many musicians, these material objects possess human and spiritual attributes. They serve to connect the various worlds that people inhabit at one time as well as to denote objects that are not simply material culture in nature."[94] Instruments possess a voice in African traditions that connect people with their ancestors, spirits, and African histories. Stone states, "[s]ound in much of Africa are voices—not only of humans but also of instruments."[95] Instruments, then, connect the historical past to the present.

The *kora* is the West African instrument of the griot. Stone argues that the *kora*, "a harp lute, is the personal extension of the West African *griot*, the itinerant praise singer, genealogist, and social commentator of the Mali and Senegal area of Mande, West Africa."[96] By including the *kora,* played by Noumoucounda Cissoko, in "Oser inventer l'avenir," Awadi connects worlds that may seem separated: the past and the present; the ancient and the contemporary; *griotism* and rapping; and African traditions and modernity. Through voice, both instrumental and human, Awadi reflects the essence of Afrocentric notions of history, which interconnect the past with the present through the reappropriation of African knowledges, ancient and new, and oral literature.

After Sankara's speech, Noumoucounda Cissoko sings in Bambara, a language that is part of the Mandé family spoken across West Africa by the Mandé people.[97] Listening to Cissoko's strong voice brings me back to the land of my ancestors: Senegal. His singing evokes in me, as a listener, an urgency to "come back" to my African roots as he transmits oral tradition to modern civilization. Following Cissoko, Awadi comes in and raps, speaking *on behalf* of Africans *to* European Western people, whose single view of Africa has been a negative one. He raps:

Mon Afrique, c'est pas rien que des cases, Elle est loin des images qu'on peut voir dans tes films nazes.	My Africa, it's not just huts, She is far from the images we can see in your stupid/outdated movies.
Mon Afrique, elle est à l'aise dans ce millénaire, Ici, on parle web, on parle net, on parle de céllulaire.	My Africa is at ease in this millennium, Here we speak web, we speak net, and we speak about cell phones.
Mon Afrique, elle a des bases plus que séculaires, Mais l'avenir se conjugue en révolutionnaire.	My Africa has age-old foundations, But the future will be revolutionary.

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[92] Le Gros, "Noumoucounda."

[93] Ruth M. Stone, *The Garland Handbook of African Music,* 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010).

[94] Stone, *The Garland Handbook of African Music*, 18.

[95] Stone, *The Garland Handbook of African Music*, 15.

[96] Stone, *The Garland Handbook of African Music*, 20.

[97] Stone, *The Garland Handbook of African Music,* 20.

C'est pas que j'idéalise, *Je suis un missionnaire, fils de Sankara, mon regard l'oeil du visionnaire* *Mon Afrique, c'est pas la guerre, c'est pas la famine,* *De l'or et du diamant, de l'uranium, j'en ai plein les mines.* *Mon Afrique, c'est pas la mort, c'est pas la misère,* *Regarde autour de toi, c'est le soleil et puis la mer.* *Mon Afrique, tu peux la voir, elle est dans les rues.* *Elle roule en Cadillac et en ville, elle prend le scooter.* *Mon Afrique, tu peux la voir, elle est dans ma rue,* *Elle vit à 100 à l'heure, à la campagne elle prend le Hummer.*	It's not that I'm idealizing, I am a missionary, son of Sankara, I have the eyes of a visionary. My Africa, it's not war, it's not famine, My mines are full of gold, diamonds and uranium. My Africa, it's not death, it's not misery, Look around you, it's the sun and the sea. My Africa, you can see her on the streets. She drives a Cadillac and in the city she takes the scooter. My Africa, you can see her on my street, She lives life to the full, speeds at 100 mph, and in the country, she takes the Hummer.

The first words Awadi raps are "*mon* Afrique" or "*my* Africa." By using the pronoun "my," Awadi is identifying himself as an African, giving himself permission to speak about *his* continent on *his* terms. The use of "*my* Africa" is a way for Awadi to speak about the Africa he *knows* and has experienced, an Africa different than the one portrayed in "stupid" Eurocentric movies. By referring to "*my* Africa" Awadi is differentiating *his* Africa from *your* Africa, a European Western idea of Africa depicted as poor, damaged by war, and miserable. He continues by saying "*my* Africa is at ease in this new century. Here, we speak *Internet* and about cell phones." Awadi challenges the "primitive" Africa associated with Eurocentric history, arguing that Africa is not stuck in the past, as European Western powers may think, but is up to date with different forms of technological innovations and fluent in their languages.

