Encircling the dance: social mobility through the transformation of performance in urban Senegal

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Abstract

This thesis looks at the social significance of dance in Dakar, Senegal, both as an everyday practice and as a performing art. The boundaries commonly drawn between stage and mundane performance are shown to be irrelevant, as people circulate between performance spaces and dance forms. The dance itself is described as an elusive and ever-changing way of constructing identity, which is renewed every time it is performed. Most importantly, this thesis introduces dance as a vehicle of social mobility in its multiple dimensions, as an instrument in the politics of ethnicity in Senegal, and as a site of negotiation of gender relations. The complex interplay between the agency of local dancers and global performing circuits is also examined. Transformations in social status of performers are traced through time, space and across three genres of performance: the *sabar,* which is central in what I call "women's dances", folkloric performance, and recent choreographic experiments, lumped under the misleading label of "contemporary dance".

The *sabar* and women's dance events are examined both as the local movement style that informs some of the choreographic work displayed on stage, and as a central space in which alternative gender relations are experimented with. I suggest that urban dance events have become increasingly dominated by women, for whom the dance is a convenient way of excluding men from their sociality, or including them on their own terms. Women are thus able to retain the control of important aspects of social life (the socialization of young girls, marriage negotiations, exchanging secrets on how to "tie" a husband), engage in trade and coach each other into small-scale business. Alongside the celebration of female solidarity, dance events are also moments of intense female competition. This is achieved through fashion, sexually explicit dancing and elaborate manipulation of the body. I argue that in a depressed economic climate which has turned to the disadvantage of most men, women are discreetly using their favourite form of sociality – the dance – to make advances into the socio-economic domain.

The argument on the performer's status through time takes the pre-colonial status stratification, particularly the figure of the Griot-performer, as a starting point. I suggest that the international career opportunities generated by the development of the folkloric genre from the 1960s onwards have helped modify the perception of the performer, albeit on a moderate scale. Further improvement has recently been achieved with the emergence of "contemporary dance". This is because the most successful performers within this experimental genre have benefited from the opportunity to promote themselves as individual

artists. Moreover, when on tour abroad they are usually paid more and perform in more prestigious theatres than they do with folkloric performance, which often remains confined to "African festivals" and tourist resorts. In Senegal, they engage in collaborative work with visiting artists from Europe, North America or Japan. By contrast with the elitist character of the genre in its early days, in the 1970s, "contemporary" Senegalese dance is gradually becoming popularized, as people promote themselves as artists with a social consciousness. But the thesis also emphasizes that social mobility is not equally available to all, and that success, far from being a linear process, also contains the possibility of its own downfall: touring abroad may lose much of its appeal once people realize that they are being exploited. For performers who experiment with "contemporary" forms, social recognition can easily turn into accusations of doing "White people's stuff". This may partly explain why these performers are so keen to make their "local" grounding explicit, and why they nurture a fascination with "tradition".

In a broader sense, this study also highlights the complexities of globalization processes in performance. It hints at the risks of the forms of globalization that reinforce power imbalances. Indeed, the renewed interest in the "contemporary" arts of Africa may be seen as part of a more general movement towards exploiting the creativity of African cultures. I examine people's ambivalent attitudes towards this, and argue that people perceive their own lives, as well as their status in the wider world, as deeply entangled with the representations of Africa which are projected onto the worldwide stage.

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List of abbreviations

AFAA	Association Française d'Action Artistique
AIF	Agence Internationale de la Francophonie
AOF	Afrique Occidentale Française
ASC	Association Sportive et Culturelle
CCF	Centre Culturel Français (since 2004 Centre Culturel Léopold Sédar Senghor)
CCBS	Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor
FCFA	Francs Communauté Financière Africaine
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MASA	Marché des Arts du Spectacle Africain
MCDS	Maison de la Culture Douta Seck
MFDC	Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OIF	Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie
PDS	Parti Démocratique Sénégalais
PS	Parti Socialiste Sénégalais
PSIC	Programme de Soutien aux Initiatives Culturelles
ROSCA	Rotating Savings and Credit Association
RTS	Radio Télévision Sénégalaise
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Note on Wolof transliteration

The Wolof transcription used in this thesis follows the rules laid down by the CLAD (Centre de Linguistique Appliquée de Dakar), and exposed in the *Dictionnaire Wolof-Français* edited by Arame Fal et al. (1990). The letters used in Wolof transcription that differ from French and English are listed here, with approximative phonetic equivalents. It should also be noted that I have taken a few liberties with the Wolof transcription, for example by inserting an occasional *s* for the plural forms (which is different from the plural form in Wolof). The names of people and places follow the French writing in use in Senegal. This is because names are not easily recognizable when transcribed according to the Wolof rules (e.g. Diouf becomes Juuf).

Consonants

ɔ	This letter is used in Pulaar, not in Wolof transcription. It is roughly equivalent to a strong b – in Wolof it would be transcribed as *bb*.
C	As in the French "*ti*ens".
j	As in the French "*di*eu".
ñ	As in the French a*gn*eau.
x	As in the Spanish *jota*.
q	A very guttural *k*, as in the Arabic *qarib* ("close to").

Vowels

a	Between the closed *a* as in *a* car and the open *a* as in m*a*rriage.
à	Open *a* as in m*a*rriage.
e	As in the French "p*è*re".
ë	As in op*e*n.
o	As in h*o*rror.
ó	As in cl*o*sure or in the French b*eau*.
u	As the French *ou*.
ã	As in the French b*anc*.

Double vowels are the transcription of a long sound (e.g. in *kaay*, "come!"), and double consonants indicate phonetic strength (e.g. in jàmm, *peace*, derived from Arabic). The

double consonants (mp, mb, nt, nd, nc, nj, nk, ng, ng, nq) should be pronounced as they are written, without adding an *e* at the beginning of the word. For example, Ndiaye should not be pronounced "E-Ndiaye".

Note on currency

The currency used in Senegal is the FCFA, i.e. "Franc Communauté Financière Africaine". Formerly tied to the French franc (since 1960), it is now tied to the EURO by a fixed rate and emitted by the BCEAO (Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest), which controls the currency common to the eight member-states of the West African Monetary Union: Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo. The international monetary symbol of the currency is XOF, but this abbreviation is not used in everyday transactions. In 1994 the FCFA was devalued by 50% in an effort to boost the competitiveness of products manufactured in the West African nations using the currency. The devaluation had mixed results as it also rendered imported products more expensive. As a consequence, the illegal trade of imported products was unexpectedly invigorated throughout West Africa.

In December 2004 the exchange rate was of approximately 1,000 FCFA for £1.06, i.e. very close to £1.

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Introduction

"There is nothing more notable in Socrates than that he found time, when he was an old man, to learn music and dancing, and thought it time well spent."

Michel de Montaigne

"Dance is about never-ending aspiration."

Judith Jamison (Alvin Ailey Dance Company)

The great paradox about dance is suggested in these quotes: on the one hand it is a universally significant activity, and on the other hand it has been devalued in the Cartesian tradition. Yet in Dakar, dance is so well integrated to the social fabric that the city's pulse seems to be beating to a multitude of dance rhythms. This thesis proposes to explore the social significance of dance in urban Senegal, both as a ceremonial practice – in the broadest sense – and as artistic performance. More specifically, it looks at the interplay between dance and social mobility, i.e. how transformations of the dance affect the status of the performers, and how performers re-negotiate their status by transforming the dance through space and time. In this context, status is understood as the social recognition of power, within the local hierarchies meaningful to people. The premise of the study is that dance, as a non-verbal, creative activity involving a "moving together" of reason, emotion and body (Parkin 1985), allows us to grasp aspects of sociality which are not easily put into words. As James (2003: 92) points out, "what can be said in language does not fully match all that is going on in life". Why and how does dance performance change through time and space? How do these changes affect social relations in urban Senegal? What does dance tell us about Senegalese social life that we would not have been able to grasp otherwise? These are the main questions this thesis attempts to answer.

I have chosen to focus on three interconnected forms: the dances performed during events organized by women's associations (which I will call "women's dances"), the folkloric genre, and the innovative styles of theatrical dance lumped together under the misleading label of "contemporary African dance"[1]. These dance forms are related in complex ways. The "women's dances" – which are in fact performed by men as well – are variations of the Senegambian *sabar* complex and its pop music offshoot, the *mbalax*. They are

[1] This is a problematic term, which I discuss in chapter VI.

performed during such a wide range of events as the evening *tannbeer* dances, festive events organized by women's networks and associations (e.g. the "tours"), weddings, name-giving ceremonies, or *soirées sénégalaises* in night clubs. Common to all these events is the dominance of women, and the circular structure inside which people take turns to perform solo or in pairs. The music is provided by a group of drummers (for the *sabar*), a live band or a disc jockey (for the *mbalax*). Echoes of *sabar* drumming also ripple from the wrestling fights followed by thousands of fans in the city's big stadiums and transmitted live on TV. Performed amid the customary rituals preceding a big fight, these dances are not only meant as a display of strength to impress the adversary, but also to create the atmosphere of a flamboyant spectacle. They contribute to the popularity of a sport formerly practised during harvest celebrations, and which has now developed into a thriving business[2].

The best dancers and drummers are likely to set up small dance troupes in their neighbourhood, and to recruit young friends, relatives or neighbours with various degrees of experience. Every neighbourhood in Dakar has several such troupes. For the most part, they perform folkloric dances from the regional repertoire that was developed in the 1960s and 1970s, following the creation of the National Ballet in 1961. National Ballets are common in post-colonial societies with a great diversity of languages, religion or modes of livelihood. After all, promoting certain kinds of "popular arts" to the detriment of others has long been an effective way of constructing a national consciousness. In urban Senegal however, I will suggest that the folkloric genre has moved quite far from its initial mission to embody nationhood, and that it has become more salient in terms of local/ethnic identity, inter-generational politics and individual careers in the performing world. Some of these troupes perform in schools, cultural centres, during events organized by various associations or in tourist resorts. Others specialize in the *mbalax* dances launched in the latest music videos as so many commodities, and compete in the TV dance competitions sponsored by local businesses, the *Oscar des Vacances*. The most successful may move on to more prestigious rehearsal spaces in the city, and even be invited to perform abroad.

According to Mademba Diop[3] (Le Soleil, 10.10.2002), there are some 300 dance troupes in Senegal at any given moment. With an average of 15-20 members per group[4], it is thousands of people who perform as professionals to some degree, or have done so in

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[2] For an excellent account of the transformation of Senegalese wrestling into a business and a political tool, see Faye (2002).

[3] Mademba Diop is a co-founder of the *Cercle de la Jeunesse*, a popular theatre- and dance troupe established in the Northern town of Louga in the 1970s.

[4] This is my own estimate.

the past[5]. The connection with the "women's dances" does not cease once people have joined dance troupes. Professionals also dance off stage in their neighbourhoods, and their bodily experience has a distinctive impact on the performance style displayed on stage. When one of Dakar's troupes created a "Senegalese cabaret" involving a mix of *sabar*, *mbalax*, Mandinka and American-style jazz dances, it was obvious that the dancers were most comfortable in the *sabar* styles, because this was what they performed during social events in their neighbourhoods. Not only do choreographers take the dancers' bodily knowledge into account, but also, as elsewhere in the world the dancers themselves bring their own favourite movements into the choreography. Both everyday movement style and Senegambian dances – including the folkloric genre – therefore, inform the more innovative genres Senegalese dancers have experimented with since the 1970s. Most, but not all "contemporary" performers have been trained in folkloric performance at some point in their career. Furthermore, most performers genuinely enjoy the folkloric, or so-called "traditional" styles; they are energetic – and therefore energizing – and the interaction between dancers and drummers is thrilling. But many also feel the need to express their creativity in more individual ways – hence their attraction to the "contemporary" genre. Unlike what is commonly assumed however, they do not simply imitate Euro-American "contemporary dance". Rather, in people's own words, they rework the local movement "languages" to create something new, which they hope will appeal to local and international audiences alike.

This thesis, therefore, is also an attempt to break down the scholarly dichotomies between the world of the theatre and that of everyday life, or between "high arts" and "popular arts", to show that dances on and off stage comment on and inform each other. Anthropologists with an interest in performance have made the same point (e.g. Barber 1997, James 2003, Wulff 2003, Williams 2004), but it can be difficult to gather enough ethnographic data on different forms of performance to support this claim. Before describing how I propose to do this, I find it important to problematize the topic by looking at the formation of European representations of dance in and of Africa[6].

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[5] Throughout this thesis, the term "professional" designates people who receive payment to perform, even when this is occasional and people have other income-generating activities.

[6] I avoid using the term "African dance", a European construction which tends to obscure the formidable diversity of dances performed across the African continent.

The dances of Africa in the European imagination

In early anthropology, dance was mentioned in passing in early writings on ritual, but it was not regarded as a social phenomenon worthy of study in itself. In spite of Evans-Pritchard's (1928) insightful article on the Zande beer dance and Mauss' (1935) call for the study of the "techniques of the body" in cross-cultural contexts, dance did not acquire any kind of status in anthropology before the early 1980s. Other disciplines caught up even later, if at all. To understand this gap, it is important to remember that one of the corollaries of the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy is that verbal language is the privileged expression of social forms. In a scholarly world marked by the Cartesian tradition, not only dance, but other bodily activities too, were engulfed in contemptuous silence. Ironically, it was partly the recognition by 1960s-social linguists that bodily gestures were an integral part of language that spurred an interest in the body. Hanna (1987) also points to the bourgeois Puritan ethics in which many Western scholars were raised as a factor in delaying the interest in dance. Farnell (1999) adds that anthropologists were unable to register bodily movement empirically because they lacked the modes of thought to do so. She also mentions that an emphasis on the body was long associated with biological reductionism, and was therefore taboo in the social sciences. Furthermore, we could add that the video was not readily available for most of the discipline's existence.

By contrast with this silence, dance has long been the object of a sinister fascination in popular representations of Africa. Ever since the development of "scientific" ideas on race differentiation in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries[7], the supposedly innate ability of Africans to dance has been taken as a proof that they, and by extension all Blacks, were closer to a primordial unity with Nature. No other form of expression has crystallized as many racist ideas as dance. Only fifty years ago, French psychiatrist Henri Aubin gave his interpretation of "African dance" in the colonial magazine *Tropiques*:

> "The multiplicity of circumstances in which under-evolved indigenous peoples dance can be attributed to the fact that dance is a rather elementary activity: motor response, usually rhythmic, responding to stimuli where sensory and emotional data play the main role. Instead of being expressed through complex intellectual representations and a rich

[7] For interesting cross-disciplinary analyses of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideas on race, see for example Stocking (1982), Mudimbe (1988), Schiebinger (1990), Appiah (1992), Nederveen Pieterse (1994) and Castaldi (2000).

vocabulary, their emotional states become actions [...] of which dance is, after all, a privileged form."

(Aubin 1951: 38, translation from French my own)

Another salient association is that between dance and sex, which could be related in part to the morality of monotheist religions. Given the variety of emotional states which can be released by moving the body in rhythm or watching others move, it is easy to see why the connection would have been made in the first place. It follows from this that political and religious authorities have often devised sophisticated ways to control the dance in order to control sexual behaviour. Whereas some strands of Islam, Sufi in particular, have included rhythmic movement to their practice, much of the history of Christianity has been marked by a tense relationship with the dance. This is illustrated, for example, by enduring ironical references to dance as "occasions of sin" in Catholic Ireland[8] (Wulff 2003). This is important because early representations of the dance in Africa were largely constructed from the reports of Christian missionaries, and in their popular form they are still with us today. Georgiana Gore (1999, 2001) has written excellent analyses of the impact of Christian missionary scholarship on representations of West African dances. She notes that most colonial and missionary documents from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century depict the dances as disgraceful, useless and indecent. In French areas, European missionaries encouraged the colonial authorities to ban dancing from the public space for fear of temptation[9], and government anthropologists were not allowed to write about dance in official documents. In Senegambia, one of the classic colonial monographs on the region is the work of a missionary, Abbé Boilat's (1853) *Esquisses Sénégalaises*. Despite a genuine interest in the region's "customs", his descriptions are very much in the spirit of the racist ideologies of his time: Africans are described as lazy, irrational, dishonest, promiscuous, childish, with a sinful attraction to alcohol, and spending most of their time singing and dancing. This should be seen in the light of the colonial project of course, as portraying people as sinful was used to justify their subjection to a new religious and political authority. The following excerpt from Boilat's section on the Moors of Northern Senegambia is revealing

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[8] The Irish state passed the Public Dance Hall Act in 1935 "as a way to stop informal dancing at the crossroads, in barns and houses" (Wulff 2003: 184). The Act was a combined effort to preserve Catholic morality and bring tax money (ibid.).

[9] Bans on festive events in colonial Dakar are described in detail in Faye (2000). Noise was often invoked as a reason for the bans.

of the association between dance and sexual temptation. He describes the evening dances that took place on gum trading boats on the Senegal River:

> "Men and women [the Moors] dance separately; all their movements simulate fighting; but it is quite different with women: they, too, dance separately, and the young men come to watch; in general the movements they execute are most indecent. They form a large circle and each in turn enters the middle to dance while the others clap and sing in rhythm.
>
> The Negro women of the Walo do not remain indifferent to these pleasures; they embark with their *Griots* and drums and dance like the others, but in the manner of the Wolof who live on the edges of the desert. One easily imagines [...] that several [European] traders come to watch these evening festivities, where they forget the sacred moral duties and those of faithfulness in marriage. They soon choose concubines among these beautiful dancers who cost them many *ballots de Guinée* [money], quite apart from the numerous gifts they are obliged to provide them with."
>
> (Boilat 1853: 370-371, translation from French my own)

Given the near absence of anthropological studies on dance in Africa until recently, it is hardly surprising that popular ideas inherited from the nineteenth century survived for so long. The early 1990s however, marked the emergence of a growing body of research on this much neglected topic. In continuity with this literature, the thesis is partly intended as a contribution to demystifying ideas according to which dance in Africa is either the domain of timeless rituals or an irrational and spontaneous activity, leading to sexual promiscuity. Dance is different every time it is performed, and therefore it cannot be "timeless". Moreover, as will become clear in this thesis, dance events are usually well-planned affairs, involving long and costly preparations. Finally, there is nothing "innate" about dance and everyday movement; both are the outcome of years of socialization, and nothing in my experience suggests that the Senegalese are born with higher dancing abilities than the French or the Brits. I have in fact encountered dancers in Dakar who did not have a particularly well developed musical sense, and people commented on this. Before discussing the main question the study addresses, i.e. the relationship between dance and social mobility in Senegal, I find it useful to situate the study of dance in West Africa within the growing field of the anthropology of dance.

The anthropology of dance

If Marett (1914) and Radcliffe-Brown (1922) are rightly remembered for their first contribution to the field, the first to take the dance seriously was Evans-Pritchard (1928), in an article on the *gbere buda*, the Zande funeral beer dance. A few years earlier, Radcliffe-Brown (ibid.) had dedicated a chapter of his *Andaman Islanders* to music and dance, which he naturally interpreted within the functionalist paradigm. Inspired by Herbert Spencer (1857), he had argued that the emotional state generated by people dancing together "as one body" made the individual lose himself in the ecstatic feeling of belonging to the community. In this view, the "function" of dance was to effect social control. This provided Evans-Pritchard with his first significant opportunity to challenge Radcliffe-Brownian functionalism. His careful analysis of *The Dance* threw light on fundamental aspects that were not easily visible in any other social form, such as the socialization of children, the shared sociality of young men and women, local notions of leadership, and the conflicts resulting from the tension between "individual vanity and passions" and the "constraining forces of the community" (ibid.: 460). In America at the same period, Margaret Mead (1928, 1940) interpreted Samoan and Balinese dances in the light of the "Culture and Personality" school. She viewed dance as a reversal of social norms or as a reflection of child-rearing practices. Looking at children in Samoa, for example, she argued that their dances served to condition them to accept social differentiation based on skill and intelligence.

Two decades later, Gertrude Kurath published her work on Native American and Mexican dances. In a classic review article (1960), she advocated the application of a wide range of paradigms to the study of dance, a step she regarded as necessary to take the emerging field of "dance ethnology" to a higher analytical level. In the United Kingdom, the Manchester school was interested in performance more generally, and Mitchell (1956) wrote a landmark study of the Kalela dance in Zambia (then the Northern Rhodesia). He analyzed the dance in a synchronic perspective, showing how it helped workers of the Copperbelt deal with the contradictions of a life caught between a sense of ethnic belonging and a daily life marked by ethnic diversity and "modern" European lifestyles. Ethnomusicologist John Blacking (1973, 1977) drew on his fieldwork with the Venda of Southern Africa to suggest that music and dance were powerful sites of socialization and expression of the group's creative potential. The late 1970s also saw the emergence of a new generation of anthropologists trained as dancers. Seeking to establish the anthropology of dance as a sub-discipline, they criticized earlier approaches for not taking movement as a

starting point, and for describing dance in terms of adaptive responses rather than as action in itself (Farnell 1999). Drawing upon the structuralist paradigm as well as linguistics and semiotics, they argued that the structure of the dance reflected deeper social structures, whose transformation could therefore be traced through changes in movement patterns. This was the case, for example, of Kaeppler's (1972, 1985) analysis of "structured movement systems" in ceremonial pig presentation to the king on Tonga. Drid Williams (e.g. 1976a & b, 1982) developed "semasiology" as an analytical tool based on recording with *labanotation*, to elucidate the meaning of human movement cross-culturally. One of her disciples, Brenda Farnell, applied the paradigm to the elaborate study of plain Indians sign language (1994) and movement metaphors (1996). The structuralist approach is explicit in Royce's (1977) classic book, but she also argues that different approaches are suited to different questions, and gives examples of the functionalist and historical approaches in the study of dance. In the same period, Hanna (1979, 1987) developed a model of non-verbal communication to classify and analyze any type of dance event. Terence Ranger's (1975) historical work on the *beni ngoma* was an important contribution, because it was the first detailed historical account of social transformation traced through the trajectory of a dance form. During colonization in East Africa, the *beni ngoma* developed as a march dance and a caricature of European military parades. At a time when no historian was interested in dance, Ranger took the bold step of showing how the hierarchies constructed in the *beni ngoma* associations helped people maintain a sense of continuity with the older stratification of Swahili society, and how the dance acted as an ironical commentary on colonial society.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the anthropology of dance benefited from an increasing interest in the body and in performance. The literature of the past two decades is too voluminous to be reviewed here[10], but on the whole studies of dance have followed wider trends in anthropology: gender and sexuality (Hanna 1988, Cowan 1990, Novack 1990, Burt 1995); ethnicity, identity and nationalism (Meduri 1996, Ness 1992, Daniel 1995, Mendoza 2000, Wulff 2000 & 2003); transnationalism (Savigliano 1995, Wulff 1998); the renewed interest in curative practices and spirit possession (Boddy 1989, Janzen 1992, Friedson 1996, Willis & Chisanga 1999, Lüdtke 2001). Buckland's (1999) edited volume on issues of method and power in dance fieldwork was also a very valuable addition to the field. Furthermore, the anthropology of dance has borrowed heavily from other disciplines, such as dance- and performance studies, folklore, media studies and philosophy.

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[10] For excellent reviews of the field in recent years, see Reed (1998), Farnell (1999) and Wulff (2001).

Within this trajectory, the study of dance in West Africa developed fairly late. Gorer (1935) wrote *Africa Dances* following his travels through the region with Senegalese dancer Féral Benga, but the style is that of travel writing. Moreover, Gorer was not a man to challenge the usual stereotypes; not having lived in the communities he was passing through, he understood very little of their ceremonial life, and his interpretations are simplistic. After describing ceremonies in four different parts of West Africa, he concludes with comments about the dance as pure entertainment:

> "The dances described above were the only considerable ones I witnessed which had sufficient dramatic content, as it were a scenario, to make it possible to give even a halting account of the movement in them. By far the greater number of dances, and the most impressive, were 'abstract', 'classical', just dancing. It might be possible with a strictly technical vocabulary to give some description of them, but I do not think it would be worth while; it would be making a gay thing heavy, a simple thing abstruse, an enjoyment tedious. [...] Africans have only one art, but to what a pitch they have brought it!" (Gorer 1935: 201)

Gorer's approach is interesting because it says more about European notions about dancing in Africa at the time than about the dances themselves. To my knowledge, Robert F. Thompson's (1974) *African Art in Motion* is the first serious attempt to grasp the social significance of dance in West Africa. But with its almost exclusive emphasis on aesthetic aspects – for example on shared principles between dance and sculpture – we miss more ethnographic data on social life outside the dance. The idea of common characteristics of "African dance" is also dated. Moreover, although Thompson advocates a historical approach, his synchronic study reinforces the impression of immobility that was already prevalent in many ethnographies of Africa. Yet, Thompson's book remains one of the most significant attempts to rehabilitate the dances of Africa, and many of his methodological reflections remain valid. Apart from his work, between the 1960s and the 1980s dance was mostly treated by ethnomusicologists as an appendix to music, and although this did not do justice to the singularity of movement, valuable contributions were made (e.g. Nketia 1962 & 1963, Bebey 1975, Chernoff 1979, Erlmann 1986). It was only in the 1990s that studies of dance in the region appeared in mainstream anthropological studies. Heath's (1990, 1994) work on dance and verbal performance in the Senegalese town of Kaolack was an important source of inspiration for my own work. Her fascinating analysis places women's performance at the centre of a process in which gender relations, social

status and political influence as constantly re-negotiated. In his article on the Casamance, Mark (1994) was one of the first to relate dance to the politics of ethnicity in West Africa, and I will return to his contribution in chapter III. Also writing on the Casamance, De Jong (1999) applied Appadurai's (1986) model to the social trajectory of a masquerade, the *kumpo*. In her work on Senegal, Castaldi (2000) discusses in detail the formation of Western representations of African dance, and analyzes the National Ballet as an embodiment of Senghor's Negritude. Argenti (forthcoming) has written a fascinating account of the generational politics of masquerades in the Grassfields of Cameroon. His work shows convincingly how local monarchies impose notions of "tradition" in masquerade to exclude women and the youths, and how the marginalized groups, in turn, seek to subvert the power of the palace elite through performance. Argenti's analysis also illuminates the ways place, identity and authority are constructed in the kingdoms of the Grassfields.

Dance and social mobility in urban Senegal

To my knowledge therefore, no other substantial study has been carried out on the interplay between dance and social mobility in West Africa. There are numerous studies of various categories of musicians/praise-singers (e.g. Camara 1992, Panzacchi 1994, Hale 1998, Leymarie 1999, Tang 2001, Ebron 2002), but because dance is not their exclusive domain, the specific agency of dance does not appear in these studies. Fieldwork in Dakar opened the door to a long series of contradictions. For example, whereas the "caste" issue sometimes emerged in conversations with ordinary Dakarois, in the dance world it was rarely mentioned and when I asked about it, people told me that it was "obsolete". I was repeatedly told that dance was the domain of women, even as I saw men dance with as much enthusiasm. The same people who assured me that ethnicity was irrelevant in Senegal, performed dances which they clearly associated with their ethnic identity. "Contemporary" choreographers spoke about working within a "traditional" framework or doing research in rural areas to know more about "tradition". Some spoke passionately about helping develop the profession in Senegal, while making plans to migrate. People described Islam as a problem for dancers, but the dancers themselves did not seem too worried about the issue. In many ways, this thesis is an attempt to make sense of these contradictions.

This study, therefore, proposes to examine the multiple transformations of Senegalese dance forms through time and space, as well as their impact on social relations. In particu-

lar, I will explore the question of how dance enables people to re-negotiate their status. The three dance forms I have chosen to deal with seem particularly well suited for the purpose, because they are interconnected in myriad ways. I should mention that I do not deal with masquerade in this thesis, because it is rarely performed in Northern Senegambia. I have only encountered masquerade on stage or during middle-class Casamançais weddings in Dakar. The choice to look at social mobility, on the other hand, came from my informants' daily concern with "making it", and most importantly, earning recognition from their local communities. I was also compelled to take seriously Mbembe's (2001) call for the social sciences to give more attention to the materiality of people's lives in Africa, rather than remaining at the level of "representations" and "identities".

As social status and its corollary power are always gendered, I propose to examine the ways gender relations are re-negotiated through the three dance forms. Whereas women's associations have been studied in the literature on development, little attention has been given to the performative aspect of these associations; by contrast, my emphasis on the dance highlights the subtle processes through which dominant gender discourses are contested. Through their dance events, I suggest, women build up social capital which can be reconverted into other areas of social life. But not all women start out with the same capacity to build up such capital, nor are their lives equally affected in all other domains. In the performing world, social mobility takes on quite different forms. For example, the "caste" issue becomes more salient because performing in public in exchange for payment is still regarded as an activity best suited for the Griots. But in a society in which the waged sector has been reduced to a minimum, and where most youths have either migrated or have been left unemployed, the possibility of achieving an international career has greatly affected people's perception of the performer. More and more non-Griots become dancers, and recent attempts to professionalize the trade have helped displace the "caste" factor altogether. But transformations in the dance world are also the result of a tension between people's need to earn a decent living from their art and subtle forms of resistance to the European hegemony in the performing circuits. This thesis, therefore, is not only a contribution to the study of dance in Africa; in a broader sense, it is also a contribution to the study of the complex interaction between global arts markets and local creativity in post-colonial societies, as seen from a local perspective.

An essential premise of this study is that dance does not simply "reflect" society. As Stokes (1994) and others have rightly pointed out, "music and dance [...] provide the means by which the hierarchies of place are negotiated and transformed" (ibid.: 4). The

mechanisms for this have yet to be fully explored, and this thesis attempts to provide some understanding of the transformative power of performance. Here the non-verbal, polysemous nature of dance is essential, and I am painfully aware of the difficulty of writing about dance, of translating a multisensory bodily experience into words. But in the end, the dance is also a means by which I seek to understand unspoken aspects of social life in urban Senegal, rather than an end in itself. Before discussing the methodological aspects of fieldwork, therefore, I should clarify a few points regarding what this thesis is not. This first point is that it does not rely on structuralist/semiotic analyses of dance. Such methods are valuable in their own right, but I find them problematic, particularly in contexts where movement styles change quickly and with a great deal of cross-cultural exchanges. Apart from the practical difficulties in dividing movement into units as one would with language, the passing of time is a hurdle: by the time we have become proficient in the movement language of a particular society, people will have moved on to something else. The second point is that there is a reason why I have only given attention to the religious factor as a background. Although religious practice occupies an important space in most of my informants' lives, on the whole they do not experience religion as much as a "problem" with regard to dance as one would think. The final point is that despite the emphasis on gender, this is not a study of gender relations or gender identities in Senegal; rather, I consider gender as an essential dimension in anthropological work, because in practice power is always gendered.

Notes on an urban fieldwork

My fieldwork was carried out over twelve months divided in three periods of six, four and two months respectively, between May 2002 and February 2004. I stayed in the capital, Dakar, for most of the twelve months, but I also took shorter trips to the rail city of Thiès, the coastal village of Tubaab Jallaw (approximately 50 km south-east of Dakar), the Siin Saalum and Saint-Louis. Much as I would have liked to spend time in the Casamance, the region was not safe to travel in at the time, and the fact that I was doing fieldwork with a small child prevented me from embarking on long travels by road[11].

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[11] For most of my fieldwork, the only ways to travel to the Casamance were by road (a minimum of nine hours from Dakar) or by plane, which was expensive. The ferry boat that was the most popular link between Dakar and Ziguinchor, the Joola, was taken out of service for a year and a half, and sadly capsized two weeks after resuming its weekly service, on the 26th of September 2002. Nearly two thousand people died in the tragedy, many of them children and students returning to Dakar for the school start.

The first period of fieldwork, between May and November 2002, was not my first visit to Senegal. On eight occasions I had spent holidays there as a child and a teenager, but my memories of the place were piecemeal and fuzzy. I did, however, remember Dakar's landscape quite clearly, seen through never-ending walks in the burning sun. I remembered the smell of fish and the empty beaches, and I was quite surprised to see that a youth beach culture had developed in the meantime. I remembered how everything seemed to come to a standstill in the daytime during Ramadan. Short phrases in Wolof had stuck to my memory. But the most intense were memories of conflicts between co-wives in the polygamous households of my father's relatives. There were also the jokes made by relatives about how they would marry me off to cousins I hardly knew – jokes I found slightly scary at the time, especially when my mother nodded with a polite smile to avoid offending her hosts. Coming back to Dakar after thirteen years, therefore, had a peculiar sense of déjà-vu. I recognized the place but I did not know it, and although I was trying to persuade myself that everything was new, I soon realized that my senses glided back into something approaching familiarity. It may have been this sense of familiarity that made me to settle fairly rapidly into fieldwork.

Through friends I came to live in the small neighbourhood of Fann Hock, which I also describe in chapter IV. I rented a small flat there and quickly found myself at home in a neighbourhood where I made close friends, including families with small children. This proved to be an unexpected resource, not only for the generous support they provided in difficult times, but also because I gained invaluable insights into the world of women. I learned a great deal about childcare practices and the beliefs associated with the dangers of early childhood; had I not had a child of my own, I would not have known what to ask. As it was, advice came spontaneously. The fact that I was married, and that my husband spent time in Dakar with me, meant that married women did not perceive me as a threat, rather as an apprentice who needed to learn the secrets any good wife should know.

The part of Fann Hock I lived in was by far the liveliest and most diverse in the neighbourhood. People kept sheep in the sandy streets outside their homes, which the children washed with great dedication on Sunday mornings. *Sabar* parties were often held there as well as family ceremonies, and religious gatherings on Thursday nights. The latter often involved drumming and chanting well into the night, and voluminous loudspeakers made sure that the neighbourhood was momentarily taken over by the sound of prayer. I lived upstairs from a corner shop where the neighbourhood youths met every day to chat, listen to Senegalese rap, make phone calls abroad or look at the girls. Fights occasionally

broke out, usually late at night when someone had been drinking. Two or three times per week, the neighbourhood's Baay Fall, a sub-branch of the Mouride brotherhood, met in front of the shop and sang the praise of their *marabout*. The singing usually went on until 1 or 2 am, later during the hot season. Once I had become used to the noise, I became very fond of this corner of Fann Hock. Everyone knew my daughter, and people I did not know greeted her in the street; she, too, had her friends in the neighbourhood, and they enjoyed teasing the little *tubaab* (White person).

Despite the vicissitudes of life in Dakar, I was always fascinated by the diversity of influences, and the juxtaposition of the old and the new at all levels of urban life. In moments of exhaustion I did feel like running away from the city and its pollution, traffic, heat and smells, but most of the time I was fascinated by the creative *bricolage* people displayed in the most trivial situations. When I had to go to the police station to report a nasty theft, I was invited to the "investigation brigade", a small office sparsely furnished with a couple of tables and chairs. One of the tables was covered with stacks of papers, and on the other sat an old typing machine, held together by strips of tape. The only decoration was a golden-framed portrait of a Tijaan Cleric (a *marabout*) hanging on the back wall. By contrast with the decrepit look of the place, the police officer was carrying a mobile phone of the absolute latest fashion. As he typed my report, the phone rang twice, and each time he stepped out and spoke for fifteen minutes. "Sorry, phone calls from New York!" he said.

From Fann Hock, it was comparatively easy to move around to various parts of the city, even though circulating in Dakar was a time-consuming and exhausting affair. With two million inhabitants including the suburban towns, Dakar suffers from the poverty of its infrastructures and for the fact that dozens of thousands of people take the same narrow roads – by minibus, by car or on foot – to the city centre every day. From Fann Hock, I could easily walk, catch a minibus, a yellow-and-black taxi or one of the cheaper unlicensed taxis, the popular *clandos*. My informants lived in very diverse parts of the city and its suburbs, and the dancers rehearsed at the Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor (between Fass and Grand Dakar), in the city centre, the Point E, at a crafts centre near Fass, and in the suburban district of Pikine. I had initially intended to focus on *sabars*, family ceremonies and possibly on hip-hop culture. But the serendipity of fieldwork decided otherwise. During my second week in Dakar, a family I had met introduced me to a dance company, *La 5e Dimension*; one of the family members had worked in the same small fishing company as one of the drummers a couple of years earlier, and they had become friends. I was both impressed and intrigued by the combination of styles the group was working with, and

they welcomed me to watch their rehearsals as often as I wanted to. At this point I did not intend to work on professional performance, but there was a good rapport with the group members, and I kept coming back at least once a week. Watching *La 5e Dimension* at work, taking part in their informal meetings and having long conversations with the performers, turned out to be one of the most interesting and constant parts of my fieldwork. I also learned a great deal from helping the group with practical tasks of various kinds, and teaching English to some of the performers. I gradually became accepted as a useful appendix to the group, which was an ideal position to find myself in. The choreographer, Jean Tamba, turned out to be one of the most experienced dancers in Dakar. He was also one of the founders of the only professional dance association in Senegal, *Kaay Fecc*[12], and the artistic director of the bi-annual festival of the same name. The first *Kaay Fecc* "festival of all dances" had been held in 2001, and the organizing team was now working on the second, planned to be held over nine days in May-June 2003. The festival was intended as an important lead in the professionalization people thought was necessary to raise the profile of dance and dancers. After I had been introduced by Tamba, the team welcomed me into the organization. By then I had realized that my easy access to the professional world would enable me to gain a wealth of data, and I spent an increasing proportion of my time with performers, either at their rehearsal spaces or at their homes. I also watched performances at the Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor, where many troupes performed for their peers and for local dance enthusiasts, and at the more cosmopolitan Centre Culturel Français. Between early February and late May 2003, I attended the weekly meetings of the *Kaay Fecc* organizing team, which consisted of some twenty dancers, musicians, cultural administrators, journalists, actors and a storyteller. Because of previous experience as a festival volunteer[13], I was paired with a visiting organizer from the Ivory Coast, and with her I recruited, trained and managed a team of fifty "volunteers". I have not had the space to include the experience in the study, but this obviously allowed me to gain a strong foothold in the dance world. People came to perceive me as a *Kaay Fecc* person, a mediocre dancer and a passable photographer, and not simply as an idle anthropologist.

I was involved in other circles in parallel with the dance world. I spent time with friends in Fann Hock of course, and through one of them, I came in contact with a local cultural association in Pikine. The association was one of a constellation of small NGO-

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[12] *Kaay Fecc* means "come and dance" in Wolof.

[13] I had worked as a volunteer assistant to visiting artists for the three-week long "Images of Africa" festival held in Copenhagen in 1996.

funded associations dedicated to the implementation of "decentralization" in such areas as health and family welfare, the improvement of literacy, or the promotion of "culture and the arts" in poorer neighbourhoods. The association initially organized a series of four afternoon-long focus groups on dance; I had not asked for this, but the members were obviously used to the "research-action" principles many NGOs followed, and they expected me to do the same. These sessions turned out to be quite useful. Although I sometimes felt awkward in a situation I had been dragged into, these were precious opportunities to collect data, especially when people got carried away and argued about social and religious issues, such as diverging notions of "proper Islam". This was also where I observed most acutely the way people switched to the language of NGOs as soon as an outsider to the community was in sight. After we had completed the sessions, I kept visiting the association once a week for several months, teaching a few English lessons, and having informal conversations with people. These regular visits allowed me to gain valuable insights into the world of local associations, many of them being offshoots of the ASC (*Associations Sportives et Culturelles*) movement (see chapter II). But I was never integrated to the local life in the same way as I was in Fann Hock, despite the fact that I also visited Pikine in other contexts.

I was also learning Wolof – in its distinctively urban version. I began taking classes twice a week at the Alliance Franco-Sénégalaise during my third week in Dakar, and when the cycle finished, I continued in private with the teacher. He also taught at the University and held workshops to teach civil servants to write in the codified Wolof script. I practised in daily life, and although I was never fluent, by the middle of fieldwork I had learned enough to follow conversations. But I never reached a sufficient level to interview people in Wolof, and most of my interactions were therefore skewed towards those who spoke at least some French (I was able to mix French and Wolof). I used the services of an assistant for about 10% of my fieldwork, mostly to introduce me to elders in the Lebu community, to join me to some of the women's events and to help me translate songs. I never used an assistant in the professional dance world because I did not feel the need for it, and because I felt that having an assistant trailing me would have introduced a degree of formality in my interactions.

There are many aspects of fieldwork I would have wanted to include here, both methodological and personal, because they have affected the production of the knowledge contained in this thesis to various degrees. For example, although I was always regarded as a *tubaab* – a term which does not necessarily denote white skin, but rather the socio-

economic status of the foreigner coming from a wealthy part of the world – the fact that my father was Senegalese made me belong to a slightly different category. As will become clear in chapter I, most Senegambian societies regard genealogy as extremely important in placing a person within the relevant hierarchies. The question that immediately followed the revelation that father was Senegalese, therefore, was: "What is your name?"[14] This was followed by more questions about his place of birth and the places of origin of his parents. Whether this worked to my advantage or the opposite depended on the context, particularly the ethnicity and social position of my interlocutor. Due to lack of space, however, I will restrict myself to a short discussion of three important points: the bodily knowledge gained from "dancing in the field", negotiating informants' expectations and the use of the video and photography.

Bodily knowledge

Helena Wulff (1998) has written fascinating reflections on how her background as a dancer had affected her fieldwork, particularly her rapport with ballet dancers. She noted that they could tell she was a dancer from the way she was watching them move. My own experience in Senegal parallels her observations. On the whole, I believe I would have done a very different kind of fieldwork had I not had any previous experience of dancing, and had I not, occasionally, taken part in the dance. "Dancing in the field" [15] helped on two levels: not only did it help legitimize my presence – people would have found odd that I did research on dance if I never joined in – but also, it enabled me to gain valuable bodily knowledge, and therefore a better understanding of people's experience of the dance. Learning techniques and styles I was completely unfamiliar with among highly skilled performers was also a humbling experience, and I gained insights into local modes of apprenticeship. This was particularly the case when I was offered to take part in a four-week "traditional dance" workshop for professional dancers in October 2002. We practised every day, and this gave me the opportunity to meet a good number of my future informants. With the "contemporary dance" groups, the fact that I knew a good deal about the Euro-American dance world was more than a token advantage; commenting on the work of particular choreographers, exchanging gossip and videotapes was the first common ground on which we met. Although I learned the basics of *sabar* in dance classes, I rarely

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[14] In Wolof "Noo sant?"; the word *sant* designates the lineage name, and is assumed to be the father's.

[15] This is a reference to Buckland (1999).

joined in real-life *sabars* on the other hand, because the interaction between drummers and dancers was too complex for the mediocre *sabar* practitioner that I was. But I did execute a few steps whenever I was invited to attend a wedding. The following vignettes illustrate my informants' expectations that I should join in the dance.

Vignette # 1

I am chatting with two of the teaching staff at the dance section of the National School of Arts. I have already visited the place several times, watching the students work and talking to the section leaders. Some of the students have volunteered to work for the *Kaay Fecc* festival. In the middle of the conversation, one of the two teachers stops abruptly, smiles and says: "Hélène... Why don't you stop talking and get to dance a bit?" He suggests that I come to follow some of the classes at the school. There is too little time left before the school holidays for me to do that, but they seem reassured when I mention with whom I am already taking dance classes.

Vignette # 2

I have come to see a dance group I know well at their usual rehearsal space. For once they are not working on a set choreography but practising some "traditional" styles, learning from each other and having fun experimenting with various combinations. The drummers play and give some feedback. The choreographer is dancing that day, which is unusual even though he is an excellent dancer. As soon as I come in, he shouts to me: "Take your shoes off!" and invites me to join in. I feel quite self-conscious because I have never tried these dances before, but his tone of voice does not leave any space to negotiate. I follow as best as I can, and to my surprise I find myself enjoying it a great deal. After an hour I am drenched and exhausted, so I stop while the others go on.

Negotiating informants' expectations

In a paper entitled "The white 'helpers': anthropologists, development workers and local imaginations", Sarah Pink (1998) argues that anthropologists' enduring dilemma about "giving something back" to informants is a matter of false consciousness. In her view, this simply reproduces the imbalance of colonial relationships, because the underlying idea is that the anthropologist takes something valuable away from people, i.e. the stories that will

help further his/her career, while feeling morally relieved from guilt after giving away cash and gifts. She says that "in an ironic scenario, the anthropologist may feel ethically virtuous whilst the informants are left wondering why they have been given whatever it was they 'got back', and what precisely they got it in return for" (1998: 11). This might have been the case in the small town of Guinea Bissau where she did fieldwork, but this was certainly not the case in Dakar. On the contrary, I found that some of my informants had surprising insights about research, and all had a sharp consciousness of the risk of being exploited by foreign academics, artists, performing agents or others.

This was the case of the Senegalese NGO worker who introduced me to the cultural association in Pikine. A former school teacher, youth organizer and political activist, he was well aware of what academic life entailed. As we waited for two members of the association to arrive on the day I was due to meet them, he became quite ironic about the situation. "You see", he said, "I know very well how these things work. You will do your research here, learn a lot from people and then you'll go back and be an 'expert'". He then proceeded to tell me about a trip to the Ivory Coast, during which a White "expert" had lectured the African delegation on cocoa farming. For him, the anecdote was a perfect illustration of the exploitation of African knowledge by White people. When the Pikinois arrived, he introduced us and told them I wished to spend time with the association and carry out interviews. He stood up and said he would leave us to "negotiate"; then he told the visitors that I was prepared to conduct a workshop in manuscript-writing for their association. They took the offer seriously, and afterwards I had a hard time convincing them that I had never written a manuscript in my life. The man's tactic was quite obvious: by making a surprise offer on my behalf, he made it clear to everybody that I would have to give something in return for the time spent with people, although not necessarily in the form of cash. We settled on English language lessons.

The reality of doing fieldwork in a context in which most informants struggle to get by, means that it is impossible to ignore people's needs. But where I would agree with Sarah Pink (ibid.) is that it is no use paying informants to talk. I had decided from the outset that I would not enter this kind of game, even though it is common that people – not only Griots – attempt to force one into a patron-client relationship. The only time I paid for an interview is described in chapter V. Whenever possible I found other ways of making gifts to key informants – for example after the birth of a child or as a contribution towards someone's business – but never as a reward for having spent time talking to me. I was all too aware of the risk that people would make up stories to receive money. There was also

the risk of making enemies of people who would have received nothing. But I must admit that the concern with "giving something back" became an obsession at times, which had diverse effects on my fieldwork. On the positive side, becoming involved in practical tasks in the dance world, helped build relationships of trust with key informants. On the negative side, I sometimes found myself unable to live up to all the promises I felt compelled to make, for example writing up CVs or translating project proposals and other texts into English. In some circumstances this obsession prevented me from putting questions I was keen to ask, for fear of rushing into things without having anything to offer. On the whole however, the balance was positive, and engaging with people's lives at various levels made it possible to build relationships which I believe will last.

Visual media

The use of photography and the video proved invaluable in many ways. The most important aspect is that I was able to help some of the groups promote their work by giving them photographs of their rehearsals and performances, both on paper and in digital format. Videos were also greatly valued, and as the word went around that I was equipped to record images, more dancers asked me to record their shows and rehearsals. This gave me an excellent reason for being there, and in some instances I came to spend more time with people than I might have done otherwise.

More surprising was the fact that using these recording tools enabled me to discover connections with the Senegalese Diaspora. Having filmed women during dance events, I noticed people's fascination for the video, and how I was always asked to walk around the circle and focus on each face individually. This was particularly true when women sat motionless in their best attire. From this I learned that in recent years, people had developed a habit of sending videos to the Diaspora, from which men who were available for marriage could choose a potential bride. Watching videos of festive events with the participants and their neighbours also offered interesting opportunities to hear people's comments about each other – and themselves.



Fig. i View of Fann Hock



Fig. ii Soumbedioune, the main fish market, seen from Fann Hock



Fig. iii View of Dakar from Fann Hock



Fig. iv The nearby Médina

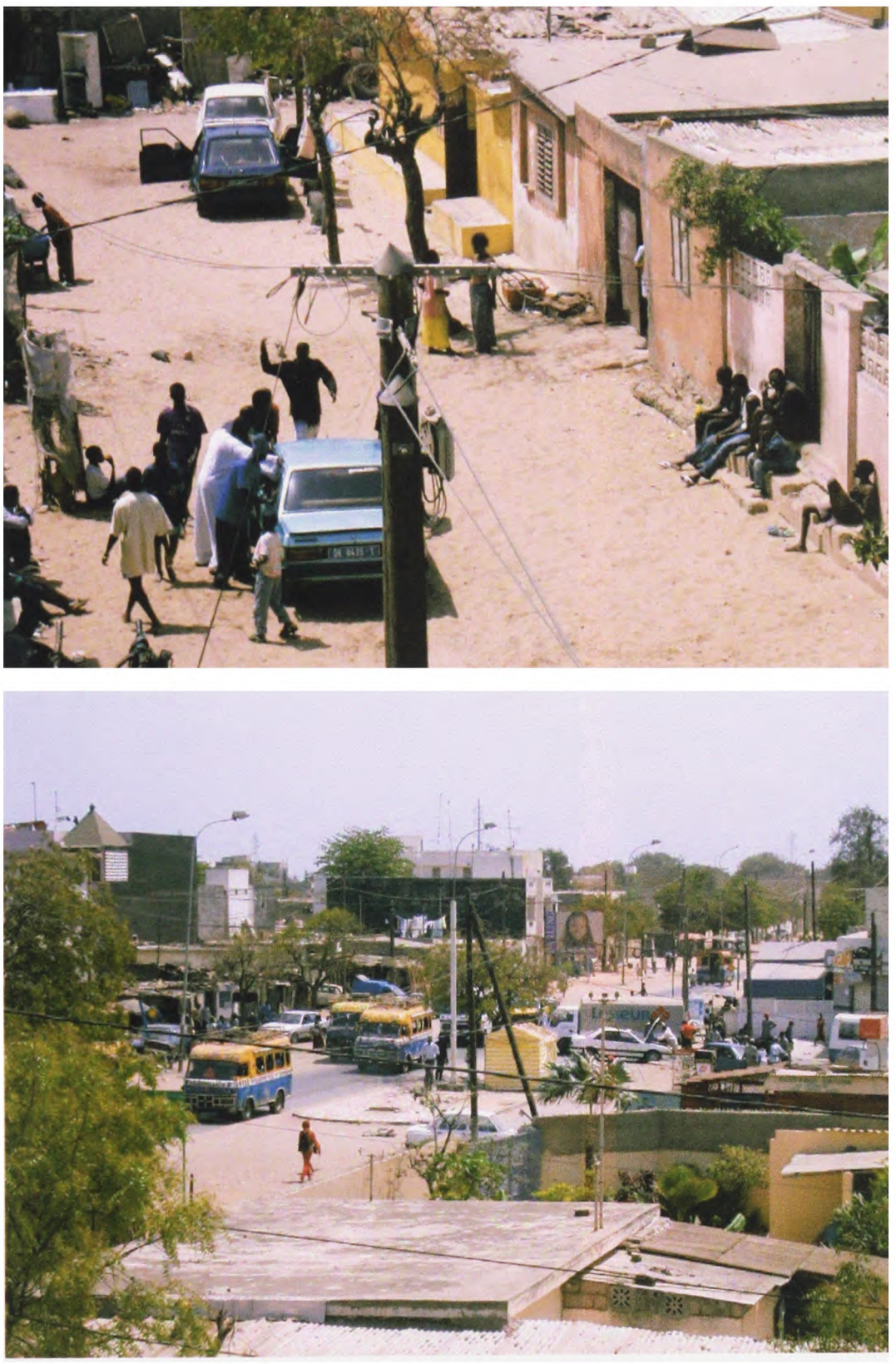
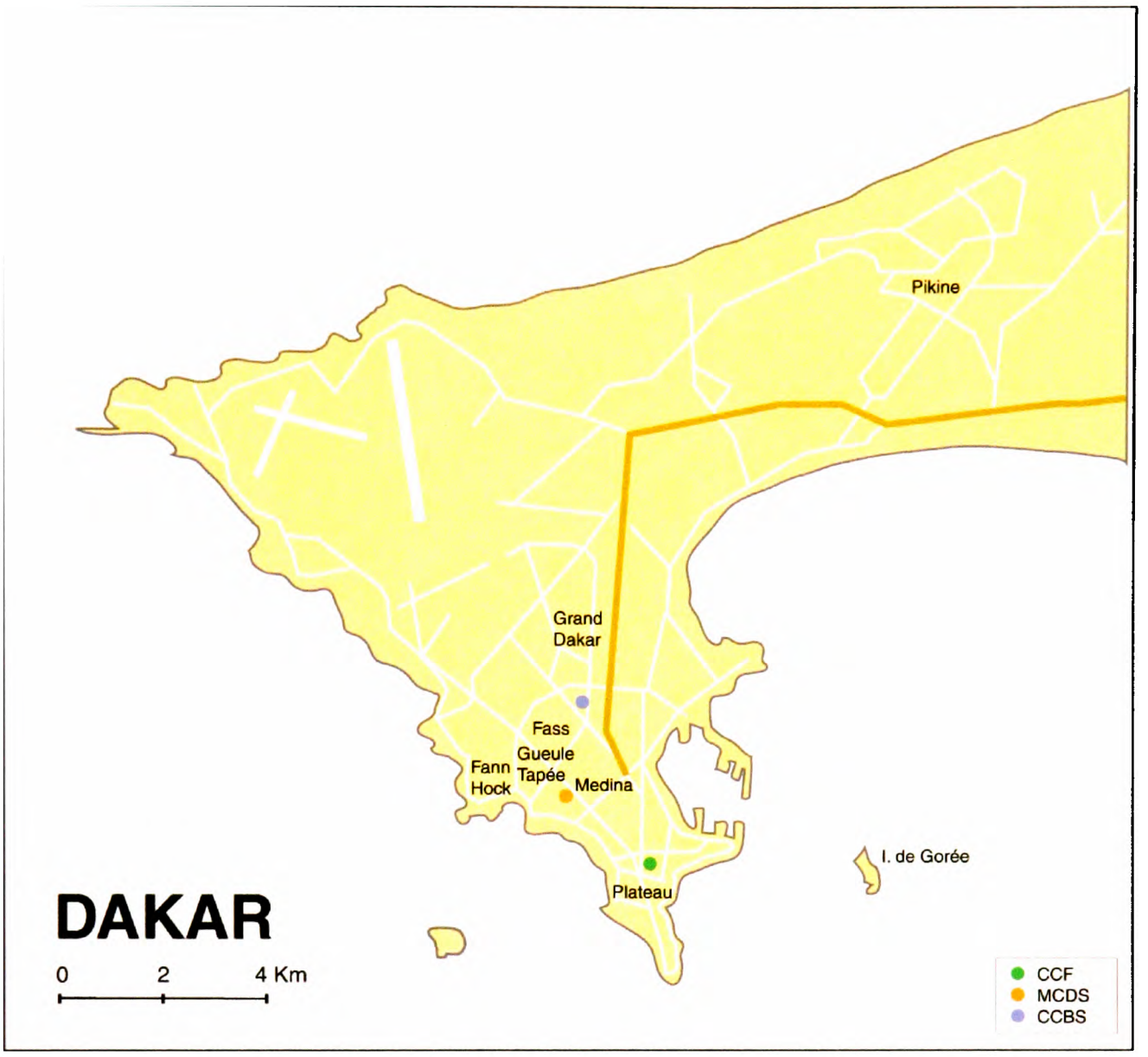


Fig. v Two views of the ICOTAF neighbourhood in Pikine



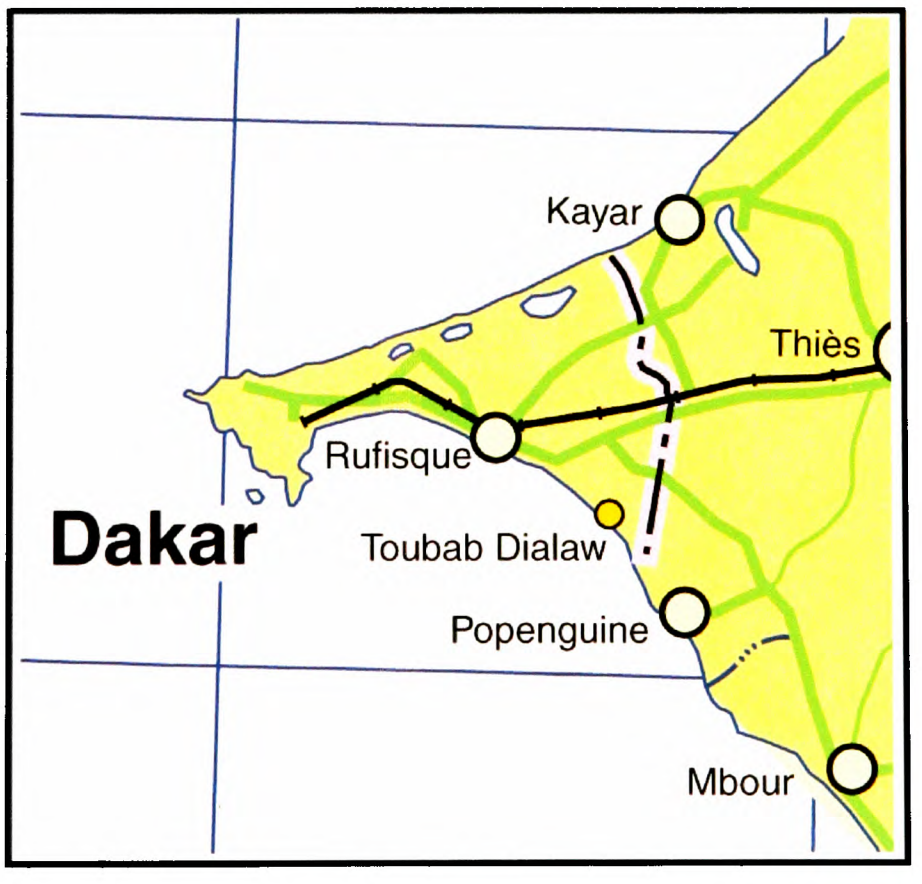


Fig. vi: Map of Dakar with main fieldwork sites indicated, and map of the Cap Vert Peninsula (CCF, Centre Culturel Français; MCDS, Maison de la Culture Douta Seck; CCBS, Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor).



Fig. vii: Map of Senegal (with the Casamance highlighted)

Thesis outline

The thesis is divided into six chapters of unequal length. The first three will "set the scene", introducing relevant aspects of the history of the region and the theoretical framework. Chapter I, therefore, begins with a short history of Senegambia since the pre-colonial monarchies. The region is presented as a major crossroads between the Muslim world, Europe and the Atlantic. The separatist movement in the Casamance, which began in 1982 but had probably been fermenting for much of the twentieth century, is briefly mentioned as an important background to folkloric performance in Dakar. The chapter moves on to problematizing the "traditional" status of the performer – the Griot – within some of the regional caste-like hierarchies. I portray the so-called "caste" systems of Senegambia as more fluid and flexible than is often assumed, as shown by the occupational changes that have taken place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the ambiguity of geneaological classification and people's ways of accommodating transgressions to the endogamy rule. This is the sociological background which transformations in the status of the performer should be held against. The chapter ends by hinting at another important factor of ambiguity in the status of the performer: Senegalese Islam in its various forms.

Chapter II focuses specifically on the development of Senegambian theatrical dance in the twentieth century. The chapter aims at demystifying the common idea that the genres of performance this thesis looks at should have developed as bounded entities, showing for example that the founding figures of Senegambian folkloric performance drew in part from their experience of colonial school theatre and of the Parisian artistic milieu in the first half of the twentieth century.

Chapter III introduces the theoretical framework informing this thesis. It asks what "dance" is, and extends the scope of the study to creative bodily performance. Several approaches to performance as a vehicle of national or regional identity, and as a site of negotiation of gender relations, are reviewed. Abner Cohen's (1969, 1993) work on the dialogic relationship between arts and politics is presented as an important analytical framework.

Chapter IV looks at the dance events organized by urban women's associations, in particular *sabar* parties and the fairly private gatherings called *tours* in Dakar. Drawing on ethnographic data from the social and spatial structure of the events, the dances and the political economy of fashion, the chapter shows how women use these occasions to create and maintain their greatest wealth: their social networks. I also argue that these are moments

during which alternative gender relations can be experimented with, and ask to what extent the socio-economic status gained from these events extends into other areas of social life. Women's dance events are described as "framed" as a separate domain from everyday life by the symbolic demarcation of space, fashion and bodily attitudes; this is not, however, a case of "framing" in Bateson's (1972) strong sense, as there are obvious continuities with other domains of everyday life. The distinction between *sabar*, "popular dances" and "women's dances" is purposefully fuzzy to take into account the ways in which the dances performed in some contexts are quickly transferred to others, so that such distinctions are irrelevant. As the women's world does not exist in a vacuum, the chapter also contrasts women's stimulating experience of the dance with the ethos of immorality which some men – and a minority of women – attempt to confine the dances within. I suggest that the aggressiveness in gender relations that comes across in this contrast is linked to men's uncertainties in the breadwinner role they are still expected to fulfill.

Chapter V focuses on folkloric performance. The common progression from small neighbourhood troupes to more professional organizations with international ambitions – for the lucky few – is made clear. With the ethnography of a dance troupe set up by migrants from the Casamance, *Bakalama*, it builds further on Mark's (1994) work, and suggests that people have re-appropriated the nation-building mission of the folkloric genre to serve a wide variety of purposes, from maintaining a sense of local belonging among urban migrants to improving livelihoods and re-shuffling the "caste" hierarchies. The analysis of a piece based on a Jola fertility ritual modified for the stage gives a sense of how folkloric performance may use the conventions of the genre – a fairly conservative and romanticized view of rural life – to subvert the initial nationhood agenda. I also suggest that people's hopes of a better life through an international career are more often deceived than most are willing to admit.

Through the history of La 5e Dimension in particular, chapter VI follows the trajectory of Senegalese theatrical dance further into its next stage, the so-called "contemporary dance". I suggest that the development of innovative forms of dance, where diversity is celebrated while remaining grounded in local urban life, is motivated both by the performers' need to express themselves in more individual ways and by the partial failure of the folkloric genre to raise the status of performers, especially women. Even though on the whole, local audiences are not yet familiar with it, for the more successful performers the "contemporary" genre opens doors to better-paid opportunities abroad, and more prestigious performing circuits. The chapter also touches on the increasing global interest in the

"contemporary arts" of Africa, and asks whether there is a chance that African artists might benefit from this or whether African performance is simply being momentarily transferred to a new ghetto.

Chapter I:
Senegambian history and the status of the performer

Introduction

This chapter is intended as a historical and sociological background to the study. The first section, therefore, provides a short overview of Senegambia's history. Whereas Senegal corresponds to the territories colonized by the French, Senegambia is a more loosely defined region comprising Senegal, the Gambia and the Senegal River valley beyond the current borders of Senegal. Islamization, the transatlantic slave trade and the French colonial period were defining moments in turning the region into a crossroads of cultural influences. The organization of Senegalese Islam into Sufi brotherhoods is mentioned here because their social, political and economic power is pervasive at all levels of social life in a country where 95% of the population are declared Muslims[16]. The nationalistic conflict in the southern part of Senegal, the Casamance, is mentioned as an important background to the folkloric dance phenomenon described in chapter V.

The second section provides sociological insights into the specific status of the performer within the "traditional" social stratification of the region. Senegambian societies are described as highly stratified along the lines of endogamous, occupational status groups. In much of Senegambia – but not in Jola society – dancing, singing, praise-oratory and music making in exchange for cash or gifts, are strongly associated with various categories of Griots. Although Griots have alternative tales of difference and status, a majority of the population associates

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[16] The four main brotherhoods, the Muridiyya, the Tijaaniyya, the Qaddiriyya and the Laayenes, account for the quasi-totality of the Muslims. Anti-Sufi reformist movements are gaining ground but remain marginal. Most sources describe the Tijaans as the most numerous (up to 50%), followed by the Mourides (30%) the Qadr (14-15%) and the Laayenes (no more than 5%).

them with a lower status, and a whole set of beliefs relating to "pollution" is attached to them. Being a professional dancer, therefore, appears from the outset as a tainted activity. This is not the case, however, in the festive events described in chapter IV; there women of all categories join in the dance.

Having described social stratification in Senegambia as a set of "systems", in the third section I temper this view by showing that flexibility has long been a characteristic of these societies. An important limit, however, is the persistence of endogamy within the main social ranks. It is during conflicts over marriage that the continuing relevance of genealogy becomes most apparent, and several case stories illustrate this. Finally, in the fourth section I suggest that the growing salience of Islam in urban life renders the position of the performer all the more ambiguous. Although the subject is rarely discussed in problematic terms in the dance world, many performers' eagerness to appear as pious Muslims may indicate that they are aware of the fragile equilibrium they find themselves in.

Senegambia at a crossroads between "Islam" and "the West"[17]

Much of the ancient history of the region is linked to the Senegal River in the Fuuta Toro, an important artery of communication and trade. The river shores have always been the most fertile areas of the region – two crops per year of millet, sorghum and rice are harvested there. To the South and West of the river, the land quickly dries to a flat and sparsely wooded savannah, which is the home of Peul pastoralists. Further South in Wolof and Sereer country, thorn bushes give way to baobab trees and peanut fields; this is the "peanut basin", a region that stretches widely from Thiès, less than 70 km East of Dakar, to Tambacounda in the East of the country. Peanuts are Senegal's main cash crop, but there also are cotton and sugar, and the large sugar plantations are exclusively operated by the state-owned Compagnie Sucrière du Sénégal. The Casamance region, South of the Gambia, offers a completely different geography. This is the Northern end of West Africa's wet tropical zone, and the home of wet rice farming. The specific geography of the Casamance is often mentioned as accounting for the region's distinctive identity within the Senegalese nation, although as I will discuss later, this cannot be the full story.

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[17] This is a reference to the title in Gellar (1982).

The Senegambian region would have had a very different history, were it not for its geographical position. As will be evident from the short historical review, this particular location at a crossroads of trades and influences from the neighbouring parts of West Africa, the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, the Caribbean and America has shaped the region's identity for several centuries.

The pre-colonial period

Between the fourth and the thirteenth century A.D.[18], the Empire of Ghana, which came to include the kingdom of Tekrur in the Senegal River valley as a vassal, played a crucial role in the trans-Saharan trade. Through trade, Tekrur became the point of entry of Islam in the region, and the kingdom's Haalpulaar aristocracy was probably converted by the Zenega Berbers settled in current Mauritania, as early as the fourteenth century (Tamari 1997; also see Dilley 2004 for a more detailed account).

The first Europeans in the region were Portuguese navigators who explored the Senegal River in 1444. Although trans-Saharan and regional slave trade existed already then, the reorientation towards the transatlantic slave trade that followed the European travels by sea drastically modified the socio-political equilibrium of the region (Barry 1988). By the sixteenth century, Senegambia had become one of the most important sources of slaves for the transatlantic trade, and not only the Portuguese, but also the Dutch, the French and the British were competing for the control of the trade routes and the most profitable alliances with the local monarchies. The Dutch built the coastal fort of Gorée in the late 17th century and according to most historical sources the island developed into a major slave-trading post, although the scale of Gorée's slave trade has been largely contested. As a result during the eighteenth century, a French-speaking Black and Mulatto population of merchants and workers settled in Gorée and in the French slave-trading station of Saint-Louis, at the mouth of the Senegal River. Meanwhile the British established themselves by the Gambia River delta, where they retained their position for more than two hundred years. On the French side the largest "slave market" was the colony of Saint-Domingue; therefore French trade declined after the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue in 1791, which resulted in the creation of Haiti. France eventually

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[18] The exact times of formation and decline of the Ghana Empire are not well known (Diouf 2001).

outlawed slavery in 1848, but did not give up its interests in Senegambia. The peanuts introduced as an alternative to the slave trade proved to be a lucrative export crop, and encouraged the government of Napoleon III to strengthen its control over Senegal from 1850 onwards. The Wolof and Sereer states were conquered by Governor Louis Faidherbe in the 1850s-60s, thus becoming the first French colonies in Africa. Dakar, a trading post since 1750, was developed in 1862 and a port capable of handling the increasing peanut exports was built. Expansion continued until 1886 when the Kajoor was re-conquered from Lat Dior Diop, who had mounted a rebellion forcing the French to withdraw in 1871. The colonizers also encountered strong resistance in the Fuuta Toro. There, Muslim leader El Hadj Oumar Tall attracted an increasing number of followers to his revolts between 1854 and 1857, when he agreed to tolerate a French presence in the region.

From the late 19th century onwards, the French colonial expansion had the simultaneous effect of weakening the old aristocracies – the four Wolof kingdoms of the Jolof, Baol, Kajoor and Waalo were destroyed by the mid-19th century – and of favouring the expansion of the Sufi brotherhoods, the *tariqas*. It is often argued that the monarchies were already on the decline, their authority undermined by their involvement with the Atlantic slave trade (Diop 1981). The *tariqas* seized the opportunity to gain the confidence of the people and dislodge the land-owning aristocracy.

Senegal's special status in the colonial project

In 1902, Dakar became the capital of the AOF ("Afrique Occidentale Française" or French West Africa) and the base from which the French would extend their colonial domination over large chunks of the region. The Casamance resisted colonization until the 1920s. Early on, the French developed a policy of cultural assimilation which stood in sharp contrast to the British indirect rule. Nowhere in West Africa was this policy as advanced as in Senegal. In 1890 for example, the four oldest trade posts – Saint-Louis, Dakar, Gorée and Rufisque – were granted special status under the exceptional regime of the "Four Communes": African men who were resident of these towns had access to full citizenship rights. In practice this meant that they had access to French education and held voting rights over representatives to the French Parliament ("Assemblée Nationale"). Although these towns represented 5% of Senegal's population at most, their Francophone elite became very influential, some of its

members being sent out as officers of the colonial administration throughout the AOF. In 1914, customs officer Blaise Diagne became the first African deputy to the National Assembly; in 1919 he founded the first western-style political party in the region, the Parti Socialiste Républicain. His opponent Lamine Guèye was one of the very first Western-educated African lawyers. By World War II, Senegal had therefore gained a leadership role in the French colonial system that was way out of proportion to its size, and this "special relationship" between Senegal and France has remained deeply entangled in the formation of a national identity ever since. At the independence in 1960, Senegal and Mali (then the Western Soudan) joined to create a federal state, but the experience was short-lived; the "Fédération du Mali" ended in obscure circumstances after two months (Hesseling 1985).

From independence to Sopi[19]

Léopold Sédar Senghor, a Christian of Sereer origin educated in French schools in Senegal and at the Sorbonne in Paris, became the first President of the independent nation, in 1960. Senghor was a poet, an intellectual, a Francophile and one of the founders of the Negritude movement[20]. Unsurprisingly, under his presidency Senegal was a loyal supporter of French policy in Africa. In exchange, Senegal received economic and military support as well as a privileged access to the French market for its exports: peanuts, phosphates and later fish and produce. Senegal also developed ties with other recent African states and maintained good relationships with Morocco, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. On a political level, Senghor always pro-

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[19] *Sopi* (or *soppi*) means "change" in Wolof; it was the slogan of the coalition led by Abdoulaye Wade, who won the presidential election in 2000.

[20] "Negritude" was originally a literary and artistic movement founded in Paris by Senghor, Aimé Césaire from Martinique and Léon Damas from the French Guyana. It was an attempt by Black artists and intellectuals educated in France to come to terms with the cultural devaluation imposed by years of colonialism. Without denying their attachment to French culture, they aimed at attracting the attention of the world to the value and specific creativity of "Negro cultures". They were also influenced by their exposure to the highly politicized African American literary milieu in Paris in the 1930s. Senghor's version of Negritude was defined as a form of cultural development that would strike a balance between the values of "enracinement" (rootedness) and "ouverture" (openness). He was abundantly criticized, both in Senegal and abroad, for romanticizing Africa and trying to legitimize the power of an elite much removed from the interests of the population. At the World Festival of Negro Arts held in Dakar in 1966, Wole Soyinka famously called Negritude into question: "The tiger does not proclaim its tigritude. It leaps on its prey." (Snipe 1998: 49)

claimed his will to implement African socialism of a new kind, albeit in continuity with an idealized version of "traditional" African communalism. During his presidency however, Senegal grew even further away from an egalitarian society. In spite of this, for the first twenty years after the independence Senegal was widely considered as the economic locomotive of the region, and a model of democracy in Africa. The change of regime following the *sopi* campaign and Abdoulaye Wade's election in 2000 reinforced the idea that democracy was well established in Senegal. Yet Senghor had forced opposition parties underground in 1976[21], and Senegal was not a multiparty regime again until 1981. In the meantime, in 1980 Senghor had retired and nominated his Prime Minister, Abdou Diouf, to be his successor. Presidential elections were held in 1983, and Diouf was elected with an official 83.45% of the votes, in what opposition parties described as a "masquerade" (Hesseling 1985).

The country has been plunged into economic stagnation since the early 1980s, and no policy or change of regime has been able to change the situation radically. A negative turning point came in the late 1970s, when peanut world prices fell, the chronic drought which had begun in the late 1960s worsened, and soils eroded rapidly due to over-exploitation. Some sources also point to the failure of the centrally planned economy to raise standards of living, and a development policy which favoured city-dwellers at the expense of the rural areas (e.g. Sharp 1994). The foreign-controlled manufacturing sector was in crisis following the liberalization initiated in the 1970s (Thioub et al. 1998). In 1980 Senegal called upon the IMF and the World Bank for rescue, and the Structural Adjustment Programmes implemented in the following years had the same socially disastrous effect as in many other developing countries. From 1984 onwards, state services were scaled down, government-run agencies were liquidated or sold off, unemployment rocketed, and the stable flow of migration almost became a mass exodus. The period also marked the beginning of the golden days of the "informal sector".

More dramatically, the major part of the population is struggling to make ends meet or even survive. Estimated average life expectancy varies from 48/50 years – for men and women respectively – to 60/64 years depending on sources (e.g. IPPF 2000, CIA 2001). In most parts of the country outside Dakar, access to health services and medicine is very limited. Less than two-thirds of Senegalese children go to primary school; along with other public ser-

[21] That year, the Constitution was amended to limit the number of authorized parties to three.

vices, the education sector suffered from the cutbacks of the 1980s. A gap also remains between standards of living in urban and rural Senegal. Even though official poverty statistics are unsatisfactory in many ways, they give some indication of the extent of the problem. In 2001 the proportion of households living in poverty[22] was estimated at 54%, down from 58% in 1994. It is even more revealing that 65% of the households in the sample of the EPPS[23] regarded themselves as poor, and that almost the same proportion (64%) thought that their situation had worsened in the previous five years (Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances 2003).

The hopes raised by the change of regime in 2000 have since been replaced by utter disillusionment in large parts of the population. In private, many Senegalese who voted for Wade and his *sopi* coalition in 2000 complain about a state of corruption perceived as worse than in the Diouf era, incompetence at the highest levels of the government and the President's bias in favour of the Mourides. In Dakar in 2003, popular rumour had nicknamed Wade "TTT" for "Télé Tukki Touba", implying that instead of working for the country he was either on TV, travelling or in Touba, the holy city of the Mourides. Spirits were high in 2000, but most Senegalese have yet to see the benefits of living in one of Africa's "models of culture and democracy".

The problem of the Casamance

The separatist rebellion in the Casamance begun in 1982, with a march organized in Ziguinchor by the MFDC (Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance). But there is evidence that Casamançais nationalism had grown roots much earlier in the twentieth century. Scholars of the region remain divided as to the period and causes of the emergence of this nationalism. Foucher (2002) has offered a comprehensive review of the main perspectives. From the point of view of the separatists, a local consciousness emerged during the twentieth century, first as a result of the position of the region at the periphery of the French colonial territories – the Portuguese handed the Casamance over to the French in 1886 – and later as a reaction against the central government's systematic sabotage of its social and economic development. But the separatists also emphasize the cultural distinctiveness of the region, and in

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[22] "Poverty" is defined here as "access to less than 2,400 calories per adult and per day".

[23] "Enquête de Perception de la Pauvreté au Sénégal", official study on the perception of poverty carried out by focus interviews group in 2001.

particular of its Jola component. This essentialist discourse has been conveniently re-appropriated by the government and by a number of scholars. Other perspectives have focused on the economic isolation of the region. Inspired by Anderson's (1991) notion of "imagined communities", Foucher himself remarks that the geographic delimitation of Casamançais separatism corresponds to the spread of schools, and argues that schooling and migration were the main factors allowing a regional – more specifically Jola – consciousness to emerge. Although a ceasefire was signed in Bissau in May 1991, the conflict went on with various degrees of intensity until a peace agreement was finally signed on the 30th of December 2004 between the government and the MFDC, represented by a Catholic priest, Father Augustin Diamacoune. The agreement is too recent, however, to know whether this will mark the end of the conflict.

Having given a very short introduction to Senegambian history, I will now turn to the more specific history and sociology of Senegambian social stratification. The organization of most societies of the region into endogamous occupational groups, although partly undermined by post-colonial nation building, is particularly important to understand the categories dancers and musicians are being mapped against.

Social ranks in Senegambia

A necessary background to discuss performance in relation to shifting hierarchies, this section provides a view of Senegambian societies as highly stratified along the lines of endogamous, occupational status groups, or social "ranks" and "categories" according to Dilley's classification (e.g. 2000). This is illustrated with the examples of Wolof and Tukulor (or Haalpulaar'en) societies.

"Castes", ranks and categories

In French colonial anthropology, the existence of pre-colonial stratified societies was largely ignored. These societies epitomized the "other" and were often idealized as egalitarian. British anthropology of the late colonial period generated very similar ideas, with the "discovery" of acephalous political organizations in rural West Africa, following the publication of the influential *African Political Systems* (1940) by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard. This vision also pervaded

the discourse of the elites who came to power in West African nations right after the independence, as the idea of a pre-colonial egalitarianism fitted well with the ideologies called upon for nation-building (Markovitz 1977). Senghor's Negritude, for example, largely glossed over the existence of long-established hierarchies in Senegambia. After all, in newly independent countries, the challenging task at hand required the undifferentiated contribution of all social groups (Botte 2000).

But in the following decade, a re-examination of the history of pre-colonial kingdoms took place. As Hart (1985) puts is, "new nations wanted new histories – invented traditions and charters for the future", as well as "regional histories to teach the schoolchildren". The challenge was taken on by French, British, American and West African scholars. The latter wished to contribute to the national project, whether or not they supported the regimes in place. In Senegambia, they included sociologists (Abdoulaye-Bara Diop, Ousmane Silla or Yaya Wane), historians (e.g. the pioneers of the "Dakar group", Cheikh Anta Diop, Abdoulaye Ly, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Assane Seck and later Boubacar Barry, Pathé Diagne and Djibril Tamsir Niane) and political scientists. In British anthropology, the collection edited by Forde and Kaberry, *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century* (1967), became a landmark. A logical consequence of this movement was to place the hereditary, endogamous occupational groups which early colonial administrators and anthropologists had come to designate as "castes" at the centre of the debate. The term "caste" itself was challenged as some scholars pointed out that it created a strong association with the Indian case, and therefore failed to reflect the West African specificities (e.g. Wane 1969, Dilley 2000). But if nothing else, the term has remained in use for reasons of convenience. Following Dilley (2000, 2004), I use the terms "social ranks" and their further division into "social categories", but "castes" is sometimes used as a shorthand for the latter.

Beyond the problem of terminology, the literature on Sahelian stratification has been divided into two main perspectives. According to the first, caste-like stratification in West Africa contains an inherent form of inequality (e.g. Silla 1966, Wane 1969, Irvine 1974, Meillassoux 1975, Diop 1981, Tamari 1997, Mbow 2000, Ngaïde 2003). The second argues that in practice, the Sahelian systems are based on differentiated forms of power (e.g. Richter 1980, Wright 1989, Rasmussen 1992, Dilley 2000). Dilley (2000: 158) recognizes that there are "differences among the versions of difference" in the Tukulor society of the Fuuta Toro, including discourses of inherent inferiority and superiority. But he also argues for a better un-

derstanding of the experience of social differentiation from the point of view of the "men-of-skill", i.e. the minority of artisans and musicians/praise-singers. This thesis borrows from both approaches. However, given my emphasis on social mobility and the performers' strategies to gain status, it could be argued that I am taking a hierarchical perspective, seen from the point of view of the high-status majority. This is a conscious choice, which I find justified by the experience of my informants. It is true that the men-of-skill (*ñeeño*) among them have their own "version of difference", but they are also painfully aware of the stigma that is attached to them. The others aspire to be regarded as "artists" rather than as Griots. The systems I will now describe are idealized models, but I find it important to present them before discussing the ways in which they are being manipulated.

The Wolof and Tukulor examples

Caste-like models of stratification have been documented throughout the "Sudanic belt" of West Africa, an area stretching across Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Northern Ivory Coast, Niger, Eastern Ghana, parts of the Algerian Sahara, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Northern Cameroon.

Sociologist Abdoulaye-Bara Diop (1981) has given the fullest description of the Wolof model, from the point of view of the high-status groups. He identifies two overlapping but distinct components, the first determining status (the "castes"), and the second determining political power (the "orders"). The "orders" consist of the royal and aristocratic lineages (*garmi* and *jàmbur*), the common freemen (*baadoolo*) and the slaves and their descendants (*jaam*), the latter category being now practically obsolete, at least in an urban context. But it is the first mode of classification I am concerned with here. Diop describes it as based on a complementary opposition between two main ranks, the *géér* and the *ñeeño*. The *géér* are the majority: 80-90% of the population (Diop 1981, Tamari 1997). In the past the *ñeeño* included the *sab-lekk*, i.e. the performers, and the *jëf-lekk*, or artisans. Among the *sab-lekk* were the *géwël* (musicians, praise-singers and genealogists) and the *ñoole* (buffoons). *Géwël*, in Wolof, literally means "the one for whom a circle is made" (Panzacchi 1994). The *sab-lekk* included numerous sub-groups distinguished by the style and function of their songs or by the instruments they played, but with time they were all subsumed in the *géwël* category.

Specialization is hereditary, and in theory the *ñeeño* are endogamous. Accounts by the first Portuguese travellers in the fifteenth century indicate that *ñeeño* and *géér* might have been physically segregated then, with the *ñeeño* living in settlements at the fringe of villages (Leymarie 1999, Diop 1981). This is no longer the case today, but ideas of *ñeeño* "pollution" remain strong among some segments of the *géér* population. Figure 1.1 illustrates the main components in Wolof stratification. I have appropriated Dilley's (2000) use of the upper case for occupations, which indicates that these are categories; they do not necessarily follow people's occupation in practice.

Ranks	Categories
géér	doomi buur (Nobles) baadoolo (Farmers and Pastoralists)
ñeeño	*sab-lekk* - *géwël* ("Griots", or Praise-orators) - *ñoole* (Buffoons) *jëf-lekk* - *tëgg* (Blacksmiths & Jewellers) - *uude* (Leatherworkers) - *seeñ* (Woodworkers) - *ràbb* (Weavers) *lawɔe* (Woodworkers; Tukulor category, and late addition to the Wolof classification)
jaam	(obsolete)

Fig.1.1 Wolof social stratification, from Diop (1981: 47-54), Irvine (1989) and Silla (1966: 731)

The Tukulor of the Fuuta Toro appear to have one of the most complex systems in the Sahelian region. There are three main social ranks: the *rimɔe* ("those without stain"), or "free-born"; the *nyeenyɔe*, or "men-of-skill"; and the *rimayɔe*, or "bondsmen and women" (Dilley 2000: 152). Each of these is further divided into sub-categories. The *rimɔe*, for example, include the *Toroɔe* (Islamic Clerics), the *seɔɔe* (Warriors), the *jaawamɔe* (Courtiers or Councellors) and the *subalɔe* (Fishermen). The Mande areas of Senegambia have similar modes of clas-

sification, where the lower rank is termed *nyamakala*. Other groups, such as the Jola, the Bassari and the Manjaks, are said to be more egalitarian.

There is a plethora of literature on the possible origins of the Sahelian stratification models, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss them. I only mention the main hypotheses here because they have taken up a significant proportion of the literature on the subject. Tamari (1997) attributes the emergence of "castes" to the outcome of a conflict between the Malinke and Sosso ruling elites in the Mandinka area in the thirteenth century. Cheikh Anta Diop (1960, 1979) argued that "castes" were the result of ancient migrations from Egypt, but it is also worth remembering that his work was largely aimed at reconstructing a history which Africans would be proud of. For Murdock (1959, cited in Tamari 1997) the "castes" emerged with the spread of Islam. Taking the accounts of early European travellers as a starting point, Charles Monteil (1951) and Vincent Monteil (1980) have argued for a Jewish origin of the "castes", even though there is no evidence that Jews might have migrated to West Africa before the fourteenth century. Walter Cline (1937) and Pierre Clément (1948) have developed a hypothesis according to which the emergence of "castes" was linked to the symbolic representations associated with the crafts practised and the materials manipulated. According to Majhemout Diop (1971, 1972) and Bokar Ndiaye (1970), the "castes" developed as the result of an increasing rigidity in professional specialization. Along the same idea, but with the added dimension of marriage, Meillassoux (1977) has argued that farmers or the land-owning aristocracy might at some point have excluded certain categories of artisans, particularly Blacksmiths, from marriage and from political power.

Oral history is also relevant because it helps understand how people make sense of these categories. Leymarie (1999) has given an account of several myths of origin related to the Wolof Griots. In one of these, two brothers travel together for days without finding food. As they both face starvation, the elder brother hides to cut a piece of his own thigh, and gives it to his younger brother to eat. Discovering later what happened, the younger brother falls to his knees and swears to serve his saviour for the rest of his life, thus becoming his Griot. In this version, both men were born with equal status, but the Griot becomes inferior because he has accepted a gift from his brother, and because he has eaten human flesh, thereby unknowingly polluting his body. Another story depicts the Griots' ancestor as one of two brothers who chose the entrails at the end of a ceremony during which both were offered meat. The

association between food, bodily pollution and Griot status – and more generally *ñeeño* – is obviously recurrent.

The figure of the Griot[24] *in Senegambian societies*

The social construction of the Griot category is of particular interest here, as it is often considered to be the antecedent of the modern performer category. But in fact the Griot's role goes far beyond entertainment; he or she (fem. "Griotte") is also a master of the word, someone who validates and even establishes people's status. This obviously confers Griots a great deal of power in many situations, as Bonnie Wright (1989) rightly pointed out. Here I only mention those dimensions of the "traditional" position of the Griot which are relevant to this thesis: the patron-client relationship, the performing skills, and the role of a ritual specialist and social intermediary.

The patron-client relationship

The Griot is essentially perceived as a provider of status for his/her patrons, who are usually *géér*. This remains valid as a fundamental principle, even though the actual relationships between Griots and their patrons have changed dramatically since the political upheavals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Griots receive money or gifts in exchange for their artful delivery of praise in a public setting. Prestige is also conferred by having a Griot deliver one's speech in public, or at least rephrase and amplify it.

The power of the Griot was most prominent when the kingdoms of the region where at their height, between the fourteenth and the eighteenth century: they were at the service of royal lineages in constant need of reaffirming their authority and manipulating their genealogies. Until recently, some Griot families were attached to high status lineages by birth (*géwël juddu*). This relationship of interdependence allowed for the history of the lineage to be passed on. To this day, a relationship of the *géér/géwël juddu* type, in which the Griot has a good knowledge of the history of the lineage he/she celebrates, is highly valued, particularly when the Griot is also skilled in amplifying – or inventing – glorious events and concealing anything

[24] I use the French term *Griot* rather than the Wolof *géwël* so as not to restrict the category to Wolof society.

that may tarnish the family's reputation. Consequently, the reward varies greatly depending on his/her knowledge and skills. A family guest at a wedding I attended reprimanded me for having given too much (1,000 FCFA) to a Griotte who had been dancing and reciting her praise in front of me. "You should take your money back", she said; "this is too much for her. She doesn't know you, she can't say anything about you, so she has no right to take that much." Beyond the patron-client relationship, Griots have long served as the repositories of social memory: they recorded and articulated genealogies, social events and individual exploits both at local and regional level. Gorer (1935) reported that a *géwël* did not deserve proper reward unless he knew the genealogies of at least seven generations, and some of the older Griots were said to have memorised hundreds of genealogies. My experience of contemporary urban Senegal however, is that most *géér* complain - often enviously – about the Griots' vanishing knowledge and their pursuit of "quick money".

The Griot as a professional performer

Validation of the patron's status is achieved through a skilful mix of "praise-oratory"[25], music-making and dancing. Here I focus on music, as dance performance will be discussed later. Whereas playing instruments is generally regarded as the domain of men, dancing is mostly, but not exclusively, associated with women. Singing and praise-oratory are more dependent on individual ability and may therefore be performed by either sex. In some communities, e.g. the Sereer of the Siin Saalum, women's singing is particularly valued. Also, Griots are not always regarded as having the exclusivity of great singing abilities; among the Tukulor for example, singing was also associated with the Fishermen category (Ngaïde 2003: 725).

The instruments played vary from one community to the other, and there are long-standing hierarchies between instruments. String instruments, for example, are generally considered more prestigious than percussion. The Mandinka Griots (*jali*), used to perform with the string instruments *ngoni*, the *kora* and sometimes the *balafon*, a form of xylophone. Among Wolof-speakers, string instruments such as the *xalam* were popular, as were a wide variety of drums. S*abar* drums were used to convey messages from one village to the other, call for gath-

[25] I follow Irvine (1989) in her choice of "praise-oratory" rather than "praise-singing" because Griots do not always sing as much as they hold emphatic, well-articulated speeches. For the verb however, "to sing" a praise is more convenient.

erings or encourage agricultural work. But there is more than entertainment and the enhancement of the patron's status in Griot performance: it is also vitalizing, and its quality is therefore of great social significance. Whereas good performance vitalizes the addressee and the community as a whole, poor performance – especially deliberate – is an insult and may have negative effects on the person's prestige and health, understood in the broad sense that includes his/her social well being (Wright 1989). This happens in cases when Griots are unhappy with the payment received. As a result, many *géér* feel obliged to show generosity, even when they can barely afford it.

The Griot, an intermediary and a ritual specialist

Given this association with the welfare of the community, it makes sense that Griots should play an important part in rites of passage. At name-giving ceremonies, they play music, sing people's praise and recite genealogies. Women cook the ritual meals, including the *laax* (sweet fermented milk) and the *ceebu yàpp* ("rice with meat"), while men cut the meat off the sacrificial sheep. In Muslim weddings, they distribute kola nuts to the guests at the mosque and publicly enumerate the presents offered to the bride by the groom's family. The Griottes, the bride's aunts and female friends accompany the bride to her new home. The following morning, it may be the Griottes who acknowledge the blood stains as proof of the bride's virginity, or who devise ways of sprinkling the sheets with blood. These practices have not disappeared in cities but they are gradually becoming obsolete.

During funerals, Griots are in charge of the ritual preparation of the corpse, for which they receive special compensation. They may also sing the praise of the deceased and perform ritual weeping. Perhaps because their role as ritual specialists places them in the best position to do this, Griots and other *ñeeño* are sought-after go-betweens and counsellors in a wide range of contexts where the ability to speak is essential, from family disputes to marriage negotiations. At the time of the monarchies, they also acted as intermediaries between states, lineages and individuals (Wright 1989).

The body of the Griot: pollution or power?

The choice of the term "caste" by colonial officers and anthropologists is likely to derive from the persistent notions of pollution attached to the *ñeeño*. Of particular interest here is the difference between the *ñeeño*'s perspective and that of the *géér*, as Dilley (e.g. 2000, 2004) has also analyzed in the Tukulor case. If on the one hand notions of pollution are an effective way of keeping certain categories away from marriage, land-ownership, political and religious power, on the other hand the people concerned have also developed idioms of exclusivity over specific skills and forms of knowledge.

From the *géér*'s perspective, there is an enduring belief that sleeping with *ñeeño*, sitting in their seats or eating from the same bowl will make one ill. There is also historical evidence that it was customary for the Wolof and the Sereer to bury Griots in hollow baobab trees, thereafter called *guy géwël* [26]. Indeed it was feared that the soil would become sterile if they were buried in it (Boilat 1853, Mauny 1955). But the *ñeeño* themselves often take the opposite perspective, in which the attributes that define pollution from the point of view of the *géér* come to stand for exceptional skill, knowledge and power. One informant, for example, proudly explained to me that "in some villages, the older Griots had so much power that they could not be buried in the soil", for fear that they might "disturb" the harvests. I shared meals with Griottes who assured me that they ate better than the *géér*. As we shared the usual *ceebu jën* they made a point of eating *mucap*, the leftovers and internal organs of the fish, insisting that it was tasty and nutritious, but that the *géér* did not appreciate it. Paradoxically, the magic power of the most skilled *ñeeño* is implicitly acknowledged by the *géér* in everyday conversation. It all works as if people from all categories take it for granted that pollution and exceptional power are two sides of the same coin, but whereas the *géér* emphasize the dangerous elements, *ñeeño* concentrate on the positive, vitalizing aspects. Thus the *géér* often say that when a Griot is talented, his/her praise-oratory will "make the person's blood run faster" and will physically compel the addressee to pull out cash as a reward for the praise. This is described as a physical reaction, as something out of the person's conscious control. *Ñeeño* women are also associated with exceptional sexual abilities. As will become clear in the next section, these beliefs related to the body of the *ñeeño* partly explain the enduring association between dancing in exchange for money or gifts, and a low social status.

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[26] *Guy* is the Wolof name of the baobab.

Why is dance associated with lower status?

Paradoxically, the practice of dance is not restricted to Griots; Senegalese social life is punctuated by numerous dance events where people of all categories join in. But I want to suggest that the association between dance and a lower status is underpinned by two main factors: the fact that an expansive movement and speech style is regarded as the marker of the "client" in a patron-client relationship, and the common assumption that women who earn a living from dancing are "loose".

Movement, speech and status

Dance, and more generally public performance, is not regarded as the exclusive trade of the Griots in Senegambian social life; more generally, it is that of the *ñeeño,* the "castés". This common perception is summarised in the following extract:

> "Dance is not well perceived in our society, this is a well known fact. [...] The phrase 'A *non casté* does not speak, sing or dance' would be repeated over and over again to those who wished to transgress this tradition. Dancing is strictly reserved to Griots, who are by vocation and by definition 'public entertainers'." (Le Nouvel Horizon, 04.03.2003, translation from French my own)

Unsurprisingly, Griot performance was already stigmatized in accounts from Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century. They may simply have taken the view of the *géér* they were in closest contact with, but their scorn may also have reinforced the devaluation of the dance and those who performed it. In his *Esquisses*, Boilat's (1853) vision of the Wolof Griots bears an uncanny resemblance with the contemporary comments of many *géér*:

> We have now come to the vilest class in Wolof society, a class that deserves the contempt and horror of the [Wolof] people. These Griots believe that God has created them to indulge in earthy pleasures, and that [...] when the good and the evil have received justice for their deeds, [they will] return on earth to entertain themselves and dance for eternity. A few of them work as weavers [...]; all others have no other trade than to play the drums to make

> the *nègres* dance, to praise all those who are vain enough to enjoy being flattered, but who end up being duped.[...] The wives of this sort of poet-musicians are covered with cheap, colourful jewellery, and with jewels of gold. Dance is the art at which they excel the most [...] It is from the Griottes that young girls learn these lascivious postures they are so good at performing in their dances." (Boilat 1853: 313-314, translation from French my own)

It is remarkable that Senegambian, and particularly Wolof and Tukulor associations between performance and status extend far beyond the dance, to include everyday movement and speech. It all works as if dance, non-dance movement and speech were so closely related as to be part of the same continuum of performance. This would corroborate Wendy James' (2003: 78-79) point that "the performative and experiential aspects of the various formal genres of patterned movement, ritual, marching, and dancing are not just a spill-over from the 'ordinary' *habitus*, but derive their power partly by speaking against, resonating ironically with, this very base". Here, the way people dance, move and speak may either serve to reiterate status by birth or to contest it. Indeed in Wolof sociality, values such as *kersa* (a mix of deference and restraint) and *suutura* (translated in French by "pudeur") are said to be the outer manifestation of rank. Restraint is generally perceived as positive, as is coolness; to have a "cool heart" for example, is to be happy[27]. These values are typically indexed by speech, movement (including dance) and bodily adornment. In Wolof this is reflected in the distinction between *waxu géér* and *waxu géwël*. The speech style w*axu géwël*[28] is often described as "loud, high-pitched, rapid, verbose, florid, and emphatic, with assorted phonological, morphological, and syntactic devices linked to those characteristics" (Irvine 1989: 261). In practice therefore, *géér* who speak loudly and accompany their speech of expansive movements are always at risk of being assimilated to Griots, as is evident in the judgment "Ya ngiy géwëlee", literally "You are becoming a Griot". Several informants insisted that they could tell from the way a person walked, dressed or spoke whether he/she was a Griot. By contrast, the speech style which indexes high status, the *waxu géér*, is slower, spoken with a lower tone of voice, less emphatic and generally considered more thoughtful.