Speaking "as the son of Thomas Sankara," Awadi articulates that he takes on the role of a visionary and missionary, like Sankara, and claims that Africa's future will be built on its revolutionary will. Awadi continues by stating, "*My* Africa, it's not war, it's not famine. My mines are full of gold, diamonds and uranium. *My* Africa, it's not death, it's not misery, look around you, it's the sun and the sea." Awadi's Africa is not *defined* by wars, famine, death and misery, characteristics often associated with Africa in European Western media. On the contrary, *his* Africa is rich in natural resources and is a place surrounded by the light of the sun and the richness of the sea.

Following, Awadi speaks to Africa's modernity by saying: "*My* Africa, you can see her on the streets. She drives a Cadillac, and in the city, she takes the scooter. *My* Africa, you can see her on my streets, she lives life to the full and speeds at 100 mph, and in the countryside, she takes the Hummer." First, it is important to note that Africa is

recognized as a *she*, a feminine power that holds African civilizations. Africa has often been portrayed as a place where women are subordinate and men "savages" because some stories have been ignored and left out, histories where women (and men) have fought against patriarchy and colonialism. Awadi's Africa, just like Europe, the US, or Asia, drives Cadillacs, scooters, and Hummers—expensive cars, not chariots like some may think. A Hummer symbolizes luxury and in my understanding this statement is saying: "Yes, we are in Africa and just like in the West, we have money and we can also buy luxurious items if we wish." I have often heard people condemning Africans for having luxurious items when other Africans are suffering from poverty. But in the US and Canada, do people not also buy luxurious items while others live in poverty? Is there not poverty in the West as well? Awadi is challenging this double standard imposed on Africa by the European Western world. Subtly, with this verse, Awadi restores a *just* image of Africa, embracing *uhaki* by demonstrating that Africa is not culturally, socially, artistically, technologically, or even economically *poor*, but is rich in many different ways, regardless of forces that continue to define Africa as the poorest and most backward continent. In other words, Awadi wants to bring Africa *justice* by presenting a different history that characterizes the continent in a positive, more authentic light.

Noumoucounda Cissoko follows Awadi and sings the refrain in Bambara before Awadi starts his last verse:

Mon Afrique, elle raffole du KFC,	My Africa, she adores KFC,
Mais à midi, elle veut du mafé.	But at lunch, she wants *mafé.*
Mon Afrique, après le tiep, nous on prend le thé,	My Africa, after *tiep*, we have tea,
Guerté kemb, café Touba, je peux t'y inviter.	*Guerté kemb*, café Touba, I can invite you.
Prends ça dans la face!	Take that in your face!

Awadi states that while Africa *knows about* and likes Western fast food like KFC, at lunch, the most important meal in Senegal, she prefers her traditional Senegalese dish *mafé*, composed of a creamy peanut paste and fish or meat. He continues, "*My* Africa, after *tiep*, we take the tea, *guerté kemb*, or café Touba, I can invite you." After eating traditional *tiep*—short for the national Senegalese dish *thieboudienne,* a dish made with fish, rice, tomato sauce, and vegetables—Senegalese like to eat their Senegalese peanuts (*Guerté kemb*) and drink their traditional café Touba, a coffee drink flavored with pepper, or *djar,* as we call it in Wolof. Awadi offers an invitation to the outsider to take part in these traditional customs, demonstrating the potential for Africans and Europeans to have a harmonious, instead of unequal, relationship, embracing *utulivu.* It is an invitation to get to know Awadi's culture, his traditions, his country, and his continent seen through *his* eyes. It is an invitation to learn about the *real* Africa through the real experiences of Africans. After he finishes rapping, the refrain comes in and Awadi ends with: "Take that in your face!" Awadi finishes his song by "slapping" colonial powers in the face by saying "we are just as good, we are just as advanced, we are just as aware and we are just as educated." He slaps them in the face with *ukweli*.

A single story has been told about Africa through dominant history, and by committing to present a different truth about Africa, Didier Awadi is committing to *kujitoa*. Yes, Africa has and continues to experience wars, hunger, and poverty, but these challenges do not define her. She is much more than that, which is a fact that needs to be addressed in order to have a more humane understanding of Africa. Awadi's song, which weaves together the traditional *kora*, the voice of griot Cissoko, and Hip Hop beats with the rapping of Awadi, is powerful in providing a positive and harmonious story of Africa that connects the past—traditional customs and languages—with the present, modernity and globalization.