In Dakar I have had numerous opportunities to witness the conscious use of w*axu géwël* both by Griots and by *géér* who needed to ask for money. During weddings for example,

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[27] *Sama xol dafa sedd*, literally "my heart is cool" means "I am happy".

[28] *Wax* means both "verbal language" and "to speak".

women from the neighbourhood came throughout the day to get their share of cash, and people did not always know whether or not they were Griottes; the fact that they showed up to ask was enough to classify them as such. They improvised ironical comments delivered in a high-pitched voice, or delivered a short, rhythmic speech on the virtues of generosity. In the best cases they made people laugh with compelling metaphors[29], but most of the time people simply gave coins or 500 FCFA-notes to get rid of them.

According to Yaya Wane (1969), similar associations are made in Tukulor society. His analysis is valuable despite expressing the point of view of a high status Cleric (Dilley 2000). His description of the demeanour expected from people from the various social categories remains an invaluable insight. In the following extract, Wane characterizes the *tooroɔe*[30] Clerics:

> "Indeed, with the unique exception of the Peul from the Fuuta Toro, who are considered equal to the *Torobe* in 'nobility', [...] the Tukulor of other castes accept the preeminence of the *Torobe*. The latter mark their superiority (*bural*) through haughtiness, and a peculiar self-important attitude that is called *Toroodaagu*, the specific character of the Toroodo. This distinct character is a complete composure and a certain unctuousness of movement, while speech is as controlled as that of the Pope." (Wane 1969: 37, translation from French my own)

In her ethnography of women and music videos in Mali, Schulz (2001) also reports a link between movement style, poses and gestures on the one hand, and socio-economic status on the other[31]. But even more than in the mundane course of everyday life, it is in the dance that

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[29] One of them, for example, told an elegant woman that there must be "no cockroaches" in her handbag, whereas her own was "a cockroach paradise". The logic is that if there are no cockroaches, there is plenty of money instead.

[30] I have followed Dilley's (2004) orthographic choice, which explains the difference with the quote.

[31] Schulz (2001: 361-362) comments on the reactions of Malian women with whom she was watching music videos of local female stars: "The movements and gestures of all the women featured in the video were a subject of considerable debate among the women with whom I followed the music clip. [...] Repeated references to the performers' glamour and movements revealed that many women tended to classify them according to their social and economic standing. [...] they generally associated her [singer Oulé Koninba's] slow and sinuous gestures and movements with notions of propriety and self-control that mark a woman of superior social rank. [...] Spectators often established a contrast with the third group of women dancers, whose strong, expressive steps and gestures, plain and simple dancing style and wide smiles evoked the simplicity and happiness of 'women farmers'."

people are most acutely aware of each other's movement style. During dance events, therefore, people carefully choose the style of their dancing, thereby indicating whether they wish to reinforce the status that goes with their rank or transgress it, albeit momentarily. During family ceremonies, for example, it is common to see several rows of women sitting on plastic chairs, keeping a dignified demeanour without a single twitch, while others are dancing furiously in front of them.

The stigma of women dancers

Female professional dancers are often assumed to be "loose". Many women dancers I met admitted that this stereotype was an obstacle to their family's acceptance of their career choice, and this cut across religious affiliation and ethnicity. A young dancer I knew was already stigmatized by her family, despite the fact that she was training seriously every day. When she met a young Frenchman and married him shortly after, her family took this as evidence that she was indeed "loose". This is the unfortunate label that many Senegalese attach to young women involved in relationships with White men, and because she was a dancer, she had multiplied her immorality. Her family did not show up at the wedding, thereby effectively cutting her off.

A woman I knew in Dakar worked as a dancer in the mid-1970s. Now a very status-conscious woman, she pretended not to have heard when I told her that I had seen an older photograph of her dressed in her dancing outfit, backstage at her former theatre. Her husband was present, and although her former career is widely known, she was obviously reluctant to talk about it. I was later told that when a old TV series in which she was seen dancing was going to be broadcast again, she used her connections to prevent it. Whether or not this is true, the gossip indicates that a respectable woman's reputation could be tarnished if she was seen dancing on TV. Although the reasons for such a perception are probably multiple, comparison with similar activities in other parts of the world may be enlightening. In her remarkable ethnography of female dancers and singers in Egypt, Van Nieuwkerk (1995) makes a comparable link between the performance and female immorality, which she relates to the history of professional entertainment in Egypt since the nineteenth century. In Southern India, the Hindu temple dancers, the *devadasis*, went from being highly respected "as 'eternally auspicious' women 'married' to temple deities" (Parker 1998: 560) to being widely described as

prostitutes by the end of the nineteenth century[32]. They had always depended on the generosity of wealthy patrons for survival, but with the impact of nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian law, these relationships became classified as immoral. In Dakar in the 1960s, female dancers in folkloric troupes were often unmarried labour migrants from the rural areas of the Siin Saalum and the Casamance. These women acquired some autonomy thanks to their earnings, and this might have been enough to label them as "loose". Moreover, many groups started travelling to perform, staying in the same houses or hotels, and in people's view, no respectable woman would agree to live so physically close to men unless they were related to them. As I will now turn to however, the hierarchies these women find themselves entangled in are more fluid and contextual than suggested by much of the regional literature.

Occupational changes, social mobility, marriage: a fluid stratification?

Having portrayed Senegambian social stratification as a set of "systems", in this section I temper the view that these are rigid and neatly bounded. Instead, I suggest that transformation has been characteristic of social ranks and categories throughout their history. This is evident both in the ability of the various categories to adapt to changing socio-economic conditions by moving on to new trades, and in the degree of individual mobility which may have existed from the outset. For example, after the regional monarchies were dismantled, Griots showed great flexibility in finding new patrons. Moreover, individual mobility has been evident in a much hidden degree of exogamy - albeit limited – and in the fact that some *ñeeño* gained access to formal education and high posts in the government. But mobility has also taken place in the opposite direction, as it were; in urban areas in particular, *géér* have been forced to accept jobs they considered to be degrading to their status. The important question that this thesis will implicitly raise is whether such transformations are superficial or whether they introduce alternative stratification criteria, alongside or instead of the older ranks.

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[32] Also see Meduri (1996), a dancer whose work on *bharatha natyam* traces the trajectory of the dance form from the pre-colonial temple practices of the *devadasi*, to their classification as "prostitutes" in nineteenth-century India, and finally to a nationalistic symbol in the twentieth century.

Occupational changes and new patrons

Due to the well-known elitist bias in Senegambian historical scholarship until the past two decades, there is comparatively little historical material available on the *ñeeño*, and the bulk of the studies that do exist focus on Griots rather than on artisans (Dilley 2004). Apart from Dilley's (2004) own work on Tukulor weavers, much of the recent work has tried to "fill in the gaps" of social history in other areas, e.g. urban popular culture (Faye 2000), women (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1994), indigenous businesses (Thioub 1989), soldiers, criminals or alcoholics.

Despite the lack of sources, there is some evidence that occupational changes are by no means a new phenomenon. Wolof weavers, for example, gradually lost their specialisation after imported fabrics begun flooding the regional markets in the eighteenth century (Diop 1981). By the 1940s, the Rufisque factory of shoe manufacturer Bata was pulling the rug from underneath the leatherworkers (Silla 1966). This was obviously a momentary decline however, because Bata's Senegalese factory no longer exists, but nowadays the local shoemakers compete effectively with the second-hand imports bulging in the city's marketplaces. The skills of the Blacksmiths, on the other hand, were still in demand long after other artisans had been forced into new trades. Until recently, they continued to manufacture tools for agricultural work but in the second half of the twentieth century, the mechanisation of agriculture forced many of them out of the trade. Their counterparts in handling "white" metals, the jewellers, have fared better because their production is more affordable than imported gold and silver, and because they have adapted to the changing tastes of their clientele. According to Diop (1981), the *ñeeño* who were forced out of their trades came to inflate the crowds of migrants to the Senegalese cities, where it was easier for them to make a re-conversion into the urban economy, from street peddling to carpentry.

Some Griots became involved in commerce during colonization, with men trading fabrics, cattle or meat, and women selling prepared foods (Diop 1981). But in post-colonial Senegal they were also successful in taking advantage of the modern media to transform their trade. A number of informants, both *ñeeño* and *géér*, maintained that there was a relatively high proportion of Griots in the TV-, radio- and newspaper world. New patrons include the *diriyànke*[33],

[33] Faye (2000) traces the word back to the arrival of American soldiers in Dakar during World War II. *Diri yankee* literally means "to bring a G.I. home to tame him".

voluptuous women who live comfortably and take great care of their appearance. Married or not, the *diriyànke* are envied by younger women and regarded by many Senegalese as independent "entrepreneurs". They are sometimes described as mistresses entertained by their wealthy lovers (Leymarie 1999). Historian Ousseynou Faye (2000: 420-421) describes the figure of the *diriyànke* as a social "mirror of fantasies" with whom moral norms can be perverted so that they can be better defended afterwards. Usually surrounded by a court of female friends, the typical *diriyànke* spends significant amounts on her Griots to maintain a socially approved reputation. The *diriyànke* who are themselves *ñeeño* nevertheless take on the role of the *géér* towards their Griots. Some of the most popular Senegalese divas have thus released cassettes singing the praise of their favourite *diriyànke*. Famous wrestlers are also popular patrons because they offer both prestige and money. For a practising Griot, being attached to a successful wrestler is an acknowledgment of exceptional skill. This is because the intimate communication between a wrestler and his Griot, an essential dimension in any good fight, is highly demanding. It is unclear however, how far back this relationship can be traced. Gorer (1935) observed the wrestler-Griot association in 1934, and by then it already had the texture of a well-established phenomenon. Patrons naturally include the political elite, but as Griots were always closely related to political authority, this is not a new phenomenon. Muslim Clerics (*marabouts*) on the other hand, have become the most prestigious of the new patrons, as I will discuss in the fourth section.

Individual mobility

The introduction of French education in Senegal was a crucial factor of social change. Throughout the twentieth century, formal education became the means by which a number of *ñeeño* were able to gain access to positions of power in the state apparatus. Early on, the colonial authorities turned a blind eye to the intricacies of Senegambian stratification, and French schools did not differentiate between pupils of different ranks. Moreover, *géér* of royal lineages were initially more reluctant than *ñeeño* to send their children to school, perhaps because the latter saw an opportunity for social mobility (Leymarie 1999: 37). During the twentieth century, therefore, several generations of *évolués* contributed to the creation of an alternative prestige structure based on education and access to well-paid jobs in the colonial admini-

stration. One of Kiné Lam's famous songs, "Tabasky Thiam", praises the *ñeeño* who have earned degrees without denying their origin:

> *Tëgg dawul mbar* (The smith has not escaped the hut)
> *Diplom yi la ko tontu* (He has replied with degrees)
> (Kiné Lam 1991, translation from Wolof my own, with the kind help of Nafy Guèye)

But this was far from being a massive phenomenon. It is also important to remember that those *ñeeño* who had dared rise "above their status" were never quite free from the scorn of many *géér* who resented this competition. Silla (1966) brushed scorn aside as innocent joking, nevertheless he remarked in the early days of independence that the few ministries headed by *ñeeño* were nicknamed *mbar*, i.e. the "hut" of the artisan. I am not convinced by his claim that the authority of the *ñeeño* Ministers was never called into question. In the "cultural association" I used to visit in Pikine, one of the committee members was an elegant man in his mid-thirties. He held a Bachelor's degree in law, but this was not sufficient for him to find work as a lawyer. He was therefore getting by with various ill-paid jobs in the artistic sector. Unlike the other committee members, he was always impeccably turned out in a suit and tie. I once made the remark, and one of the others immediately replied in a contemptuous tone: "He thinks he can be a man of culture by wearing a suit. But he is a Griot, his family are Griots. He wants people to forget about it, that's why he is wearing a suit".

Transcending "castes" also took place downwards, as it were. Wane (1969: 37-38) described how the necessity to survive had forced recent generations of Tukulor *tooroɔe* to compromise with their "legendary pride" and become house employees, factory workers or street cleaners in Dakar. However, he added, such voluntary submission was only acceptable when the *tooroɔe* were employed by non-Tukulor: French, Libano-Syrian, or reluctantly, Wolof. In an urban context, contextual manipulation of status is all the more convenient as people are not always aware of each other's ascendance. Playing on the ambiguity of names, for example, is fairly common because a number of Senegambian names like Guèye, Ndiaye, Diagne or Faye do not betray their bearer's "caste"[34]. Common names such as Mbaye or Niang are noto-

[34] Several of my informants explained this in terms of colonial history. According to them, the French established censuses by sending administrators to every household. *Géér* household heads would hide the internal hierarchy

riously ambiguous, and people play on the phonetic ambiguity when the context is appropriate. A long "Mbaay" for example, is the mark of a *géér* name, whereas a shorter "Mbay" identifies a *géwël.*

Continuity and change in endogamous practices

There is thus a tension between continuity and change in the traditional stratification model, which becomes particularly tangible in the domain of marriage. In urban Senegal, endogamy of rank persists in spite of increasing frustrations with this bastion of the old order. In families that remain attached to the endogamy rule therefore, people often find ways of accommodating transgression. This is especially true when money compensates for the "wrong genealogy", or when people are confronted with a fait accompli. It should also be said that it is as likely that a *géér* family refuses a *ñeeño* spouse as the reverse. I illustrate these tensions with five case stories from informants, whose names have been changed.

Case 1: Where the rule prevailed

Ousmane is a *ñeeño* through both patrilineal and matrilineal descent. As we discussed the "caste" issue once, he told me that *géér/ñeeño* marriages were tolerated in many families, and that whenever disagreements arose, they were usually solved by following the Wolof kinship rules. He proceeded to explain that if a man wished to marry a woman from a different "caste" but his father refused, the mother's brother could always be consulted instead[35]. If the latter agreed, the marriage could take place. According to Ousmane, it is rare that both the father and the mother's brother oppose a marriage. Nevertheless, he commented on the fact that "*ñeeño* prefer to marry amongst themselves". He explained this by making a point I had already heard from other informants, i.e. that endogamy was not solely maintained by *géér* who refused to give spouses to the *ñeeño*, but also by *ñeeño* who were reluctant to take spouses from the *géér.* He added that Griots may also refuse to take spouses from other *ñeeño* categories: "You see, our women [Griottes] are raised to be extremely generous and hospitable, be-

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from view by reporting that all members of the household carried the same name, including the *ñeeño* associated with the family.

[35] This is in accordance with the historical evidence of double descent in Wolof society (Diop 1985).

cause these are our values. So if a woman who hasn't had this kind of education comes into the family, she will not be able to keep up. Her husband's sisters and the other women in the family will keep making gifts to her, and she will not know what to do. So we'd rather not take their women, to save them from being humiliated".

Further into the conversation, he told me a personal story which contradicted his first point. As a young man, he had hoped to marry, a *géér* he went to high school with. She was also keen to marry him, but when her mother discovered that Ousmane was a *ñeeño*, she ordered her daughter to forget about him. Nothing was said directly, but Ousmane understood the situation when a friend of his, the girl's cousin, published a tale in the school magazine. It was the story of a *ñeeño* who had made the mistake of thinking himself worthy enough to ask for the hand of a *géér*. Ousmane knew that the tale was implicitly directed at him, and it was all the more painful as it was coming from a friend. He felt humiliated and broke off the relationship himself. Later, he said, third parties visited the girl's family and told them about the glorious feats of Ousmane's ancestors. According to him, the mother changed her mind and told her daughter that if she had known about his ascendance, she would not have opposed the marriage. But it was too late for Ousmane, whose pride had been irremediably hurt. He told the girl that although he loved her, he could never marry someone whose relatives had insulted the "life [his] parents had given [him]". A few years later, he married a *ñeeño* woman.

No matter how accurate the story is, it reflects Ousmane's contradictory feelings about the social hierarchies that shape his life. His first remark about the "second solution" when a father disagrees to a marriage provides an ideal vision of Wolof society as harmonious, with homogeneous values and almost in-built rules to guarantee a fair degree of freedom. By contrast, his second remark emphasizes heterogeneity because it inverses the dominant view in Wolof society, which is that generosity is the prerogative of the *géér*. His personal story is even more in contradiction with the ideal vision, as it shows that endogamy may still prevail at great personal cost for the individuals involved.

Case 2: Two cousins

Soukey (Soukeyna) and Khady (Khadidjatou) are parallel cousins (their mothers are sisters), both in their mid-twenties. In Dakar they share a two-bedroom flat with Khady's elder brother, his wife and their three children. They could probably be described as belonging to

the increasingly impoverished urban middle class, but Khady's brother's has a job at the harbour, and they make ends meet. Soukey has been unemployed for a couple of years, and Khady is a university student who occasionally does a bit of trade between Senegal and Morocco. Both women travel regularly to Thiès, the former railway centre of Senegal, to visit their mothers and other relatives in the family compound. In Thiès, the two older women are the heads of a household in which husbands, children and grandchildren have come and gone for several decades. Their own mother, Soukey and Khady's maternal grandmother, had been the household head ever since her husband, a railway employee, had died in the mid-1960s.

Soukey and Khady's matrilineal lineage are *géér* who pride themselves of being the descendants of a royal family of the Jolof kingdom. The girls describe the family as "very conservative" when it comes to *géér/ñeeño* relations. This came to the fore a few years ago, with sad consequences for Soukey. She had fallen in love with someone, and after they had been seeing each other for a couple of years, he decided to make a formal marriage request to her family. As is customary in Senegambia, the family made private enquiries about his ascendance. It did not take them long to find out that one of his parents was a *ñeeño*. Soukey had not been aware of this, and when she confronted him, he made no effort to deny it because "he had done everything right, and he did not think it would be a problem". Indeed he had shown exemplary respectfulness towards Soukey's mother and aunt, always being careful to bring money and gifts for them. By doing so he had gained their affection, but in the end nothing could redeem his ascendance. Soukey's mother, aunt and elder brother ordered her never to see him again. When I met Soukey, she had almost given up hope of getting married to someone of her choice, but she did not complain. She explained that the family had acted in her own best interest. There was, however, much sadness in the way she told her story.

I also had the opportunity to spend some time alone with Khady, and I once asked her jokingly how long she intended to remain single. She confessed that she was seeing someone, but that she had no hope of marrying him because he was a *ñeeño*. Having learnt from her cousin's experience, she did not even dare raise the issue with her mother. Although her elder brother knew about it and disapproved of the relationship, he had kept it secret for fear of creating more trouble in the family. Khady was now considering taking advice from her mother's elder brother, but she had little hope that this would make any difference. When I returned to Dakar a few months later, she had not yet brought herself to speak to him, and was still seeing the young man in secret.

For many young adults in Senegal, family conflicts over marriage and status have become commonplace. The fact that the topic also appears in Senegambian novels (e.g. Sow Fall 1994) confirms that it is an important concern in people's lives. As I have suggested, social rank remains salient in the way people classify each other, but it is not the only important factor; sometimes ethnic affiliation and place of origin are considered essential as well in the perspective of marriage. In fact, as case 3 will show, it may be difficult to distinguish the importance of rank from that of a person's place of origin (i.e. the area or village claimed as the most important reference in the family's genealogy). Often, people themselves do not make a clear distinction between "caste" and ethnicity, because once the social category is named, ethnicity becomes redundant. It is understood, for example, that the place of origin of a *tooroɔe* is the Fuuta Toro; a *tooroɔe* can neither be a Jola nor a Wolof.

Case 3: Waiting for a wind of change in the Fuuta Toro

Ndèye, a Sereer woman in her mid-twenties, used to tell me that the Tukulor were "racists", as she put it. For some time I did not know what to make of this claim because I knew that the man she was seeing was a Tukulor. From later conversations with people from the Fuuta Toro, I understood that in this context "racist" meant "endogamous". I also understood what had prompted her grievance when Fatim, the man she was seeing, told me he was depressed because their marriage plans were failing. Fatim was in his mid-thirties. When he had decided to ask Ndèye in marriage a year earlier, he had taken precautionary steps before raising the subject with his own family: he had asked a Sereer friend to go to Ndèye's native village and approach her mother and uncles. The friend made discreet contact and reported that the family would most probably welcome Fatim's request. When he told his own family however, all hell broke loose. His father did not mind his choice, but his mother's brothers were strongly opposed to it, and nothing would change their mind. Fatim was from a high-status lineage, and not only was he expected to marry a woman of equal status, but she would also have to come from his village of origin. Moreover, preference should be given to a cousin. Fatim sent intermediaries to the Fuuta Toro for conciliation, but after a year the situation had not moved an inch. Fatim was beginning to worry that Ndèye was getting older, and that she might accept another marriage offer. When I asked him what his options were, he said that most of his friends encouraged him to go for a common conflict-solving strategy among young Tukulor

men: to comply with the family's request for the first wife, possibly leave her behind in the village, and a year or two later, take a second wife of his choice. Fatim insisted that this did not suit him, as he felt his life would become a lie. Although he did not mention this, other young men in the same situation are also concerned that too many years will pass before they can afford to marry a second time. His second option was to marry Ndèye and accept being irremediably "cut off" from his family. But he could not resolve himself to do this either. His last hope was that his elder sister would intercede in his favour, and that she would have enough power to convince the family. His sister's opinion carried more weight because she was older and lived abroad, from where she supported the family financially. But it would be another year before she returned to Senegal, and in the meantime Fatim would have to wait. When I spoke to Ndèye the following year, she told me that Fatim's family had finally changed their mind, but she would not tell me why. It was Fatim who wrote to me that Ndèye had won his family's heart by moving in with another of his sisters, and caring for her when she was ill. Ndèye and Fatim were now planning to get married.

The next two cases show that accommodations with transgression may work better for men than for women, possibly as an implicit continuity with the old regional custom according to which freeborn men could marry women of a lower status than themselves, as long as they were relegated to the status of last wife (Silla 1966, Wane 1969).

Case 4: Family secrets

Djibril, a handsome man in his mid-forties, was born and raised in one of Dakar's large suburban towns. Unmarried father of a six-year old boy, he lived in the family house with his parents and siblings, while his son lived with his mother. When I asked him whether he knew of any marriages between *géér* and *ñeeño*, he replied that such cases were rather uncommon, yet increasing in cities as people found it difficult to carry out in-depth genealogical enquiries. He added that existing cases generally involved a *ñeeño* woman and a *géér* man. The example he gave me, however, was the opposite: his own half-sister (from the same father) married a man who was a Griot by his mother. The man's father, on the other hand, was a *géér*. According to Djibril, his own mother and his half-sister's mother were aware of this, but he did not think his half-sister was. Noticing my surprise at the idea that a woman would ignore such a thing about her husband, he casually explained that his sister was "much younger" than himself, and

that she did not, therefore, know all the family secrets. Indeed in Senegambian societies, age and knowledge are strongly believed to be correlated. Djibril did not seem worried about what would happen if his half-sister discovered the truth. Some marriages break up when people's real ascendance is revealed, but he did not expect this to happen in this case.

Djibril went on to tell me that he was himself involved in a casual relationship with a Griotte. But although she was a "good girl", he would not marry her. He hastily added that this was not due to the fact that she was a Griotte, but that she was simply "not for [him]". He mentioned that she was illiterate and that this might be a problem, but then changed his mind and said it did not matter. In any case, if he wished to go ahead, his family would not oppose the marriage. The girl herself feared that his family would reject her, and it is likely that he let her believe so while making up his mind. But he said his family had always been "liberal" when it came to *géér/ñeeño* relationships. He added that his father was "too old anyway to know what [was] going on", and therefore would not interfere. But what Djibril did not mention, in this context, was that his parents originated from a part of the Sereer country where hierarchy of rank had been less dominant than in other parts of Senegambia.

Case 5: Does money make a difference?

Mariama is a divorced woman in her early thirties. She lives in Dakar with her parents, siblings and two sons. Her father is a Lebu and devout Muslim, and her mother belongs to a highly respected family from Saint-Louis. A few years ago, she met a man who was keen to take her as his second wife; the status of a divorced woman in Senegalese society is not particularly enviable, and therefore she was keen to accept. But her father refused categorically because the man was a *ñeeño*. Her mother, however, had a very different take on the situation; he was wealthy, and the family needed the money. In the end the authority of Mariama's father prevailed and she did not remarry.

Things were quite different for her elder brother, who had enjoyed more freedom in his choice. He had married a *ñeeño* woman with whom he had two children, and although the father was not thrilled, he had accommodated himself with the situation. The family simply avoided mentioning the wife's status. When Mariama told me that her sister-in-law was a *ñeeño*, she hastened to add emphatically: "But she is a good person" [*nit ku baax la*]. In fact the family had grown so fond of her that when Mariama's brother left his household to go and

live with his second wife, the family sided with the first wife, and sometimes alluded to the fact that their son had "not behaved as a good husband".

These case stories were meant to give a sense of how salient "traditional" stratification is in people's lives, and how it generates conflicts and dilemmas which are not always verbalized in everyday life. I believe this to be important to understand the kind of environment dancers and musicians find themselves in. But "caste" is not the only restricting factor when it comes to the dance; as I will now discuss, Senegalese Islam also generates dilemmas because of its ambiguous attitude towards dance and music.

The ambiguous position of the performer in Muslim Senegal

Given the importance of Islam in Senegalese life, I find it important to examine the interplay between performance, social stratification and Islam. I begin therefore with a short discussion of the attitude of Senegalese Islam towards a "caste" system that is likely to have pre-dated this religion in the region. I particularly emphasize the dilemma in which Griots were caught in the early Muslim communities. I then zoom in on the perspective of modern-day performers and suggest that although performance is rarely discussed as a "problem" in everyday life, the tendency to make "correct practice" as conspicuous as possible reveals the uncomfortable position many performers find themselves in. I finish by discussing the ambiguous, even divided perspective of the Muslim clerics.

Status groups and Senegalese Islam

Muslim theology postulates that believers can only be distinguished according to their degree of piety, and therefore "caste" classification would seem problematic in a predominantly Muslim society. But on the whole, Senegambian Islam has not attempted to revolutionize the old order. In the Fuuta Toro, the category of *tooroɔe* Clerics that emerged in the late eighteenth century initially included people from all social categories[36]. With time however, it was transformed into another exclusive, endogamous group (Wane 1969, Dilley 2004). In fact, the picture that emerges from Dilley's fascinating analysis of the interaction between Islam and the

[36] Wane (1969) mentions the diversity of *tooroɔe* names as evidence of this.

categories of Tukulor men-of-skill is even more complex: he argues that the framing of *ny-eenyɔe* knowledge as anti-Islamic served as an instrument in the power struggle between the different components of society.

Among Wolof speakers, most marabouts were *géér* from an early stage in the development of Muslim communities, and on the whole they have shown little interest in challenging the state of affairs. In the Tijaaniyya for example, very few *ñeeño* became *muqadam*, i.e. high-ranking Clerics who represented the *Khalife*. Diop (1981) interpreted this as a consequence of the fact that *ñeeño* families did not encourage their children to pursue long-term studies, even religious. But this cannot be a sufficient explanation, as many *ñeeño* have seized the opportunities offered by French education. Exceptionally, Ibrahima Niass (1902-1976), the famous Tijaan marabout from Kaolack and founder of a dissident branch in 1924, was the grandson of a Blacksmith from the Jolof. Against strong opposition from within the Tijaaniyya, he married a *géér* woman. But this isolated case did not fundamentally affect the power structure within the *tariqa*. Silla (1966) was somewhat idealizing the situation when he wrote that Niass' influence had increased steadily after the "noble families" of the Saalum had failed to prevent the marriage. Indeed, he did not mention that Niass' descendants were now exclusively marrying *géér* (Tamari 1997), or that his origins had caused many *géér* to refuse allegiance to his Tijaani branch, as Soukey and Khady's family (case 2). The *ñeeño* are slightly more numerous among the Mouride *cheikhs*, and Tamari (1997) reminds us that founder Cheikh Amadou Bamba Mbacké promoted *ñeeño* men to high positions in his religious community. He also encouraged exogamous marriages, but this does not seem to have had a lasting influence. On the other hand, music and dance seem to be more acceptable in Mouride communities in Dakar, where a majority of performers claim allegiance to the Muridiyya.

On the whole, it seems therefore that *ñeeño* have been largely excluded from power within the Senegalese *tariqas*. Among the *ñeeño*, the status of the Griots has been particularly ambiguous. In the newly formed Muslim communities of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, their role as public performers was problematic from the outset. Many of those who converted to Islam were encouraged to abandon their trade and work for their marabouts (Diop 1981). Among Wolof speakers, some abandoned the designation *géwël* and called themselves *ràbb*, or Griots-Weavers, even when they did not practice weaving. But according to Diop (ibid.), there was never a complete rejection of the skills of the Griots, because brotherhood life could make use of them as muezzins, song and ritual specialists, praise-orators for the

marabouts or to amplify public speeches. There is even a great prestige that comes with being a "Griot of the Prophet" (*géwëlu Yonent*). Moreover, chanting and drumming play an important part in some religious practices, for example during the Thursday night meetings of the local Muslim associations or in the practices of the Mouride sect of the Baay Fall[37].

A God-given talent

If anything, the ambiguous position of dance and musical performance in Muslim Senegal has become even more problematic with the emergence of a "modern" profession of performers who are not necessarily Griots. The performers themselves seem to be aware of this ambiguity, and they have chosen different ways of addressing it. In the past two decades, popular musicians have made increasing use of religious themes (McLaughlin 1997). Nowadays there is hardly a cassette of popular Senegalese music that does not include at least one praise song dedicated to a high-ranking marabout or one of the *tariqa* founders, particularly Cheikh Amadou Bamba. Some musicians seem to promote the unity of Senegalese Islam by dedicating songs to past or present leaders of all the *tariqas*. This is what Senegalese star Youssou Ndour did for his 2002 release *Sant'*[38], even though he is a declared Mouride. The shrewd businessman, politician and controversial Mouride Seriñ Modou Kara Mbacké, often described as the marabout of the youth and the Baay Fall, has become a producer of devotional music; in 2003, his music video was advertized on Senegalese TV alongside soap, stock cubes and hair-styling products.

In the dance scene, religious devotion is also visible, but it has not made its way into performance as explicitly as in popular music. By contrast, a strict practice in everyday life seems to be perceived as compensating for the choice of a "tainted" profession. There is also an important minority of Catholics among dancers[39], possibly because many of them originate from the Casamance, where European missionaries kept a fairly strong foothold until the mid-

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[37] For an interesting comparison between the Baay Fall and the Jamaican Rastafari, see Savishinsky 1994.

[38] For the first time in Youssou Ndour's career, his latest release, *Sant'*, is exclusively composed of what he describes as "Sufi devotional music". The album was recorded in Cairo with Fathy Salama's orchestra from Egypt, and the version released for the international market is called "Egypt". In Wolof, *Sant'* is shortened from *Sant' Yalla*, literally "thanks to the Grace of God".

[39] Senegal officially includes less than 5% of Christians. In the urban dance world, my estimate is that Christians may represent up to 15-20% of the total.

twentieth century. In my experience, many of them keep a low profile when it comes to religious matters; they often respond to salutations in the Muslim way, and may even open their hands upwards in the sign of Muslim prayer, for example at the end of meetings. Some of them accept to be nicknamed with a Muslim name. This does not mean that people deny their Christian faith, but rather that in some contexts they choose downplay their affiliation. In the privacy of people's homes by contrast, Christian symbolism is made more obvious. A few of them confessed that they were annoyed by people constantly trying to convince them to become Muslims. "What's wrong with my religion? I'm fine as I am!" one of them said.

Muslim practice, by contrast, is so conspicuous at times that one is left wondering whether people are trying to make a point. At the Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor (CCBS) in Dakar, the arrival of prayer time means that conversations and sometimes dancing are interrupted, and prayer rugs pop up everywhere. On Fridays, people come to the rehearsals dressed in their best Muslim outfits, and some of the women dancers bring their white prayer shawls. Performers walk around with a chaplet in hand or around the neck, and men go to the mosque together. Those who do not go – a minority – keep quiet about it; no one openly comments on this, but everyone knows that a reputation as a "good Muslim" brings the respect of one's peers. Among the Mourides, some were born in Mouride families whereas others converted in early adulthood[40]. Once a year, they leave Dakar for the *Maggal*, the pilgrimage to the holy city of Touba. Some of the Mouride dancers spend considerable amounts of time reading *Khassaïdes*, Cheikh Amadou Bamba's devotional poetry. Often, the reading seems to work as a means to concentrate and gather energy just before a performance.

I occasionally asked dance people how they were able to reconcile their profession with being "good Muslims". The reactions were very diverse, but almost always with an edge of uneasiness, as if this was not a proper question to ask. Some found a polite way to avoid answering altogether. One of the more experienced dancers, who never missed a prayer, shrugged his shoulders and replied that his dancing skills were a God-given talent. God, he said, would understand that he used his talent for a good purpose, i.e. to feed his family. He

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[40] Although particularly true of the performing world, this is not an exclusive case. Mouridism is described as the fastest growing religious movement among urban youths, and my own experience corroborates this. However, there is a significant "grey zone" between the two main brotherhoods, as many urban youths who show their allegiance to Mouridism confess, in private, that they still belong to Tijaaniyya through their parents (Havard 2001).

added that he would "redeem" himself in due time, when he could no longer earn a living from the dance. In fact, talent in dancing was often described as "God-given", as if to recast the dance as a religiously appropriate activity. One troupe manager said that people in his group had "gone very far" into trying to "compensate" for their profession. Every other Sunday, for example, some of them took part in a *zikr*, a collective ceremony involving several hours – sometimes whole nights – of praying and chanting. He also suggested that the group had integrated "Muslim rhythms" into their performances.

Concluding remarks: performance and the degrees of piety

The few clerics I interviewed – mainly Tijaan – were fairly accommodating towards dance and dancers. They insisted that dancing was not "recommended" by Islam because it could so easily distract the believer from his/her religious duties, but they also tempered this view by explaining that among the many "degrees" of acts contrary to Islam, dancing was redeemable as long as the performers were "properly covered". One of them mentioned that committing adultery, for example, was a much more serious offence. The issue of what people do with the money earned was also brought up, thereby suggesting that although "performing money" is tainted[41], it can be rendered clean if used according to the highest moral standards, such as supporting one's family.

My informants had received their religious training in Senegal, Morocco or Egypt, and could be described as "mainstream" in the context of Senegalese Islam. By contrast, I once had the opportunity to interview a reformist leader trained by people who had "studied in Saudi Arabia". He lived in a village of the Lower Casamance, not far from the border with the Gambia, and had travelled to Dakar for medical reasons. He was probably in his late thirties or early forties. In Dakar he was accompanied by his very young wife, who carried their baby, wore a brown *hijab* and did not speak unless spoken to. It became obvious from the beginning of our conversation that he saw himself as a reformist, because he argued very strongly that Senegalese Islam as it was practised today was "wrong", and that it had been corrupted by the older marabouts. He claimed to have a growing number of followers in his village, ordinary

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[41] The notion of money being "tainted" by an "immoral" activity has been described in other contexts, e.g. in the American prizefighting economy (Wacquant 1998).

family men who were forced to hide to visit him. "I tell them exactly what is in the Qur'an", he said, "not what the marabouts say, because they don't know. Ask me anything, and I will tell you *exactly* what is in the Qur'an". So I asked him about the dance. He became more and more agitated as he explained that there were only two moments in life during which dancing was permitted: "when your child gets married, and your heart is cool" and "when your child has borne a child, and your heart is cool". In other words, dancing is appropriate as an expression of joy and gratefulness to God at weddings and name-giving ceremonies. Aside from these two contexts, he argued that dancing was contrary to the recommendations of the Qur'an. He added that there could be aggravating circumstances, such as when a married woman dances in front of other men, or when "people who normally respect you" watch you dancing. He meant that one should not be seen dancing by people of a lower status than oneself. As if he feared that I might not understand, he made a graphic comparison between dancing and the movements of people who are in Hell, who constantly "move about to avoid the flames". He was adamant that a good Muslim should not "imitate those who are in Hell". This rather extreme attitude should not be interpreted as common among Muslim leaders in Senegal, as I have only encountered it once. But reformist movements have undoubtedly gained ground since the late 1970s[42]. In mainstream Senegalese Islam, although dance and musical performance remain an ideological problem, in everyday life the tension seems to be more or less resolved by an emphasis on correct religious practice. But there is no guarantee that this equilibrium will remain indefinitely.

To conclude this chapter, Senegambian status stratification appears more fluid than suggested by much of the scholarship on West African "castes". In fact, transformation is probably a permanent feature of social ranks and categories in the region, but to my knowledge the impact of performance on status transformations has not been sufficiently researched. This study, therefore, will look at whether the transformations of the dance in urban Senegal are in continuity with this long-standing flexibility or whether we are seeing the emergence of a new category of artists-performers. In the next chapter therefore, I focus on the history of Senegambian performers in the twentieth century.

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[42] See, for example, Magassouba 1985, Guèye 2002 and the work of Erin Augis (2002) on the women of the Sunni *Jama'aatu Ibadu Rahmane* in Dakar.

Chapter II:
Senegambian performers in the twentieth century

Introduction: total theatre in pre-colonial days

In the first chapter, I suggested that Griots were the precursors of professional performance in Senegambia. This shorter chapter builds further on the history of the profession by focusing on the development of stage performance since the colonial exhibitions of the late nineteenth century. My point is that the performing world as it is today was not only shaped by regional cultures, but also by the Parisian artistic scene in the first half of the twentieth century, by colonial school theatre and by post-colonial cultural policies. Reconstructing these histories allows us to go beyond the usual stereotypes about African performance stemming directly from the remote past of neatly bounded societies, and thereby to prepare the ground for a more nuanced interpretation of the dance.

There is very little literature on pre-colonial forms of dance and theatre in Senegambia aside from Griot performance, but there is evidence that "total theatre" existed in a participatory form. More historical research on the subject would allow us to challenge the numerous versions of "tradition" re-created in the post-colonial context, according to which performance was restricted to life-cycle rituals. Indeed it is likely that performance, dance in particular, was also integrated to everyday life, both as entertainment and as social criticism. In Senegambia, Diop (1990) describes the historical figure of the storyteller ("conteur") as the bearer of older forms of comedy, and suggests that he was also a dancer, a musician and a mime. The storyteller would not always perform alone; he could act short stories with a small group of performers playing different roles. There was also the Wolof *mbànd*, a form of spectacle which Diop (ibid.) describes as a "farce". Amar Samb (1975) wrote briefly about the *mbànd* and its "professional" performers, the sedentary *mdandkat* and the travelling *mbandaankat*. According to him, both were dancers and bards who celebrated the beauty of young women and were

paid in return. Storyteller Massamba Guèye, who holds a university degree in oral literature and teaches young dancers about performing traditions, consistently describes the *mdandkat* and the *mbandaankat* as the "ancestors" of today's professional dancer.

The trajectories of individual dances are even more difficult to reconstitute. There are hundreds of dances specific to the region, each with its own history and social context. But with very few exceptions (e.g. Girard 1965, Mark 1992 and De Jong 1999 on the Casamançais *kumpo* masquerade), these histories have not been researched. Chapters IV to VI will draw on examples of how they are imagined in the context of staged performances, but for now this chapter will be restricted to twentieth-century theatrical dance in and of Senegambia. The trajectories of specific groups are also presented in chapters IV to VI.

An obvious difference between older forms of performance and the modern profession is the fact that these forms were exclusively directed towards the local community. The novelty of colonization and the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fascination with "race" was the attempt to transform African bodies into a spectacle for the entertainment of Europeans (Chalaye 2003). As I will show in the next section, Senegambian performers who arrived in Paris as early as the nineteenth century played a crucial role in shaping French – and European – representations of Africa.

Senegambian performers in Europe from the late 19th century to the 1930s

The early days of African performance in Europe and America cannot be understood outside the context of the World Fairs, the colonial exhibitions and the impact of early anthropology. Rydell (1999) provides an interesting explanation to the early Euro-American interest in "exhibiting" Africans on stage:

> "African shows at American fairs [...] owed their existence to a world of popular entertainments increasingly shaped by the active intervention of anthropologists. Indeed, ever since George Cuvier had dissected the genitalia of the 'Hottentot Venus' in 1815, European anthropologists had developed a positive passion for exhibiting Africans. The reasons for this commitment to the exhibition medium were twofold. First, anthropologists sought to wed their profession to specific national, imperial ambitions and thereby demonstrate their use-

> fulness to the state. Second, they sought to educate the public about the applicability of social Darwinian insights to social struggle at home and imperial expansion abroad. Nowhere in Europe did that passion bear more fruit than in France, especially in the on-going displays at the Jardin d'Acclimatation that featured so-called native villages from Senegambia, western Sudan, and western Africa." (Rydell 1999: 136)

Sylvie Chalaye (2003) tells us that the "display" of Africans in Paris began as early as 1870s, and was not restricted to the Jardin d'Acclimatation; the Hippodrome and the Champs de Mars were also put to use, and images of these exhibitions circulated in newspapers, posters and drawings. The displays were relayed by colonial exhibitions, the most extravagant of which was the big exhibition of 1931. There, "after passing the Porte Dorée, the visitor was taken through a décor of pagodas, Indochinese temples, African huts, Arabic minarets and great Sahelian walls" (Décoret-Ahiha 2004: 49, translation from French my own). More than two hundred dancers and musicians were brought in from all over French West Africa, including twelve Dogon dancers from Bandiagara[43], performers from the Ivory Coast, Dahomey (now Benin), Guinea, the French Sudan, and of course Senegalese performers who re-created the ceremony of the Fanaux, from colonial Saint-Louis.

The late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries were also the golden days of the Parisian music-hall. Chalaye (ibid.) argues that the use of African performers in shows was in natural continuity with the colonial displays. In 1879 the Folies-Bergères recruited Zulu dancers to perform almost naked, and around the same period the show at the Casino de Paris featured topless women dancers from the Dahomey. In Paris at the turn of the century, Black music-hall dancers were made to denude themselves so as to capture the sexual fantasies of a bourgeoisie whose own bodies were hidden underneath layer upon layer of heavy fabrics. As if to complete the representation of Black cultures as something naturally emerging from highly sexualized bodies, from 1900 onwards black boxers from America featured in some of the shows. Josephine Baker played this game to the full and even took it to the extreme. Following her tremendous success in the mid-1920s, Black performers became a "must" in every *revue*. One of the most successful dancers at the time was Senegalese Féral Benga. Born in Dakar in 1906, he accompanied his father on a trip to Paris at the age of seventeen and decided to

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[43] They were called Dogons later, following the writings of French anthropologist Marcel Griaule.

stay on. By 1926, he was performing in "La Folie du Jour" with Joséphine Baker at the Folies-Bergères. Until 1936 he danced in various shows at the Folies-Bergères, the Casino de Paris and in 1933, at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées (Décoret-Ahiha 2004). He performed in Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Great Britain, and he accompanied Geoffrey Gorer in his expedition across West Africa in 1934. He formed the idea to set up a troupe of African dancers in Paris, and although this never materialized, he opened an African cabaret-restaurant in 1938 and choreographed various pieces, including *Tam Tam* at the Olympia in 1943, featuring eight women dancers from West Africa. He also served as a relay for African artists who came to Paris, including Guinean poet Fodéba Keita. Benga died in Paris in 1957.

There was also Habib Benglia, a friend of Benga's. Benglia was born in 1895 in Oran, Algeria, as the son of a trader from the French Sudan (today's Mali). He grew up in Timbuktu and came to Paris in 1912 to study. Like Benga, he became a successful music-hall dancer between the two world wars, and as an actor he also appeared in various plays, movies and at the Folies-Bergères. Interestingly, the reactions of the Parisian dance critics to Benga's and Benglia's pieces were not far removed from the dilemmas encountered by contemporary African choreographers. When they danced almost naked, they were praised for the "animal-like" texture of their movements[44], but when they experimented with creative choreography, they were both criticized for betraying their "African roots" (Décoret-Ahiha 2004). Already then, African performers were expected to stick to the image of the "noble savage" they were assumed to represent.

In Senegal at the same period, the William Ponty School was promoting the emergence of a genre of theatre which, under the pretence of conserving West African traditions, would inadvertently reinforce the stereotypical representations of African dances.

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[44] When Benglia appeared at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in 1923, in Gaston Baty's "L'Empereur Jones", critic René Wisner wrote in *Le Carnet*, on the 11th November 1923: "Tout son corps fléchit, se redresse, bondit et retombe. Il fait de sa noire académie, un poème exprimant la détresse ou l'espoir. Un acteur joue avec son cerveau et son visage. M. Benglia, lui, joue avec ses muscles. [...] La sueur l'inonde, fait reluire son torse bronzé, et prouve qu'il subit en effet, toutes les affres de l'Empereur Jones. Il est impossible d'être plus sincere, d'être plus près de l'animalité, et d'être plus artiste" (Chalaye 2003: 99).

Colonial Senegal and the nationalist period

Moved from Gorée to Sébikotane on the road from Dakar to Thiès, the Ecole Normale William Ponty was a pillar of the French assimilation policy in the AOF, and was aimed at educating an elite of indigenous schoolteachers and colonial administrators. In 1933, the school introduced a new practice: the students were asked to write school plays during their holidays, with the explicit aim to illustrate the "native" traditions. The underlying idea was not only to provide the school staff with knowledge about local societies they knew little about, but also to encourage the students to preserve a connection with their "native culture". This would make them more efficient as colonial officers, as evident in the following extract:

> "Des élèves ont demandé au Directeur de l'école William-Ponty de leur prêter les costumes exécutés pour la fête afin qu'ils puissent 'jouer' pendant les vacances.
>
> Demain, fonctionnaires, ils iront avec sympathie vers leurs frères des villages, ils étudieront les formes d'art trop longtemps négligées et les remettront à la place d'honneur. Ce sera précieux pour nous, qui aimons l'Afrique et qui la connaîtrons mieux; ce sera précieux pour ceux qui se consoleront des menus tracas du métier grâce à cette activité désintéressée et généreuse, – l'instituteur qui aura trouvé une nouvelle et gracieuse légende ou qui aura noté un vieux chant héroïque, oubliera vite qu'il s'est chamaillé avec l'interprète du commandant."[45] (Béart 1937: 14)

The Ponty plays were a landmark in a new genre of West African theatre in which dance would gain a prominent place[46], and certainly the first organized attempt to imagine and represent tradition on stage. Foucher (2002: 111) even states that following the Ponty experiment, "school theatre progressively became a defining feature of educated elites throughout West Africa". But the plays also symbolized the ambiguity of the colonial regime, because

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[45] "Some of the pupils have asked the Director of the William-Ponty school to lend them the costumes made for the [end-of-year] party so that they could 'play' during the holidays. Tomorrow, as civil servants, they will meet their village brothers with sympathy, they will study the art forms neglected for so long and they will return them to the place of honour. It will be precious for those of us who care about Africa, because we will know it better; it will be precious for those who will find consolation from the minor worries of the profession in this voluntary and generous activity, – the schoolteacher who will have discovered a new and enchanting legend or who will have transcribed an old epic song will quickly forget that he quarrelled with the commandant's interpreter."

[46] I am grateful to Vincent Foucher for drawing my attention to the importance of the William Ponty plays and school theatre in the geneaology of Senegalese theatre.

while they were controlled and sometimes censured by the French staff (Mbaye 2004), they also provided the students with unprecedented opportunities to express emerging nationalist sentiments, as in the following example:

> "It was in Ponty that Assane Seck, later to become a major political figure in Casamance, and some other students first wrote and played Bigolo, the story of anti-colonial Diola warrior Djignabo – Paul-Ignace Coly, the future mayor of Bignona and another Ponty graduate, played Bigolo in later productions." (Foucher 2002: 230)

The connection with the Casamance is also relevant here because folkloric performance later became an important vehicle of expression of Jola identity, as I discuss in chapter V. The plays could also be seen as subtle resistance to the colonial system: they were occasionally performed in competition for an audience of high-ranking French officers (Mbaye 2004). The dances that were incorporated into the plays may have given room for even subtler messages, because the colonial administration perceived them as innocuous and timeless folklore. This is evident in the following comment by Henri Vidal on Lompolo Koné's play, "Téli Soma Oulé":

> "This is an exclusively folkloric play, which allows to incorporate men and women dancers who, as direct descendents of the legend characters, will dance what their grandparents danced in front of the famous chiefs of the time." (Vidal 1955: 66, cited in Mbaye 2004, translation from French my own)

It is therefore hardly surprising that Guinean poet Fodéba Keita, to whom Kaba (1976) attributes a Griot background, was also educated at Ponty. After a few years of teaching in what is now Guinea, he made his way to Paris to "further his education and try for success" (ibid.: 202). There he met Benga, and most probably Benglia and others. The combined influence of the Ponty theatre and of the Parisian artistic milieu encouraged him to set up his own group, the "Ensemble Fodéba-Facelli-Mouangé" in Paris in 1947. In 1950, the Ensemble became the *Ballets Africains*, which Keita described as an exercise in cultural salvation:

> "If it is true that any civilization worthy of this name must be capable of both 'giving and receiving', it is in the interest of Africans to preserve that which has universal value in their heritage, while borrowing from the outside world that which is necessary to their current

> evolution. But may they refrain from letting themselves be guided by mercantile interests, thus forgetting the social and utilitarian role of their art. It is unfortunately the case of many artisans who, having settled near the markets, manufacture objects designed exclusively to satisfy the taste of the exotic. [...] May the Africa of tomorrow refrain from loosing the secret of its dances and songs! [...] May She [Africa] still know how to dance, because for Her this means knowing how to live, and for a thousand years Her life has been one long dance with innumerable figures, a true dance of life which constitutes her message today." (Keita 1955: 55-56, translation from French my own)

The group's repertoire was composed of dances from the whole of West- and Central Africa, with "special emphasis on the Mandinka folklore of Guinea and Casamance" (Kaba 1976: 202). In 1956, the Ballets went on tour in West Africa and recruited new performers. Keita's perspective should also be understood in the context of the 1930s-50s, a time when anthropologists and travellers foretold the imminent death of African traditions. Gorer (1935: 186) for example, wrote that "Africans used to dance until their families and clans were destroyed, until [...] missionaries forbade dancing as heathenish, and administrators stopped dancing because it disturbed their sleep or prevented people working." At Guinea's independence in 1958, the group was renamed *Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée* and began touring the world as their nation's "cultural ambassadors". Keita held a post in Sékou Touré's first government, and many of the country's early policies bore his mark (Kaba 1976, Castaldi 2000). Whether or not the *Ballets Africains* were as groundbreaking as his reputation suggests, Keita is regarded as the founder of professional dance in West Africa. The more experienced among my informants mentioned him often, one of them owned an old videotape of the *Ballets*, and at the National School of Arts in Dakar, the students were taught in African dance history that "it all started with Fodéba Keita in 1957" [47].

The international success of the *Ballets* inspired Senghor to create the National Ballet of Senegal in 1961. Some of Keita's dancers from Guinea and Mali moved to Senegal in the 1960s, where they helped build a repertoire of dances from Senegambia, Guinea and Mali. To those who argued that Africans had no history and no culture, Senghor replied by staging sophisticated African traditions in what he perceived to be the primary African idiom: dance and

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[47] Personal communication from dance section leader Martin Lopy, Dakar, May 2003. The year 1957 is held as a reference because this was when Keita's group became officially associated with the Guinean national project.

music (Castaldi 2000). As Senghor's critics promptly pointed out, he had simply inverted the euro-centric dichotomy according to which the essence of Western civilization was reason and that of the African, emotion. But the growing criticism of his version of Negritude did not affect the success of the National Ballet on the worldwide stages.

Later in the 1960s, the first World Festival of Negro Arts held in Dakar in 1966 is a little acknowledged landmark in the development of new performing genres in Senegal. Although the festival remained largely an elitist event, the fact that thousands of artists and interested visitors flocked to Dakar from Africa, Europe and America, was a tremendous source of inspiration for the local artistic communities. It also focused international attention on this part of Africa, thereby encouraging African American performers, among others, to become involved in artistic exchanges with Senegal. Following the festival, for example, an American dancer settled in Dakar, where he taught jazz dance. But the spill-over of this highly politicized festival[48] has not been sufficiently documented, and therefore its impact is difficult to evaluate. Tracy Snipe has given a taste of the "greatest single cultural event in the history of Senegal":

> "The Musée Dynamique [...] was built for the First Festival. Modeled on a Greek temple, the museum opened with 'the largest museological exhibition of classical Black African art to date'. Art work from museums, cultural organizations, ethnic groups, and private collections from throughout the world were displayed. A Nigerian art exhibition was also held in the Dakar Town Hall. [...] The museum continued to host salons and foreign exhibitions and became an important institution for training artists from Senegal and elsewhere in Africa." (Snipe 1998: 48)

Another important landmark, a few years later, was the creation of the *Cercle de la Jeunesse* in Louga, a folkloric troupe which probably started as an offshoot of the ASC movement[49]. At

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[48] In 1969, a counter-festival was organized in Algeria: the Pan-African Festival of Arts, which emphasized "Africanism" rather than "Blackness". The second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture was held in Nigeria in 1977, amid continuous criticism of Senghor's Negritude and of the Francophone attempt to gain leadership in Africa. Back in Senegal, the festival also became entangled in politics; intellectuals and opposition leaders such as Assane Seck (mentioned earlier in connection with the Ponty plays) openly criticized the whole enterprise (Snipe 1998). This did not prevent him from being appointed as the Minister of Culture later on.

[49] The ASCs (*Associations Sportives et Culturelles*) are grouped under the overarching control of the OCAV (*Organization de Coordination des Activités de Vacances*), a state-sponsored youth organization. In the late 1970s, after

the time, the creativity of the *Cercle* brought the group great popularity throughout Senegal, and more youth troupes with a strong foothold in the local community popped up in the major cities. The ASC movement has also fostered the creation of hundreds of dance troupes in Dakar's *quartiers*, which compete in the annual TV competition "Oscars des Vacances". I have not carried out specific research on the very popular "Oscars", but this is worth mentioning because a fair number of professional performers in the Dakarois dance world began in their local ASC.

The post-colonial search for a "new idiom of contemporary African culture"[50]

By the mid-1970s, folkloric performance was already well established as a genre, but underneath the façade, Senghor's Negritude ideology had lost some of its appeal. This may explain, at least in part, why the time was ripe for new cultural and artistic experiments. Dance was an obvious medium for this, as Senghor had always regarded it as the most "African" idiom. When he encouraged the creation of the pan-African dance school Mudra Afrique in 1977, his objective left little doubt in terms of its universal ambition:

> "Beyond the establishment of an inventory of Black African dance steps and movements, Mudra Afrique must absorb the steps and the values of other dance forms in order to generate a new kind of Black African Dance that can be understood and appreciated by people of all cultures." (Léopold S. Senghor, quoted in Acogny 1994: 4)

Housed in the lavish building of the Musée Dynamique built on the sea front for the 1966 festival, the school was supported by the Senegalese state, the UNESCO and the Gulbenkian Foundation, the latter two making a joint donation of $100,000 (*Mudra Afrique*, 1980). A unique experience in Africa at the time, it was founded by French choreographer Maurice Béjart, whose Mudra school in Brussels was one of the major dance institutions in Europe. Daily leadership was handed over to Germaine Acogny, who would become one of the pio-

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Senghor had forced opposition parties underground, some of the urban ASCs also served as a relay for political activism (Personal communication from Ousseynou Faye, Dakar, July 2002).

[50] This is a reference to a comment in André Waksman's 1980 documentary film, *Mudra Afrique*.

neers of "contemporary African dance" [51]. At Mudra Afrique, twenty-five students from all over Francophone Africa and Haiti were trained in ballet, Mrs Acogny's "African dance" technique, American modern dance (Martha Graham technique), singing and drumming in a three-year course. Master Drummer and Griot Doudou Ndiaye Rose, who had already worked with Mrs Acogny on the Majorettes project, taught *sabar* drumming. Dancers from Béjart's *Ballet du XXe siècle* were brought in to teach ballet, and a pianist was on loan from the Bolshoï. While the project was praised by some as a daring investment in culture, it was loathed by others as an expensive cornerstone in Senghor's political ambitions, and an elitist affair in a country plagued by poverty. The early 1980s were also the time of the first Structural Adjustment Programme, and when Abdou Diouf became President, state funding was withdrawn. The school was forced to close in 1982. Nevertheless, the Mudra experience inspired the next generations of Senegalese – and African – dancers and choreographers. Several of my informants, now in their forties, spoke about choosing to become dancers from watching the Mudra students at work.

The 1980s were also a time of mass migration of West African performers to Europe and North America. While economic conditions at home deteriorated, the renewed success of African music and dance abroad raised people's hopes that migration would lead directly to success[52]. Following the closure of the school, Mrs Acogny herself settled in France. In 1995 she returned to Senegal, and in 1998 she officially opened her training- and choreographic centre in the coastal Lebu village of Tubaab Jallaw, some 50 km south of Dakar. The opening of the *Ecole des Sables* was a landmark, as for the first time since Mudra closed down, a large and well-equipped space was entirely dedicated to the production of theatrical dance.

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[51] Germaine Acogny was originally from Benin but was raised in Senegal. Trained as a sports teacher, in the early 1970s she was teaching rhythmic gymnastics in Dakar. Before taking the direction of Mudra, she had been invited by Senghor to "Africanize" a highly nationalistic symbol, the Senegalese Majorettes. In 1972 she was also appointed as the leader of the dance section at the *Institut National des Arts*, a post from which she resigned after a year. The dance section's 1972 annual report written by Mrs Acogny, which I had the opportunity to see quickly, made explicit reference to the need to "modernize" the traditional dances. To achieve this, she argued for the codification of traditional dances as a set of "techniques".

[52] The World Music phenomenon was "launched" in the early 1980s, and the international success of Senegalese musicians such as Youssou Ndour, Ismaël Lô, Baaba Maal, Touré Kounda, Xalam and others encouraged young performers to try their chance abroad. Dancers were also concerned, not only because they performed in concerts around the world, but also because the music spurred a booming interest in "African dance" classes in the major cities of Europe and North America.

Concluding remarks

It is often assumed that theatrical dance from Africa is either a direct transfer of ceremonial traditions to the stage or a pale imitation of Euro-American dance forms. In fact, in the case of Senegambia, the sparse history available shows that dancers have been performing on the European stages since the late nineteenth century at least. It was not simply the case that these performers were brought to Europe to display their traditions and then returned to Africa undisturbed. While some of them remained in Europe – in France in particular – and contributed to the development of new genres there, others returned to West Africa to set up folkloric troupes which owed much to their European experiences. Colonial school theatre also played an important role in generating a Francophone African style of performance. The case of Guinean Fodéba Keita is exemplary because he combined his knowledge of the Mandinka music and dance styles with his experience of colonial theatre and the Parisian milieu to produce a genre which was since canonized as "traditional". These histories are also relevant in the context of this thesis because they show that theatrical dance and social mobility in Senegambia were closely connected throughout the twentieth century, even though initially, opportunities to gain prestige and achieve a successful career were only available to a French-educated minority.

Chapter III:
Theoretical framework

Introduction: What is dance?

The objective of this chapter is to introduce the analytical approaches which inform this thesis. For the most part I do not discuss the theoretical framework in the next chapters, which form the core of the thesis, because this would be at the expense of the ethnography. To begin with, I should make it clear that I have combined several approaches; as Royce (1977) demonstrated in her classic book, this enables us to paint a richer portrait of the social significance of dance. Moreover, by combining several approaches I have tried to avoid being too dogmatic in my analysis of social mobility, as I do not feel this would have done justice to the complexity of my informants' motivations. Before discussing important theoretical points, I find it useful to reflect on the category of "dance" that is at the centre of the study.

Throughout much of the discipline's history, anthropologists with an interest in dance as well as dance scholars have attempted to verbalize the nature of dance. Given the enormous cultural variation in the social phenomena described as "dance", it has proved impossible to come up with a satisfying universal definition, even though "dance anthropologists seem to converge on a consideration of bounded rhythmical movements that are performed during some kind of altered state of consciousness" (Wulff 2001). "Rhythmical movements" are performed in such a variety of contexts as social gatherings, religious rituals, spirit possession, oratory performance, folklore, theatre, masquerades or children's games. Although it was long taken for granted that dance was the same phenomenon everywhere, the fact that many West African languages do not have a specific word for "dance" (Gore 2001) underlines the Eurocentric character of the category. In Wolof, "dance" is best translated as *fecc*, or *baal* for an urban party, but the words most commonly used designate the whole context the dance is a part of. The term *sabar* for example, is used for the festive event of the same name, a type of drums, a set of rhythms and a range of dance styles with a similar structure. The Wolof *kasag* is both a set of rhythms and a dance performed in male circumcision rituals. This implies that

dance cannot be easily separated from the other components it is associated with: music, rhythms or setting.

This is important because just as with music and the arts, applying the same category cross-culturally has affected our understanding of the phenomena studied. Williams (1982) and Kaeppler (1978) have refuted the idea of a universal definition, arguing that lumping widely different practices together obscured more than it revealed. But their notion of "structured movement systems" has displaced the problem rather than solved it, because most repetitive movements of everyday life could fit under this designation. Gore (2001: 33) offers an interesting perspective by suggesting that we should perhaps stop trying to isolate dance in culture, not only because this is "conditioned by the deeply-ingrained Eurocentric habit of conceiving of art as compartmentalised and specialised practice", but also because this produces a discourse which contributes to the devaluation of traditional performance in "socially and ritually significant contexts". She does not, however, suggest any alternative, perhaps because as she acknowledges, "habits of thinking" are difficult to dislodge.

Other authors have tried to characterize dance in relation to ordinary movement. Drawing on his work on Umeda dance, Gell (1985: 183) found that the difference between dance and other movement was one of style rather than of kind: "We always find the self-consciously graceful walk that seems continually to refer to the dance without quite becoming it, and the half-hearted dance that lapses back into the security of mere locomotion". Gell argues that the role of style in dance is to create a "frame" in Bateson's (1972) sense: the message "this is dance" defines a context in which the rules differ from those of everyday life, while referring back to everyday life in a symbolic way. But his argument sends us back to a universally valid set of characteristics of dance, a question as yet unresolved. My own view is that it is perfectly acceptable, as Wulff (1998) and Stokes (1994) have pleaded for, to search for dance but redefine our object of study in every cultural context. In this thesis, "dance" practices range very widely from the festive circle to the world of theatrical dance. But what is important, perhaps, is that I never use the term "dance" in contexts in which my informants do not.

My use of the definite article in some instances – *the* dance – follows Spencer's notion that "one is not just concerned with dancers or their dancing, but with an institutionalised arrangement" (1985a: 2). Finally, when I use the term "performance" it is in the sense of "particular 'symbolic' or 'aesthetic' activities", or "intentionally produced enactments which are (usually) marked and set off from ordinary activities, and which call attention to themselves

[...] with special purposes or qualities for the people who observe or perform them" (Schieffelin 1998: 195). It is not, therefore, in Goffman's (1959) sense of the performativity of everyday life. In this study, I often extend the notion of dance to performance in order to capture the fact that there is always much more going on than dance in all the events concerned; there is almost always drumming, sometimes acrobatics, and often a degree of "acting" too, even in the *sabar* and popular dances.

Dance as a site of individual experimentation

Although our primary concern as anthropologists is with social phenomena, I find it useful to try to understand how dance "works" at the level of individual experience before looking at dance as a social practice. We can only begin to understand why dance is a universally powerful activity if we ask ourselves such questions as why dance has the capacity to influence individual experience, and where the specificity of the dance resides, which makes it different from other human activities such as singing, walking, painting or cooking. Dance is a complex phenomenon, and I do not pretend to uncover all its potentialities here. Rather, I have chosen to focus on two aspects which I have found to be particularly relevant to this study: the power of dance to bring the body, reason and emotion together to create a heightened sense of "being in the world" and the performer-audience connection.

Play, emotion and the non verbal

In "Western" societies, dance is often usually regarded as entertainment, as an emotional activity, and in any case as something which does not play a serious role in people's lives. As hinted at in the introduction, the marginalization of dance in social life can probably be traced back to the development of the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy in Western thought, even though we could argue that many of our everyday practices challenge this dichotomy. Yet dance has unique kinaesthetic properties that make it a particularly appropriate activity to bring emotions and cognition together. Dance has an element of play, and often an element of ritual; it is also a non-verbal and rhythmic bodily activity.

Although dated, Huizinga's book on "cultural play", *Homo Ludens* (1949), is still inspiring to reflect on the effect of playful activities such as dance on individual experience. Huizinga

defines play as "a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary life' as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly" (ibid.: 13), and opposes the playing side of human life to its functional aspects. He argues that play affects human experience more intensely because it is not functional, it is not "work". Huizinga's work has had a tremendous influence on studies of performance, ritual, sports and childhood, and although his definition of "play" has been criticized for being too broad, some of his insights remain valid. Bailey (1996: 4) makes a similar point when he suggests that "play" is convincing because it belongs to the "consent" side of life, the side that is "opposed to the calculation of utility and the use of force". The problem with too much emphasis on this approach in the context of dance is the risk of reinforcing stereotypes on dance as "spontaneous" and "pure entertainment". As this thesis will show, dance may well be playful and utilitarian at the same time. Gore (1999) points out that in several West African languages the same word refers to "dance", "play" and "games". To my knowledge, the words used for "play" in Wolof (e.g. *fo*, to play, to joke or *tëgg*, to play the drums) are not used for dancing.

The literature on ritual also provides clues to reflect on the emotional impact of dance. There is often a great deal of overlap between dance events and rituals, and even stage performances can be seen as ritualized events. Some of Victor Turner's most influential work (e.g. 1982) suggests that modern theatre derives from a universal human need to transform important moments of social life into ritual. The non-verbal aspects of ritual are by nature difficult to analyze in words, but some of the most inspiring work I have come across is Parkin's (1985) work on ritual among the Giriama of Kenya, in which he argues that the efficacy of ritual pertains to the "moving-together of reason, emotion and body". Among those who have analyzed dance as a non-verbal bodily activity, Hanna (1987) also focuses on breaking down the mind/body dichotomy. She argues that the holistic aspect of dance explains its potential to supplement and transcend verbal language. She views dance as "communication" and argues that the efficacy of dance lies in its capacity to fully engage the human being. Hanna also reminds us that all bodily activity involves rhythm, from breathing to walking, talking or eating; dance should therefore be regarded as the "mother" of all human activities, a view echoed more recently in Wendy James' work (2000, 2003).

The performer-audience connection

What has been said so far concerns the experience of the performer more than that of the audience, even though the distinction is not always valid. Dance events in urban Senegal, for example, are participatory in ways that make the dichotomy irrelevant. But in the case of stage performance, what are we to make of the experience of the audience? Schieffelin (1998) has rightly argued that the performer-audience connection remains largely unexplored in the social sciences, and that more attention to this dimension would greatly improve our understanding of the relationship between the individual and society. This is important because the question of whether or not performance affects people's lives beyond the elusive moment of performance is central to this thesis. Bailey (1996) views the connection in terms of the manipulation of the spectators' emotions:

> "When a performance or a work of art enfolds a social commentary [...], a selected version of the real world is admitted into the frame and there subjected, so to speak, to emotional irradiation. Then the patients are released back into the real world, carrying with them an altered capacity for feeling about and acting upon that world. The message people get from a performance is not only informative, but also – primarily – attitude-shaping."
>
> (Bailey 1996: 4)

Inspired by Peckham's (1965) work on art, Hanna (1987) makes a closely related point when she argues that dance allows performers and spectators to comment upon social reality and try out alternative scenarios. According to Peckham, art may provide protected situations in which "disorientation" or "the discontinuity of experience" can be savoured. In this view, art works as the symbolic experience of chaos, thereby providing people with the experience of novelty necessary to bring about social change. This approach is useful but it also considers art as "text", and therefore misses on important aspects of performance as a living interaction renewed every time. Yet the idea that performance may allow people to experiment and carry some degree of transformation back into everyday life intuitively resonates with our phenomenological experience of the dance.

I find Schieffelin's (1998) approach to the performer-spectator relationship even more compelling because it challenges taken-for-granted notions of staged performance as "fake". He suggests that the Aristotelian divide between a "world of spectator which is real and a

world conjured up by performers which is not" or has a "virtual or imaginary" reality (ibid.: 200), prevents us from fully grasping the relationship between performance and the "social construction of reality". Taking his own work with the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea as a starting point, Schieffelin shows that there are other ways of conceiving of this relationship. In the Kaluli's Gisalo ceremony described in his earlier work (Schieffelin 1976), the dancers sing with nostalgia about the landscape the audience is emotionally attached to. People can be so moved by the performance that they end up attacking the dancers and burning them on the shoulders with torches. As the author points out, it is not that the Kaluli are unable to conceive of the performance as a virtual world; it is rather that they take it as a provocation. For them, the evocative aspect of the performance is more important than its aesthetic qualities. The fusion of realities in the participants' experience may well be one of the ways through which performance accomplishes something unique. Moreover, the effect on the participants has the potential to change with every performance in ways not so easily achieved with text. As Wulff (1998) remarked, even in the highly codified world of ballet, where choreographies are rehearsed to the slightest movement hundreds of times, every performance is unique.

This thesis does not pretend to answer all pending questions regarding what dance accomplishes and how, but I will attempt to make a contribution through careful attention to the performative interaction between the participants, and how this reverberates into people's everyday lives. This will be particularly evident with the *sabars* and other dance events discussed in chapter IV, but in the professional world too (chapters V and VI), the interaction among performers and between performers and audience will underlie the analysis. I also extend the notion of "audience", which I prefer to that of "spectator", to the performers' communities. Although this is rarely mentioned in the literature, dancers and musicians do not only perform for those present at a given event; the virtual audience of their relatives and friends is also essential to them. In other words, performers are always concerned with the community's appreciation of what they do. This does not necessarily work positively; in some cases people feel that they must hide to dance – for example by taking part in a *sabar* in a different neighbourhood – so that this "virtual audience" does not come to know about it. That which happens in the realm of the performer-audience relationship partly accounts for the transformative power of performance at a sociological level, which I discuss in the next section.

Performance and social transformation

If we agree that the world of performance is a part of society rather than outside it (e.g. Stokes 1994), then studying transformations of performance should tell us a great deal about a society. However, until the 1960s at least, African performing arts in contemporary urban contexts were largely ignored in the social sciences. Any form of performance that was not "traditional" was regarded as inauthentic and as a symptom of the "acculturation" of African societies. In the words of Ghanaian arts scholar J.H. Kwabena Nketia:

> "Until a few decades ago, encounters with the contemporary arts of Africa generated considerable ambivalence. While some artistic products appeared exciting because of their novelty or creative potential, others were brushed aside because they seemed elementary or lacked the authenticity of the traditional arts. [...] Although the situation has improved considerably, especially in the last two decades, we have still a long way to go to create a critical and appreciative environment in which contemporary African arts can be accepted on their own merit." (Nketia 1996)

By contrast, this thesis situates itself within the growing body of literature on urban performance in Africa. Rather than assuming that bits of local culture are lost with every transformation of Senegambian dance styles, I attempt to remain as close as possible to the point of view of the performers, thus trying to understand in which context these transformations occur, and how they affect the wider society. First, I look at the appropriation of performance for political purposes, and how people often re-use the same idiom to contest such manipulation. Second, I interrogate the efficacy of performance as a vehicle of social mobility and transformation of hierarchies.

Folkloric performance and nationalisms

Chapter V will focus on a popular form of performance known among ordinary Senegalese as "ballets" or "ballets traditionnels". Professional performers increasingly favour the term "danses traditionnelles", but they continue to use the term "ballets" as well. By contrast, I have chosen the term "folkloric performance" or "folkloric dances" for several reasons. Firstly, when the genre developed in Senegambia in the 1960s, it was called "ballets folkloriques",

and therefore by using the term "folkloric" I remain faithful to the original denomination. The term "traditional dance" did not become generalized before the 1980s. By then African dancers teaching in Europe were using the more flattering term "traditional" because it resonated with the Africa people wanted to imagine. This was obviously more appealing than the association with tourist art suggested by the term "folkloric". Through permanent interaction between these performers and the dance communities in their home countries, the term "traditional" quickly travelled back to West Africa. Secondly, there is something uneasy about using the term "ballet", because it was appropriated by many new nations of the twentieth century to suggest that their national troupes were as sophisticated as European or American ballet companies. But the underlying assumption is that classical ballet is a superior dance form, a value judgment that is not tenable in anthropology[53].

The term "folklore" is problematic too because of its resonance with a European intellectual tradition based on differentiating "high arts" from the "culture of the people". Composed of "folk" and "lore", the term originally meant "the lore of the people". The notion of a set of cultural practices belonging to the masses was conceptualized around the late eighteenth century, but the term itself was coined in 1846 by Ambrose Merton, a.k.a. William John Thoms (Ó Giolláin 2000). The paradox about folklore is that it does not exist outside of an ideology, often carried by a nationalistic agenda, which imposes itself as having the authority to decide what is "popular" or authentic and what is not. "Folklore" is therefore closely related to notions of authenticity and tradition. In this thesis however, I am only concerned with these notions insofar as they appear in the discourse of my informants. I have chosen to retain the term "folkloric" because it aptly describes a performance genre that is rooted in a Senegalese nation-building project in direct continuity with colonialism. After all, Senegal's cultural policies in the two decades after the independence were building on the French legacy. For example, the various "cultural centres" built in the main cities followed the model of colonial institutions aimed at promoting French language and culture. The President's nephew Maurice Sonar Senghor, who was instrumental in developing the state-controlled performing arts, had studied at the Comédie Française, from which he drew much inspiration for the National Theatre troupe, the National Lyrical Ensemble and the National Ballet. Since Senegal

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[53] Joanne Kealiinohomoku (1983 [1970]) was among the first scholars to denounce the hierarchy of cultures implicit in the status enjoyed by classical ballet in the performing arts world.

did not exist as a unified entity before 1960, as elsewhere in Africa the nation-building project was very much about imposing a view of "authentic" Senegalese culture, and therefore the term "folkloric" is appropriate here.

When it comes to folkloric performance, this thesis is informed by the idea that dance is a particularly effective form of "cultural performance" (Parkin 1996) in the context of nation-building and the construction of ethnicity. The worldwide use of dance – and music – as an agent in nationalism and ethnicity has to do with its non-verbal, polysemous character. Because of its potential to encapsulate complex and ambiguous messages, dance lends itself particularly well to embodying identities in the making. The dance itself is always in the making, as it were, and can therefore be manipulated according to context, audience or ideology. As Susan Reed (1998: 511) puts it, "dance is a powerful tool in shaping nationalist ideology and in the creation of national subjects, often more so than are political rhetoric or intellectual debates". Wendy James (2000: 142) makes a similar point when she reminds us that "political authority has again and again claimed the spiritual and moral high ground, if not prohibiting then at least undermining the power of competing performative practices by restricting, co-opting or trivializing them". But despite the explosion of "nationalism and ethnicity" as a field of study since the 1970s, studies of dance and other forms of bodily performance in the national context were relatively neglected until the mid-1990s.

Among recent studies, I have found inspiration in Helena Wulff's ongoing work on Irish dance (e.g. 2000, 2003, forthcoming). Rather than focusing on a single aspect of the "Irish body in motion", Wulff takes into account a wide range of styles in different contexts and at different times, from the *feisanna* (dance competitions) organized by the Gaelic League at the end of the nineteenth century to the contemporary "Worlds" (Irish dance championships), popular competitions in pubs, dance performances in theatres and the *Riverdance* phenomenon. Covering a wide ground without compromising with the depth of the ethnography, Wulff paints a rich portrait of the multiple ways in which promoting and controlling the dance – along with the Irish language – has been an integral part of the Irish national project since the late nineteenth century. In fact the dance has been more successful than language in many ways, helping maintain a sense of Irish identity among the Diaspora in Great Britain, the US, Australia and New Zealand. Wulff also links the nationalistic aspect to other important issues in the re-definition of contemporary Irish identity, showing for example how dance becomes again and again entangled with religion and moral politics; debates on authenticity, tradition

and modernity in national culture; or the politics of distinction through artistic taste. Her analysis of the transformations of Irish dances, and the conflicts of ownership that inevitably follow, has also informed my interpretations of the dance in Senegal.

Yvonne Daniel's (1995) work on dance in Cuba was also illuminating. She tells us that rumba was chosen as the national dance in post-revolutionary Cuba, and promoted because it had been associated with the Black working class since the nineteenth century. Rumba was therefore more appropriate to represent the socialist ideology than ballet[54], *son* or other popular dance forms. But the authorities have had a mixed success in spreading rumba to all segments of society, which is a reminder us that dance can never be completely controlled. It always carries the seeds of social distinction, even when purposefully packaged as "popular culture".

Peter Mark's (1994) work on rural folklore in the Casamance is also useful here, both because of its regional relevance to my work and from an analytical perspective. Building up on the work of Karin Barber (e.g. 1987) and scholars of post-World War II "Volkskunde" (e.g. Bausinger 1990), Mark shows how folkloric performance in rural Casamance has expressed a growing sense of Jola identity since the beginning of the rebellion, while also being instrumental in creating it. Aside from older life cycle rituals such as initiation, marriages and funerals, which have long been occasions "for each Jola community to reaffirm its distinctive cultural identity" (Mark 1994: 565), the author describes the emergence, in the 1980s, of rural folkloric dance festivals as "new opportunities [...] for the presentation of community-wide dances" (ibid.: 566). In Mark's article, the term "folklore" is used to designate the "more or less self-conscious recreation of ritual and masquerade" (ibid.: 568), which is very close to the sense in which I use the term "folkloric performance". He relates the development of Casamançais folklore to two main factors: the post-independence establishment of dance troupes among Casamançais migrants in Dakar[55], and the development of tourism in the Casamance as a conscious strategy from the Senegalese government. Through a detailed ethnography of a "semaine culturelle" in Mlomp and Thionck Essyl, two communities in the Lower Casamance, Mark shows how people have appropriated the folkloric genre developed

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[54] Ballet was also promoted in Cuba, but to a lesser degree than rumba. In Cuba, ballet was introduced through the Russian school and did not, therefore, carry the same associations with bourgeois entertainment as it did in Europe.

[55] The trajectory of one of these troupes will be presented in chapter V.

in Dakar in the 1960s to assert their regional identity. He also observes that although events like the "semaine culturelle" were intended to attract tourists, the audience was mostly made of local people; this is very similar to my observations of the folkloric genre in Dakar.

The main contribution of this thesis will be to show that even though folkloric performance is often constructed for political purposes, the agency of the people involved prevents it from being completely subjected to control. Folkloric performance cannot be entirely owned by its patrons – most often the state – because political ideologies never fit completely with the interests of the performers, choreographers and other actors involved. As the power of patrons is transformed, as was the case with the weakening of the state in Senegal throughout the 1980s, the artists inevitably develop their own agendas, whether to improve their status or to effect change in other domains. Indeed the people who create performance may have the ability to react to socio-political change faster than their patrons, and even contribute to change by adapting performance to a wide range of contexts and audiences. Many Senegalese folkloric troupes, for example, are equally able to embody ethnic identities for events organized by local associations, project the image of Senegal as a united nation or construct representations of "traditional Africa" for tourists[56]. Folkloric performance, therefore, need not be as frozen as the Volkskunde suggested. In Senegal, this is evident in the multiple ways ceremonial life, popular dances and folkloric performance constantly feed into each other.

Performance and social mobility

Given people's widespread concern with improving their lives in the spaces they associate themselves with, it is surprising that social mobility has not been a more important topic in the literature on performance. Perhaps with the demise of Marxism and other grand schemes in the social sciences, studies that dealt with issues of class and status became unfashionable precisely at the time when anthropological interest in performance developed. There are however a number of studies which have informed this thesis, including those within the closely related domain of sports.

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[56] As I have not done fieldwork in hotels, I do not deal specifically with the tourism context in this thesis. Rather, it is treated as part of the environment in which folkloric performance develops.

One interesting case in Africa is Marjorie Franken's (1994) work on dance in Kenyan Swahili society. Franken suggests that people reaffirm their rank by emphasizing different parts of the body in their dances. She contrasts two dances traditionally performed by the high status *waungwana* (the *ngoma la hazua* for weddings and circumcisions, and the married women's *lelemama*) at the turn of the twentieth century with two dances associated with the lower-status *watwana*, the *uta* and the *mwaribe* performed in Lamu during the Maulidi week. From a comparison of the movements, setting (inside houses or outdoors), dress and accessories, Franken concludes that the dances are redundant in defining status. Whereas an emphasis on the arms denotes high status, vigorous movements of the legs and feet are associated with the former slaves. Her study is interesting because she carefully examines the quality and texture of the movement, and even includes sets of movement notation. What I find problematic however, is that she presents us with a fairly frozen view of Swahili social stratification. There is no suggestion that people may try to transcend the category they were born in by manipulating movement, dress or other attributes. Moreover, her comparison of dances performed "at the turn of the century" with current Maulidi practices is confusing because it implies that Swahili society has remained fairly static during the twentieth century. This thesis by contrast, resolutely approaches social stratification as a dynamic process of change.

In her ethnography on "mestizo" performance in a small town of the Cusco region in Peru, Zoila Mendoza (2000), shows how the local dance associations (*comparsas*) who perform for the annual patron saint's festival, help "re-create local and regional identities and is a practice that deals with ambiguities and paradoxes in history and in everyday life" (ibid.: 36-37). In San Jerónimo, social stratification still bears remnants of the colonial time, when Europeans enjoyed the highest status, "mestizos" were in the middle, and the "indigenous" population was relegated to the bottom. The town is now populated by people who are neither completely Indian nor completely "mestizos", a category designated by the negative term "cholos". As most people still practice small-scale agriculture alongside occupations that frequently take them to Cusco, their everyday life is permanently stretched between the city and the countryside. Since the 1940s structural changes in land tenure and the economic development of the region, partly owing to tourism, have fostered the emergence of a "petite bourgeoisie" of traders, truck owners and drivers, cattle dealers, technicians, state and private employees. The ambiguous ethnic situation of the people of San Jerónimo, Mendoza argues, makes it even more imperative for members of the "emergent socioeconomic groups" to per-

form "mestizo" dances in their most important public ritual, the festivity of the town's patron Saint Jerome. Through their performers and sponsors, the *comparsas* represent the main professional occupations of the town. In a context of intergenerational tension embodied in conflicts over notions of authenticity, people attempt to construct new statuses for themselves through the creative manipulation of *comparsas* performance. By means of the dances, "members of the new local petite bourgeoisie have devoted their efforts to blurring the differences between themselves and Cusco urban elites. In doing this, they have also distinguished themselves from the rest of their fellow townspeople, becoming the new local 'mestizos' " (ibid.: 84). Mendoza's work echoes Filmer's (1999) little known article on the role of gentry dances in legitimizing a new social order – the rise of the bourgeoisie – in late eighteenth-century Europe. These studies have enriched our understanding of the intimate relationship between dance and society, but they are not always completely convincing because we are given too little to see of people's ordinary lives to find out how effective performance is in re-shuffling hierarchies.

Elsewhere in Latin America, the work of John L. Lewis (1992) and Barbara Browning (1995) on Brazilian capoeira has informed my interpretations of the dance from an early stage. Replaced in the broader history of Black communities in Brazil, the trajectory of capoeira is closely related to social mobility, and carries many similarities with the dance in Senegal. Loïc Wacquant's (1998) work in the prizefighting world in Chicago is also illuminating. After all boxing is not only a sport, but also a bodily practice and a performance. Wacquant portrays prizefighting as an embodied social capital through which inner-city young men are able to become "somebody", in their own words (ibid.: 13). In their experience, building their bodies into fighting machines is one of the few routes available to those who are keen to gain status. In many ways the worlds described by Wacquant and Lewis are closer to the dance scene portrayed in this thesis, because as opposed to the *comparsas*, they have to do with people's occupation in everyday life. Wacquant's fascinating observations on how the dreams of the individual boxers feed into the shady and exploitative practices of the pugilistic economy are useful because in Senegal too, dreams of social mobility feed into the transformations of the dance and the exploitative practices which occasionally accompany them. Moreover, as with the prizefighting community, there is a sense in which the profession remains "tainted" despite the success of a growing minority.

Gender and the dance in Senegal

The interplay between gender – i.e. the social elaboration of the biological differences between the sexes – and dance is an important dimension of this study, because social status is always highly gendered. There are myriad possible ways to look at this interplay. Ifi Amadiume (1996), for example, looks at elite women's use of "cultural performance" to promote their interests in Nigerian politics. Following the objective of this thesis, which is to examine the ways in which people use dance to re-negotiate their social status, I have chosen to explore both the gendered dimension of dance performance and its impact on gender relations, as these are expressed in the economic and moral domains. I have identified these domains because they are directly related to the dance in people's everyday discourse as well as in the media.

Gender, anthropology and Senegambia

The development of gender studies since the early 1970s has been described extensively elsewhere; therefore I will not retrace the trajectory in detail here. I only mention the main developments insofar as they are relevant to this study. Anthropology contributed to the development of feminist theory as early as the 1960s, by providing cross-cultural data supporting the notion that gender was socially rather than biologically determined. The biological facts of difference between the sexes were acknowledged, but what appeared to be more relevant was that gender was culturally variable. As Moore (1994: 10) points out however, the differentiation of sex and gender did not account for what was then brought forward as the universal subordination of women. To explain this, anthropologists developed two complementary theories based on the binary oppositions of nature/culture and the private/public spheres. According to the first theory (e.g. Ortner 1974), women were everywhere associated with nature because of their reproductive role, whereas men were associated with culture; the universal dominance of culture over nature in human societies, it was argued, accounted for women's subordination. The second theory followed a similar line, but found the most salient association to be that of women with the private (or domestic) and men with the public sphere. These theories were later criticized for being ethnocentric (e.g. MacCormack and Strathern 1980, Moore 1988).

The growing critique of all-encompassing feminist theories from the early 1980s onwards paralleled the demise of grand schemes to explain social transformation. It was also fostered by attacks from a number of non-Western female scholars, who pointed out that despite all the good intentions, Euro-American feminism could turn into an oppressive ideology in itself. As anthropologists and other social scientists began to refine cross-cultural studies of gender, it became obvious that gender relations could not be easily understood apart from such other factors of distinction as class, race, age or marital status. In the case of urban Senegal for example, the social position of a wealthy *diriyànke* and that of a poorly paid house employee are in no way comparable. Whereas the *diriyànke* enjoys considerable status and may even have men working for her, the house employee is more likely to be exploited and physically mistreated by people of both sexes.

Another important development in the study of gender within the social sciences was the rehabilitation of masculinity and the exploration of "alternative" gender identities. In the 1990s it became obvious that the feminine and the masculine were mutually constituted, and that focusing on one at the exclusion of the other caused important aspects to be missed (e.g. Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994). On the whole however, West African studies have not yet caught up with these developments. With a few exceptions (e.g. Amadiume 1995, Faye 2000, Biaya 2001), "research on gender" still means "studying women", at times from a fairly conservative perspective (e.g. Ndiaye 1986). Studies of gender relations from the perspective of other disciplines, such as development studies and political science, provide valuable additions to the anthropological approaches, not only because these studies are concerned with the gendering of power, but also they have had a significant impact on the implementation of development policies in Africa. Hesseling and Locoh's (1997) introduction to the issue of Politique Africaine entitled "L'Afrique des Femmes" provides an excellent overview of this field since the 1960s.

Dance and gender

Following recent developments in the study of gender, Moore (1994), among others, has argued convincingly for more attention to the influence of multiple gender discourses on the formation of individual identities. She has also shown that gender identities are contextual, in other words that every individual emphasizes different identities in different contexts. If we agree that the manipulation of bodies is a privileged means of contextualizing gender, then

dance is bound to be at the centre of how gender relations are negotiated. But the important question is whether or not what happens in the dance has an impact on people's lives once the fleeting moment of the performance is over.

A key text in the anthropology of dance in the last fifteen years is Jane Cowan's (1990) ethnography of celebratory practices in the town of Sohos, in northern Greece. Looking at events such as weddings and the formal evening dances of the local civic associations, Cowan argues that the dance is problematic for men and women in different ways. Youths and men are expected to put aside their antagonisms, and unite in the shared pleasures of dancing and drinking until they reach the altered state of *kefi*. But it is also regarded as legitimate that they should assert themselves as individuals. The quarrels that occasionally break out are therefore interpreted both as evidence of men's "liveliness" and as an expression of their laudable attempts to assert or challenge their position in the Sohohian order. Women, by contrast, are much more restricted in the repertoire of identities that is appropriate for them to choose from. Their behaviour during these events is always interpreted in terms of their sexuality. They are therefore forced to affirm their individuality in much quieter ways than men, for example through their clothing, hair style and movements. Cowan's approach is inspiring because she emphasizes the complexity of gender relations in Sohos, and shows how this complexity is best grasped through the dance. Men and women from different generations and social backgrounds also hold conflicting views on gender, and this comes across even as people unite in the pleasure of social dancing. This thesis builds further on Cowan's work to show how gender relations in urban Senegal are reworked in different ways in different performance contexts. With regards to women's dance events in particular, I also sharpen the focus on the competitive dimension, which may be more acute in the polygamous societies of Senegambia than in Sohos. In Dakar, dance events do not simply reflect female competition; this is where competition *is* played out, not only through dancing but also through fashion and the symbolic use of male drummers as pawns in a game. In fact, it was one of Evans-Pritchard's (1928) early insights to identify the Zande beer dance as a privileged medium for competition – in that context male competition for leadership and for the attention of girls. Most importantly, the fact that social relations – gender and other – are reworked through the dance is a testimony to its transformative power.

Concluding remarks: the transformative power of performance

This thesis as a whole is informed by the notion that performance, dance in particular, is a powerful agent of social transformation. Some of the most inspiring work I have come across is Abner Cohen's (e.g. 1969, 1981, 1993) model of a dialectic relationship between performance and politics – the latter being defined in the broad sense of the struggle for power inherent in all social relations. His work on the Hausa of Ibadan (1969) prefigured later developments of his notion of "cultural performance" (Parkin 1996). In the early 1950s, the rise of Nigerian nationalism and the demise of Hausa party politics created a vacuum in Hausa traditional power. Following the visit of Senegalese Tijaani Cheikh Ibrahima Niass, the community adopted the Tijaaniyya Order, and religious ritual became the new idiom for political organization. Cohen showed how the formation of Hausa ethnicity was a process linked to involvement in long-distance trade. Maintaining a degree of political autonomy was necessary for the trade, and the new form of religious organization helped recreate a cohesiveness that was directly linked to the community's economic survival. Cohen's early insights on ritual practices were later extended to performance in a broader sense. His work on the Notting Hill Carnival (Cohen 1993) is particularly illuminating here, because the masquerade shares the non-verbal polysemy of many other dance forms. Having followed the event over two decades – the time span was an advantage most doctoral students do not have – he was able to show how such cultural performances as Carnival were bound to shade into political interests, and vice versa. He also put into sharp focus the duality of performance, suggesting that in some situations Carnivals served "as 'rituals of rebellion' the effect of which is cathartic and ultimately a mechanism operating in the maintenance of the established order", whereas "in other situations they serve as an expression of protest, resistance and violence" (ibid.: 128). Cohen's insistence on the notion that the artistic and the political cannot be easily separated from each other is of particular relevance to this study.

Chapter IV:

Dancing with neighbours: Sabar and other "popular" dances in Dakar's quartiers[57]

Vignette

Fann Hock, Dakar, August 2002. It is early afternoon in the middle of the rainy season, the *nawet*, and the heat is threatening to make the stones burst. The sea is less than 300 metres away, yet no wind is blowing; the neighbourhood seems to be caught mid-air in complete stillness. Wafts of fetid air are coming from the nearby Canal IV, a long rift in the city landscape filled with stagnant water, rubbish and mosquitoes. A few passers-by are slowly walking down the alleys. Some are elegantly wiping their face with tissues, as if keeping a spotless appearance would make the heat easier to bear.

The stillness is only broken by an island of sound and movement underneath a big tree, on the opposite side of the sand-blown alley. As every day except on Fridays, when prayer overtakes the city, a small group of children, probably aged five to ten, are dancing the *sabar*. Two of them are using sticks to drum on an empty tin can and a cardboard sheet. The others have drawn a circle in the sand, taken their shoes off and lined them up outside the circle. The oldest child, a girl, seems to be leading the party. The children take turns to dance inside the circle for a few seconds at a time, their tiny bodies taking suggestive poses so similar to those of adults. Sometimes they encourage the dancer by clapping their hands in rhythm. The game goes on for more than an hour. Several women are sitting nearby, chatting while one is braiding another's hair. On the other side of the street, a small group of men are preparing *attaya*, the Senegalese mint tea, and playing the *jeu de dames*. No one seems to pay attention to the children. Occasionally they argue, and one of them leaves the game, only to return a few minutes later. The oldest girl is very directive in deciding whose turn it is to dance, and al-

[57] I keep the French term "quartiers" because it is widely used in Dakar to designate the low-income neighbourhoods which have expanded northwards from the older centres of the city, the Plateau and the Médina.

though I cannot hear what it is being said, this seems to be the main cause of the arguments. Yet the children are obviously having a lot of fun, and show no sign of being bothered by the heat. Since it is school holidays, they may start again in the evening and go on until long after I have gone to sleep, in my little flat just above one of the neighbourhood's lively corner shops. They will probably be at the same spot the next day with the tin cans, the cardboard sheet, the sticks and the circle; as everyday in this ordinary corner of Dakar.

Introduction

In this chapter, I have chosen to focus on a generic category of events, which I call "popular dance events" or "women's dance events", depending on whether or not the emphasis is on the gendered aspect of participation. I use the term "generic" because the category covers a wide variety of events, yet they have much in common from the point of view of their structure. As it would be impossible to cover them in their totality, I focus on two types which differ in the kind of space they delineate and in the gendering of participation: *tours* and *sabars*. Whereas *tours* are regarded as highly "private" and almost exclusively involve the participation of women, sometimes with male musicians or a disc jockey, *sabars* often delineate an encircled yet "public" space. *Sabars* are usually organized by women[58], but men may participate on women's terms, and on-lookers of both sexes are accepted as part of the event. *Sabars* always feature live drumming; owing to the call-and-response nature of the *sabar* style, a disc jockey is not sufficient. As in most of West Africa, the drummers paid to entertain are nearly always men. Senegal's most successful Master Drummer, Doudou Ndiaye Rose, has taught his daughters to play the *sabar* drums, but this remains an exception. Their group, the *Rosettes*, performs during concerts on stage rather than for the kind of events portrayed here.

In Dakar, unlike in rural areas, "*tour*" is quickly becoming a generic name for any female association[59] which meets on a regular basis, as well as for the meetings themselves. *Tours* often overlap with the economic arrangements called "tontines" all over Francophone Africa, *nat* in

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[58] Some informants reported that communities of homosexual men also organized *sabars*, but I have not come across such events myself. According to my informants, this usually takes place in private places to avoid harassment from people of the neighbourhood.

[59] Whereas "associations" entail a degree of organizational structure, what I call "networks" are more loosely defined groupings, with open borders and without a formal structure. In Senegalese associations people also meet physically on a regular basis, which is not necessarily the case with networks.