Conclusion

For centuries, Eurocentric knowledge and notions of history have dictated *what* is considered history. As a result, many European Western historians have given themselves the authority to *distort*, *write*, and *tell* the histories of *all* peoples with, consciously or unconsciously, an imperialist mindset, *silencing* the voices of Indigenous peoples, especially Africans. According to Smith:

> This collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about Indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized.[98]

As Africans, in order to liberate ourselves from colonial mentality and find our ways in the world, we need to *rewrite* and *re-right* our history by placing our experiences, our perspectives, our knowledges, and our realities at the *center* of the research process.[99] We have to rediscover *our* African past according to the African principles of *ukweli* (truth), *ujamaa* (community), *kujitoa* (commitment), *utulivu* (harmony), and *uhaki* (justice), in order to understand the present and inform a future in which we can prosper as a people. Paulo Freire states, "[l]ooking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they [formerly oppressed peoples] are so that they can more wisely build the future."[100] By rediscovering and reclaiming our history, we are also reclaiming our sense of agency, realizing that we have the power to *create* our history instead of endure it.

Présidents d'Afrique gives life to African history through human and instrumental voices, lyrics, and powerful Hip Hop and traditional African beats, creating strong emotions in the heart of its listeners. With his album, Awadi seeks to break the cycle of ignorance about African history by *retelling* our stories through the voices of our strong ancestors. Awadi reclaims and restores *resistant* aspects of Africa's historical past when African leaders actively and definitely rejected colonial and imperialist policies imposed

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[98] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 1.

[99] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies.*

[100] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 30th ed. (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2010), 84.

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by European Western forces. Instead of accepting how things are, Awadi is presenting African youth with an alternative, asserting that things can be different—and at a point in time, in the time of Sankara, Lumumba, Nkrumah, they were! As an African and Pan-African (r)evolutionary figure, Awadi reclaims histories *as an* African *for* Africans, and as a revolutionary act that can and should be taken up by all oppressed and indigenous populations.

Awadi's critical Hip Hop music addresses the sociopolitical tensions between dominant history taught in school, which remains colonial, and an authentic account of African histories centered on African experiences. Awadi shares the African knowledge he received from his *grands frères*, his family and his Pan-African ancestors, to create a pedagogical and musical project that completes and contests schooling in Senegal, understood as the "exercise of domination [that has] the ideological intent to indoctrinate [students] to adapt to the world of oppression."[101] Awadi is using the creative and artistic medium of music and spoken words to informally teach African youth about resistant African histories. Through music, Awadi is making African knowledges publicly accessible through *sound*, legitimizing oral literature as a valuable form of knowledge.

As an *educator*, Awadi works through the medium of music to translate African teachings. Through his songs, he engages with political conscientization and encourages mobilization. Like Paulo Freire, Awadi advocates for a critical pedagogy that awakens the consciousness of young Africans so that they question and challenge their global position and posited domination and understand how colonialism has impacted their everyday lives. In this sense, both Awadi and Freire engage in critical and conscious education work, but their means for translating knowledge are very different. Freire is a scholar who uses academic platforms and language to communicate his knowledge on behalf of the "oppressed people."[102] As a result, his work is accessible to those who can (1) read and (2) understand academic language. Awadi, on the other hand, uses music, something accessible and appreciated by many people in the world, to communicate indigenous knowledges. Awadi presents pedagogy with a holistic approach that is rational and also emotional, rebuilding on indigenous knowledges, which include songs, dance, and musical instruments. He is not limiting his work to the cognitive, but draws on the heart and *emotions*—sentiments of community, culture, courage, compassion, pride, freedom, and unity—to *teach*. Awadi's music connects the mind, the heart, and the body, recognizing *education* as a process that goes beyond the intellect to include emotional being. His music advocates for the need to know oneself outside of the colonial paradigm and, as a result, the musical medium through which Awadi works becomes important and pedagogical. In the form of music, Awadi created a revolutionary project that continues to *educate* the young African masses with the hope of creating a free continent in which African women and men are proud, prosperous, respected, strong, and unified.

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[101] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 78.

[102] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 78.

This paper contributes to the existing literature on Hip Hop by focusing on how Senegalese rapping, understood as a form of *storytelling*, has been used as a decolonizing public pedagogy that reclaims Pan-Africanist visions, histories, and truths, which has not been explored to date. There is a dearth of academic work about Hip Hop in Senegal, yet Hip Hop is central to political public pedagogy in Senegal and throughout the continent. As an international African revolutionary presence, Didier Awadi uses rap accompanied by African beats to awaken the youth to their histories, their realities, their position in this world, and the power they hold in changing their situations. Awadi's efforts to reveal the richness, histories, beauty, and potential of Africa and its peoples as well as his determination to contribute to a better Africa through Hip Hop should be recognized in Hip Hop literature.

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