Wolof and ROSCAs (Rotating Savings and Credit Associations) in the social sciences. I have chosen to look at these events for two main reasons. Firstly, the "popular" dances performed there constantly feed into the professional dance world, and constitute an essential dimension of the "movement environment" (Novack 1990) most dancers grew up in. Many of the musicians attached to dance companies also perform during *tours* and *sabars*. Secondly, as modes of organization these events epitomize the socio-economic world of women in contemporary Senegal. In my view, therefore, they are essential spaces in which gender identities are being made and re-negotiated. In Dakar, nearly all the women I met were or had been members of a *tour* or a tontine. ROSCAs have been documented in excellent studies in various parts of Africa, Asia and Europe (e.g. Little 1972, Ardener & Burman eds 1995, Evers Rosander 1997a). But to my knowledge, none of these studies has taken performance into account as a salient dimension in analysing the sociological role of the ROSCAs.

Sabar is an overarching Wolof term which encapsulates a whole set of performance elements; it is primarily the generic name of a particular style of drums, but "*sabar*" is also used for the rhythms, movements and events where all these elements come together. *Sabar* drums are beaten simultaneously with a hand and a stick, and a complete ensemble includes at least six different drums[60]. Because each of them plays a specific role in the polyrhythmic metre characteristic of the *sabar* style, the best musical effect is obtained when they all play together. A metallic dish (*ból*) turned upside down is sometimes used in short sequences instead of the

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[60] In my experience, different *sabar* ensembles combine different categories of drums, but one common "modern" combination includes the *nder* (the leading drum), the *mbung-mbung*, the *tunguné*, the *lamb*, the *talmbat* and the *gorong* (Tang 2001: 138-139). During a Kaay Fecc "traditional dance" workshop I took part in, the four *sabar* drums were the *cól*, the *nder* (leading), the *mbung-mbung* and the *talmbat*. Some ensembles have also added the *tama*, the small laced "talking drum" drum strapped at the shoulder; the *tama* player (*tamakat*) pinches the instrument with the upper arm while beating it with the fingers of the same arm and a stick held in the other hand. Each category is further divided into several types; as a musician from Pikine explained to me, the *tama* for example, carries a different name depending on its size (*nder* for the smallest, *nder balla* for the medium-sized and *balla* for the larger tama). In large *Griot* families in Dakar, each generation invents new variations of the *sabar* drums. Master Drummer Doudou Ndiaye Rose, for example, invented a technique whereby a drummer plays on two *gorong* at the same time, hence the name *ñaari gorong* (literally "two *gorong*"). By contrast with the *sabar*, the *tama* is widespread throughout West Africa, but Wolof- and Sereer speakers often describe it as born of their own tradition. The skin used made be made of a varan or a goat. The *tama* has been revived in women's dance events since the 1980s, and it is said to have the power to make women dance in sexually suggestive ways; devout Muslims even describe it as "the devil" (*seytaan*).

drums. There are no "modern" instruments in *sabar* but the immensely popular *mbalax*[61] is a syncretic style that makes extensive use of *sabar* rhythms. In the past *sabar* drums had a wide range of functions in Wolof and Sereer societies, from inter-village emergency communication to support in warfare, agricultural work and wrestling competitions. Because of its enduring use in urban ceremonies, *sabar* is regarded as "traditional" Wolof and Sereer music par excellence, but it has been adopted in other parts of Senegal as well. Unlike the *jembe* which is encountered all over West Africa, the *sabar* style is not performed outside Senegambia, except by the Senegambian Diaspora. This obviously reinforces the association between the *sabar* and Senegambian ceremonial life.

The objective of this chapter is two-fold: firstly, to argue that women in urban Senegal use dance events as a protected space to re-negotiate their status in the female world and to experiment with alternative gender relations, and secondly, to portray these dances as an essential part of the movement atmosphere in which Senegalese professional dance emerges. In the first section therefore, I set the scene by tracing the ancestry of today's urban women's associations. The second section is an ethnographic introduction to the *tours*, otherwise described in Dakar as "women's business" (*aféeru jigéen*). The third section supplements the second by focusing on the more mixed *sabar* parties, or simply *sabars*. There, men's participation often appears to be welcome as an opportunity for laughter. In the fourth section I analyse the gendered structure of these events, and argue that they work as an inversion of the gender relations dominant in everyday life. The fifth section is dedicated to the material culture surrounding the events; the competitive dimension of fashion, in particular, is regarded here as revealing in terms of the social capital that the dances represent. Based on case stories, the sixth section is a further exploration of the notion of socio-economic status. It asks whether the social capital many women gain from the dance events is reconverted into power in other areas of their lives. In

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[61] *Mbalax* is the urban Wolof music style popularized by singer Youssou Ndour, who also coined the name. In *mbalax*, traditional *sabar* rhythms are mixed with influences from funk, pop and sometimes Cuban music or reggae. In the 1970s Youssou Ndour's music had a strong Cuban flavour, but later he created a more distinctively Wolof style. He told Lucy Duran: "I took the word *mbalax* because it's a beautiful and original word, it's a purely Wolof word and I wanted to show that I had the courage to play purely Senegalese music" (Duran 1989: 277). *Mbalax* is now the pervasive music style that is played in night clubs and in many other contexts, from festive events to home dancing in front of music videos, tapes played loudly in local taxis and mini-busses, or tailors' shops. *Mbalax* rhythms are complex, with frequent changes of tempo. This makes it difficult for untrained ears to dance and therefore reinforces the style's nationalistic flavour.

the last section I temper the positive view given before by showing how women's dances have become entangled in moral debates which I take to be linked to the ethos of uncertainty most men find themselves in, in the face of socio-economic hardship and competition for and from women.

Continuity and change in women's associations

The objective of this section is to trace the connections between urban women's associations and older forms of organization in Senegambia. These connections are essential because they provide evidence that dance may have been central to the constitution and challenging of hierarchies in the region. There are signs that through their associations, urban Senegalese women may be reclaiming some of the power that was undermined by colonization. The impact of colonization on women's status has been the object of heated debates, but there is little doubt that there were some negative effects. Rokhaya Fall (1994) for example, argues that colonization had a negative impact on women because the French assumed that the gender inequality that prevailed in Europe in the 19th century was equally valid in Senegambia. As a result, women were discouraged to take part in cash-crop agriculture or to enrol in schools, and they became confined to household work and subsistence agriculture. When it comes to schooling, the fine study by Diane Barthel (1975) confirms that the minority of women who gained access to formal education during the colonial period were the daughters of men who already held positions in the colonial administration. Many studies on women in the two decades following the independence neglected the more discreet forms of power contained in women's associations and networks, and therefore there is little historical data available on the topic.

Among Wolof speakers, age-sets (*mbotaay*) and female groups of friends (*ndey dikké*) have long been an important basis of solidarity. In villages, these groups organized collective work such as washing, millet grinding, wood collecting etc. They also organized dance events, and most importantly, they helped each other gather the resources needed to fulfil their social duties during weddings (*séetal*), name-giving ceremonies (*ngénte*), circumcisions or deaths. For the Pulaar speakers of the Fuuta Toro, Wane (1969: 27-28) also points out the importance of the female age-sets (*fedde rewre*) in the collective organization of domestic work. The enduring salience of age-sets associations is important in the context of this study because their practices

reveal that dance has long been at the centre of generational politics. We are reminded here of Spencer's (1985b) fascinating work on the Samburu initiation and warrior dances in Kenya. Historian Ousseynou Faye suggests that the closest ancestor to the modern *tour* is the female *mbotaay*. He also points to the fact that age-set associations were unnecessary for elders because they already held the political power; there is therefore, he argues, a subtle dimension of contestation of elder – and male – power in the female *mbotaay*[62].

Given the richness of the oral tradition in Senegambia, it is also worth taking oral history into account whenever possible. Massamba Guèye[63] is a secondary school literature teacher, a playwright and a storyteller, who occasionally teaches young dancers about Senegambian performing traditions. According to him, in rural areas *sabar* dances were performed by married women when they gathered for practical duties, such as fetching water outside the village. In the "private" space thus created, they were able to exchange married women's secrets, display their intimate "assets" and solve family conflicts. He acknowledged that conflicts were commonplace among co-wives, which is consistent with my observations of polygamous households in Dakar. Apart from facilitating the practical work, the dance, therefore, probably involved a competitive dimension from the outset. In fact, one may wonder whether the dance helped the work or whether doing the work collectively provided a space to compete through the dance.

Throughout the twentieth century, the urbanization of the region gave rise to new modes of organization. Women's sections of political parties, for example, were created at the initiative of the women themselves, and have played an important yet unacknowledged role in Senegalese politics since the 1940s (Ndiaye Sylla 2001). Apart from the significant increase in the number of women ministers or parliament members since the independence[64], women's performance during political meetings implicitly validates the status of the personalities involved (Heath 1990, 1994). Other organizational forms have appeared under the impulse of the state or foreign development organizations, such as the "Groupements de Promotion Féminine" created in rural areas in the 1970s with the explicit purpose to integrate women to development projects. "Private" women's associations (i.e. independent of any state control)

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[62] Ousseynou Faye, personal communication, Dakar, October 2002.

[63] This is my informant's real name.

[64] Whereas the second Legislature (1963-1968) included only one woman out of 80 Parliament members (1.2%), the ninth (1998-2000) had 19 women out of 140 members, or 13.6% (Ndiaye Sylla 2001: 68).

have multiplied since the 1980s, competing with the local chapters of religious movements, youth "sports and culture" associations, associations of migrants from the same village or region, neighbourhood clubs or trading communities, to harness economic resources and social capital (see Dahou 2004). Family *tours* are also likely to be fairly recent in their current form, because it is mass migration away from people's regions of origin that makes it relevant to maintain lineage-based networks. The growing salience of these associations should be understood in the light of what Dahou (2004) has described as the "drying up of traditional sources of accumulation". Following the steam roller of the structural adjustment policies imposed by the IMF (International Monetary Fund), The World Bank and other multilateral organizations from the early 1980s onwards, the Senegalese state lost much of its power base, i.e. its capacity to entertain a clientele[65]. The vacuum thus created was partly filled by private modes of organization, such as the women's associations. Nowadays, lineage-based networks and various forms of women's associations are the primary organizers of *tours* and *sabars*, while weddings, name-giving ceremonies and funerals[66] are organized by the extended family.

The female world: the *tours*

As I will describe shortly, *tour* is a single name used to designate a wide range of events. They all have in common to involve a fixed group of people, usually women, who meet at regular intervals and take turns (hence the term *tours*) to arrange a venue. The term "tontine" (*nat*), on the other hand, strictly refers to an informal mode of saving. But there is often an overlap

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[65] Mbembe (2001: 74-75) has brilliantly described the decline of African states following the "tutelage of international creditors": "There is no need for any reminder that throughout the 1980s, the dominant explanation for the 'African crisis' consisted in placing responsibility on the state and its supposed excessive demands on the economy. [...] But, by doing everything possible to dismantle state intervention in the economy [...], without making the state more efficient and giving it new, positive functions, the result has been that the state's (already very fragile) material base has been undermined, the logics underlying the building of coalitions and clienteles have been upset (without being positively restructured), its capacities for reproduction have been reduced, and the way has been opened for it to wither away."

[66] Dance has practically disappeared from Senegalese funerals, with the exception of the Casamance. This transformation is usually attributed to the penetration of Islam. But apart from the Futa Tooro, this is certainly a recent development. In the mid-19th century, for example, dances were still performed at Sereer funerals in the Siin (Boilat 1853: 101), and an informant in his eighties told me about the funerary Lebu rituals still performed in his youth. They involved dancing.

between the two, and most *tours* involve some sort of economic transaction between the participants.

The multiple facets of the tours *in Dakar*

Tours in Dakar take multiple forms depending on the basis of the association and the interest of the participants. Most *tours* involve dancing during meetings, but not all of them do; some women refrain from dancing because they feel they have reached an age when it is no longer appropriate to do so, or because they belong to high-status families (see chapter I). I have also encountered women who did not to enjoy dancing, or who felt too self-conscious about their style. Religion is sometimes a factor in people's refusal to dance, but I have rarely heard informants make this explicit. Heath (1994) on the other hand, reported that in Kaolack in the mid-1980s, organizing dance events could be problematic for women married to pious Muslims. But this did not prevent them from dancing outside their homes. Undoubtedly, our different experiences reflect the multiplicity of attitudes towards Islam and the dance that coexist in Senegalese society. There were, however, two cases in which I suspected that the desire to be "good Muslims" was directly linked to women's refusal to dance, even though this was not made explicit. Two of my informants, in their late twenties to early thirties, said they did not dance at their tontine meetings, even though they did not disapprove of other women who did. Both of them lived next door to a Tijaan *marabout*, and were considering wearing the *hijab*. As far as I could tell, their attraction for the *hijab* had to do with a desire to earn people's respect in a fairly religious neighbourhood. One of them was divorced with two young boys, and the oldest boy had explicitly asked her to wear the *hijab*.

Most *tours* involve economic transactions of some sort, whether they overlap with a structured tontine or whether cash is simply collected from each member as a contribution to the expenses generated by the gathering (food and drink, drummers or a disc jockey, the rental of plastic chairs). *Tours* and tontines may meet every week, every other week or every month. The amount collected from each participant varies greatly depending on what the women can afford, which means that such associations tend to follow class distinctions. Contributions range from 500 to 50,000 FCFA, and my estimate is that most women save between 500 and 5,000 FCFA per week. Those who save more than 10,000 FCFA often spend their payout on their own business activities rather than on household expenses, because they usually belong

to the wealthiest households. Many women belong to several *tours* and tontines at the same time, a strategy allowing them to spread the risk of inflation[67] and extend their social networks. These amounts should be held against statistics (both official and empirical) on average incomes in Dakar. The World Bank (2004) estimated the average income per capita at $550 in 2003 (approximately 300,000 FCFA) for Senegal as a whole. Other sources estimate that the figure should be doubled for Dakar, with great variations in the different parts of the capital[68]. By contrast with official statistics, my observations are based on occupation, and given that a high proportion of adults engage in several and sometimes seasonal occupations, they do not overlap the statistics on income per capita. Moreover, my empirical observations share a weakness with official statistics, in that they ignore remittances from the Senegalese Diaspora[69]. Nevertheless, the following data will be useful as a foil against which the economic transactions mentioned throughout this thesis can be mapped.

Occupation	Average range of monthly earnings (FCFA)
Primary school teacher	48,000
Factory worker	40,000
Taxi driver	50,000 – 70,000
Electrician	100,000 – 130,000
House employee	5,000 – 30,000
Committee member of a local "cultural" association[70]	25,000
Monthly average per capita – Senegal (World Bank 2004)	**25,000**

Fig. 4.1: Income data by type of occupation, Dakar, 2002-03/Own observations and World Bank 2004

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[67] As already reported in much the literature, during periods of inflation ROSCAs can be counterproductive, as those at the end of the rotation effectively subsidize the others (e.g. Nelson 1995). In Senegal I have not come across any mechanism to compensate for this, but the rate of inflation was moderate while I was doing fieldwork, between May 2002 and February 2004 (see for example the website of the *Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances*, http://www.finances.gouv.sn/sitecfi.html).

[68] Karim Dahou, former head of ENDA (Environment and Development in the Third World) research team in Dakar, personal communication, Oxford, October 2004.

[69] In 2002 for example, remittances by Mouride migrants were estimated to be over 200 billion FCFA (approximately £200 million) by the Senegalese *Direction de la Prévision et de la Statistique* (Walfadjri, 22.04.2003).

[70] This is based on the case of a youth cultural association in Pikine.

Apart from the economic aspect, an important dimension of the *tours* is the basis on which they are constituted. Common bases of organization include friendship, age, residence, kinship, or a mix of several of these factors. There are also *tours* or tontines for second- or third wives, and for mothers of newborn children (Bop 1996). It might be questionable therefore to lump together a range of very diverse phenomena, but I choose to do so because of the central place of the dance in a majority of them. There are also female Muslim associations (*dahiras*), but they are not included here as they do not usually involve dance. These may, however, involve religious chanting[71]. As an example of a kinship-based, or "family" [72] *tour*, two Sereer sisters I knew were members of a group gathering 23 women from their patrilineage once a month. They also identified strongly with the Sereer migrant community in Dakar, even though they were not fluent Sereer speakers. Dancing, mostly *mbalax* and *sabar*, usually went on for most of the evening, and through these gatherings, my informants always kept abreast of the latest urban dances. The 5,000 FCFA collected from each participant was a contribution towards food and the occasional hiring of one or two *tamakat*, but there was always cash left for the organizer to spend as she wished. In addition, the more "business-minded" among the participants always used the opportunity to sell goods imported from neighbouring countries, such as jewellery, fabrics, underwear or watches.

Apart from the small trade aspect, many Dakarois regard family *tours* as an important way of maintaining links between descendants from a common ancestor. Without the *tours*, women who live in widely distant parts of the city would rarely see each other. Maintaining a regular face-to-face contact enables them to mobilize kin in times of crisis and for the enormous expenses generated by family ceremonies. The *tour* meetings also provide opportunities to discuss family conflicts, initiate marriage negotiations and impose the authority of older women over the younger ones, often under the guise of "correcting deviant behaviour". Because the explicit purpose is entertainment and money-saving, anything else that might take place during these events remains hidden to outsiders, men in particular. By emphasizing the importance of genealogy, family *tours* also incorporate an exclusive dimension, in particular the exclusion of people from a different status within the "caste" structure. Some *tours* are closer to the old age-set structure. One young woman I knew in Dakar belonged to a *tour* which gathered the

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[71] For a vivid account of a female *dahira* meeting in the town of Kaolack in the 1980s, see Deborah Heath (1992).
[72] Throughout this thesis, I use the term "family" synonymously with "lineage", unless otherwise made explicit.

female friends she had grown up with in Thiès, 70 km East of Dakar. They only met a few times per year, whenever they needed to collect contributions for a member's wedding, e.g. to buy matching fabrics and have new outfits sewn. Among Wolof speakers, such associations are often designated by the old age-set term, *mbotaay*.

Membership of *tours* and other women's associations, therefore, is never random; women co-opt their kin, friends, neighbours or peers in terms of socio-economic status. It is also likely that in some cases married women refuse to include too many divorced peers so as to avoid tainting their reputation. But in this domain I have no other evidence than men's gossip and the widespread disregard for divorced women[73]. In order to give a more vivid impression of how such dance events may unfold, I now turn to a *tour* I attended in Fass, a lower-middle class neighbourhood of Dakar, in May 2003. This particular *tour* overlapped with a tontine and gathered women friends from their late twenties to their early forties, most of them married.

"Snap-shots" from a tour

Around 4 pm on a Sunday, a woman friend and I went to meet a drummer I knew at his family's house in the Médina. Four of his friends were gathered in the small room. They spent more than an hour preparing their instruments, an operation which consisted in cleaning and changing the skins of the two small *tama* and the four larger *sabar* drums[74]. The drummer I knew was going to play the *tama* along with his "Master", a Griot from Pikine. The five musicians were used to working together, and the atmosphere was relaxed as they worked on the drums, made Senegalese mint tea (*attaya*), chatted and listened to Senegalese rap. When the drums were ready, both instruments and people were loaded onto two taxis, and we headed for Fass.

As we arrived on the roof of the house were the *tour* was taking place, the organizer was already greeting the first guests. She snapped at the musicians for being an hour late, but they remained undisturbed and took place on plastic chairs, accustomed as they were to such ways

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[73] Some of my male informants described the "Hindu" (Bollywood) dance circles in Pikine, the largest suburb of Dakar, as "prostitution networks". When I asked them to explain, one of them replied: "Can't you see? All these women are divorced... They are prostitutes!"

[74] For *sabar* drums goat skin is used, but for the smaller *tama*, the best quality of sound is achieved with varan skin.

of marking authority. As they started playing *sabar* rhythms, the roof filled up until some fifty women, a few toddlers and two girls in their pre-teens were gathered. As is the norm for such occasions, all the women wore Senegalese clothes, mostly *boubous* and a few *taille basse*[75]. Light green, yellow, pink and two-colour combinations were in fashion, and the display of bright colours, shiny fabrics, glossy make-up, jewels and perfume was overwhelming. The shoes – high heel sandals with a sharp point in front – and small party bags were all matching the outfits. Headscarves were tied according to the latest *jalgáti* ("to bend the rules") or *uppukaay* ("fan") fashion. The *uppukaay* style involves up to two dozen needles and half an hour of preparation for the headscarf alone. Although the women were all friends or neighbours, they obviously appraised each other – and me – with a critical eye. The young girls were elegantly dressed but did not wear make-up or jewels, except for the compulsory earrings[76].

When the drummers started playing dance rhythms, a young woman stood up, took her shoes off, lifted her skirt up to the knee with one hand and stepped forward in rhythm, waving the other hand back and forth. Step opening the knee to one side, then to the other; this is the time for getting into the rhythm and attracting the attention of the audience. She stopped shortly in front of the musicians, took the quick jump that marks the beginning of this particular *sabar* step; quick jump with one foot forward, then knees up, jump, jump, jump, turn on one leg with arms folded at waist level and palms forward, quick jump on both feet to re-establish the balance, and start again. As she began to dance, the rhythm stepped up. Her movements were encouraging the drummers to play faster, but she was also responding to their rhythmic challenge. She danced for about half a minute and ran back to her chair, laughing. Other women congratulated her, and the atmosphere suddenly became more cheerful.

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[75] A *boubou* (*mbubb* in Wolof) is a loose robe cut from a large square of fabric, sometimes with cut-out sleeves, and worn with a wrap-around skirt underneath (a *pagne* or *sér* in Wolof). There are *boubous* of varying lengths. For ceremonies and the Friday prayer, a muslin shawl is thrown over the shoulders or head. The *boubou* is the women's ceremonial outfit par excellence, the equivalent for men being a long caftan with loose trousers. *Boubous* are associated with "traditional" Senegalese dress, but Heath (1992) traces the popularization of the *boubou* to the post-independence nationalist period, when urban elites needed to invoke "tradition" to build up their legitimacy. A *taille basse* (*taay bas*) is a two-piece dress including a long skirt (fitted or wrap-around) and a tight-fitted top with sleeves. The *taille basse* is also perceived as traditional Senegalese dress, but in fact the style was inspired by European dress and made its appearance in the 1930s (Faye 2000, Rabine 2002). Senegalese clothes are usually worn with a head scarf tied in various fashionable ways, a *musoor* (from the French *mouchoir*).

[76] In Wolof society, earrings are an essential artefact marking female gender from birth. Upon seeing my daughter, who was one year old when I begun fieldwork and did not wear earrings, people always asked "*Goor walla jigéen la?*" ("Is she a boy or a girl?"), even when she was wearing a dress.

Gradually, more women stood up and stepped into the central space inside the circle, dancing solo or in pairs. There are four common patterns in *sabar* dancing: a solo dancer, a pair of dancers facing the musicians, a pair facing each other, or towards the end of the evening, group dancing. People dancing in pairs challenge each other in a competitive yet playful, friendly way.

The musicians played a wide range of *sabar* rhythms, and every change prompted the women to dance new styles. At first it would seem as if the choice of which rhythm to play, and therefore which dance to induce, is in the hands of the musicians but in fact, this is a case of call-and-response[77]. The lead drummer must have an acute sense of what women will enjoy dancing at a particular moment, and direct the drumming accordingly. Whereas some of the dances belong to the older *sabar* repertoire, such as *ceebu jën*[78], *Baar Mbaye* (from the old name-giving ritual, the *bëkëtë*), *kaolack* or *mbabas*, others formed part of the rapidly changing fashion of so-called "urban" or "popular" dances. The latter are usually "launched" in connection with the latest *mbalax* music videos by Senegalese pop stars, and spread through the city like fire. Ironical names add an extra layer to the dimension of "play" that is essential to the performance of these dances; in 2002-03 for example, city-dwellers vibrated to the sound of Coumba Gawlo Seck's *joggati* ("to go on stamping"), the *jalgáti*, Papa Ndiaye Géwel's *raas* ("to pick" or "to hunt") or Pape Thiopet's *bu ko racati* ("don't spill it"). These dances have become efficient marketing devices for the Senegalese music industry, but people also appropriate them for competition and fun. Although recent and rapidly changing, they are said to be based on older *sabar* rhythms. The analogy between language (songs), rhythm and movement is in continuity with the Wolof tradition according to which the same quality can be found in movement and speech style (see chapter I). My dance teacher used to say that "the *sabar* [was] like Wolof, and if you don't understand Wolof, you can't dance the *sabar* properly." There is

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[77] The call-and response structure is a common feature of West African musical performance. This was pointed out by a number of ethnomusicologists and by arts scholar Robert F. Thompson: "South of the Sahara, solo-and-circle, or solo-and-line, or solo-and-solo forms of dancing mirror melodic call-and-response. [...] Often the overlapping danced responses to the calls are enthusiastic and very strong. Rising eloquence can cause the size of the chorus dramatically to swell. But it is not just aesthetic impact that is at issue here, but also the moral condition of the singer or the dancer." (Thompson 1974: 27)

[78] Some of my informants in their mid-forties reported that the *ceebu jën* had not changed since their childhood, and Germaine Acogny (1994) mentions that it was already known in 1928. *Ceebu jën* is also the name of a common Wolof dish of fish and rice. The dance may be performed accompanied by percussion on a dish turned upside-down.

a continuity indeed between popular *mbalax* songs and the traditional Wolof style of sung poetry called *taasu*. *Taasu* are mostly performed by women during dance events, in a sort of "dialogue" with the dance. But as Heath (1994) pointed out, *taasu* are often implicit, so that even when a *taasu* is not sung, performing the corresponding dance silently invokes its ambiguity and irony. Castaldi (2000) provides a very detailed and illuminating description of the *taasu* as a complex interaction between sung poetry, drumming that can be translated into words, and dance steps translatable into drums rhythms. In part, this is the tradition many Senegalese singers have adapted to the modern media.

Just as the traditional age-sets appointed a leader and figurehead, the "mother" of the group (*yaayu mbotaay*), urban female associations also have a "mother". She must be trusted as she bears the crucial responsibility of collecting the money and keeping the books, and she should preferably be literate. That evening in Fass, the "mother" sat in a corner and wrote names and amounts in her notebook as the women turned in contributions of 1,500 FCFA. Later in the evening, a name was picked from scraps of paper in a basket, and the payout winner was called; she gave a loud cry, then twirled and danced as her friends congratulated her.

As the evening went on, the energy level rose along with the sexual suggestiveness of the dances. Shouts of encouragement and loud laughter resonated when the drummers played the rhythms of the *lawɔe* [79] dances, such as the very suggestive *lëmbël* (also called *ventilateur*). This is a style in which the emphasis is placed on rotating movements of the buttocks, and when maximum effect is sought, women turn around and perform them right under the nose of a musician, preferably the lead drummer. Such playful provocation is always rewarded with loud cheering, as is daring acrobatics by young girls. One of them suddenly jumped up and landed with both legs crossed, looking calmly around as if she had never moved from the tiled floor. The surprise effect of the trick sent waves of laughter around the circle.

All women were forced to perform at least once, and those who refused were required to pay a symbolic fine (150 FCFA). Most moved back and forth between dancing, chatting, appraising each other, and towards the end, lifting their skirts to display their waist beads and nylon thongs. By the time the party was about to end, shortly before 8 pm, a third of the women had shown their underwear. A few had removed their *pagne* altogether, revealing their

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[79] The *Lawɔe* are an endogamous category of Woodworkers (see chapter I).

petit pagne (*beeco*)[80]. Releasing one set of laughter after the other, they paraded amid their friends with great humour, obviously competing to be the most daring. A handful of them wore white *beecos* on which male and female genitals were painted or embroidered. Meanwhile the two *tamakat* (*tama* players) had left their fixed spot on one side of the terrace, and were moving around freely, acting as if the sight was almost too much to bear. It is significant that it was the *tama* players who teased the women, as the *tama* is said to arouse them to dance even more suggestively. This is often expressed as if women were physically unable to resist its effect. The players joked about the women's underwear with comments such as "It is Sotiba[81] that is teasing us". Suddenly, there was a commotion. Everybody crowded to the centre of the terrace, and I had to struggle to come forward. One of the players was standing behind a woman; he had grabbed her by the waist and was mimicking intercourse. The friend I had arrived with looked at me, laughing embarrassingly and said: "Have you seen the drawings on her *beeco*? It was too much for him, he couldn't resist"[82]. The game ended quickly, and all of a sudden the *tour* was over. The women exchanged goodbyes and climbed down in small groups while the musicians collected their fee from the organizer. On the way out, my friend and I asked the musicians whether they felt any attraction towards the women or whether it was all an act. They just laughed and replied ambiguously that they were just "used to it".

Straddling the male and female world: the *sabars*

The main difference between a *sabar* and a *tour* is the kind of space these events delineate: "semi-public" (a closed circle in the street) and open to all for the *sabar*, "private" and clearly dominated by women in the case of the *tour*. As the *sabar* straddles both the female and the

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[80] The *beeco* epitomizes the underwear of the modern Senegalese woman. It is a light piece of fabric that is tied around the waist, underneath a *pagne*. It may be made of plain fabric or with holes forming the latest fashionable patterns, e.g. like a fishing net (*mbaal*). Whereas women's use of several layers to cover the lower body was already observed in the mid-19th century (e.g. Boilat 1853), the designs worn in Dakar today are made with cheap imported fabrics.

[81] Sotiba, located in the outskirts of Dakar, is the main manufacturer of industrial fabrics and clothing items in Senegal.

[82] This formulation, although used by a woman, is consistent with the common Senegambian view that sexual temptation comes from women. During a discussion on prostitution with male informants, I purposefully provoked them by suggesting that there would not be any prostitution if there were no male clients in the first place. They all turned to me with scandalised looks and asked angrily if I was "playing the devil's advocate".

male world, the playful power struggle that goes on inside the circle is no longer restricted to female competition; with the *sabar*, men/women relations may be played out as well.

Sabars are often organized by informal or formal associations of women from the same neighbourhood, and are therefore more closely linked to local communities than *tours*. The women collect money for the musicians' "transport" (a generic term for "fee"), the rental of plastic chairs, lighting equipment if the event takes place at night, and if they can afford it, the fee for a photographer or cameraman[83]. *Sabar* parties take on different names depending on the time of the day; a *tannbeer*, for example, takes place in the evening.

Women in the less privileged neighbourhoods and the suburbs of Dakar, the *quartiers*, are the keenest *sabar* organizers. Except during the rainy season, *sabars* were fairly frequent in my small neighbourhood of Fann Hock, two steps away from the oldest "African" wards in Dakar: Médina and Gueule Tapée. The Médina was built on the eve of World War I, when the French expelled the African populations from the Plateau in order to develop the colonial city[84]. The Gueule Tapée was added later as an extension. Fann Hock was the first urban quarter built in the 1950s by the SICAP (*Société Immobilière du Cap Vert*), the state-funded organization in charge of developing the city. It is delimited by the sea to the West, the Gueule Tapée to the South, and the Cheihk Anta Diop University to the North and East. Fann Hock is also a rapidly changing mix of small houses from the 1950s (often arranged around a courtyard to form a compound), recent 4-5 storey buildings and shack houses made of wood, corrugated plates and cardboard. The population includes lower-middle class families, a few members of the educated bourgeoisie, and Senegalese and Moroccan students. From the point

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[83] Renting the services of a cameraman is becoming increasingly popular, not only for the *sabars* of the wealthy, but also for the ceremonies or ordinary Dakarois families. The cost may vary between 20,000 and 30,000 FCFA (£20-30) for the day. Not only does this enable participants and others from the neighbourhood to watch the event afterwards, but also, video tapes are now customarily sent to the Diaspora to encourage men to select a first or second wife.

[84] The expulsion of the "indigenous populations" from the original Lebu settlement in 1914 is one of the most dramatic episodes of the French colonization of Senegal. The reason invoked for the expulsion was an outbreak of Plague which, according to contemporary commentators in Senegal, came at a "convenient" time for the colonizers. As the Lebu communities who had inhabited the Cap Vert Peninsula were forced to sell their land, this also paved the way for their gradual marginalization from political power, to the benefit of the French first, and later to that of Wolof speakers from outside the Peninsula. For an excellent history of the Médina in the colonial period, see Faye (2000).

of view of ethnicity the neighbourhood is fairly blended too, with a predominance of Wolof speakers, and Sereer and Jola families.

In my section of the neighbourhood, the closest to the Gueule Tapée, *sabar* parties were usually organized by the same group of women. They began in the late afternoon or early evening, after a circle of plastic chairs had been set up in the sandy alley outside the main organizer's house. The drummers were brought in from other neighbourhoods. The dance always started with the children while the women, some of them very young, took their seats. There was always a marked difference between the women who were part of the organizing group on one hand, and the spontaneous participants and on-lookers on the other hand. The former were those who sat on the chairs and were dressed in their best attire, the hair carefully styled and wearing a thick layer of make-up. They all wore colourful *boubous* or *taille basse* outfits with grid-like or shiny *petit pagnes* and waist beads underneath. As the women started dancing, the children and young girls gradually left the middle of the circle and sat on the ground in front of the chairs, watching the dance. Now the space was taken over by the young girls and adults.

Just as with the *tour*, the drummers alternated different *sabar* rhythms that would prompt different dances, which were themselves a combination of set steps and individual choreographic creativity. Obviously, not being up-to-date with the latest popular dances could strike a blow to a young woman's reputation, and the "mother" of the *sabar* was often seen walking around the circle with a stick she used to hit the legs of the girls who had not yet danced. They had to "get up and do it", or else they would never learn. The many dimensions of *sabar* parties, therefore, not only include the opportunity for young women to show themselves as in tune with their time, but a privileged moment for the socialization of girls. Through the dance, they are disciplined, taught the values of womanhood and generational differentiation.

Once again, the atmosphere became increasingly heated, and the women increasingly daring as the evening went on. In fact, there seems to be a parallel between the structure of a *sabar* evening and that of a West African drumming sequence: call-development-acceleration (*dakasé* in Wolof). At one point, some of the young women removed their skirts altogether and danced in their underskirts (*beeco*), thus revealing their legs as they performed the highly energetic, upwards-oriented *sabar* movements. But unlike with the *tours*, during *sabars* there were always men and boys among the audience, standing behind the circle of chairs. Most of them stood at a safe distance, but occasionally a young man came forward and danced, and

this usually released much laughter from the women. Some of the *sabar* dances performed by men are identical to women's, but they tend to do the same movements in a more athletic way, with higher jumps and wider arm movements. Often they blend in movements from *kasag* (male circumcision) dances, which are also performed with *sabar* drumming; for example they finish the dance by grabbing their crotch and thrusting their hips forward. These movements are paralleled by women's movements when they dance in pairs in a friendly challenge, facing each other and sometimes ending a sequence with a quick forward thrust of the hip. Some men perform parodies of the women's dances, with exaggerated movements and the eyes rolling upwards. But male participation at Fann Hock's *sabars* did not usually last for long, and there was a distinct feeling that once the women stopped laughing and cheering, they were no longer welcome. And unlike the women, young men did not dress up; they came forward wearing everyday clothes: a T-shirt, trousers and trainers, or bare feet.

A category that was almost invisible in the dance was that of older women. There are festive moments when it is appropriate for older people to join in the dance, such as with the Lebu *ndawrabin*. But in most of the *sabars* I have attended, whenever older women did participate, they were expected to do so with restraint, particularly if there were men in the audience. In Fann Hock, an older woman who lacked a few teeth would always dance surprisingly energetically during *sabars*, and people who did not know her commented on this, saying that she must be "crazy" (*dof*). This echoed what historian Ibrahima Thioub told me about his older aunt: "She loved to dance but she couldn't allow herself to do so, because of her rank. She was too old and too respectable to be seen dancing. So during family gatherings she always sat there and marked the rhythm with her feet. You could always tell that she was there, from the tapping of her feet underneath the table"[85].

As Castaldi (2000) has noted as well, in the best moments the interaction between dancers and musicians follows a call-and-response pattern that is thrilling for both performers and the participating audience. She rightly points out that the best dancers' skills earn them the right to take momentary control over the drummers' play. These dancers may challenge the drummers to play more complex, fasters rhythms; the lead drummer in turn responds and if inspired, he may initiate new challenges. A master drummer explained to me how thrilling the challenge was to him, and found it unfortunate that this kind of interaction was missing from

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[85] Ibrahima Thioub, personal communication, Dakar, June 2002.

the "modern" dances. He described the interaction in such terms as "if you are a good dancer, I just need to look at your leg and I know what it is going to do next". He was of course referring to the *bàkk*, the free rhythms played by the lead drummer in response to, or to initiate the most creative sequences in solo dancing. A *bàkk* is also the personal rhythm of a talented wrestler, who will have the drummer attached to him play his *bàkk* before a fight.

Towards the end of an event always came a time when the drummers required more money from the organizers, even in cases when they had already received their fees. The drummers' request for money during a *sabar* is a ritual which serves both as entertainment and as a public reminder of the client status they find themselves in, in relation to the women organizers, their patrons. The lead drummer or the *tamakat* may stop playing and shout to the audience that the music will not resume unless more money is brought forward. He then moves around the circle and makes bawdy jokes that induce general laughter. One of them, for example, jokingly threatened the women to make their genitals "fly away" if they did not bring out more money. The *tamakat* give their drumming sticks to women in the audience, taking them only with money attached. When a *sabar* is organized by a *mbotaay* for a particular purpose (e.g. contributing towards setting up a birth clinic) the organizers may also charge a fee from the participants (Castladi 2000).

Having now painted some hopefully vivid impressions of the most popular women-dominated dance events, *tours* and *sabars*, in the next section I turn to the significance that can be drawn from the structure of these events. With "inversion" as a running theme, I suggest that they mark a time-space in which alternative gender relations may be experimented with. The important question of whether or not such experimentation affects women's status and power in everyday life will be dealt with later in the chapter, by looking at the social capital and economic opportunities created through these events.







Fig. 4.2: Views of a *sabar* in Fann Hock, April 2003

Symbolic inversions

The first question that needs to be addressed here is how the dancing spaces are being delineated, in an urban context where houses and streets are constantly crowded with people of both sexes. How do both men and women make it clear that different rules apply during dance events? Dealing with this question will then lead to a discussion of how the gender discourse dominant in everyday life is ironically inverted in the dance.

Although I have not described family ceremonies in the ethnography, I take them into account here because they involve women-dominated dance events very similar to the *tours* and *sabars*. Family ceremonies are also opportunities for a woman's networks, including the *tours*, the *mbotaays* and the tontines, to come together and offer moral and material support. Sociologist Codou Bop made the point well in the following extract:

> "Family ceremonies are important opportunities for women to receive the financial and social support from all the networks they are involved in. Indeed, for women they represent privileged occasions to gather a high number of people and to receive goods. There they consolidate their status in a society where prestige is dependent on both the material and human resources available to a given person. This is why, even when they are plagued by financial worries and burdened by hard work, women do not count when it comes to family or social ceremonies". (Bop 1996: 144, translation from French my own)

Marking space

While remaining aware that the public/private dichotomy may not be entirely appropriate in the Senegambian case, dance events indicate distinctive ways of marking private or intimate spaces in which outsiders are unwelcome. As elsewhere in Africa, the circle is a potent symbol here[86]. It is also significant that the etymology of *géwël*, the Wolof word for *Griot*, means "the one around whom a circle is made" (Panzacchi 1994).

Whereas *tours* tend to take place in houses, courtyards or on roofs, *sabars* and family ceremonies (weddings, name-giving ceremonies and funerals) are routinely held in the street. But a "street" in Dakar has a very different texture from a street in any European city. While it is

[86] For a fascinating social history of the circle in East African dances, see James (2000).

open to anyone most of the time, a portion of street can be quickly closed off and transformed into a private space. An open tent may be rented, which delineates the closed space. For *sabars* the chairs are always arranged in a circle, with a small open space on one side for the musicians. For the gift-exchange and dance sessions at weddings and name-giving ceremonies, people may sit in several, smaller concentric circles, or in two series of rows facing each other. In any case, even in a public space such as the street, the ceremonial arena is clearly marked by the seating pattern. In some neighbourhoods this is even formalized, as people are required to pay a fee to the local police station for permission to close off the street[87].

But the material arrangements of ceremonies (*sabar* parties are highly ritualized and may therefore be regarded as ceremonies) are not the only means of marking space. I would suggest that the body language of the participants is just as important although less explicit. Most of the time, participants look at each other inside the circle, but on-lookers seem to be purposefully ignored, as if there was an invisible wall between the two. As if everyone knew that this was a private space, on-lookers, men in particular, tend to remain at a safe distance. The ideal watching position is from a window overlooking the street, so as not to be seen. Testing the spatial boundaries of privacy in these events was revealing, particularly in the case of family ceremonies. I have often come closer to a dancing party gathered in the street and waited to see what would happen. Most of the time, a participant would turned to me and ask, in a friendly manner, whether I wished to join in the dance. This was said in the same polite way as when one inadvertently looks as people eating, and people immediately offer to share their meal. The offer to share is a social obligation but one is not necessarily meant to accept, and neither is one welcome to stand there and watch people eat. This was equally valid with the dances: either you became a participant (which was unlikely if you were unrelated to the organizers and had not dressed up for the occasion), or you stopped watching, at least conspicuously.

Inside the circle: inversion and play

I have so far been faithful to my informants' designation of *tours*, *sabar* parties and family ceremonies as "women's business". But in fact, I was often intrigued by the discrepancy between

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[87] In 2003 the rate was 5,000 FCFA in the middle class neighbourhood of Dieupeul.

people's statements and who actually participated in these events. It is not strictly true, for example, that *tours* are restricted to women: drummers are always men, male members of the household where the *tour* is being held may be present in the house, and men may even be invited for specific purposes (a male friend of mine was invited at a *tour* party to take photographs). For dance events held in the street, although the space is "closed off" men often watch from a safe distance, and during *sabars* some make short appearances inside the circle.

Whenever I mentioned this contradiction, people brushed it aside as insignificant. Men who had caught glimpses of *tours* in their own households said that they just happened to be there and were not supposed to know what was going on. One of them made this very explicit: "Even when we [men] are around, we have to pretend we don't see anything". On the presence of male musicians, comments such as "they are just musicians" were commonplace. It all works, therefore, as if the men present are either ignored (the on-lookers) or transformed into objects to be used on women's terms (the musicians, the *sabar* dancers). The fact that male musicians might play an active role in "acting" responses to women's sexual provocation, for example, is never mentioned.

The assumption that drummers are *Griots* provides part of the explanation; due to their *ñeeño* status, they are not supposed to have sexual intercourse with *géér* women, and are therefore assumed to be innocuous. In this perspective it would be useful to make comparisons with events where all the participants are *ñeeño*, but in practice it is always difficult to be sure that this is the case. Beyond the "caste" issue, there is also a denial of what is going on during these events because everyone knows that women express their sexuality in ways unacceptable outside the context of the dance. Two French students who spent two months in Senegal to make a documentary on dance asked me if I knew anyone who would be willing to tell them about the *tours*, because so far all the people they had met – of both sexes – had declined. I once brought up the topic with a Senegalese couple in their early thirties; they ended up arguing with each other when the man commented on the loose behaviour of upper-class women, whom he was convinced were the most inclined to do unmentionable things with the musicians, or even among themselves. His wife maintained that *tours* were innocuous and entertaining affairs, but she claimed never to have taken part in one herself. The argument was characteristic of the secrecy and fantasy the *tours* are surrounded with. Such secrecy is not only convenient for the women involved, but also for many men for whom it would be difficult to acknowledge that their wife (or wives) might not always appear in the restrained bodily pos-

ture that befits a "respectable" Muslim woman. I would argue that ultimately, few men are seriously interested in destroying networks which are so well integrated into the fabric of socio-economic life.

During *sabar* parties too, men who occasionally step into the circle and dance appear to be there for the pleasure of women. They make the women laugh by parodying them. But when the irony fails or when they attract too much attention at the expense of women, the atmosphere immediately changes: the clapping and laughing stop, and the men are quickly "frozen out" of the circle. Dance events are spaces in which women are confident that they hold the upper hand. At the end of a *tannbeer* I attended, some of the girls who had been dancing were beginning to disperse in the nearby streets. The dancing had stopped but they still seemed "charged" with energy. When two men who had been watching from a distance made provocative comments, the girls made scary faces and started running after them. Although it was all done jokingly, it was no coincidence that the scene was taking place at the end of a dance event.

This is in sharp contrast with other domains of social life, where girls and women are in a minority (e.g. formal education[88], the waged economy) or invisible. They are invisible in the practice of Islam, for example, as they are not allowed into mosques. By contrast with men, who routinely pray in public, women only pray in the privacy of their homes. This is significant because the mosque is an important space of male socialisation, as reflected in a comment made to one of my friends by his neighbour: "we don't see you much around here". My friend interpreted this as "we do not see you at the mosque". In this context, dance events provide a space in which they are not only able to "let go" (in many women's own words), but also where they are "in charge" and where men can be toyed with. A similar type of inversion was described by Gondola (1997) in his article on the inversion of gender relations in the dancing bars of colonial Kinshasa:

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[88] According to a World Bank study (2002), in 2000 only 28% of Senegalese women over 15 years were literate, against 47% of men. This fits well with my own observations, and is well under the Sub-Sahara African average of 53% of literate women and 70% of literate men. Even though such figures should be taken with caution as the methods used are unknown, they highlight the gap between male and female access to formal education.
(2002 World Bank gender statistics available on http://devdata.worldbank.org/genderstats/genderRpt.asp ?rpt=profile&cty=SEN,Senegal&hm=home)

> "In Léopoldville, women were seen as masters of the evening social game and men as sovereigns of daytime society. This observation shows the obsolescence of the dichotomy of domestic vs. public domains, commonly used by some authors. Daytime society remained a male arena while evening society, which can be considered as the public space, was dominated by women. In bars, married men who 'wore the pants' in their households became subject to women's rules. Thus, women who were living in a daytime society in which they had no say lorded it over men in the bars at night". (Gondola 1997: 76)

In Senegal, outside the context of the dance many popular songs and novels deal with changes in sexuality, or rather with the perception that the transformation of gender relations has an impact on women's sexuality. Viviane Ndour's popular song *Sama Nene* ("My Baby") from the 1999 album *Ci Sunu Biir* ("Between us"), makes implicit reference to men being transformed into passive sexual partners. In the novel *Ramata* by Senegalese writer Abasse Ndione (2000), the main character is a beautiful but unhappy and manipulative woman, whose comfortable life changes after her violent encounter with a young man with whom she discovers pleasure as he is raping her. The man turns out to be the son of a hospital porter who had died by her mistake twenty years earlier. Ramata eventually holds the young man as her sex slave while her husband, discovering that she has betrayed him for many years, commits suicide. She is portrayed as a predatory woman who maintains the appearance of a devoted wife, but who ends up leading men to their loss, before she loses her own mind. There is also a powerful element of "play" in women's dance events, which is not only visible in the way men are being "played with", but also in the creativity displayed by the women in their dance. But as I discuss in the next section, the "seriousness of play" (Turner 1982), or in this context the social significance of the dance events, is also demonstrated in the elaborate strategies women deploy to acquire the appropriate paraphernalia (clothes, jewels, underwear, hair style).

Fashion and dance events as social capital

Having hopefully made it clear that dance events are important moments in the social life of many Dakarois women as well as spaces where the dominant gender discourses can be challenged, I now argue that women's elaborate festive dress enables them to build up social capital. I attempt to support this idea by focusing on the time and material resources women spend

on bodily adornment for festive events. I sometimes use the term "bodily adornment" because it includes other important elements apart from clothing (e.g. smells or skin treatment).

In urban Senegambia, female fashion, articulated around the Wolof concept of *sañse* (from the French *se changer*), i.e. to dress well, is a privileged vehicle for women to reassert their status alongside that of their husbands. At the same time, the circulation of cloth, for example during family ceremonies, reinforces existing bonds of solidarity. Thus at a few wedding ceremonies I attended, on the first day of the ceremony the bride was given piles of 6-yard cloth sets[89] by her husband's female relatives, only to give some of them back to other members of the family-in-law the next day. The importance of fashion in Senegalese ceremonial life was brilliantly described by Deborah Heath (1992). Inspired by Bakhtin (1982) among others, she views the social practice of dress in urban Senegal as a "dialogic process" which "entails both a centripetal, unifying aspect tending toward a single cohesive ideological system and a centrifugal aspect marked by stratification and diversity" (Heath ibid.: 19). I would add that *both* bodily adornment and the dance symbolize and create this "dialogic process", which is almost perfectly materialized in the dance circle: the circle itself is cohesive in its cheering atmosphere, but in the middle there is space for individuality to express itself before being absorbed again in the anonymity of the crowd.

"Let me see what you're wearing": the female paraphernalia of status

Popular songs often have the best resonance when they say something about people's everyday preoccupations. *Ma yër li nga yore* ("let me see what you're wearing"), a song by Coumba Gawlo Seck, became popular with Senegalese women in 2002 because it reflected the competitive atmosphere of dance events that is embodied in glances at each other's underwear. Indeed apart from the genuine fun, the display of dress, underwear and other bodily adornment makes or breaks reputations.

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[89] Cloth is usually sold by sets of 6 yards, which is the standard length required to cut a *boubou* and matching skirt or a *taille basse* outfit. Full sets of the most valuable cloths represent impressive amounts of money by local standards; richly embroidered cloth imported from Indonesia, India or Dubai, and used to make *grand boubous* for ceremonial occasions, may cost up to 90,000 FCFA per yard. The most expensive cloth is used to make the outer *grand boubou*, and the wrap-around skirt underneath is then made with a cheaper satin.

Adorning the body

Senegalese girls learn from an early age the importance of taking care of their looks, and in Dakar women of all social categories spend considerable time and resources in bodily adornment. This is certainly not unique in the world, but for Senegalese women the importance of being beautiful (*rafet*) is taken to the extreme. Many Senegalese commentators attribute this to the fact that polygamy[90] encourages competition, an argument supported by the fact that the care invested in the body is nowhere as magnified as in women-only gatherings. Women friends and informants I knew at all social levels spent a considerable amount of time commenting on how other women dressed, or complaining about the pressure to look perfect as soon as one leaves the bedroom. One friend confessed that she had abandoned her family *tour* because she could no longer take the tensions between the "clan" of those who could afford to dress up and those who did not. Another reported a comment by a woman cousin of hers upon arriving to her house and seeing her wearing ordinary clothes and no make-up: "Ah, it's you... I thought it was the maid." My friend explained that "if you don't make an effort [to look your best], people [women] in your family will come to see you and tell you to pull yourself together, or they will ask if you have problems, that kind of thing." Friends and relatives may – more or less intentionally – humiliate the woman concerned by offering her money to buy cosmetics or a few yards of cloth. Men also take great care of their looks, but in more discreet ways. Not only are good looks essential to maintain status, but they are also taken to reflect health and personal qualities, such as being sociable and brave. On countless occasions I have heard informants speak respectfully about someone who always dressed well, making such comments as "at least she/he doesn't neglect herself", and implying that this was evidence of a good fighting spirit.

Bodily preparations for dance events may start long before the actual event. To appear with a fair complexion, some women start bleaching their skin weeks in advance. The popularity of skin bleaching, the *xeesal* (from *xees*, "to have a fair skin" in Wolof), varies depending on women's social position and the fashion of the moment. Recent campaigns aiming at informing women of the damaging effects of skin bleaching have had some impact, although mostly on middle class women. In Dakar's *quartiers*, a fair skin remains a desirable competitive advan-

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[90] According to statistics from the *Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances du Sénégal* (http://www.finances.gouv.sn/-pauvrns3.html), in 1997 46% of married women in Senegal lived in polygamous marriages. The incidence of polygamy is said to have remained high despite predictions that it would disappear with urbanization.

tage in the seduction game. But it is also about status in the female world, as evident in the numerous cases where women keep bleaching their skin despite the disapproval of their husband or boyfriend. Some told me about having faced scorn from their relatives and neighbours when they stopped the *xeesal*. For them, comments such as "Your husband is going to find himself a *disquette* if you go on like this[91]!" were the daily bread. Others had tried to stop but could not stand to see their skin become even darker than before. Poverty adds to the damage because women from poor households buy the cheapest and most damaging products, or mix their own by using life-threatening chemicals. These treatments leave them with dark spots on their feet, hands and neck, and sometimes with scars, bleeding wounds and a skin so thin that it cannot tolerate any surgery.

An elaborate make-up supplements – or covers – the complexion. For festive events, some women wear so much make-up that they are barely recognizable from everyday life. Together with the removal of the eyebrows, thick layers of make-up are the prerogative of the urban woman, who is often able to spend more time looking after her body than her rural counterpart[92]. Women I met in villages of the Siin Saalum commented on this. One of them, in her late thirties, told me that she lived in Dakar for a few years, where she had a relationship with a policeman. "I was beautiful then", she added, "but here in the village, it's not the same... With the hard work it's not the same." Faye (2000) traces the generalisation of make-up in Dakar to World War II. Nowadays before dance events, women friends and relatives flock to hairdresser salons in small groups, where they spend hours chatting, having their hair braided or straightened then styled (sometimes with added *greffage*, i.e. a sewn wig) and make-up applied.

Another important element is the underwear, which usually includes a *beeco* (*petit pagne* in French), several ranges of waist beads of various colours (*fer* in Wolof), and a thong for the young. The use of waist beads was already documented by the French Abbé Boilat (1853)[93].

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[91] *Disquette* is the term used to designate young urban women who dress up in a trendy fashion. The senior counterpart of the *disquette* is the plump independent woman, the *diriyanké*.

[92] Many households in Dakar, even those with a modest income, have a (poorly paid) house employee or younger relatives to take care of house chores. This is not the case in rural areas. Most house employees are migrants from the Siin Saalum, the Casamance, the Gambia and Guinea Bissau.

[93] In his chapter on the Wolof, Boilat describes the customary dress in great detail, in his characteristically condescending style. On the waist beads, he notes that "instead of displaying their slim waist, women burden their hips with thirty of forty rows of cheap colourful beads [*verroteries*]. When walking, this adornment produces a jingle

Many women hang both underskirt and waist beads over clay pots containing the local incense (*curaay*) before wearing them, so that the slightest movement of the body gives off fragrant wafts. *Curaay* is normally made of fragrant seeds (the most popular being the *goowe*, imported from Mali) or woods from the Middle East, blended with perfume extracts. Tree bark is sometimes used as a trompe-l'oeil to replace the more expensive imports. *Curaay* has become part of the most intimate secrets of married women, and those in polygamous marriages hide up to three dozen *curaay* jars underneath their bed.

The women who sell underwear items from market stalls are shrewd marketeers[94] who have understood that female competition is easily fed by the novelty of fashion items: being "up-to-date" with the latest *beeco* and fabric designs is crucial to maintain one's status in the women's world. Consequently, they have renamed the waist beads *jaljali* for the larger beads ("to jump") and *bin-bin* for the smaller ones, in reference to the clicking sound of the beads. New styles are launched regularly. The same is true of the *beecos* of course: new designs appear on the market several times per year, and each design carries an ironical name referring to a celebrity, an event or a concern in women's lives. In 2002-03, fashionable names included *Coupe du Monde*, *Ma yër li nga yore* (from Coumba Gawlo's song), *Fatou Laobé* (a diva whose songs emphasize Senegalese women's sexual attractiveness), *Kayitu yi kër gi* ("the [ownership] deeds of the house"), *Caabi kër gi* ("the key to the house") or *Mbaal* ("fishing net"). Those who can afford it buy hand-made *beecos* because they are more distinctive and can be tailor-made to taste; but they are up to five times as expensive as the standard items sold on market stalls.

Finally, the outer outfit is designed to make the most striking impression. It may be a *boubou*, a *taille basse* or a camisole with a *pagne*. In 1950s and 1960s in Dakar, any woman who could afford it would wear "European dress" for ceremonies and festive events (see Diallo 1975). But the 1970s and 1980s have seen a revival of "Senegalese dress" instead, and status has now become embodied in expensive damask cloths (*basin riche*) and heavy embroideries. Combined with jewels, bags and shoes, fabrics are at the centre of the conspicuous consump-

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that signals a respectable Negro woman [*une négresse de bon ton*]." (Boilat 1853: 315, translation from French my own)

[94] Market vendors of such items (underwear, *curaay* and potency enhancers of all sorts) are assumed to be either *lawɔe* women or *Griottes*. Both categories of women are perceived as experts in sexual matters. They do not only sell their products, but also give generous advice on how to use them.

tion characteristic of festivities in urban Senegal. For weddings and name-giving ceremonies, the women of the families involved must show up with new outfits. The bride or child's mother must wear the most expensively embroidered outfits, followed by her mother, sisters, mother-in-law, sisters-in-law and other important women in the family or associated families[95]. They must show themselves with two or three different outfits during the main day of the ceremony, and the evening outfit is usually the most expensive. Hierarchies within the family are thus made apparent in women's dress. As one informant put it: "If you want to be sure that no one will wear the same as you, you have to wear something very special, and that can be very expensive." Another informant bought fabric for a new outfit to attend a party, but refused to have it sewn when her tailor told her that it was "everywhere at the moment"; she went off, bought a new fabric and gave the first to her cousin. Unless held for a special occasion, *tours* and *sabars* do not require new outfits, but women are still expected to show up in their best attire. *Boubous* worn only once at a family ceremony are re-used for these events, or borrowed from friends and relatives. Dress, therefore, does not only indicate hierarchies within families, but also among different types of events: the more important the event, the newer the outfits.

The price of status

As Ardener (1995) pointed out, ROSCAs are sometimes so elaborate that they cannot be dismissed as a purely economic affair. Women's dance events in Dakar are a case in point. The fact that they spend a significant portion of their resources on the appropriate paraphernalia confirms that these events are much more than economic transactions or opportunities to have fun and relieve the tensions of everyday life: they also have to do with building up status in the community and maintaining networks which can be harnessed for other purposes. As evidence of this, I find it useful to show that personal expenses for festive events can reach significant levels compared with people's income. The following table, therefore, indicates the expense scale for each category of item in 2002-03. As price statistics do not exist, I have used

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[95] Associated families are not necessarily tied by kinship. They may be tied by a long-standing bond of friendship between senior members, in which case the bond is often symbolically transformed into a kinship-like bond, for example by giving a child the name of the friend. A child is for ever bound to the person he or she was name after, and this involves reciprocal duties throughout life.

empirical data based on my own observations. The variations in prices are due to great variations in the quality and place of origin of the items, particularly for fabrics. Gold jewellery is not included here as it is often acquired as a wedding gift from a husband. Make-up is not included either because when applied in salons, it is included in the "hairstyling" rubric. *Curaay* is not included either because it is used for everyday purposes as well, but prices range from 500 to 8,000 FCFA per kilo, and a kilo may last for a couple of weeks if used every day. In the case of *tours* and tontines, these figures should be held against a typical lump sum of 30,000 – 100,000 FCFA distributed to each member in turn.

Category of item	Price scale (FCFA)
Fabric for main outfit (4 – 6 yards)	3,000 – 360,000
Sewing & (optional) embroidery	4,000 – 25,000
Beeco	1,000 – 10,000
Waist beads (optional)	200 – 2,000
Shawl	1,500 – 6,000
Shoes	1,000 – 30,000
Bag	1,000 – 20,000
Jewellery, non-gold	500 – 15,000
Skin-bleaching product – per unit (optional)	800 – 12,000
Hair-styling	1,500 – 10,000
Total	**14,500 – 490,000**

Fig, 4.3: Scale of expenses in dress and other paraphernalia for festive events, Dakar, 2002-03

As would be expected from my earlier descriptions, the largest expenses are incurred by weddings and name-giving ceremonies (not taking into account the gifts and money involved in ceremonial exchanges, the food, rental of equipment and cash for the *Griots*), followed by *sabars* and *tours*. Given the scale of ceremonial expenses in relation to people's income, it is not surprising that women spend much time and effort chasing the money needed. These expenses are evidently an investment in social capital, but not all social capital is later converted into money; it is also converted into peer support, friendship, and perhaps most importantly, into the security of having a "safety net" of relations which can be called upon in times of crisis. To keep renewing the "investment", therefore, women must find resources elsewhere. Elaborate strategies are deployed to this end, in which men still play an important role.

Money-making strategies

"When it comes to ceremonies and parties, women always find the money" or "it is money that girls are interested in" are among the comments I have heard dozens of times in Dakar, both from women and from men. Yet whenever I asked more details about how women found the cash needed, answers were at best fuzzy. Men in particular, assured me that this remained a mystery to them. Yet I gradually realized that part of the reason why most men were less talkative than women on this topic was that they did not wish to acknowledge their part in the *mbaraan* described below. But other strategies are also available to women when they must meet the requirements of festive fashion: requiring the financial contribution of a husband or other family members, borrowing the items needed and the imitation of luxury.

The financial contribution of a husband or that of other family members (for non-married women) is always invoked as the ideal pattern, in an urban society where most people are keen to maintain the illusion that a married man is an all-powerful figure in the household (e.g. Bop 1996, Abdoul 2001). Women often reinforce this, for example by joking amongst friends about their ability to obtain money from their husband by granting him exceptional sexual favours. In practice however, the depressed economic climate renders an increasing number of men unable to provide for their wives and children, let alone for their festive expenses. Bop (1996) notes that in Dakar, only one father out of five provides for all their children's needs. From data gathered in the late 1970s, Diop (1985) had already reported that more than half of all divorces were caused by the husband's failure to fulfil his role as a breadwinner. Considering the growing number of divorces in Dakar[96] (Bocquier & Nanitelamio 1993, cited in Bop 1996), the tendency for urban women to get married later in life[97], the increasing absence of husbands caused by migration and the fairly high number of widows (due to the fact that many men take a young second or third wife in their forties or fifties), it is easy to see how a significant proportion of urban women are forced to find other sources of income.

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[96] In central Dakar, where most middle class women live, one woman out of four was divorced in the early 1990s. The proportion was much lower in the poorer suburban areas, e.g. 6% in Pikine (Antoine et al. 1992, cited in Bop 1996).

[97] In 1997, the average age of first marriage in urban areas was 19.6 years, against 18.3 in 1978. The age of first marriage is lower in rural Senegal but follows the same trend, with 16.3 years in 1997 against 15.6 in 1978 (Adjamagbo & Antoine 2002).

Obviously, the tontines and family ceremonies already mentioned constitute sources of credit which can then be transformed into income-generating activities, but they require an investment in the first place. This investment takes the form of direct monetary contribution or expenses in dress, food, gifts and transportation. Borrowing clothes or money from family members or friends is a common strategy, but unless one is able to reciprocate, the option does not remain available indefinitely. A person who is always at the receiving end places him- or herself in the role of the client in the patron-client relationship thereby established, which implies giving up status in relation to the giver. Some women mobilize credit in difficult times, for example by paying for their purchases or services in several instalments or by depositing gold with a jeweller in return for cash. Following prior agreement, the interest is repaid in cash or as a fraction of the gold. But for many young women, one of the most common strategies to acquire the cash needed is the *mbaraan*. The *mbaraan* consists in maintaining a small network of admirers who occasionally give money in return for sexual favours, or the hope of gaining them in the future. But few women openly admit the practice, especially – not surprisingly – if they are married. One of my informants, a woman in her early thirties, confessed to keeping a few men in her circle before getting married, but said she had given up when she realized that the game did not suit her. She had been strongly encouraged by a friend who told her that she was "stupid" not to do as everybody else did. The friend was eventually caught at her own game when she became pregnant with a man she did not love. Facing pressure from her family to save her reputation, she agreed to become his second wife. A few years later, she was repudiated. My informant commented that "she thought she was smart[98] with her *mbaraan*, but she stumbled upon someone who was more *say-say* [naughty] than her". A male informant spoke contemptuously of a married woman who had tried to seduce him in the compound where he rented a room a few years earlier. "Every time her husband went out", he explained, "she cleaned the floor in front of my room, wearing a white *beeco*". After of few weeks of this "dance", she asked him to lend her 5,000 FCFA, complaining that her husband had not yet received his salary. He gave her the money and told her that there was no need for her to repay, thereby making it clear that he did not wish to be seduced. My informant, in his early forties, insisted that he had been approached by many

[98] In Wolof, "he/she is smart" translates into "*Am na xel*", literally "he/she has got spirit".

women in search of *mbaraan* candidates. He always looked suspiciously at well-dressed women strolling down the streets of the city centre in late office hours.

Articles about the *mbaraan* as a social phenomenon appear in the local press at regular intervals, and they reflect the male bias of the press in the way they accuse women of acting as immoral temptresses (e.g. Sud Quotidien 09.06.1999, Walfadjri 18.10.2002). Whereas women emphasize solidarity towards their families, the occasional necessity to accept money from several sources to make ends meet, and sometimes the freedom to choose their sexual partners, men often describe women as selfish and exclusively concerned with their looks. Not only are women blamed for the prevalence of the *mbaraan*, but also the existence of opposite situations, in which young men offer sexual favours in return for money, is swept under the carpet. Some women find other satisfactions in the game apart from cash; for unmarried women in particular, creating overt competition is sometimes a way of increasing their attractiveness in the eyes of potential marriage candidates. Moreover, many believe that other women are likely to benefit from the generosity of their husband or boyfriend, and they argue that "the more we get, the less will go to other women".

Finally, a strategy which belongs to a different register altogether is that of the imitation of luxury. The idea is to buy cheap fabrics, e.g. low grade damask cloth (*basin*), and to have it sewn into elaborate outfits so as to make it look expensive. Imported, starched damask cloth is widely used in the confection of *boubous*, and what differentiates high grade damask (*basin riche*) from the cheaper qualities is the texture and the quality of the dyeing. The cost, on the other hand, can be up to ten times as high. Evaluating the quality of an outfit, therefore, can be difficult even for a trained eye, and many women take advantage of this ambiguity. As already mentioned, not all the social capital women accumulate through dance events is later reconverted into money. But whenever it *is*, what do women do with it? This is the question I deal with in the next section. This is important in relation to the more fundamental issue addressed in this chapter, i.e. whether or not the power women enjoy in the context of their dance events extends further into their lives.



Fig.4.4 Weddings guests in Dakar, January 2004

Tours, tontines and small-scale business

Small-scale business is not the only destination for the savings and credit mobilized by women through their associations and dance events, but I have chosen to focus on this because this is a domain where women's initiative is increasingly apparent in urban Senegal, and because this is the most likely to bring changes in terms of gender relations. Other common uses include paying off debts (e.g. with local shop-owners), buying fabrics, medicines or making gifts for family ceremonies. In this thesis I focus on women's associations in which money is collected for individual use, but there are also associations in which the money collected is reinvested in community projects, such as the *mbotaay*. I should also mention the increasing salience of the religious associations, the *dahiras*, in which people of both sexes help each other make donations to their local Muslim leader (see for example Heath 1992, Mbow 1997, Evers Rosander 1997c). *Tours*, *tontines*, *mbotaays* and *dahiras* are in no way mutually exclusive, and many individuals are involved in several associations at the same time. In this section however, I focus on the individual uses of the resources mobilized through the *tours* and tontines described earlier.

Case stories

A woman's social status is sanctioned by marriage, and unmarried women enjoy very little consideration in much of Senegambia. It is not surprising, therefore, that most "women entrepreneurs" I have met were or had been married. It should also be noted that although all the women portrayed have benefited from the associations they were involved in, it is not always possible to establish a direct link with the setting up of a small business. But in all cases, associations with peers have played an important role, both financially and in terms of confidence-building. Not only do they provide women with cash and a social network that is essential to economic autonomy, they also constitute a competitive, emulating environment in which they are keen to appear as successful businesswomen.

From dance to fast food

Aïcha is a married woman in her early fifties. She lives in Dakar with her husband and two teenage sons. Born in a modest Peul family from the Casamance, in the 1970s she performed as a dancer with a troupe based in Dakar. After a few years, and for reasons I do not know, she quit her dancing career. Being regarded as an exceptionally beautiful woman, she found employment as a receptionist in one of Dakar's luxury hotels. There she met a man almost twenty years her senior, stopped working and married him. He was fairly wealthy at the time, and she was happy to stay at home and manage the affairs of the household. Several of her family members moved in, and the family later moved abroad. Meanwhile, Aïcha kept living comfortably as a housewife.

By the time the family returned to Senegal ten years later, the tide had turned. Aïcha's husband had lost his well-paid job, and the family had not been careful, or able, to save money for harder times. While her husband was struggling to find money and re-establish his lost status, spending time contacting any old acquaintance who owed him a favour, Aïcha became involved in two tontines for middle-class women. A few months after returning to Senegal, Aïcha started her own trade. She had relatives in the United States to whom she regularly sent Senegalese outfits and fabrics. They sold the goods at a much higher price and shared the profits with her. As soon as she was able to, Aïcha travelled to the US herself and stayed for a couple of years while her sons and husband remained in Dakar. Although her husband kept saying that she was due back "very soon", there were rumours that she had entered the US on a tourist visa. If this was the case, she was forced hide as an illegal migrant if she wanted to consolidate her business there. The possibility to travel back and forth on business trips simply did not exist. Upon return to Senegal, Aïcha opened a fast food restaurant in one of the densely populated suburbs of Dakar, amid a landscape of concrete houses and shacks. During my last stay in Senegal, she was working long hours to get the business started. By then her husband's financial situation has improved slightly, and he was once again able to give her money. Nevertheless, she had joined a new elite tontine.

Although she is often away from home and comes across as an independent woman, Aïcha insists that she owes her success to her husband's support. This is consistent with several studies of Senegalese women who, despite being the most stable providers for their households, modestly state in interviews that their husband's moral caution and financial support is the secret of their success (e.g. Bop 1996, Fall Diop 1997, Abdoul 2001). In her article on women

household heads in Dakar, Codou Bop reports that female leaders of *groupements économiques* "claim modestly that the origin of their success is to be found in their submission to their husbands, from whom they require permission and advice before each initiative" (Bop 1996: 141, translation from French my own). This is also consistent with the Wolof notion of *sutura*, a highly valued attitude according to which one should keep quiet in the face of conflicts and shortcomings in the family. Women in particular, are expected to hide the shortcomings of their husbands from outsiders' view in order to maintain the family's reputation.

A hairdresser's diary

Saly is in her early thirties and lives in Dakar with her husband and two toddlers. She is trained as a hairdresser and loves dancing. At the moment she does not have permanent employment, but she likes to remind her friends that she has been financially autonomous since her teenage years, and that she is looking forward to working again.

Saly did not choose her vocation; she says she was born with a talent for hairstyling, and she pursued this route simply because braiding women in her neighbourhood allowed her to earn money as a school girl. By the age of 20, her savings and the credit she had mobilized through young women's associations had enabled her to open her own hairdressing salon. Unfortunately, the experience was short-lived; she explained that her place was constantly invaded by friends and relatives who did not pay for her services. No longer able to make ends meet, she was forced to close the business after a year[99].

She went on doing people's hair from home. Shortly after getting married, she had two children and started attending a hairdressing school in Dakar. Despite her extensive experience, she felt that a formal degree would earn her respect and allow her to charge higher prices when she eventually opened her own salon. The degree was also meant to prepare her for the possibility of working abroad if her husband was posted outside Senegal. In 2002-2003, she was trying to mobilize credit with a view to open her own hairdressing and tailoring business, both through her *tontine* and through the more formal channels of donor-sponsored microfinance organizations. Before getting married, Saly had always been a keen participant in

[99] This is not an isolated case; I have been told many stories of people who had lost their jobs or whose businesses had gone wrong due to the financial pressure of relatives and friends. This explains why many households are poor even though one of the members earns a decent income.

women's dance events, and although she had stepped down when she moved to a different neighbourhood, she had retained some of her old networks. Apart from a *tour* with old neighbourhood friends, weddings and name-giving ceremonies provided opportunities to maintain these relationships. During our conversations, Saly always stressed the importance of female solidarity, as the only way for a woman to remain in control of her life. She was quite cynical about Senegalese men: "Once you are married, that's it, they no longer do anything for you. They spend all their time courting other women". Her conviction that women must retain control over their lives, even after marriage, came across in numerous informal conversations about polygamy. On one occasion when a common woman friend was present, Saly made her point forcefully:

> Friend (addressing me): "Sometimes you marry into a family, you are happy, and after two years they impose another woman on you. Most of the time you don't have a choice."
> Saly: "No, no, you always have a choice! You can leave! *I* would leave."

As much because she was the eldest female sibling as because of her proud and independent personality, Saly had gradually emerged as a role model amongst her female relatives, several of whom had moved in with her. Although her husband was the "official" family head, in practice she had a tremendous influence on all important decisions concerning the household. She also managed the family budget, and I often overheard her ask her husband: "Give me my money!" ("*Jox ma sama xaalis*!"). In her own view, her strong inclination for autonomy stemmed from an upbringing in a polygamous household in which her mother, who was her father's cousin and the second of three wives, had struggled just to be "left in peace". "Every day when I came back from school there was shouting and fighting; so I went out again and did not come back until I'd got money", she said. Indeed, Saly felt from an early age that she must support her mother in the competition against her co-wives, and that one way of doing this was to achieve financial independence. Her mother had also taught her to respect the golden rule of generosity, and Saly's generosity was undoubtedly a major reason for her current status. But status often comes with people's envy, and Saly remained entangled in competition with the children of her mother's co-wives, the other *doomu baay*[100]. In the past, her in-

[100] *Doomu baay* literally means "children of the [same] father".

volvement with women's associations outside the family had provided her with a power base to counteract their envious influence. This was less the case now that she lived in a different neighbourhood, and Saly was discreetly looking for ways of building up new networks.

Divorce, business and family

Astou is a woman in her early thirties. She is divorced and lives in Dakar with her two children, her parents and siblings. Although she never finished secondary school, she is perfectly literate. At the age of 19 she married a man she was in love with. Unfortunately, he turned out to be violent, unable to provide for her, and when she became pregnant for the second time, he humiliated her by telling her father that she was a "slut" and that she was pregnant with someone else. With her parents' support, Astou went back to their house and requested a divorce. Because her ex-husband does not have a regular income, and because the monthly payment of child support by fathers is rarely enforced in practice, Astou is mostly left to support her children on her own.

Like many Senegalese women, Astou is a good organizer who knows how to manage her tight budget to make ends meet. For a couple of years she cooked snacks which she sold in various parts of the neighbourhood. When I met her, she was hoping to set up a small catering business with her sister, who was finishing high school. Astou had been saving money regularly through several tontines. She changed her mind about the catering business after one of her tontine friends convinced her that small-scale trade would be an easier way of making money, and offered to coach her. By then, Astou had not lost hope of getting married again, but she had become quite disillusioned with men and their ability to keep their promises when it came to financial support. She had recently been going out with a friend of her ex-husband's for a few months, but he was unreliable, and she had given up on him. Not only had he lost his job because of his alcohol addiction, he had also turned her down when she had become pregnant by him and had asked him to help her pay for a clandestine abortion. He told her that it was her fault and left her to find elsewhere the 50,000 FCFA needed.

When it was her turn to receive her payout from one of the tontines, therefore, she used the money to get a loan from a micro-credit organization, and embarked on an informal trading business. She accompanied her friend on her next trip to Conakry, where she bought fabrics, shoes and other accessories to the value of 500,000 FCFA. Astou's friend was helpful in

sharing her experience and knowledge of the latest trends. When she had sold everything and made a smaller profit than expected, Astou decided to continue the trade but to purchase the goods from Mauritania instead. She could indeed travel to Mauritania by road, which made the trip cheaper than travelling to Guinea by plane. She is still making regular trips to Mauritania to buy fabrics, bags, shoes and jewels, and is keen to live a more comfortable life as a businesswoman. Wealth, she feels, would partly compensate for the fact that she has the little enviable status of a divorced woman.

In the local community, Astou and her parents carefully maintain the illusion that her father is the sole breadwinner, and that his remaining wife (the other died in her early thirties while giving birth) and daughters "help out". But Astou's father works as a freelance architect and does not have a regular income, nor is it sufficient to support the family when rare payment for a construction project comes in. In practice, therefore, it is Astou and her mother, a strong woman who sells oil, fish and other products at the harbour, who provide the most regular support. When one of the children is ill, it is also Astou who goes around to various acquaintances with a prescription in hand, asking for money to buy the medicine. Astou says that things were different ten years ago, when her father had money. Nowadays the family's house is bare and derelict. In the main room, Astou and her younger sister share a bed while her two sons sleep on foam mattresses on the floor; Astou's parents sleep in a small adjacent room, and her brother, who is a university student and pious Muslim, has been given a tiny room of his own in the courtyard. Used for cooking, washing and holding sheep, the courtyard is shared with Astou's aunt (her father's sister) and her family, who live in the two remaining rooms. The main room in Astou and her parents' part of the house is the place where the family eat, pray and welcome their guests, who may then sit on the bed. The single luxury in the house is a TV which is keenly watched by neighbours as well. For a small fee, as elsewhere in Dakar's *quartiers*, most households are able to watch cable TV illegally, but watching TV is also a convivial activity. Occasionally, Astou's younger cousins from next-door pop in to eat; with an alcoholic husband, their mother is constantly struggling to make ends meet and keep a brave face. Like Astou, she says that she doesn't know what she would do without her tontines.

In fact, the family's living conditions are not too bad by the standards of the neighbourhood: it is a concrete house while most families around live in tiny flats or wooden shacks. But the fact is that this house used to be well decorated and fully furnished, like a middle-class

house. "It wasn't always like that", Astou told me with nostalgia. In the past her father had been generous with his extended family, who knew all too well that a man in his position was expected to show generosity. When the tide turned for him, friends and family stopped coming to the house, and he had to sell most of the furniture (in fact, whether it was sold or seized by creditors was never made clear to me). He tries to be fatalistic about the situation and has found refuge in Islam. Her mother, on the other hand, cannot hide her bitterness. This is understandable given that their eldest son died a couple of years ago from a disease that could have been treated if the family had been able to afford it. One day, as they were discussing how much to give for a funeral in the neighbourhood, she raged: "I'm not giving anything at all! Who was there to give me money when my son was ill? No one! I'm not giving anything!"

Beyond the cases

For many women, economic autonomy is an obvious way of improving their status within the household, the extended family and the female networks they are involved in. Many women have no fear of setting up their own (formal or informal) businesses, because they have the "safety net" provided by their peers through tontines, *tours* and other associations. But the picture that emerges is also that of an urban society in which women can only achieve any power if they maintain the appearance of submission to their husband's or father's authority. This situation is well summed up by Codou Bop:

> "But as everywhere else, sooner or later the increase in women's economic power will force our society to redefine its notions of the masculine and the feminine. How long, then, will women keep a low profile? Instead of explicit demands and/or struggle, a majority of them seem to have chosen negotiation and the patient gnawing [*grignotage*] at this patriarchal fortress [*citadelle du patriarcat*] that the family is." (Bop 1996: 142, translation from French my own)

Why women choose the route of apparent compliance is not absolutely obvious. A functionalist explanation would be that Senegalese women do not dare challenging the socially valued *sutura*. After all, being labelled as someone who does not respect the discretion that will save

the family's honour is not an enviable position[101]. Women's compliance with the *sutura*, even when it works against them, brings echoes of Gramsci's notion of hegemony, which has been so widely used in gender studies. And indeed there is an element of male hegemony in gender relations in urban Senegal. But women's compliant attitude, I suggest, is also pragmatic. Ultimately, they need their initiatives to be socially sanctioned, because without social recognition there is no power to speak of. And being as a woman who has *sutura* will ensure great respect from the community in the long run. The children of such a woman, for example, are likely to become highly attractive marriage partners, following the notion according to which moral values are inherited primarily through the mother.

On a more practical level, women who engage in small-scale trade, the transformation of fishing products or other activities that take them outside their homes for long hours or days at a time, need their husbands' or fathers' acceptance that household chores will be fulfilled by others (usually daughters or daughters-in-law, other female relatives or house employees). Without this moral caution at least, women find themselves trapped between their individual ambitions and the role they are still expected to fulfil.

Moreover, women's dance events usually take place in people's homes or in their immediate vicinity. In other words, because in most cases the household head is a man, at least nominally, everyone is aware that men provide the *space* where these *aféeru jigéen* may take place. Finally, as Parkin pointed out, individuals are not always acting in a consciously rational way. Sometimes the outcome of people's choices and actions is a form of "cultural and political distinctiveness" (Parkin 1996: xxvii), rather than the climax of a well-planned strategy. Likewise in Senegal, women are not always making conscious plans to resist male authority, although they sometimes do. Open resistance is regarded with ambivalence by people of both sexes, and many Senegalese regard feminism as a "debate of intellectuals". This attitude of apparent compliance is often expressed in the popular songs of the Senegalese "divas", i.e. *Griottes* trained in the traditional praise-singing style, who have become "pop stars" with the development of the Senegalese music industry[102]. In her song "*Boroom kër*"[103], Kiné Lam (1991), a

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[101] If a woman complains in front of strangers that her husband is an alcoholic for example, people might say with great contempt: "*Amul benn sutuura*" ("She/he has no discretion"). As one of my informants commented, "when such a person enters the room, all conversations stop".

[102] For an excellent description of a similar phenomenon in Mali, see Schulz (2001).

diva who performed with the National Lyrical Ensemble in the 1970s and 1980s, paints a revealing portrait of the urban household head.

Boroom kër[104]

Boroom kër ya kaaru mbar mi	*Boroom kër* you are the saviour of the hut
Bul gawa sa ngëm	Do not lose faith
Yàlla boo gawa sa ngëm boroom kër	May God prevent you from losing faith, *boroom kër*
Bul gawa sa ngëm	Do not lose faith
Gungel ma njaboot gi, boroom kër	Guide the family for me, *boroom kër*
Boroom kër xool naa la xool yërëm la	*Boroom kër* I have looked at you and I pity you
Ma dellu ko xool yërëm ko	Again I looked and pitied him
Boroom kër ya kaaru mbar mi	*Boroom kër* you are the saviour of the hut
Soo joge si mbar, mbar mi rës	If you leave it, the hut will fall apart
Fajar fekk na nga jog	Before dawn you are up
Lan lay yobbu jafe loolu	Transportation is difficult
Booy dem dangay lang ak axëlu	When you leave, you hang on to the back [of the minibus, to avoid paying] and you think
[...]	
Lu ca root dal nga yobbu sa njaboot	You bring the fruit of your labour back to your family
Takk sa biir bi xiif ak mar	You deprive yourself of food and water [lit. "you tie your stomach until you become hungry and thirsty"]
Waw waw ngir sa njaboot (x2)	Yes, all this for your family (x2)
Soo waccee ba togg	As soon as you come home from work and sit down
Xale yi wër la dal	The children begin to surround you
Situut soxna sa nuyoo	Your wife immediately comes to greet you
Waw waw yori kayit	Yes, she is holding some papers
Nga xamnee lep ga ak ndox ma	You guess that these are the debts and the water [bill]
Moo ko tax di wax	That is what she came to talk about
Situut Diallo nuyoo taxaw feyyu	Diallo[105] immediately drops by to ask for his money

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[103] *Boroom kër* literally means "master of the household". It may be a woman, but the word has a strong male connotation. The same kind of metaphor is used with *boroom xaalis*, literally "master of the money" (wealthy person) or *boroom jën*, fish vendor.

[104] I am grateful to Ousseynou Faye for useful comments on the translation and interpretation of this song.

[105] Diallo is the generic name given to small shop owners, who are assumed to be Guineans or Pulaar speakers.

Ñun jigéen ñi nañu bàyyi feyyu bor guddi	We women must stop talking about debts at night
Ñu bàyyi xuloo guddi	We must stop quarrelling at night
Baaxul ci boroom kër	It is no good to the *boroom kër*
Yalna yàlla waccee xéewal yu bare	May God bring prosperity [on the family]
Bul gawa sa ngëm	Do not lose faith
Yàlla boo gawa sa ngëm boroom kër	May God prevent you from losing faith, *boroom kër*
Yalna doom yi baax ba fey la	May God protect your children so that they can repay you
Bul gawa sa ngëm boroom kër	Do not lose faith, *boroom kër*
Yalna yàlla waccee sa boroom kër	May God free you from everything, *boroom kër*

(Kiné Lam 1991, translation from Wolof my own, with the kind help of Nafy Guèye)

On the praise-singing mode people are familiar with, Kiné Lam pays tribute to the courage and endurance of the household head. The song expresses pity, which has a positive connotation in the local context; the feeling of pity suggests that the pain is shared between equals. But her praise is ambiguous because it is mixed with subtle hints that men have lost some of their authority, as they struggle to provide for their families. The word *mbar* used to designate the home refers to an open hut, i.e. a temporary, light and unstable construction. The image that comes to mind is not that of an uncontested figure of authority, but rather that of the *goor goorlu*[106], the "débrouilleur", the city-dweller who struggles daily to bring bits of cash home.

It is also important to remain aware of the differences of position amongst women. The category "urban Senegalese woman" is far from being homogeneous, and this translates into differentiated capacities to "gnaw" at the "patriarchal fortress". For example, women's status and power, both within and outside the family, remains closely tied to their age, the status of their husband and their own rank as wives. Thus the first, and generally eldest wife (*aawo*), usually enjoys a great deal of power over both male and female household members. This is emphasized even more in regions young men have migrated from, such as the Senegal River Valley and the region of Louga. Women often stay behind and are thus left to compete for power amongst them.

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[106] The *goor goorlu* is well portrayed in a cartoon by T.T. Fons, adapated as a TV series by Senegalese director Moussa Sène Absa. The goor goorlu's daily mission is to search for the DQ ("Dépense Quotidienne", or daily expenses), and his wife never leaves him in peace until he has found it. More often than not however, he fails.

Moreover, the ability to harness money and other resources for further investment is highly dependent on women's initial socio-economic position. Wealthy tradeswomen tend to form tontines with peers of a similar position, as in Aïcha's case. They are the ones who are able to contribute up to 50,000 FCFA every other week or monthly; with such amounts the payouts are very significant indeed. They are the ones who are able to travel as far as Dubai, India or Indonesia to purchase fabrics and cosmetics for re-sale in Senegal. Not only are many of them shrewd businesswomen, but they also enter the game with resources that most Senegalese can only ever dream of. There is a degree of social mobility, but those who have moved upwards have almost invariably benefited from the financial support of a man or several men. As I will now discuss, men, on the other hand, are often uneasy about women's newly gained autonomy.

Women, dance and the "decline of moral values"

What has been said so far indicates that Senegalese women's increasing economic autonomy, which is itself facilitated by their urban associations and the related dance events, contributes to a quiet reshuffling of gender hierarchies. However, women's dances are also the focus of increasing tension. Part of this tension is framed in religious terms, as when religious leaders occasionally condemn the dances, or as shown in the widespread belief that bans on *sabar* dancing and drumming, when the rains are late, are dictated by the religious authorities[107]. In this section however, I focus on another aspect of the tension: I suggest that women's autonomy is increasingly perceived as a threat by men. In a chronically depressed economic climate, the growing gap between what is expected of them and what they are able to deliver generates tense gender relations. I argue that the framing of women's dances as immoral is one of the most visible expressions of this tension. As with Cowan's Greek women, it is as if "power comes only at a price" (Cowan 1990: 15).

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[107] The ban was last in effect in Dakar in August-September 2002, but did not prevent people from enjoying themselves with the *sabar*. When I asked lead drummers why this was, they looked unconcerned and replied that derogations from the police were easy to obtain (perhaps in exchange for a small fee).

Women's dances and moral politics

An overwhelming majority of my informants of both sexes were convinced that *sabar* dances and their modern offshoots had become increasingly suggestive in the twentieth century, and particularly since the 1970s. The fact that the *beeco*, the underskirt, had become visible to everyone attending an evening *sabar* (*tannbeer*) or a *soirée sénégalaise* (a *sabar*-like party in a night-club) was often mentioned. People assured me that in the past, seeing a woman's *beeco* was the prerogative of a husband, and was confined to the intimacy of the bedroom. Such comments as "women of the previous generations used to dance wearing several *pagnes*, so that you could see the layers underneath but not the legs" were commonplace. In the course of a discussion about women and popular dances, a 45-year old man added that "some women, when they have a nice skin, they like to show it to everybody". There is indeed a widespread perception that urban life has encouraged women to unleash their sexuality, and that this is most obvious in their dances. A couple of my informants, men in their mid-forties, even saw a political agenda in this state of affairs. Echoing what is commonly said about the development of football in recent years, they argued that women's dances were under the immoral influence of the state-controlled TV. "The PS [*Parti Socialiste*] was showing sex on TV all the time to distract the youth from becoming interested in politics", one of them told me as we discussed the popular dances. Although it is certainly true that the TV has an impact on local notions of sexuality, my observations contradict the idea that women's dances should be a simple imitation of music videos and soap operas etc. In fact, the dances displayed on TV are often more restrained than their "real life" version. In several variety programmes I have watched on the RTS, the camera was awkwardly moving away as soon as a woman was beginning to execute risqué hip movements.

It is also significant that the moral judgment depends on who is talking. In other words, whereas no one denies that the dances involve a sexually suggestive dimension, not everyone finds this to be problematic. Unsurprisingly, the harshest judgment comes from men, but in fact the different views do not strictly follow the gender division. It would be more accurate to talk about a continuum of attitudes. At one end of the continuum are women of any age who enjoy dancing, or who encourage others when they no longer dance. There are also men who allow themselves to dance despite the social stigma this increasingly carries for them. For these women and men, *sabar* and other popular dances are an enjoyable and socially bonding

activity, with a healthy competitive element. The suggestiveness is part of the fun. Some of them also invoke "tradition" (*cosaan*, i.e. "origin" or "past"), insisting that "people here have always danced like that, and it never used to be a problem."

At the other end of the continuum are reformist Muslim leaders and their followers, for whom this kind of dancing will lead people directly into Hell. Not far from this position are many *marabouts*, i.e. clerics at all levels of the Senegalese Sufi *tariqas*. But most people have mixed attitudes which could be plotted somewhere along the continuum. They include people who do not dance or who do so in "modest" ways (with *kersa*), but who find enjoyment in watching others dance suggestively. They also include women who refrain from dancing in public because of their status, but who take it for granted that women of a lower status than themselves should do so. In practice however, the matter is further complicated by the fact that women who dance may deny doing so when interviewed, particularly in front of men. This happened during a group interview I conducted with five men and two young women. One of them insisted that she did not dance, but when I later asked her what a particular style looked like, she spontaneously stood up and showed the movements. Similarly, the same men who explicitly disapprove of women's provocative moves can be seen watching a *sabar* with great fascination. Ultimately, contradictory attitudes are often mixed in the same individuals in complex ways, and attitudes may also change in the course of people's lives – not always towards the more conservative. In this sense, Moore (1994) is right when she calls for more attention to the ways individuals relate to competing discourses on gender.

But one might rightly ask what the connection is between the "moral politics" of dance and the ethos of uncertainty which many men find themselves in. My argument for linking the two is backed up by the observation that whereas women's suggestive dancing is probably an old phenomenon, the widespread perception that it causes and reflects social decline can be traced back to the 1980s. One may of course argue that this has more to do with the growing salience of Islam in Senegalese life than with economic uncertainty, but these factors are not mutually exclusive. Going further into the interplay between religion and the economy would be beyond the scope of this thesis however, and I will therefore turn to the historical evidence pointing towards my argument.

Women's dances since the 19th century

Historical sources on Senegambian dances are unfortunately sparse, and therefore the only alternative left is to suggest hypotheses from the few known testimonies. Oral tradition outside Dakar would be useful in this respect, but the time constraints of fieldwork have not allowed me to collect extensive data in rural areas. Nevertheless, from the mid-19th century we have the testimony of a French Catholic missionary, Abbé Boilat; his *Esquisses Sénégalaises* (1853) have become a classic of colonial Senegambia. His view must be understood in the context of its time, and needless to say, dances everywhere in Africa were ill-regarded by the 19th-century Church. Yet his writings suggest that evening dances were already dominated by women, as illustrated in the following quote. Because it is now a classic, I have found it best to leave the French text, which is extracted from a section appropriately entitled "Plaisirs et distractions des Wolofs":

> "Dans tous les villages, il y a un hangar recouvert de paille ou de plantes grimpantes, sous lequel s'assemblent les hommes durant la journée, quand ils n'ont point de travail, ce qui arrive presque tous les jours. [...] S'il fait clair de lune, le tamtam de la place annonce la danse vers la fin du repas ; les femmes paraissent électrisées de cette musique, elles se lèvent brusquement et accourent de toutes leurs forces ; bientôt les hommes les suivent. Les premières scènes sont exécutées par les jeunes gens, les femmes chantent et battent des mains ; tout à coup elles s'y précipitent elles-mêmes et exécutent des danses que la pudeur me défend de peindre ici et qui ne sont autres que la représentation des passions les plus brutales. Les marabouts et leurs familles ne prennent jamais part à ces derniers divertissements."[108] (Boilat 1853: 323-324)

Dress is an essential element in the dance, and looking at its trajectory is therefore illuminating. The piling of several layers was already mentioned by Boilat (1853: 315), but there is evi-

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[108] From "Pleasures and entertainment of the Wolof": "In all villages, there is a hall covered with straw or vines, under which men gather during the day when they do not have work to do, which happens almost every day. [...] On moonlit evenings, the local drum announces the dance towards the end of the meal; the women seem electrified by this music; they suddenly get up and come running at great speed; soon the men follow. The first sequences are performed by young men, while women sing and clap; all of a sudden they jump in the middle and perform dances that decency prevents me from describing here, and which are nothing but the representation of the most brutal passions. The Clerics and their families never take part in these festivities."

dence that this fashion became more sophisticated during the prosperity that followed World War I, particularly in Dakar. Thus historian Ousseynou Faye (2000) has traced the emergence of the competitive superposition of *pagnes*, the *rawatle*, to the period 1918-1930. He suggests that a flourishing groundnut trade generated wealth among some segments of the African population, and that these favourable economic conditions, combined with the emergence of a specific urban culture, encouraged the *rawatle*. Faye states that by the early 1930s, it had become fashionable for urban women to wear two, three and up to seven *pagnes* on top of each other. We must assume that women were likewise dressed for dance events, the domain of competition par excellence. In fact, some of the dances I had the opportunity to learn, such as the Lebu *ndawrabin*, involve a sideways "rounded" leg movement, knees bent, in a manner which *feels* designed to reveal inner garments while freeing the leg for movement.

Closer to our time, one of my informants, recalled the dance events he used to spy on as a young boy. According to him, in Dakar in the 1960s the young women who danced were denuding themselves much in the same way as they do now, particularly during events that took place in the intimate space of the house. "In fact it was even worse", he said, because at the time many women wore nothing underneath their *beeco*, and "you could see everything". He also remembered details about how women's ways of decorating their intimate body parts varied according to the latest fashion. Surprisingly, two informants in their mid-forties recalled that in their childhood people danced sequences of twist during *sabars*. American-inspired social dances like the twist are hardly perceived to be provocative today, but in the 1950s and 1960s they gave these urban events a groundbreaking edge.

It is also worth remembering that President Senghor forbade a popular dance from public performance in 1972, the *arwatam*, because it was deemed "indecent". Somehow the *arwatam* did not fit into the image of the modern Senegalese state. Senghor's constant courting of the Muslim *tariqas*, which proved invaluable to his political career (e.g. Behrman 1970) may also have influenced his decision. In any event, in the early 1970s accusing fingers were already pointed at women and their supposedly "loose customs", but from the testimonies of a number of informants, the "hunt for moral decline" took new proportions in the late 1980s. Yet no amount of legislation or media campaigning has prevented women from dancing; the *arwatam*, which Biaya (2000) calls an "erotic street dance", did not disappear in 1972; it was simply replaced by more fashionable dances. Heath (1994) observed similar phenomena when she did fieldwork in Kaolack in the early 1980s. This was the reign of the "danse du ventilateur" (the

"electric fan dance", a version of the *lëmbël* mentioned earlier). In the "ventilateur", women turned their back to the drummers or the audience; with bent knees and hands solidly placed over them they rotated the buttocks in rhythm. The electric fan dance swept through West and Central Africa as a symbol of sexual freedom.

Controlling women through their dances?

It seems therefore that whereas Senegalese women may have covered the lower part of the body more in the dance, their suggestive style, on the other hand, has probably been performed in the region for a long time. The perceived difference between the present and a timeless "past" is obviously exaggerated. It is also likely that the perception of rotating hip movements, pelvic thrusts and high jumps as "sexually provocative" was reinforced by Islamization and colonization. In any case the growing unease about young women's public assertion of their sexuality can be felt at many levels of everyday life. This is also consistent with the remark by several informants that in the past men danced the *sabar* more than they do nowadays. According to them, the perception of dance as "women's domain" is a fairly recent phenomenon. Historian Ibrahima Thioub relates this to the fact that men feel their masculinity threatened by the intrusion of women into the public space[109]. Dance is all the more problematic for men as in some contexts (e.g. *sabars*, *simb*[110] or "Hindu" events), those who dance are at risk of being classified as homosexual (*goorjigéen*, literally "man-woman").

But what are we to make of this moralization of the popular dances? Henrietta Moore (1994: 67-68) describes violence as being "often the outcome of an inability to control other people's sexual behaviour, that is, other people's management of themselves as engendered individuals" and adds that "challenges to the exercise of power or to its effects in terms of status, strategies and interests are perceived as threats to identity. The obverse appears equally

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[109] Ibrahima Thioub, personal communication, Dakar, July 2002.

[110] The *simb* is a ritualized game, or playful performance also named "jeu du faux-lion", during which performers dressed in lion outfits try to catch some of the participants, children in particularly. The simb has structural similarities with both the *sabar* and Senegalese wrestling (*lámb* or *mbapat*), also involving a circle of participants, *sabar* drumming, dancing and sung poetry. The origins of the simb ar unclear; whereas a common myth traces the ritual back to a time when men who had survived a lion's attack became invested with the animal's powers, informants in the Senegalese performing scene describe it as a ritual of rebellion and a vehicle for secret communication during the colonial period.

true, so that challenges levelled at an individual's gender identity [...] may be perceived as a threat to power, position, control and even assets". Accusations of immorality against women and attempts to constrain their dances may not be "violence" in a literal sense, yet they can be felt by the women concerned as a form of moral violence. Considering what has been said before, I want to suggest that men feel less and less able to control young women's sexual behaviour, and that some women's increasing economic success is perceived as a threat to their power, and therefore a challenge to their identity.

The important question that derives from this, is whether or not the moralization of women's dances works to restrain the impact of the socio-economic power gained from their associations. This is obviously the case because most women still need the support and approval of their male relatives to carry out their activities. An anecdote from the field will serve to illustrate this. In September 2002 I attended a "Hindu" event organized by a local dance association in a school courtyard in Pikine. White plastic chairs had been set up in a U-shape around the middle space, and the free end of the courtyard was occupied by a disc jockey and his music equipment. Songs from older and newer Bollywood films – I recognised the music from the film *Lagaan* (2001) – were playing as people, including many women with babies and toddlers, took place on the chairs. A few men were also dressed up for the occasion. Meanwhile the aisles of the schoolyard were filled with on-lookers of all ages who had come to watch the "Hindus". The women who intended to dance were easily distinguishable from the seated audience of aficionados: they were dressed in their best imitations of Bollywood costumes, the skin freshly bleached and wearing a distinctively Indian-style make-up. The party began and dance sequences followed each other to the sound of the film songs. They were either performed by a man, a woman – including a woman in her forties who enjoyed considerable status as one of the best "Hindu" dancers of Pikine – or by a woman/man duet, sometimes accompanied by a "chorus" of girls. By contrast with the improvisation characteristic of a *sabar*, the dances had obviously been rehearsed beforehand. On several occasions a young woman came forward and started dancing and twirling, abandoning herself to the pleasure of moving. Every time, participants grabbed her forcefully and forced her back on her chair. By the third time, she was violently pushed back while several people admonished her loudly. One of the male dancers was particularly aggressive, and at one point I thought he was going to hit her. Eventually she burst into tears and ran out of the courtyard. The party went on as if nothing had happened. I had arrived with two male informants from Pikine, and I

asked them what was going on. One of them replied: "Her husband doesn't want her to dance. Besides, she doesn't dance very well, and it isn't even good for her to dance. Every time she dances, she gets a headache."

There might have been many reasons why the young woman was treated as a trouble-maker, but it was significant that her husband's authority was mentioned first, in an environment where most other women were either single or divorced. It is likely that people did not wish to face the husband's anger when he discovered that they had let her dance. In any case, the fact that she was married and that her husband's opposition to the dance was known by everyone, constrained her physical behaviour as well as her capacity to build up social capital through Pikine's "Hindu" circles.

Concluding remarks

In a context where men explicitly seek to constrain women's suggestive *sabar* dances while simultaneously providing discreet support for the dance events (money, space, permission to attend), one may ask what view these dances provide of gender relations in urban Senegal. Heath (1994) argues that women's dances are a scarce resource people may put to various uses depending on the context. For example, she suggests that "the identification of women, as well as lower-caste male performers and their drums, with sexual expressiveness allows certain men to maintain their reputation for reserve" (Heath 1994: 95), i.e. the attitude that is expected of *géér* men. Although I do agree with her, I argue that this tension also has to do with the socio-economic power that women construct through dance events and associations from which men are largely excluded. Paradoxically, women's associations seem to have flourished in the wake of a general weakening of the state's social, economic and moral power. In the vacuum thus created, women compete with elders, religious leaders and other forms of organization dominated by men to harness the scarce resources available to the community.

In the light of Henrietta Moore's (1994) notion that perceptions of diminishing gender power become experienced as threats to gender identity, it is also tempting to conclude that Senegalese men experience the growing socio-economic power of women as a threat to their masculinity. This may explain why women and their suggestive dances are too readily accused of being responsible for the "moral decline" of society. In the same movement, men invoke traditional values to maintain control over women's sexuality, for example with the notion

that the health and success of a child depend on the mother's devotion to her husband ("*liggeyu ndey anu doom la*", i.e. "the destiny of a child is the mother's work"). As we have seen Moore also argues that the opposite is often true, i.e. that threats to gender identities become perceived as threats to power. In the Senegalese context, it is tempting to ask whether women's dance events promote competing discourses on women's sexuality – for example a more satisfying sexuality for themselves – which men come to perceive as a threat to their masculinity.

But what do women gain from the subtle acts of subversion displayed in their dance events? In the light of the numerous small businesses women set up with the credit mobilized through *tours*, tontines and other associations, it would seem that these events serve as a space where women are able to re-negotiate their social status, both amongst themselves and within the wider community. This is not always done consciously or with the intention to subvert the established order. After all, there is evidence that women have danced in similar ways in the region for decades, but the association between the dances and the subversion of a male-dominated sexuality is fairly recent. Faced with this transformation, women could well have chosen a submissive attitude and stopped dancing, or continued to dance in more restrained ways. Instead, they maintain the appearance of submission in everyday life while defiantly re-affirming their autonomy in the dance. In the end, some women gain power while others are kept in the status quo of submission. But the success of a few is in itself a factor of transformation, because it raises the hopes of others. Due to the stratification of Senegalese society along other lines than gender however (e.g. "caste", "class", age or religious status), women's dance events are only partly successful in re-shuffling gender hierarchies: wealthy women and those who benefit from the support of male relatives, husbands or lovers are still more likely to extend the power gained through female associations to other areas of their lives.

I will conclude this chapter by pointing out that *sabar* and other popular dances constitute a permanent bridge between ordinary life and the professional dance world. In fact, popular dances feed into the professional world, both in terms of inspiration for movement and music and in terms of people. Indeed, many dancers discover their taste and talent with these dances: as *sabars* and family ceremonies are open to children from both sexes, these are privileged moments for children to imitate the adults' dances. Until puberty, both boys and girls are encouraged to dance and are praised for risqué movements and suggestive poses. Later, some of them realize that they could well make a living of this. Ndèye Khady Niang, a well-known

dancer with the National Ballet (see chapter V), was recuited in the late 1960s; by then she had been noticed as an exceptional dancer during weddings and name-giving ceremonies in Dakar. There is a parallel with musical careers, many of which have their roots in family ceremonies, youth parties or *soirées sénégalaises*. Youssou Ndour for example, emerged very young as a singer of *kasag*, circumcision songs (Duran 1989).

When it comes to performance itself, the folkloric genre owes much to *sabar* dances as they are performed in Dakar's *quartiers*. What people call "traditional dance" is often inspired directly from the events described in this chapter, and nowadays every big folkloric troupe must have at least one *sabar* programme in its repertoire to please the local audiences. During breaks between rehearsals, I have often watched dancers spontaneously form a circle while the drummers kept playing, and improvise *sabar* dances with great enjoyment. The interplay between *sabars*, *tours*, family ceremonies and the professional world is even more obvious when one knows that many drummers perform in all these contexts. Not only is this necessary for them to earn a living, but playing for non-professional events also reaffirms their belonging to a musical community outside of which they have little status. The musical community also fosters and develops talent, as the young drummers are in apprenticeship with the more experienced for several years at a time. This is significant because in folkloric troupes, the role of the drummers, and particularly that of the lead drummer, is much more important than a simple accompaniment of the dance. Folkloric troupes are often founded and led by a Master Drummer, and the more experienced routinely comment on the choreography and the quality of the dancing performance. They may even have a say in who is recruited into the group. In other words, professional performance has developed within a "kinaesthetic atmosphere" (Novack 1990) in which *sabar* dances play a central role, and where musicians come and go between the professional and the everyday world.

Chapter V:

Transcending the quartiers: folkloric dances, the local stage and the outside world

Vignette

Dakar, June 2003. It is a warm day in one of the populous suburbs north of the city. The smells of decomposed foods and stagnant waters threaten to topple you over if you are not used to them. A few months ago, a drummer from the neighbourhood – I will call him Daouda – has set up a youth folkloric troupe which he calls a "dance school". Today he has invited me to come and record the troupe on video while they perform the programme they have put together over the past months. They rehearse three evenings per week in a room of the local "cultural centre" or in the spacious ground floor of the house we are now heading for. As we left his house, Daouda said he had to show himself at a name-giving ceremony nearby before he could join us, and so I am accompanied by his daughter. Every other step she sends greetings to people she knows as we walk along the sandy streets. We cross the railway, on which no one ever seems to expect a train to pass, and enter a large, one-storey concrete house. It is about 5 pm and the room is still bright from the daylight coming through a patio-like opening. The walls are run-down and the room is bare, apart from a table in a corner and benches along the edges.

This is where Daouda's troupe rehearses. The drummers, all young men in their late teens or early twenties, have already arrived and are slowly beginning to play on one side of the room, while small groups of teenage girls are warming up on the other. It is not yet a formal rehearsal; the girls show each other steps, chat and comment on each other's hair or dancing clothes (tee-shirts or short, tight-fitting tops and leggings with a *beeco* or a *pagne* on top). Some of their friends and women from the neighbourhood are there as well. This is not only a place for rehearsal, but also a place for young people from the neighbourhood to socialize in the late afternoon, when there is little else to do. The whole affair seems a bit chaotic, and it is diffi-

cult to believe that some choreographed performance will emerge before the day is over. But the *maître de ballet* shows up with a few male dancers, and slowly things begin to take shape. The drumming intensifies, becomes louder and better coordinated. *Sabar* and *jembe* sequences alternate while the dancers start rehearsing short sequences of the programme. The room is getting dark and I am worried about the lighting for the video, but before I have said anything, someone has brought a portable light projector. That will have to do, because there is no other lighting in the room, and even if there was, a power cut would be more than likely at this time of the year.

Daouda shows up around 7 pm, and by the time the troupe is ready to perform, the atmosphere has been transformed. The whole neighbourhood, adults, youths and children alike, seems to have shown up to see Daouda's troupe dancing "in costumes" and the *tubaab* with her toddler and her camera. Daouda is still wearing the beige *boubou* of *basin riche* he had changed into for the name-giving ceremony. He sits in the front line of the crowd crammed along one side of the room, and tells his performers to begin. The programme starts with fairly long sequences of solo *jembe*, with the performers entering the middle space from the four corners of the room. Some of the drumming has the distinctive texture of the apprentice play: the drum is "attacked" with a staggering energy, but with hesitant precision. The less experienced drummers have not yet learned how to relax the body over the instrument, and save their energy for several hours of drumming. Most of the musicians wear nothing but loose cotton trousers with the patchwork designs (*jaxasoo*) characteristic of the Mouride sect of the Baay Fall.

The drumming sequences are followed by a three-piece programme performed by eight drummers (all male) and twelve dancers, including eight girls and four boys between the ages of fourteen and twenty. The first piece is a succession of dances from the Mandinka regions stretching across Guinea, Senegal and Mali. It includes such dances as the *kuku* popularized by the Guinean dancers who came to Senegal in the 1960s. The second piece features one of these "traditional" stories so predictable in the Senegalese folkloric genre; it is set in a village, and involves a young girl who is bewitched by a hooded character covered in red. The girl dies and we understand that she was the victim of a spell cast upon her out of love jealousy. As the drama unfolds, she is miraculously resuscitated, and the black magic is turned against its sender, who ends up dying in great pain. The audience, who had been watching in silence throughout the first two pieces, seemed to wake up for the *sabar* programme that followed. As

the male dancers came to perform in the middle space, flanked by the girls conspicuously relegated to two "decorative" lines on the sides, loud cheering issued from the crowd. People recognized the *sabar* dances they knew from everyday life, and the youngest in the audience seemed eager to jump up and join in. The dancers seemed to enjoy themselves more than they had done with the first pieces. From the very short cotton skirts and beaded tops the girls had been wearing for the Mandinka dances, they had changed into colourful outfits and *beecos* of the same type as those women wear for *sabars* and *tours*.

By 8.30 p.m. the performance was over. I reluctantly told Daouda that some of it would appear very dark on the video, as a single projector was far from enough to illuminate the room. But this did not seem to bother him. Obviously, the event was valuable in itself, as he had been able to demonstrate for the whole neighbourhood that his newly formed group had raised the interest of a *tubaab*. As I stood there, exhausted by the heat and the concentration it had required to film without stumbling upon dozens of pairs of feet, another event was echoing in my mind. A few weeks earlier, I had recorded a dancing party, a *furël*, which a friend of mine had organized outside her family compound in the same neighbourhood. The disc jockey had encouraged people to dance their best, because, he shouted in Wolof, "You see the *tubaab* with her camera? The tape will go to America!" It was obvious that Daouda was also hoping for the tape to end up in England. He asked me to tell the organizers of the *Kaay Fecc* festival about his work with the troupe. He knew them, but he obviously thought that my recommendation would add weight to his own promotion. After all the *Kaay Fecc* team, with the centrally-located performance spaces they had access to for the festival and the 100,000,000 FCFA they had mobilized, had come to stand for those who had "made it" in the Dakar dance world. Central to Daouda's quest for recognition, however, was the neighbourhood. Before we left, he led me to the first floor to pay my respects to the house owner, a local businessman who introduced himself as a dedicated patron of the unemployed youth. "It is good what you are doing", the man said to me, "we must support the youth, otherwise they have nowhere to turn and they get into trouble".

Introduction

Folkloric dances, popularly called "ballets", developed with the creation of the National Ballet in 1961. Before this date there were dance troupes performing in schools or during official

events, but the consciously political profiling of the National Ballet marked a departure from earlier activities. From the outset a "political" project, folkloric dances have grown to embody a wide range of identities at the national, regional, village and neighbourhood level. In Dakar for example, dance- and theatre troupes have been particularly successful in reinforcing a sense of distinctiveness among migrants from other parts of Senegal. With these regional troupes, people have sought to maintain a sense of local belonging for themselves and their children, in the midst of the city's melting pot. But as was the case in many other recent nation-states, the cultural forms that people sought to preserve have been transformed by the staging process, and "traditional" forms transferred to the stage have developed as a genre in itself, in parallel and in connection with the practices embedded in social life.

To a certain extent, folkloric dances can be said to represent one of the more successful elements in a multitude of attempts to contest the "Wolofization" of post-colonial Senegal. They have also allowed individual performers to move away from their communities and create better life opportunities for themselves, but on the whole the success has been moderate in terms of their status in the wider society. They have gained some status compared with the figure of the *Griot* in many traditional societies of the region, as is evident in the increasing attractiveness of the profession for *géér* youths, but on a moderate scale. On the whole, artists still need to go abroad to earn a decent living. I argue here that part of the explanation for this limited success may be found in the initial "marriage" between folkloric performance and politics. Once the state was no longer able, or willing, to invest in the performing arts as an instrument in the nation-building process and as a means to promote Senegal worldwide, many troupes found themselves in limbo. Based on examples from within the performing world, this chapter therefore describes folkloric performance as "imagined tradition", and examines the changing status of performers over the last two decades.

In the first section the trajectory and back-stage life of *Bakalama*, a troupe associated with a small town of the Lower Casamance, serve to show how similar groups have developed from vehicles of cultural expression to income-generating businesses. The performers' upward mobility can simultanesouly be traced in spatial terms, as troupes often provide their young members with the first opportunity to leave their *quartier* on a regular basis. Whether people go to a "Centre Culturel" to rehearse, perform in various parts of the city during festivals or travel outside Senegal, these movements in space provide exposure to wider sections of the society, and feed hopes of a better life.

The second section moves front-stage to examine *Kañaalen*, a recent piece in *Bakalama*'s repertoire. With the limited data available, I suggest that folkloric performance tends to represent "tradition" as more timeless and bounded than it really is. Beyond the politics of ethnicity, such representations could be seen in continuity with what Diouf (2002) has described as the nationalist period's manipulation of tradition, in an attempt to reinforce the superiority of elders over the young, and I would add, of men over women. Diouf's work echoes an idea already developed by a number of scholars, i.e. that representations of an imagined past are always part of the politics of the present (e.g. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Cohen 1993, Ó Giolláin 2000). Indeed when they reach a wide audience, as is the case in urban Senegal, representation of tradition are bound to have an impact on people's perception of their own "culture", and therefore of the performer's status within it.

The third section moves again back-stage and examines folklore from the point of view of the performers, as livelihood and as a possible route towards an improved status. Upward mobility occurs mostly for those who are able to perform abroad. In terms of income there are great variations between performers however, and due to the irregularity of contracts and to the demands of redistribution in people's households, even those who are successful are easily thrown back into poverty.

Folkloric performance and local community

Although based in Dakar from its creation in 1972, *Bakalama* presented itself as a "ballet" from the "village" of Thionck Essyl in the Lower Casamance. It is significant that Thionck Essyl remains classified as a rural settlement, despite having a population of approximately 8,000 inhabitants. Most are wet-rice cultivators, and almost exclusively Muslim (De Jong 2002). *Bakalama* means "calabash" in Jola, and this is one of the most popular folkloric troupes in Dakar. All members of the troupe live in Dakar and its suburbs. Of more than twenty performers, all but three and the manager are Jola, but not necessarily from Thionck Essyl. Most of them, however, grew up in Dakar. The performers were all Muslim at the time of my fieldwork, but there had been non-Muslim dancers in the past, including a young woman who was now performing with a "contemporary" company.

Bakalama, *from Thionck Essyl to Dakar's* quartiers *and further*

According to my informants in the company, *Bakalama* was created by migrants from Thionck Essyl for whom it was important to maintain a sense of local belonging as they struggled to make a living away from home. In the 1970s *Bakalama* was setting up plays sprinkled with dance sequences. Theatre was already popular in the Casamance after being introduced in the local schools as early as the 1940s. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, *Bakalama*'s success grew with the number of migrants from the Lower Casamance to the Senegalese capital[111]. As Foucher (2002) and Lambert (1999) have shown, one of the most significant factors in the social transformation of the Lower Casamance in the 20th century was migration, despite the fact that the region remains commonly perceived in Senegal as rural, backwards and unchanging. There were, however, important variations amongst villages when it came to migration strategies. Doing research in Thionck Essyl in 1978, Alice Hamer (1981, cited in Foucher 2002) found that 15% of the population were engaged in seasonal migration and that 18% were permanent migrants, with almost a half of these settled in Dakar. She also found that most migrant women who held a waged job worked as house employees (84%), and that 73% of these had no formal education. In terms of the history of folkloric performance in Dakar, this is consistent with reports from several informants that the first generation of female performers worked as house employees during the day and came to the rehearsals in the evening.

Bakalama performed in Dakar, in the Casamance and later toured abroad, as far as Japan. Most of the life of the group, however, was in Dakar[112]. At the time, all the profits went to the Thionck Essyl village association in Dakar[113]. Very little was redistributed to the performers, and "professionalization" was not an issue. In the early 1990s, a generational conflict ended up in a dramatic change of power within the group. By then the children of the *Bakalama* foun-

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[111] Foucher's excellent work on the origins of Casamançais nationalism includes detailed macro- and micro-statistics on migration from the Lower Casamance to Dakar. From 134 in 1936, the number of migrants from the Lower Casamance (seasonal migration excluded) grew exponentially to 10,350 in 1961, paving the way for the mass migration that was to follow. By 1992, the number of "permanent emigrants" (people "whose region of birth is different from [their] current region of residence") to Dakar from the Lower Casamance's most populated area, the region of Ziguinchor, had reached 52,866 according to official statistics (Foucher 2002: 39-46).

[112] This is in contrast with the National Ballet *La Linguère*, which is on tour every year for several months at a time.

[113] With 8,000 inhabitants Thionck Essyl is now a small town, but according to the official categorization of the territory it remains a "rural" settlement.

ders had become adults, and some of them resented this complete dedication to the interests of a village they did not feel as attached to as their parents did. When they took over, the group retained its association with Thionck Essyl but evolved towards a more commercial organization. A new manager was brought in who had gone to school with one of the musicians. Conveniently, he was a Tukulor and was not, therefore, subjected to the authority of the village elders. Profits were gradually redirected towards the performers, and as if to mark the change spatially, the company moved from a wrestling arena in Fass to the state-owned *Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor* (CCBS), about a mile away. Several other dance and theatre troupes rehearse at the CCBS on a regular basis, which is therefore an ebullient performing *milieu.* Another, more gradual transformation was the transformation of the *Bakalama* into a dance troupe (a "ballet"), the place of dance and music in the performances gradually taking over from theatre. This made sense as the group increasingly targeted national and international audiences beyond the communities of Jola migrants.

Although the company remains known as an expert in Jola dances, a few years ago a *sabar* programme was introduced to accommodate the Wolofized audiences in Dakar and elsewhere in Senegal. One of the musicians, a Tukulor who joined the company in 1999, said he was the one who had encouraged *Bakalama* to enrich its repertoire with the *sabar* style, arguing that "nowadays you must be able to play whatever people want". Indeed when the company was invited to perform at a festival in Libya in 2001, it was as a representative of Senegal as a whole. The leaders felt therefore that they would be in a better position to gain contracts with a more diversified repertoire. This proved to be true when the group was selected to perform at the opening ceremony of the *Sommet de la Francophonie,* in Beyrouth, in October 2002. Unfortunately, cultural politics came in the way and at the last moment, the media-friendly *Pirates de Dieupeul* went off instead. Rumour in the dance world had it that this was due to the Ministry of Culture's wish to represent Senegal as a "modern", forward-looking nation; in other words, *Bakalama* had become too "traditional" for this particular political context. Many were openly scandalized that *Bakalama* had been by-passed by a group that was popular with the Dakarois youth, but which some described as "the guys who imitate whatever is fashionable on TV and make quick money with it." Many dance people saw the incident as added evidence that artists in Senegal remained all too dependent on the arbitrary mood changes of the political elite. Less openly, people wondered whether this was yet another sign that Casamançais culture remained marginalized despite governmental claims of the opposite.

From *Bakalama*'s point of view, the change of focus towards larger audiences has not completely displaced the concern with maintaining a sense of local identity among migrants and their descendants. Most of the performers still identify with the Lower Casamance. They go back to their region of origin at least once a year to spend time with relatives, and several men in the group have undergone the Jola male initiation ritual, the *bukut*. When the *Kaay Fecc* association held a "traditional dance" workshop at the CCBS in October 2002, one of the three dances in the intensive four-week programme was the Jola *kambacce*. The *kambacce* is performed by people of both sexes to mark the end of the *bukut*. The dance training was followed by sessions in Wolof, during which thirty dancers from all parts of Senegal were taught about the "traditions" associated with the dances. For the *kambacce*, two of *Bakalama*'s drummers gave their account of the different stages of the *bukut* process, except for what took place in the three-week retreat in the "sacred grove". This must remain a secret, and all the Jola present had stories to tell about how people (including nosy foreigners) died after sneaking into the grove. The drummers circulated photos of themselves wearing the distinctive dress of the initiates, and the coordinator of the "tradition" course printed handouts of their accounts. The dancers sat respectfully on the floor with their handouts and pens, in what felt much like a classroom situation.

Bakalama has often performed in Thionck Essyl and in the regional capital of the Casamance, Ziguinchor. I have met Casamance migrants in Dakar and in the UK who had performed in local troupes, and who obviously regarded *Bakalama* as a model of success. In Dakar for example, I met a security guard in a bank, who turned out to be a former stilt performer in a rural troupe of the Lower Casamance[114]. After a few years in the troupe, he had moved to Dakar where he had lived off small jobs before being recruited into a security company. "Every evening we gathered to dance", he said, "and we invented new steps, all the time. Always new steps, and we had fun, even though we didn't have much money like *Bakalama*."

Bakalama occasionally performs in other parts of Senegal. In June 2003, the group went to Joal, some 150 km south of Dakar in the Sereer country, to perform for a local association. But travel is restrained by members' occupations elsewhere; given the difficulty of making a

[114] By contrast with other parts of Senegal, the Casamance also features rural folkloric troupes, partly fostered by the development of tourism in the region from the mid-1970s onwards. For a description of the involvement of some of these troupes in local festivals, see the excellent article by Peter Mark (1994).

living of performing, several members of the troupe have other income-generating activities. Some perform with another troupe at the same time, not only for the money but also to get some training in other dance styles, and thereby increase their chances of a successful – i.e. international – career. Combining company work with other jobs is easiest for the drummers, some of whom play during *tours* and family ceremonies, or teach foreign students. Individual drumming lessons to *tubaab* students in Dakar can be paid up to 5,000 FCFA per hour, which is more than what people may earn for a full performance. One of the female dancers, a Jola, occasionally teaches the *sabar* style to *tubaab* students. For this the rates vary between 8,000 and 12,000 FCFA per hour, to be shared between the dancer and the 3-4 *sabar* drummers. Although this is a highly irregular activity, she still considers herself better off than her fellow group members who work as house employees during the day. The manager, who is married to one of the dancers, works until 3 pm every day at a post office. He dreams of a career in the performing world but is not yet able to make a living of it. He started as the manager of smaller music groups in the early 1990s, and still manages an all-girl rap group. He is also involved with the organization of the *Kaay Fecc* festival, which he discreetly hopes will give *Bakalama*, his wife and himself opportunities to perform and teach abroad.

In fact, plans to travel to Europe or elsewhere in the wealthy part of the world have been encouraged by the experience of former group members. In the past few years, four of the group's male performers have left Senegal after marrying foreign women to whom they had been teaching drumming and dancing. They have maintained a connection with their fellow performers in Dakar, and when I went to watch rehearsals at the CCBS in January 2004, two of them were home for Tabaski[115]. They were reviving old choreographies and bringing new ideas from their travels. One of them had been a dance leader in the group, and he had glided back into his former role. He was also wearing one of the troupe's fashionable costumes, a loose green/yellow/red tunika – the colours of the Senegalese flag – with matching trousers. It seemed obvious that the returnees were enjoying the special status attached to those who have "made it" abroad.

The transformation of *Bakalama*, from an informal performance group embodying a local identity to a national, outward-looking artistic organization, is exemplary but not unique. *Forêt Sacrée* is another group based at the CCBS; it is more eclectic but the repertoire reflects a

[115] Tabaski is the name given the Muslim Eid ul Adha in Francophone West Africa.

distinct association with the Mandinka styles the group's founder was trained in. The *Makou Group* of Pikine is a dance and theatre troupe whose objective is to allow the children of migrants from the Casamance "to keep in touch with their traditions", in the words of the leader. But he also explained that he had to mix movements from traditional dances with urban popular music in order to make them more appealing to the youths. He added that some of them had never been to the Casamance, and that he felt therefore obliged to introduce elements they could recognize from their daily life. While there are also numerous examples of similar groups of Sereer speakers from the Siin Saalum, such as *Kolam Sereer* or the *Ballets Africains de Sangomar*, it is significant that there are fewer performing groups who identify themselves with the Wolof majority. Many folkloric troupes in Dakar, it seems, have come to embody the complex blend of interests in non-Wolof communities, between the desire to preserve their cultural distinctiveness and the need to earn a living.

The ordinary days of a folkloric troupe in Dakar

A majority of the group's performers live in Fass and in the nearby Médina. In folkloric troupes in Dakar, there is often a tendency for people to live in the same areas, even when the rehearsal space is far from the place of residence. This is not surprising given that most groups are initiated by people who have grown up in the same neighbourhood, and sometimes – but not always – identify themselves with the same place of origin. Even when troupes expand and become more diversified later on, a degree of attachment to a particular neighbourhood often remains.

From Fass, *Bakalama* members walk the mile or so to the rehearsals at the CCBS, men and women often separately. Those who live in other neighbourhoods walk some of the way and catch a *car rapide* along one of the main avenues of the city. For 50 FCFA (5p) per ride, the *cars rapides*, old mini-buses imported and modified in the mechanical workshops of Colobane, have been the most popular means of transportation in Dakar since 1947. Colourfully decorated with religious inscriptions[116], these yellow-and-blue metallic shacks on wheels spit their

[116] *Car rapides* in Dakar are owned by Muslim Clerics (mostly Mourides), hence the religious references. The interior is decorated with photos of known *marabouts*; these form part of an extensive religious iconography that is believed to bring *baraka*. Inside *car rapides* and taxis, photos of other personalities are sometimes believed to have the same effect, for example the players of the Senegalese football team.

grey fumes and stop with a jerk when the *apprenti*, standing on the step outside the back door, knocks on the roof with a coin. Dance people sometimes own scooters but few can afford a car, and therefore as most ordinary Dakarois, they spend a considerable amount of time walking, waiting and bumping along in a *car rapide*.

Bakalama's rehearsals take place at least three times per week at the CCBS, and begin when everybody is ready; they usually last for two or three hours, any time between 5 and 9 pm. On arrival people mingle with performers from other troupes, technicians and "animateurs culturels" across the run-down sections of the spacious building. As the sound of drumming fills the space, people rehearse, watch other groups, discuss ideas for joint projects, pray, eat, exchange gossips about fellow performers and fall in love. Senegalese politics are discussed profusely. Whereas some express nostalgia about the "golden days" of the Senghor regime, others lash out at their corrupt politicians. People constantly wonder why the performing arts are only given scraps of money, when the government multiplies speeches about "culture" as the most promising tool for development. Many dance people feel that *they* are the "culture", and yet no one seems to bother about supporting them. The bitterness that is expressed towards the political elite is not unique to the artistic community. In 2002-03 at least, many Senegalese were no longer hiding their disappointment after President Abdoulaye Wade's new regime, which had enjoyed so much popular support following the 2000 elections, had failed to deliver "change"[117]. The state-owned CCBS however, offers fairly good conditions compared with what most dance groups in Dakar have access to. Were it not for the hard floors – damaging to the dancers' already strained bodies – and the sickening smell that emanates from the toilets, the CCBS would almost be pleasant.

Among the troupes that have established a base there, *Bakalama* has a reputation for being one of the more democratic. This is an image the group cultivates, perhaps in part because Jola society is widely perceived as more egalitarian than its Senegalese counterparts north of the Gambia. At least once a week, chairs are set up in a circle in the sandy area surrounding the building, and the evening begins with a group meeting in Wolof. New projects are discussed and individual or collective problems brought forward. I did not attend any of these very private meetings, but I occasionally overheard comments and gossip afterwards. These

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[117] "Change" (*sopi*) was the name chosen by Abdoulaye Wade's PDS (*Parti Démocratique Sénégalais*) to symbolize the political coalition that was challenging the dominance of the PS (*Parti Socialiste*).

meetings seemed to act as an important counterpoint to people's individual ambitions. The latter were more readily observable because people threw them at me all the time, hoping that I would help them find work in the UK. One of the dancers, for example, told me that she was hoping to travel to Europe to teach Senegalese dances to children, but not with the company. It would be easier to find work as an individual, she argued. Another introduced me on several occasions as his personal apprentice, which I was not. He was thereby justifying my presence and raising his own status in people's eyes – through the prestige that comes with having a foreign student – while indirectly suggesting to me that he was hoping to get something out of this association.

But the group meetings also fostered a sense of community which helped maintain people's loyalty to the troupe. Much in the same way as women and their *tours*, it is not only the love of dance and the hope of social mobility that people seek by staying with the same dance troupe for years, even when cash levels hit rock bottom. It is also the sense of safety and community provided by the group. The element of local identification, as with the Lower Casamance in *Bakalama*'s case, appears as a strengthening factor, rather than as an end in itself. This may explain why local identification, which is more appropriate than "ethnicity" here because the group is not restricted to the Jola, is rarely mentioned in *Bakalama*'s everyday life. People could make a point to speak Jola, but they speak Wolof instead, partly to avoid discriminating the non-Jola members and partly because many children of Jola migrants were born in Dakar, and are therefore more fluent in Wolof than in Jola. As I am writing about a named group there are limits in terms of the personal stories I am able to reveal, but a few examples will serve to illustrate the "community" aspect.

One of the performers had been suffering from a chronic disease for several years. His fellow group members were very concerned about this, and it was from them that I learned about his affliction. They occasionally gave him money to buy medicines, and although the Casamance was not his region of origin, they eventually put him in touch with a traditional practitioner there. He was sent off to spend a couple of months "cleansing" himself in a forest retreat. I saw him when he returned to Dakar, and although he was not cured, he seemed happier, and seemed to have regained some energy to fight the disease. Another case I was told about was even more serious, but also more shrouded in secrecy. A young apprentice in the company, recently arrived from the Casamance, had fallen off a two-storey window. He survived and was hospitalized in a coma when I heard about the event. Although this had not

happened while he was working with the troupe, everyone felt involved. There were rumours that this was not an accident. Company members were concerned that whoever had intended to kill him might come to the hospital to finish him off, and they took turns to visit him at the hospital. But some were even more worried about the imminent arrival of the boy's elder brothers from the Casamance. There was fear, as often when someone is harmed in mysterious circumstances, that traditional divination would be practised and that someone would be accused, perhaps even within the group. In this case the whole group was deeply involved, but this was not always possible. When one of the female dancers got married for example, her initial happiness was somewhat diminished when her family-in-law began placing restrictions to her coming and going, and demanded that she stopped dancing. In that case there was nothing *Bakalama* could do to help her. After all, marriage had been her choice, and although she had not quite anticipated such restraint, antagonizing a family-in-law would have been beyond the boundaries of acceptable involvement in people's private affairs. Apart from the professional business at hand, these were the kind of issues that were discussed during group meetings.

As in all troupes, the atmosphere during the rehearsals varied from fairly relaxed to extremely tense, depending on people's mood, the state of interpersonal relations in the group and the quality of the work achieved on a given day. Folkloric troupes usually have a fairly monolithic creation process, with most of the choreographic input coming from one or two people. They may be called "choreographer" or "ballet master". Even when performers contributed with their ideas, this is rarely acknowledged. Helena Wulff (1998) has made the same remark about the transnational world of classical ballet, which indicates that this may be a feature common to the performing arts everywhere. Men and women usually perform different dances, even when they appear in the same sequence; therefore for practical reasons, they work in separate groups during rehearsals, until each group's performance is "tidy" enough to be put together. Whereas some groups have a female leader for the women and a male leader for the men, others have a single male leader for everybody, with an experienced dancer then acting as an "assistant". But none of the folkloric troupes I have encountered was explicitly led by a woman, and even in cases where an experienced female performer was leading the women, she still appeared to be under the authority of the male leader. The few groups with a female leader were more involved with the "contemporary" style. One woman dancer told

me that this was a problem because female Senegalese performers lacked "models" to encourage them to come forward and set up their own group.

The gender differentiation is even reflected in the "informal" dress code that has become a visible marker of the *Dakarois* folkloric dance scene, cutting across the centre/periphery boundaries[118] I have hinted at. Whereas the dress code is free for men, women dancers are expected to wear a tight-fitting top, leggings and a *beeco*. None of the informants I have asked knew the origin of this habit of wearing a piece of clothing that is used as underwear in everyday life. During the "traditional dance" *Kaay Fecc* workshop for young dancers I attended in October 2002, a few young women had turned up wearing sports trousers or simple leggings. One of the organizers asked us to "make an effort" for the next day, and wear a *pagne* or a *petit pagne*. He added that we needed to "show some respect to traditions".

Occasionally, rehearsals at the CCBS end up in a *sabar*-like party: people stand in a semi-circle or in two lines with the drummers at one end, and take turns to improvise short sequences. People perform *sabar* dances or anything they are good at and enjoy, with a great deal of improvisation and acrobatic tricks. These are the moments when the place is at its most lively: between 8 and 9 pm, when bodies are exhausted and it is time to give free rein to individual creativity, cheer one's friends, enjoy being together as a "family". Exactly as the end of a *sabar* party, people's energy in the dancing comes to a climax, and all of a sudden everything goes quiet. The drummers pack up their instruments, shoulders slump down, feet are once again being dragged, everyday clothes are put back on. A bit more chatting, a tiny gossip perhaps, and people walk out into the night in small groups. Some will have to sit in a *car rapide* for another hour, others will walk. A few are left behind to catch up on the last prayer of the day[119].

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[118] I have purposefully avoided placing too much emphasis on the centre/periphery distinction, because the boundaries are both recent and fairly fluid: rather than fitting neatly with the socio-economic geography of the city, "centres" emerge informally from places with enough performing activity to attract people from other places and generate a *milieu*. Places like the CCBS and other "cultural centres" have a special status because they are state-owned, but "centres" also emerge in privately owned music studios, local "sports and culture" associations, schools and NGO-funded associations. The populous suburban town of Pikine, for example, is quickly becoming a "centre" of popular culture.

[119] The five prayers of the day are commonly designated by their Wolof names: *Fajar*, *Sibar*, *Takusaan*, *Timis* and *Géwé*.

I will now turn to what *Bakalama* does on stage with a key piece in the company's repertoire, *Kañaalen*. I suggest that the kind of performance people engage in has a significant impact on their lives, particularly on the performers' construction of their own "culture" and on their status in the wider society.







Fig 5.1: Fig 5.1: *Bakalama* performing a "free animation" at the *Maison de la Culture Douta Seck*, Dakar, April 2003





Fig 5.2: The *Kaay Fecc* "traditional dance" workshop held at the *Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor*, Dakar, October 2002





Fig 5.3: Improvisation during a break at the *Kaay Fecc* workshop, Dakar, October 2002

Folklore on stage: an "imagined tradition"?

Kañaalen has been on the company's repertoire for a couple of years at least. Apart from rehearsals and shorter presentations of sequences from the piece, I watched a full performance of *Kañaalen* at the MCDS in Médina, during the *Kaay Fecc* festival in June 2003. The full piece is almost 45 minutes long.

Kañaalen

In Jola society, *kañaalen* is a sorority of women who have undergone a long ritual process after failing to become pregnant, undergoing several abortions or losing several young children. The decision to send a woman off to become an *añaalena* (the name given to women while they undergo the process) is taken by the village priestess who is an expert in collective protective rituals, the *ati eluñey* (Fassin 1987). In the Casamance, the ritual usually lasts three to five years. It involves a ceremony in the forest, close to the village of adoption in which the woman will be secluded throughout her ordeal. All women in her village of origin, who are at a procreative age, participate in the ceremony. Among other things, the *añaalena* will have to crouch on the ground and eat a meal without using her hands. She is accompanied by her baby if she has one. Following this, she will live with a family in her new village, where having to undergo daily humiliations by other women is part of the cleansing process. The *añaalena* will also have to dress like a fool[120] and perform acts of buffoonery that would be deemed highly inappropriate if performed by other women (Fassin 1987, Mark 1994). During weddings and name-giving ceremonies in particular, the *añaalena* are mocked copiously, but as Fassin (1987) has suggested, people must not forget that this is ultimately a ritual, and therefore the mockery must comply with certain rules. After resuming a normal life in her husband's village, a woman who has undergone the *kañaalen* will always be expected to act as a buffoon during public ceremonies, and sessions to maintain the efficacy of the protection will be required after each birth. The very existence of the *kañaalen* also betrays ideas on the body and fertility, common to many societies of the region, according to which the health of a lineage is directly related to women's physical and moral purity. Similar rituals exist in other communities of the Casamance, for example among the Manjaks. The social significance of

[120] According to Fassin (1987), in the past the *añaalena* wore a simple short skirt, but nowadays they cover their bodies for fear of appearing indecent.

this female ritual is confirmed by the fact that *kañaalen* associations have been formed in Dakar and other cities where Jola communities have settled, albeit with simplified versions of the ritual (Fassin 1987).

Bakalama's piece is inspired by the *kañaalen* sororities. It features a succession of tableaux with dancers of both sexes performing separate choreographies and a lead singer/dancer who plays the role of the *añaalena*. Dancers alternate on stage while the drummers remain throughout. After an opening with rhythms from the Casamance played on Jola drums, the piece begins with an ensemble dance by the men. They dance and sing in Jola with artefacts simulating agricultural tools. There is an obvious concern with realism, as the dance suggests the movements of wet rice cultivation, a long-standing practice in the Lower Casamance. The costume is a sleeveless, half-length tunika maintained on the sides with straps, and worn with loose trousers. Although inspired by "traditional" dress, it is a creation by a designer whose atelier is in the old Médina neighbourhood, in Dakar. It is made of cotton cloth featuring "village life" motives. The dancers move and sing in almost perfect unison. At the end of the sequence, women's voices raise from the back of the stage. The men stop moving, look at each other in surprise and run away from the women, who are now making their entrance. They wear half-length shiny, batik-printed *boubous* and matching *pagnes* in various colours. As they enter the stage, they sing and step in rhythm, carrying raffia baskets on the head. The baskets are filled with rice plants, and the singing is reminiscent of lively chatting. The women lower the baskets to the ground and start simulating the gestures involved in re-planting rice. They keep stepping in rhythm all along, bodies bent deeply over the ground, singing in high-pitched voices.

The next scene introduces the main characters, a young man and a young woman who fall in love with each other. Their wedding stretches over a succession of tableaux in which details of Senegambian weddings are brought to the stage. One of the women following the bride carries the suitcase she must bring with her when she enters her husband's home[121]. The bride, Akietou, comes surrounded by her kinswomen, her head completely covered by a richly embroidered cloth. But her happiness does not last: in the following tableaux, she is rejected by

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[121] This is not specific to the Jola. The "suitcase" is a common feature in many Senegambian weddings. It is reported in the literature (e.g. Diop 1985) and I have observed it at weddings in Dakar involving migrants from various parts of the region.

her husband when she fails to become pregnant. She is scorned by everyone in the village, and once alone on stage she begs God – in French – to let her carry a child:

> "Je suis fatiguée de marcher. Je suis fatiguée de me soumettre aux critiques des autres. Ô mon Dieu, faites que j'aie un enfant. Faites que je devienne comme les autres femmes. Je ne puis continuer de vivre ainsi. Ma co-épouse a toutes les faveurs de notre mari, qui ne deigne même pas me prêter son attention. Je suis triste et abandonnée. [Song in Jola] Qu'ai-je donc fait pour mériter ce châtiment ? Bannie des femmes, méprisée des hommes, Akietou ne sait plus où aller. J'ai fait le tour du village. Les sorciers, les marabouts, les sages, tous ont reçu ma visite. [...] Les enfants fuient sur mon passage ; les mères se méfient de moi et me maudissent. [...] Dès l'aube, furtivement je regagne ma chambre de peur d'éveiller ma co-épouse et sa marmaille. [...]" (Extracts from Akietou's monologue in *Kañaalen* by *Bakalama*, Dakar, 5th June 2003)

We understand from Akietou's monologue that her co-wife has children. The village women are seen gossiping and harassing the husband about why his wife has not yet become pregnant. Two women are seen courting him ostensibly, kneeling at his side and complimenting him on his well-built body. Akietou goes on to visit *kañaalen* priestesses in the forest, and submits herself to lengthy rituals involving much dancing and singing. The whole atmosphere is very joyful. At long last she is cleansed, and the piece ends up with the whole village marvelling at the sight of her newborn baby.

Continuity and change in Kañaalen *on stage*

At first glance, *Kañaalen* seems to give a faithful representation of life in the Casamance. If we take a closer look at the different elements composing the piece, however, the picture that emerges is more complex. It is not that the life depicted in *Kañaalen* does not exist, but as is often the case with folkloric performance, whole dimensions of social life are being obliterated. Whether in Senegal, Guinea, Mexico or Russia, one of the common features in much folkloric performance around the world is that it presents a consciously biased, yet authoritative version of "local culture" and "local traditions". Recent incorporations into local culture, on the other hand, may be portrayed as "traditional" as long as they serve the politics of ethnicity or nationalism that gave rise to the genre in the first place.

In this case, there is plenty of evidence that festive and ritual life in the rural Casamance has undergone rapid change during the 20th century. By the 1950s for example, the region had already been exposed to ballroom dancing and French music. Foucher (2002) described the former as one of the cultural practices through which the *évolués* were able to demonstrate their success in the 1950s and 1960s:

> "Ballroom-dancing was the other activity which saw a particularly rapid development in rural Lower Casamance. In all villages, the youth would provide for a cemented floor and a record-player with the latest songs. Ballroom-dancing had the educated young men in suits meet with the young maids in European dresses, demonstrating their new urbanity in a way quite different from traditional dances, which set genders apart." (Foucher 2002: 112)

This is not to say that rituals such as the *kañaalen* have come to involve exogenous music, but the village scenes are depicted as if life in rural Casamance had remained timeless and bounded, and the intrusion of "imported" music into social life shows that this is far from being the case. Doing fieldwork in the early 1970s, Irvine and Sapir (1976) suggested that changes in the musical styles of the Kujamaat Jola reflected the process of individualization taking place in the local society.

Costumes are also revealing of the kind of images the piece is trying to evoke. In *Kañaalen*, they are *designed* to give the piece a traditional feel. But "tradition" is not always what we expect it to be. Although still widely used today, the *ndokets* – long loose robes festooned with lace and with short, wide sleeves – worn by some of the women in the village scenes were invented in the late 18th century. They were inspired by the European dresses worn by the *Signares*, the creole women who carried out the slave trade. In the ritual scenes in the forest, men and women dance in matching red-and-blue costumes. The women wear short, tight-fitting tops, long necklaces crisscrossing their chest, and knee-length wrap-around skirts. One of the drummers and two or three women are blowing whistles, much in the manner of what is seen at official ceremonies throughout West Africa. The men's costumes are an intriguing mix of elements, and bear a striking resemblance with military uniforms: loose red-and-blue trousers (with a small raffia skirt on top for some), epaulettes and high red, fringed hats. Inspi-

ration may have been found in the uniforms of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*[122] or the *gardes de cercle.* These elements may have a Casamançais flavour, yet they are probably not as "old" as is usually imagined when the performance is presented as "traditional". On the other hand, the costumes reinforce the self-perception of the Jola[123] as a warrior society. According to historian Ousseynou Faye, this perception can be traced back to the transatlantic slave trade, when the Mandinka violently forced the Jola to retreat in the wet-rice areas. In the post-colonial period, careers in the military and in the police became favoured vehicles of social mobility among the Jola youth[124].

In *Kañaalen*, the calabash Akietou carries with her in the forest is faithful to the decorated calabash emblematic of the *añaalena* during the years of the ritual, and even later during family ceremonies. At a Casamançais wedding I attended in Dakar for example, the groom's sister, a woman in her mid-forties, spent the afternoon dancing with the invited folkloric troupe, wearing a camisole which differed from her usual style, and carrying the beaded calabash indicating that she was a former *añaalena.* Later in the afternoon, she and her older sister were driven to a beauty salon to have a thick layer of make-up applied. She changed into an expensive *grand boubou*, and her behaviour was transformed to the degree that she seemed to be a different person. She had gracefully performed her role as a buffoon, albeit with the decency and moderation expected from middle class women in Dakar, and in the evening she resumed her role as the groom's sister.

The dances in *Kañaalen* are in many ways faithful to the region they represent. In some scenes, women use small wooden sticks as a percussion instrument, clapping them against each other with and *contra* the beat. People associate these sticks with life-cycle events in the Casamance, and indeed I have seen them be used during familiy ceremonies organized by Casamançais migrants in Dakar. Much of the style of dancing is also recognizable as characteristic of the Casamance area: both legs alternate in powerful stepping into the ground, feet flat, while the knees are bent and the body is leaning forwards at a 45 degree-angle. The arms are

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[122] The *tirailleurs sénégalais*, or "Senegalese riflemen", were in fact recruited all over French West Africa, sometimes by force, to serve in the French army in World War I and II.

[123] The reification of Jola identity is in itself a fairly recent phenomenon, which has increased with mass migration to the Senegalese cities. The origins of Jola- and Casamançais "nationalism", both in terms of time and in terms of causes, remains a subject of debate among scholars of the region.

[124] Ousseynou Faye, personal communication, Dakar, January 2004. On the military and the police, see Foucher (2002).

held away from the body, and occasionally the hands are used to lift the clothes slightly, but by contrast with some *sabar* dances, the arms are never higher than the shoulders. The energy emanating from this movement style is different from the *sabar*, more controlled in the upper body, and more grounded into the earth. Similar forms of performance were reported by traveller Richard Jobson, writing in 1620-1621 about the region of the Gambia River. Given the inevitably "unfinished" character of dance described in writing, it is difficult to establish how close the current dances are to what he experienced almost four centuries ago, but the text hints at similarities. Jobson's account is cited in Thompson (1974: 32):

> "The most desirous of the dancing are the women, who dance without men, and but one alone, with crooked knees and bended bodies they foot it nimbly, while the standers-by seem to grace the dance, by clapping their hands together after the manner of keeping time." (Jobson 1904: 136)

But *Kañaalen* does not only feature dances from the Casamance; dances from the whole region are represented, and particularly from the Mandinka area, which includes parts of the Casamance, the Gambia, Guinea and Mali. I also recognized steps usually attributed to the Sereer, but this may not be surprising as people often stress the similarities between Sereer and Jola dances. Beyond the joking relationship connecting the Jola with the Sereer and the Tukulor, this might be evidence of the historical fluidity in the region's ethnic composition.

Furthermore, *Kañaalen* features movements and steps that have emerged with the development of West African folklore as a genre. That new steps are created is a natural occurrence when dances are taken away from their social context and brought to the stage. Even when the movements are similar to those encountered in Jola ceremonies for example, a new entity is being created when professional dancers break the circle to stand in a line facing the audience; when they leap higher into the air to create a more striking effect on stage, or because they have an athletic body that allows them to move in new ways. The dances are also transformed when the sequences are shortened to avoid boring the audience (during life-cycle events, people perform the same movements for hours at a time) or because time-slots on stage are limited. New instruments may be introduced because the musicians recruited know how to use them, or "transition steps" created to allow the dancers to move about the stage according to a designed pattern. New steps also emerge as a form of "acting" of specific mo-

ments in social life. In the first tableaux of *Kañaalen* for example, men and women are seen "dancing" the gestures of rice cultivation. In real life there was singing when collective work had to be done (performing the movements in rhythm helped people mobilize the strength needed), but neither the Jola nor their neighbours danced while working in the rice fields.

What comes across in this account is that folkloric performance has developed as a nationalistic/regionalist genre that selectively emphasizes elements from local culture and obliterates others. It is not a frozen genre, but neither is it a transposition of social life on stage. Which elements are chosen depends on how well they fit into the kind of representations dance people and their patrons wish to promote. In the next section therefore, I move further beyond the *Kañaalen* case and expand on Senegalese folkloric dances as "imagined tradition".



Fig. 5.4 A Casamançais wedding in Dakar, January 2004. A folkloric troupe has been invited to perform. In the middle of the top photograph, a former añaalena can be seen with her beaded calabash.

Folkloric dances as "imagined tradition"

Senegalese choreographers and dance managers often claim that they have a mission to "educate" the local audiences. In their view, performance – i.e. dance, theatre, music or a combination of these elements – must not only entertain, but also comment on society so as to generate reflection and action. But by contrast with the "contemporary" style that will be introduced in the next chapter, folkloric performance provides an idealized view of a society in which conflicts, hierarchies and exclusion do not exist.

Bakalama is an independent troupe, but it was created in the middle of Senghor's nationalist presidency. Despite the generation shift in the company's leadership in the early 1990s, the group's creations are influenced by the aesthetics of state-sponsored performance in the 1960s and 1970s. This is due in part to the circulation of performers between the National Ballet and other Dakarois troupes since the 1960s. Rituals are always portrayed as very joyful affairs, and the pain in the *añaalena*'s experience, for example, is hidden from view. The civil war in the Casamance is likewise silenced and yet, it has had a profound impact on rituals in the region. Older informants have thus told me that some ceremonies that were earlier performed in the "sacred grove" no longer exist because land mines have made the forest too dangerous. It is likely that the important rituals have been re-created in a different form, as the *kañaalen* in Dakar. Fassin (1987) reported that in Pikine, some Jola women used the rubbish ground behind the railway, in *Guinaw Rail*, as a sacred site. But rituals inevitably change form when transferred to a new place. In the case of the *kañaalen* for example, the extreme simplification Fassin observed in Dakar was problematic, because people started questioning the efficacy of the new forms. No such developments are ever represented in folkloric performance.

On the other hand, some themes are recurrent because they fit with the national or regional identity people try to promote, both in the Senegalese context and abroad. A favoured theme in the case of Casamançais identity is that of initiation. In other groups, weddings, agricultural work, harvest feasts, Senegalese wrestling (*làmb* or *mbapat*) and magic practices are favoured themes. Of course one could argue that these are all important moments in social life. But the "traditional society" that is displayed on stage is an *imagined* time and place in which rural life revolves around agriculture or fishing, where people sing and dance merrily even during hard work, and where peace prevails. The male Jola initiation ritual, the *bukut*, is always portrayed as a benign event, without any trace of the hardship and physical violence that

informants report in covert terms. Moreover, despite common claims that those who fail to submit themselves to the *bukut* will meet an early death, not every Jola who lives away from the Casamance is initiated. The case of one of my informants illustrates this point. He is in his mid-forties and the leader of a Casamançais troupe in a suburb of Dakar. The objective of the group, he told me, is to allow them to preserve some knowledge of their Casamançais culture. As most troupes of this kind, *bukut* dances figured in its repertoire, and it was with great pride that he told me about the initiation. He emphasized that the *bukut* was such a powerful cement of the Jola community that people felt compelled to come all the way from Dakar or from Europe when time came for them to be initiated. This echoes De Jong's (2002) article, in which he analyzes the decision of politician Robert Sagna, former Minister of Agriculture, to undergo the *bukut* at the age of fifty-five. De Jong suggests that the *bukut* has become such a strong marker of Jola identity that Sagna had to become initiated in order to gain status as an adult man in the community. This also echoes Thomas' (1965) seminal work, in which he reports that if a male member of the community attempts to escape initiation, he may be punished by death. In Jola villages the *bukut* has a cycle of 20-25 years, and for the ritual to be carried out, resources gathered by the community for years are mobilized. My informant himself had been initiated in his father's village. Much to my surprise however, later in the conversation he confessed that he would not allow his sons to be initiated. "You know", he said, "I am a good Muslim, and as good Muslims we should not be doing these things any more". He also added that many other fathers in Dakar's Jola community held the same view, and that the *bukut* was therefore bound to disappear. This is not the view held by a number of Casamance scholars (e.g. Foucher 2002: 77), yet the discrepancy between his idealized description of the *bukut*, which he even brings to the stage, and his personal beliefs was revealing. Discrepancies are also evident in the religious domain. On stage the *bukut* is invariably portrayed as a "traditional" affair, untainted by the presence of Islam or Christianity. But in fact, in the 1960s Thomas (1965) already observed the presence of Muslim clerics as an integrated part of the *bukut* in the village of Niomoun. The following extract is taken from his account of the third day of the festivities:

> "Around 4.30 pm, the Muslims – many animists participate as well – proceed to the kola nut ceremony [...]. Suddenly, there is complete silence. The *elders* sit on the *kahen* and the crowd gathers in concentric circles around them. The patriarch holds a kola nut in his hands

> and attracts the favours of heaven upon the boys. He mumbles in Jola: 'May *Ata-Emit* give us *kasumay* (peace)!' Then all the Muslims pray, palms raised towards the sky, as the *marabout* whispers a verse from the Koran. [...] Again they all sit in the Muslim way for a second collective prayer. Once this is over, the group disperses, and the dancing and singing resumes with even more enthusiasm." (Thomas 1965: 105, translation from French my own)

Gender relations are another important domain in which performance is often more conservative than the reality it is supposed to represent. Men and women are usually portrayed as supplementing each other without major conflicts of power. In staged polygamous marriages the danger of evil practices is never far of course, but somehow it seems to add a touch of magic rather than destroy the fundamentally positive view emanating from these performances. It is also significant that the slave trade and colonialism are seldom hinted at, as if to reconstruct a vision of Africa before the Europeans came.

The processes by which narratives, rituals, steps, rhythms and other elements of social life become reworked into a new entity in folklore, an entity which in turn becomes canonized as "tradition", are complex, and there is insufficient historical data to reconstruct them satisfactorily. But the stories that circulate in the professional world around a particular set of movements and rhythms, the *Wolosodon*, are instructive in this respect. I saw the *Wolosodon* being performed in a variety of contexts, including in a teaching situation at the National School of Arts. An experienced choreographer assured me that everyone knew the ancient history of this Malian dance. According to him, Askiya Muhammad, ruler of the Songhay empire who seized power in Timbuktu in 1493 – my informant did not know the date; he placed the event "200 years ago" – undertook the pilgrimage to Mecca. Upon return, my informant explained, he declared that the Qur'an disapproved of slavery, and freed all the slaves in his empire. To celebrate their newly gained freedom, they created the *Wolosodon*. But there is no historical evidence that the Askiya freed the slaves; on the contrary, some versions of oral tradition report that he sent the Meccans thirty virgin slaves upon return, and that these "fell in with some *jinn*" along the way (Fisher 1996: 246). Diouf (2001: 47) also mentions that the Askiya used a great number of slaves as a labour force in his fields. Moreover, as he was the son of a Muslim Cleric and a practising Muslim (Kaba 1984), it is unlikely that he would not have known the recommendations of the Qur'an about slavery until he went to Mecca. Yet the *Wolosodon* is widely known in West African performing circles, and is even taught in

drumming classes in Europe. I was also told that the *Wolosodon* had been staged in a folkloric piece on the freeing of slaves in Dakar in the 1960s. Whether or not it is accurate, the *Wolosodon* story fits well within the 1960s-1970s mission of Senegalese folkloric performance: to recreate regional histories people would be proud of, and which would simultaneously act as ambassadors of Senegambian cultures. The choice of the Askiya Muhammad may not be a coincidence here. After all, his rule marked the height of the Songhay Empire, and inspired later rulers of the Western Sudan as a symbol of political and economic power combined with Muslim orthodoxy.

The political dimension of folkloric performance as "imagined tradition" should not obscure the fact that it helps maintaining an idea of "home" for many urban migrants and their children. It is obvious, from watching the enthusiasm of the local audiences and the way they occasionally join in, that people feel an emotional attachment to these dances. It is as if "the village" were there "in absentia". This is mostly true of good performance of course. But what is revealing here is that in Dakar, people of any part of the region may enjoy watching and performing dances associated with another ethnicity than their own. In a sense, it is as if the region's ethnic fluidity was embodied in performance, in spite of official – and colonial - discourses of neatly bounded local cultures.

In a different way, the traditionalism displayed in Senegambian folkloric performance made sense in the post-independence period, when the political and intellectual elite were keen to reconstruct the region's "stolen history", and when the performing arts received the explicit mission to help construct national or regional consciousness. But this has been a double-edged sword, because the genre has also become the victim of its own romaticization of social life. The enthusiasm mentioned above is not sufficient for people to make a living of it. As Cohen (1993) has shown in his fascinating work on the Notting Hill Carnival, cultural performance is always political, but it works best when enough ambiguity is maintained not to fall into political propaganda. Senegalese folkloric performance may not have succeeded in maintaining the necessary ambiguity, and the balance between the political and the cultural. But the question we need to ask, at this point, is what kind of impact the development of the folkloric genre has had on the status of the performers.

The transition from politics to livelihoods

The problem with art that is overtly tied to a political agenda, is that it is in constant danger of being thrown into crisis in the course of regime changes. In Senegal between the 1960s and 1980s, folkloric dances were too tied to the politics of nationalism not to suffer from the withdrawal of state patronage, from the early 1980s onwards. This was most obvious with the National Ballet[125] and a few other dance or theatre troupes that were directly sponsored by the state. But even the troupes that promoted a particular ethnicity, such as *Bakalama*, were riding on the back of the state-sponsored genre. Paradoxically, it was only after the state withdrew its support that the status of the performers begun to change.

The emergence of new patrons, such as luxury hotels, big businesses and local festivals funded by international donors, brought a new aura of prestige to the profession. So did the mass migration of performers from the mid-1980s onward, as opportunities to migrate or at least to travel on a regular basis became valued in their own right. Apart from the obvious potential to earn cash, travelling became even more a symbol of success than it had been in the past. This came across very well in a comment from a performer whose company had been invited to participate in a three-day festival in Sweden. The troupe declined the offer because the festival could not afford to pay for the travel expenses, and my informant tried to console himself: "What's the point of going for three days? If people see me here this week and they see me here again next week, they won't believe that I've been travelling... So what's the point?" The prestige of travelling is also obvious in people's pride in showing photographs of themselves in transit situations: at the airport, dressed smartly and carrying a suitcase, in the plane, or standing next to a travelling football team. When visiting people at home, it is indeed common practice that an album of photographs lands on your knees as soon as you have settled in a chair. As I will now discuss, it is in the back-and-forth movement between Senegal and the global North and in trading "tradition" as a commodity that many performers hope to find the key to social mobility.

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[125] One of the two troupes constituting the National Ballet was laid off in the 1980s. It was re-formed as an independent troupe under the name *Sinoméew*, now based at the CCBS.

The scramble for cash

It is notoriously difficult to gather data on people's income in societies where the so-called "informal economy" dominates[126]. But the data I have been able to gather from folkloric performers suggests that whereas a few are able to make a decent living from their trade, most are left to struggle to get by. They have other activities on the side or depend on their families or partners for support. The latter solution is problematic for men in particular, because young men who do not earn a living of their own are often despised at home. When the family is already opposed to the choice of a performing career, relatives do not miss an opportunity to point out that "dancing does not feed the belly". For the few who are successful on the other hand, respect from the community usually follows.

As performers often lament, neither local audiences nor patrons have felt that folkloric performance deserved a high remuneration. Given the resources people are able to mobilize for other purposes, poverty does not sufficiently account for this; the reason, rather, must be sought in the status of the performer in Senegambian societies (see chapter I). As a consequence, even such troupes as *Bakalama*, earnings are highly irregular. People do not usually get paid for rehearsals, even though in the best cases a contribution to transportation expenses is granted. This is because most troupes do not have any income when they do not perform. I have encountered only one group that was able to pay its performers on a regular basis, but the funds came from the dance school the leader was running and from her personal savings. Apart from the choreographer, every group member earned no more than 44,000 FCFA per month. For this, people travelled from remote suburbs – this can take up to a couple of hours each way – to come and rehearse for several hours, five or six days of the week. The leader had managed to sustain this arrangement for two years, but she told me that she would not be able to continue doing so unless she found contracts for the group to perform abroad. Her group was once invited to perform at a festival in Italy, but the tour was cancelled at the last minute because the performers were refused a visa. Yet these were considered to be good conditions in a profession in which people never know what the next month will have in store. Several performers supported a whole family with their monthly allowance, and for this

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[126] In many ways the distinction between "formal" and "informal" economy is, of course, artificial. The reason why the informal economy is so dominant is because the formal sector has failed to include large parts of the population. Moreover, the elites involved in both sectors often overlap.

reason, the families strongly encouraged them to continue. Whereas all the musicians in the group were from Griot families, this was the case of no more than half of the dancers.

One of the most best folkloric troupes in Dakar performs for a minimum of 200,000 FCFA per evening, to which transportation expenses must be added. Unsurprisingly, therefore, most of its opportunities are either abroad, with luxury hotels in Senegal or with well-funded local festivals such as *Kaay Fecc*. In 2003, *Kaay Fecc* was able to give each troupe a *cachet* of 250, 300 or 500,000 FCFA depending on the "degree of professionalization". This kind of amount must be considered as the upper end of the local scale, and therefore few groups are able to obtain more than one or two contracts of this kind per year, if any. Once the cash has been redistributed to twenty or more performers and to the young "apprentices", there may be little left for each individual to take home. Moreover, although everyone officially gets paid the same, in practice internal hierarchies generate significant differences. Rank within a given group is usually – but not always – linked to experience, age, gender[127], and to the inividual's artistic role. An experienced lead drummer, for example, is in a better position to negotiate than his fellow musicians because he cannot be replaced easily, and because his wider networks in the artistic community can benefit the group.

At the other end of the scale, folkloric troupes who perform during large family ceremonies and political rallies often consist of semi-professionals with a less rigorous training, at least where the dancing is concerned. Excellent musicians can be encountered in any performing context. These groups can be paid as little as 20-30,000 FCFA per performance, to be shared between ten to twenty individuals. On the other hand they have more opportunities to perform, particularly if they have built up a reputation of excellence in their linguistic or spatial community. The middle-scale could be defined as the large number of folkloric troupes who perform in hotels, schools or for local associations. A lead drummer in one of these troupes, who also plays for a "contemporary" company, said he usually earned 7-8,000 FCFA per show, but that most of his fellow group members only earned 3,000 FCFA, even when they perform in five-star hotels. His drumming lessons to foreign students gave in 5,000 FCFA per hour, and he usually had one or two students at a time for a couple of hours per week. Yet the combination of these three activities did not allow him to live like a king. He lived in a

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[127] My distinct feeling was that women performers were generally paid less than their male counterparts, but it was very difficult to get evidence of this. Women are often reluctant to discuss their earnings.

small room on the first floor of an unfinished house – or rather a building site – in one of the *quartiers*. The room was furnished with just a foam mattress, a chair and a small table, an open shelf, a nylon curtain and a radio-cassette player. There was no electricity, yet my informant did not complain because he was independent, and the Mouride cleric who owned the house allowed him to live there for free.

It is hardly surprising then, that the objective of many performers, men in particular, is to have regular opportunities to dance or play abroad; for some, a few performances in Europe or North America generate an income equivalent to a whole year of hard work at home. One common trajectory, therefore, is to begin as an apprentice in a neighbourhood troupe – e.g. *Jant bi*, the *Ballets et Rythmes* or the *Diamants Noirs* in Pikine, *Kibaro Baleya* in Dalifort, the *Farafina Guy Gui Ballet* in HLM, the G.I.E. (*Groupement d'Intérêt Economique*) *Goorgoorlou* in Yëmbël – and then move on to a larger folkloric troupe, such as the National Ballet *La Linguère*, *Bakalama*, *Sinoméew*, *Forêt Sacrée* or the *Ballet Mansour Guèye*, with a good record in touring abroad. One *Griot* and lead drummer with one of these troupes asks for a fee of 300,000 FCFA per show when on tour abroad, but does not always obtain satisfaction. Having been on a tour a few weeks before his wife gave birth to their fifth child[128], he spent most of his earnings on the lavish name-giving ceremony she had always dreamt of. Some months earlier, he had been able to use his modest savings to set up a dance troupe in his *quartier*, with youths recruited from both *géér* and *ñeeño* families. Although the troupe had not yet been paid to perform, he was keeping unemployed youths occupied, teaching them useful performing skills. They had hopes of a better future, and although he was a Griot, he enjoyed considerable status in his *quartier*. Other informants who were active in developing popular arts in their neighbourhood talked about him as a "cultural actor", a "group leader" or a "musician", rather than as a Griot. An experienced dancer in another big troupe said he had received 200,000 FCFA for two performances in a luxury hotel in the Caribbean. But he also had to contribute 50,000 FCFA to the group's savings, which were spent on costumes and redistributing smaller amounts (15-30,000 FCFA in this case) to performers and "apprentices" who had not been selected to travel. "We do this so that people keep the motivation, so that they do not become discouraged", he assured me, "and also because we are all a family".

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[128] Sadly, given the high incidence of infant mortality and the fact that deceased children are no longer mentioned, it is almost impossible to know how many children a woman has born in her fertile life. Therefore the number of children mentioned throughout this thesis corresponds to those who have survived.

In both cases the men involved were highly skilled and experienced, not only as performers but also as negotiators. Unfortunately, in many other cases the promise of financial salvation from touring is deceptive. This is because young performers, particularly women, are not always in an advantageous bargaining position. Many of them are illiterate and have only the leaders' or the tour organizers' word for how much the group is paid to perform. More often than not, they are not given any information, particularly in bigger groups. As an added disadvantage, women performers are expected to comply with the authority of the male leaders. This is especially true if the women are young, which most female dancers are. Others are blinded by a lump cash sum thrown at them upon return. A sum that looks significant by local standards may not bear any relation to the number of shows people have performed in. The folkloric world is therefore ripe with rumours of exploitation by troupe leaders, tour organizers – some of whom are former performers established abroad – and foreign hosts. One dancer recalled his time with a folkloric troupe more than ten years earlier, in which the leader – and lead drummer – had married a Swiss woman and therefore found an ideal way to share his time between Senegal and Switzerland. Occasionally, he brought his troupe to Europe to perform. My informant confessed that he had been bitter when he repeatedly failed to be selected for the trips. "He [the leader] only took the young ones with him so that he could exploit them", he said. Likewise, other informants expressed their sense of exploitation in no uncertain terms:

> "You go to Europe for two or three months, you dance almost every day and then come back with 100,000 or may be 200,000 [FCFA]. It seems like a lot of money, but when you start thinking about it, it's not much for all this work. Most of the time you don't even know where the money goes." (A male dancer in his late twenties)

They sometimes add that by the time they have bought the gifts their relatives expect them to bring back, there may be very little cash for them to save. Of course these stories partly reflect the internal politics of the dance troupes; despite people's claims that they are like a "family", internal hierarchies are felt very strongly, and people do not like being by-passed. Perhaps the "family" metaphor is quite appropriate here, because family hierarchies, too, are often experienced as an enormous burden. But beyond this, there is a genuine feeling of powerlessness on the part of many performers. This is one of the reasons why an increasing number of them are

attracted to the "contemporary" style, with which they hope to retain more control over their own labour. I will come back to this point in the next chapter. Given these obstacles, people may chose to pursue individual strategies for which they use whatever skills and networks available to them. The most popular activities include trading drums – which I do not describe here due to lack of space – and constructing Senegambian "tradition" as a commodity.

The commoditization of tradition

Remodelling narratives about tradition (*cosaan*) and trading them as a commodity is by no means unique to Senegambia. But at the internal level, the existence of a Griot culture with elaborate forms of story-telling has worked as a facilitating factor. In addition, the nationalist period's emphasis on re-creating regional history on stage has facilitated the objectification of tradition. At the external level, a renewed interest in African forms of performance, in the wake of the World Music phenomenon from the mid-1980s onwards, has also made people aware that their "culture" could be valued beyond the borders of the region.

As could be expected, there is a degree of irony in the way people construct their version of "traditional Africa". There is almost a business-like sense that there is nothing wrong in giving people what they are prepared to pay for. This is often combined with a resentment of Africa's exploitation by the rest of the world, and therefore a sense that Africans should in turn be able to exploit "the only valuable thing" they have left: their "culture", in people's own words. I was often told that the *tubaab* had gained wealth but had lost their soul in the process. Europeans, it is therefore assumed, look towards Africa in their search of spirituality. "Traditional" dance and music are seen to be part of the quest. One informant told me about the dance and drumming workshops he organized for high school pupils from France. Aside from his work with a troupe, the workshops were his personal business. "If they only want the dance classes I ask for 30,000 FCFA per hour [for the whole group]", he said. "If they want the little stories as well [performing traditions], I ask for the double".

During my first months in Dakar, people had often suggested that I speak to Ndèye Khady Niang[129], Senegal's most famous dancer ever, a former member of the National Ballet and dancer with Youssou Ndour. Ndèye Khady is probably in her early fifties, and still dances oc-

[129] This is her real name.

casionally; I watched her perform some of the *sabar* steps she invented in a variety show on the national TV. She was known throughout Senegal for her creativity and her talent as a dancer, as well as for her extravagant life. As it turned out, a friend of mine knew a relative of hers, and after a couple of phone calls she agreed to see me. She had made it clear that she expected to be paid, and therefore I did not raise my expectations of the meeting. My friend tried to reassure me by pointing out that Ndèye Khady was a Griotte, and that women like her had a right to expect cash for their services. When the three of us arrived at her house at 10.30 am however, she had already left. Someone from the household let us in, and we decided to wait in her spacious *salon*. The place had all the attributes of the middle class urban house: uncomfortable but expensive-looking armchairs and a sofa, all covered in flowered synthetic velvet, a low glass table, shelves with glass-covered showcases filled with trinkets, and plastic flowers. A heavy scent of *curaay* was floating in the air, and my friend remarked that the place smelled like the house of a *diriyanké*, a wealthy courtesan. Married women often have a couple of photographs of themselves exhibited in their home, wearing their best attire and heavily made-up. But Ndèye Khady had gone over the top: the walls were filled with framed photographs of her, either alone, with friends or with well-known artists and politicians. Given her former reputation as a supporter of the PS along with Youssou Ndour, it was even puzzling to see a centrally placed photograph of her with President Abdoulaye Wade. The only photograph on which she appeared modest and without a thick layer of make-up, was a large portrait of her as a young girl, surrounded by both her parents. As in the house of every self-professed good Muslim in Dakar, a glass-framed photograph of the Kasbah in Mecca was also displayed prominently. Undoubtedly, Ndèye Khady's *salon* was her own "show room". Having waited for an hour, we decided to track her down at her family house in a different neighbourhood. There we received a warm welcome from the family. Two older aunts seemed happy to see Ndèye Khady's male relative, and they teased him about when he was going to get married and to whom. Looking over to me, one of them laughed and said that if he wanted to marry a *tubaab*, he could choose someone with my skin colour, but then no lighter. They offered us soft drinks. The door to the street was permanently open, and our chat was occasionally interrupted by a neighbour's greeting or a street peddler selling anything from vegetables and *bisaab*[130] to kitchen utensils and teddy bears. When the dancer

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[130] *Bisaab* is a bright red refreshing drink made from boiling the flowers of the *hibiscus sabdariffa*, to which water,

finally turned up, she made a flamboyant entrance and pretended to have just returned from the presidential palace. We started negotiating the price of the interview, and while she insisted that she did not "sell her art" because this was "a gift from God", she was fairly greedy. She argued that the kind of information I was looking for was priceless and that having worked with American and Dutch scholars in the past, she knew the value of knowledge.

As I proceeded to interview her in a mix of French and Wolof, she consistently refused to talk about her career. She told me bluntly that her life was "already in all the books", and that she knew best what kind of information I needed for my degree. She tried to impress us by talking about the numerous official distinctions she had received, how she had been invited to teach at Maurice Béjart's school in Switzerland, and how she had appeared in the best music videos in Senegal. Obviously, she did not mention that she had spent a couple of years in prison for involvement in fraudulent visa trade. She did, however, enumerate the various *sabar* rhythms, and made a half-hearted attempt to describe the "traditional" costumes, even though I had not asked her to do so. The climax in the interview came when I asked her to tell me about the social context of a dance that had been one of her favourites. "You could do that for an official visit, so you'd call in the TV, go to the airport and everything", she said quickly. I thought she might have misunderstood my question and repeated it differently, but she clearly became irritated. Waving the hand dismissively, she indicated that she did not like my question. She replied that in the past this dance was performed during weddings, name-giving ceremonies and other festivities, and hastened to change the topic. After half an hour she said that the time was up and demanded to be paid. This was the first and last time I paid for an interview. She also suggested that I come back to watch music videos with her, but I did not return to see her. It is quite possible that she was offended by my style of interviewing; after all I had challenged her when she had pretended to know better than I did what I ought to ask about. But it is more likely that her offended airs were part of the game she wished to play with a foreigner like me. It is also possible that there were elements in the relationship with her relative that I was unaware of. But in the light of how little most performers know about the histories of the regional dances, it is more likely that she did not know the answer to my question, or that the dance she described as "traditional" was fairly recent.

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sugar and sometimes artificial flavourings are added. It is cheap and very popular as a drink and as medicine.

Leymarie (1999) had already reported that one of the modern specialisations of the Wolof Griots was to work with foreign researchers. Once in Dakar it did not take long to come across this phenomenon. I met Souleymane, a story-teller and "expert in tradition". He told me that he could not share all his knowledge with me at once, implying that I had to deserve his trust in the first place. As I came to know him better, he shared some of his stories with me, but consistently found roundabout ways of escaping the question of his sources. He said his knowledge was derived from his upbringing in a rural area and from years of personal interaction with elders. Yet I came to the conclusion that his stories, however well-informed, were constructed from a mix of oral tradition, story-telling and written literature. The latter included Marcel Griaule's work on the Dogon and Cheikh Anta Diop's contested theories on the origins of the West African people. Souleymane's self-conscious construction of tradition gave him a certain status – albeit contested at times – in the performing world. He often participated in TV- or radio programmes on Senegambian traditions, and worked with foreign researchers as a matter of routine. But he also confessed that he had felt exploited by foreign scholars, and that he had therefore taken to the practice of asking hourly payment for sharing his knowledge. As he watched me wonder how to react to the subtle hint, he hastily added that my case was different because he understood that my project was also an "existential quest".

Souleymane belonged to a category of people who made a genuine effort to build up a repertoire of stories about performing traditions and make it available to the Senegalese dance world. He often told young dancers that they ought to know the history of what they were doing because they needed to have "real values" to offer to the outside world; for him, traditional knowledge and morality were connected, but this should not prevent people from using their knowledge to advance their careers. At the other end of the spectrum were also a cohort of performers, successful or failed, who simply gravitated around foreigners in the hope of selling their services. Their strategies occasionally worked with dance- and music tourists easily blinded by the sheer excitement of meeting an "authentic" West African Griot. One of them was Ousmane, in his mid-twenties and from a family of practising Griots. When we met, he offered to tell me "everything" about Wolof traditional ceremonies, and naturally suggested that I give him some kind of compensation. He had just been "working" with two French students for a week, mainly introducing them to some of his friends, and he was hoping to repeat the success with me. He became quite confused when I told him that I was more inter-

ested in his own background. In fact, Ousmane was not a practising Griot, and although he had previously worked as a drummer with a folkloric troupe, he was no longer performing. He was trained as a welder and enjoyed his profession, but at the moment, he explained, he was out of work. His brother – or cousin – was a musician who lived in Paris, and he had encouraged him to learn how to play the *sabar*. Hoping that this might give him opportunities to follow in his brother's steps, Ousmane had been a drumming apprentice for a couple of years, but eventually found that he had no great talent. He was now trying to recruit drummers for his brother's "club" in Paris, and was hoping to leave himself. He showed me a list of the musicians already selected, which included the usual mix of professionals and "migration candidates".

When I asked Ousmane how he had acquired his knowledge, he told me that his grandfather was a Griot well versed into oral history and genealogies. Ousmane had never been interested in these stories until he realized that he could turn them into cash. With much catching up to do, he had taped his grandfather's stories and listened to them again and again, trying to extract their deeper meaning. He obviously had little confidence about his knowledge, but had nothing to loose in trying to turn it into a commodity. When I told him I was interested in attending family celebrations, he immediately offered to sell me video tapes of "authentic" ceremonies of Griot families, "because we *géwël*, we do it the real traditional way", he said. When I declined, he pulled out another set of services: he was prepared to introduce me to "famous Senegalese dancers" – young people who performed in *mbalax* music videos – and negotiate on my behalf for dance lessons. When I met him again a few weeks later, he had been luckier with a young American woman who was following him around. Less than a year later, he had become an assistant manager in a newly formed dance troupe, and was still waiting for his visa for France.

A profession replaces a "caste"?

The perception that the performing world has become attractive as a vehicle of social mobility should be seen in a context of economic stagnation. The waged economy is no longer able to create jobs, and in cities like Dakar, where only 10% of the employment is within the "formal sector" (Chidzero 1996, quoted in Rabine 2002), people have lost much faith in the benefits of lengthy schooling. When university-educated youths remained unemployed for years while

some performers have the opportunity to travel and come home with significant amounts of cash, people obviously start questioning the hierarchies they grew up with. As a result, an increasing number of high-status Senegalese venture into an activity they would have regarded as degrading until recently.

I once asked an experienced informant in the Dakarois dance scene, a Griot himself, to estimate the proportion of Griots in dance troupes[131]. His guess was that 90% of drummers were Griots, but that the proportion was lower for the dancers, probably around 70%. My own observations have led me to conclude that the proportion of *ñeeño* in general is probably closer to 50% for the dancers, and 70% or more for the musicians. Since they represent no more than 20% of the population (Diop 1981, Tamari 1997), they are obviously overrepresented in the performing world, but this is far from being the complete dominance that people usually expect. This is confirmed by the numerous cases I have encountered, in which the initial resistance of a family towards the person's career choice was eventually softened, if not completely vanquished.

Among them was a Tukulor in his mid-thirties, from a *tooroɔe* (Cleric) background who trained as an actor and a dancer. When I asked him what his family thought of his choice, he replied that his parents were open-minded people who had always supported him. What the rest of the family thought, he neither knew nor cared much, because he had very little contact with them. By a strange coincidence, someone I knew met one of his relatives in a different context. The relative had a different perspective. As *tooroɔe*, she and her side of the family disapproved of my informant's choice. This even appeared to be the main reason why she had little to do with him. Whatever the real reasons for these tensions were, the woman's use of the "status" argument – which is also strongly connected to Islam in the *tooroɔe* case – was revealing. But this did not seem to be a problem in his mostly Tukulor neighbourhood. By now he was not only a dancer in a respected company, but also the leader of a smaller group in his *quartier*. The fact that he taught some youths and provided them with an occupation seemed to make his choice acceptable to the community. His troupe rehearsed seasonally in the sandy courtyard of the local school under the keen eyes of children, elders, and women attending *cours d'alphabétisation* in the nearby classrooms. People did not always understand what he was trying to do, but they approved of it nevertheless.

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[131] Managers, technicians and costumes designers are not included here.

Another informant, a drummer with a folkloric troupe, also belonged to a high-status Tukulor family. His father had therefore been against his career choice from the outset. "You will not bring the *sabar* [drums] inside the house of a Bâ as long as I live!" he had ordered his son. But my informant had a passion for music, and he continued drumming, because he "couldn't help it". After a few years of practice with Griot friends away from his father's surveillance, he was recruited into his current dance troupe and began making a living of drumming. He was also asked to play for *sabars*, tours or other festive events at least once a week. The sudden flow of cash prompted his father to change his mind, as my informant proudly commented:

> "When my father saw me come home with 50,000 [FCFA] sometimes, he asked: 'How did you earn this?' I said it was the drumming. In the beginning he didn't believe me, but after a while he told me to go out and drum some more [laughing]."

When I visited him at home, a wide range of drums were displayed in his room, where his musician friends regularly met to chat, listen to music, repair the drums and drink *attaya*, Senegalese mint tea. His family had come to terms with his drumming, but they hoped that he would eventually turn to a more respectable trade.

By contrast, a woman friend of mine, in her early thirties, had not been able to pursue her passion in the same way. She had been partly raised in a rural area of central Senegal, and partly in Dakar. She had always loved dancing, but her family had discouraged her from becoming a dancer, telling her that this was not appropriate for a *géér*. Her schoolteacher had reinforced the stigma: upon learning that she had taken part in a *sabar* one day, he had bullied her in class, accusing her of having "danced so well that everybody [was] still talking about it". He ordered her to forget about dancing and concentrate on school, which she did. She confessed that if she had been a teenager now that the profession had become more respectable, she would have chosen otherwise.

What would appear more surprising, at first glance, is that some *ñeeño* families have also been reluctant to let their children embrace a performing career. Cornelia Panzacchi (1994) had already remarked on this. In some cases, this is due to the desire to remove all visible traces of *ñeeño* status. For others however, the "modern" profession is radically different from the traditional trade described in chapter I: they see it as fostering a decadent morality and en-

couraging young people to drink alcohol (*sàngara*), take cannabis (*yamba*) and be promiscuous. A lead drummer and Griot I knew, in his early forties, had been working with dance troupes since his teens. His oldest child, a 15-year old girl, was always noticed as a good dancer during *sabars* and family ceremonies, and she admitted that she wished to become a professional dancer. But her father would not let her practice. She said he wanted her to get an education, and rehearsing three or four times per week would jeopardize her schooling. When I asked her father about it – without mentioning my conversation with his daughter – he replied that because she was a gifted dancer, he did not want her to be exposed to public envy too early. "You have to watch out for tongues, you know. Not all of them are good", he explained. On the other hand if she waited for a couple of years, she would be better protected against people's envy. In a different conversation however, he and two fellow musicians had suggested that the performing world favoured sexual promiscuity. They both agreed that they would not want to be married to a dancer, for fear that her presence would interfere with their flirting with other women. In the end the different versions of the girl and her father did not exclude each other, but they pointed towards issues having little to do with "caste".

Married women and the stage

Although many families have changed their attitude towards performing, there is often a sense of tolerance rather than acceptance. Some simply turn a blind eye as long as the performer shares his or her earnings with the household. Others make it clear that they will only accept such "deviation" for a limited period of time, but in most cases there is a mix of both attitudes. In the most extreme situations, older relatives exercise pressure to make the individual abandon the trade, for example by withdrawing financial support or arranging a marriage. This is particularly effective to stop women from dancing, as few husbands will accept to have their wife performing in front of other men. Accordingly, many married women feel ashamed (*ruus*) to dance in public. Similar observations have been made in other Muslim societies, for example with female performers in Egypt (Van Nieuwkerk 1995). This notion of shame may therefore be linked to the long-standing presence of Islam in the region, but it does not preclude others factors. I will not dwell further into notions of honour and shame however, as this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Women who marry by mutual consent may also find themselves obliged to abandon their career, and this occasionally causes tension between them and their husband or family-in-law, as in the *Bakalama* case. But some also leave the trade of their own free will, either because they do not wish to engage in conflict over the issue, or because they are quite relieved to quit a profession which is competitive, requires hard work and is difficult to combine with family life. Moreover, the professionalization process at work puts many women at a disadvantage because of the gender imbalance in formal education[132]. As their career develops, those who are illiterate feel increasingly vulnerable. They see their fellow male performers negotiate for themselves, and realize how dependent they are on male managers to negotiate their engagements, particularly for festivals and tours abroad. They are neither able to read nor to evaluate their contracts without assistence. In other words, the sense of exploitation I described earlier is magnified in the case of women performers, and this causes some of them to leave the trade altogether. In such cases, marriage may provide a convenient escape. Thus one of my informants, a forty-year old male performer who had recently married a dancer in her early twenties, told me that she thought about giving up dancing. She was illiterate, did not speak French and as a result, she had lost confidence in her future as a dancer. She often felt inferior in front of educated dancers, and was discouraged by the fact that she had to rely on her husband for everything, from talking to the leader of the group to reading her contracts. She had also discovered that one of the most lucrative opportunities, teaching dance to *tubaab*, was out of her reach. She had taught a couple of lessons but people became impatient because she could not explain what she wanted; although dance is a bodily activity, Europeans regard verbal communication as essential in a teaching situation. In this case, it was the husband who did not approve of his wife's plan to stop dancing. He thought she was a gifted dancer, and he was keen to continue working with her.

Concluding remarks

In his work on the Notting Hill Carnival, Abner Cohen (1993) made comparisons with carnivals in the Caribbean and with West African forms of social criticism through poetry. This led him to remark that the British-born Carnival was "not a return to the past or the simple con-

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[132] According to UN data, in 2000 only 28% of Senegalese women over 15 years were literate, vs. 47% of men.

tinuity of traditional forms but a manipulation of these forms to deal with the present" (ibid.: 105). The same could be said about Senegalese folkloric performance. As I hope to have shown in this chapter, folkloric performance in urban Senegal is very much a manipulation of traditional forms. Such manipulation is inevitable when social forms are brought to the stage, whether for entertainment or for cultural expression. But in Senegal from the independence to the early 1980s, folkloric performance also served the politics of ethnicity and nation-building. In fact, urban folkloric troupes seemed to embody two seemingly contradictory projects: the "Wolofization" of national identity on one hand, and a glorification of the nation's diversity on the other hand. This may appear less as a contradiction, however, if we agree that nationalistic movements tend to construct their identities by mapping their cultural practices against those of groups they share similarities with (e.g. Mark 1994, Harrison 2003). In the Senegalese case, we could thus say that the state needed the existence of troupes representing "minority" cultures, such as *Bakalama*, to make the all-encompassing nature of such institutions as the National Ballet more powerful. From the point of view of the "minority" groups, the state-controlled genre was useful because it fostered the development of an artistic milieu they also benefited from. Ultimately, what is significant is that performers and choreographers have appropriated the folkloric genre and transformed it for different purposes than to support the post-independence nationalistic ideology. One aspect of this transformation was the development of folkloric performance as a cornerstone in the formation of regional or ethnic identities, particularly in the Jola case. It is certainly not a coincidence that some of the most active troupes represent the Casamance, a region of Senegal where people have elaborate ideas about their own cultural distinctiveness. In recent decades Pulaar communities have also developed a strong sense of their own identity, but there language and music are promoted as idioms of cultural expression, rather than dance. The more ancient Islamization of Pulaar-speaking communities may provide elements of explanation for this difference, as does people's attempt to promote the transnational rather than the local dimension of Pulaar ethnicity[133]. In the 1970s and 1980s, a number of village associations of Jola migrants in Dakar cre-

[133] Festivals celebrating Pulaar (Fulani in Anglophone West Africa) culture have flourished in Senegal, Mali and Niger. By contrast with the dances of the Jola, the emphasis is usually on verbal forms (poetry, storytelling, song) and visual arts (e.g. Le Soleil 05.09.2001). Whereas they are explicit about the pastoral life this "culture" stems from, it is significant that these festivals are usually held in major cities, and not in villages as is the case with cultural festivals in the Casamance.

ated folkloric troupes which came to represent and promote Jola culture throughout Senegal. This affected local practices in the Casamance, as the troupes performed in local festivals there. With folkloric performance and with increasing migration out of the region from the 1960s onwards, selected rituals and other cultural forms became transformed and valued in a much more self-conscious way than they would have been otherwise.

Social mobility for the individual performers is the other crucial aspect of the transformation of the folkloric genre. The competition between local and national identity has not completely disappeared with the drying up of state patronage of the arts in the 1980s, but individual ambitions have come to the fore. If folkloric troupes are still regarded abroad as "cultural ambassadors" of local or national culture, at home people are increasingly pursuing individual strategies to further their careers. They are not always as planned and coherent as the word "strategy" may imply, but they are always diverse and creative. People may, for example, join several dance troupes simultaneously in order to increase their chances to travel, redistribute some income into their local community, set up new groups to exploit short-term opportunities, trade drums, organize workshops for "dance and music tourists", possibly marry one of them, or turn "tradition" into a commodity. Opportunities to meet foreigners and to establish networks abroad have played an important role in raising the status of performers, as people around them realized that they had more "contact zones" (Clifford 1997) with *tubaabs* than most ordinary Senegalese. There is often a conscious element of deceptiveness in the transactions people engage with in these "contact zones", but many performers find some satisfaction in holding knowledge, skills and objects (drums, clothing accessories, "traditional" artefacts) *tubaabs* are prepared to pay for. It is as if the situation of colonial exploitation was reversed, albeit momentarily.

It is also important to recognize that the world that is represented on stage is connected to social reality in complex ways, apart from the life of performers "back-stage". As I have discussed in the theoretical chapter, theatrical performance provides a different vision of reality, which can be used by the audience as a "mirror" of its own reality. By representing Senegambian "traditions" as more ossified and conservative than they really are, folkloric performance may therefore have contributed, perhaps inadvertently, to maintaining a vision of society in which elders still have undisputed authority over the young, and men over women. This is also a vision of society in which dance always verges on the inappropriate, the marginal and the sexually scandalous. Given the moral ambiguities of women's dancing I have described in

chapter IV, one may even ask whether folkloric performance has contributed to making women's dances seem "inappropriate". There is not enough evidence at this point to answer this question, but meanwhile it is obvious that there is a constant interplay between theatrical performance and social practices.

If the impact of social practices on theatrical performance is obvious, the reverse is seldom documented in the literature. Yet in Senegal, the interplay works both ways. There are many opportunities for ordinary Dakarois to watch these performances, either on TV (as a background in some music videos, as *Bakalama* did), in connection with weddings, local dance- and music festivals or during formal events organized by local sports- and culture associations, health centres, schools, political parties and state institutions. In other words, far from being restricted to entertaining tourists, the genre also inspires city-dwellers in their own festive events. I have attended several *sabars* in which professional dancers had joined in, and their presence had an obvious effect on the participants, either by inspiring them to dance even better, or by making them withdraw to the fringes of the circle. What is more, the interplay extends to the rural areas as there is a constant back-and-forth movement between "the city" and "the village". People from *Bakalama* thus told me about their emotion when *añaalena* spontaneously joined in *Kañaalen* when they performed the piece in the Casamance.

But for many performers, the problem of their socio-economic status remains largely unsolved. Throughout the 1980s, those who could, left Senegal and settled in Europe, North America, Australia and Japan. In the 1990s however, this became increasingly difficult, for three main reasons. Firstly, it became more difficult to obtain a visa to enter the host countries, many of whom had sharpened their immigration policies. Obtaining a visa is now a greater challenge than obtaining an invitation to perform. Embassies are rumoured to hold "black lists" of troupes suspected to serve as a cover for migration. Secondly, people are aware that the competition in Europe and North America has become fiercer, precisely because hundreds of West African performers have already established their own performing circuits. These include lucrative "African dance" courses and "summer schools". And thirdly, we could say in crude business terms that during the 1990s the global market for "traditional" African performance became saturated. Audiences in Europe and North America are less impressed than they were in the past by performances they now regard as a bit "dusty". These are some of the reasons why young artists increasingly turn towards different forms of performance, particularly the so-called "contemporary" genre discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter VI:
A "pendulum swing": between local life and the global world of performing arts

Vignette

Dakar, January 2004. In one of Dakar's "centres culturels", a "dance and theatre" workshop is taking place. Coming from the bright sunshine outside and entering the dark room where some twenty dancers are gathered feels like walking into a cave. I know most of these dancers, and my familiar face blends in with the walls. They are working hard but there is tension in the air; nothing like the joyful atmosphere I had experienced during a "traditional dance" workshop a year and a half earlier. The participants, however, are here of their own free will. Most of them are folkloric dancers, and some are also involved in "contemporary dance". With such workshops as this one, they hope to increase their chances of an international career by diversifying their skills. They are also paid a small fee to participate, which is undoubtedly an incentive.

The workshop is led by a theatre expert and a dancer/choreographer everyone is familiar with. Yet things do not go smoothly. The dancer has asked the participants to improvise individually, working with changes in movement style and energy. They must try to access different feelings within themselves and express them in movement. Whereas some get the idea immediately and start moving on their own, looking concentrated and withdrawn inwards, others are reluctant to engage in the exercise. They start moving a bit in the style they are used to. The leader shouts encouragement or corrections. He moves very close to them, pushing them to expand the scope of their movements. After a while a few dancers, the women in particular, end up with the sour faces of people who are not happy to have their bodies – quite literally – pushed around like this. To mark their dissatisfaction, they say nothing but turn their back to the leader and walk ever so slowly back to the corner from where they will have to start again. All the resistance is in the silence, the sudden sloppiness of the movement,

the way they avoid his eyes even when he is looking straight into theirs. Working with new movement styles is a difficult process, especially when you feel that it is being imposed on you. With some people it comes with time, and much hard work. But here there is also the added problem of male and female bodies having to work together in ways people are not used to. The language is also problematic; the workshop is held in French, and some of the participants would feel more comfortable with Wolof.

During the second part, the dancers are asked to divide themselves in four or five groups and create a short choreography on the theme of "initiation". They are told to think about initiation in a very broad sense, and to create their own "ritual". Each group will work on its own, and later be asked to explain the ideas that have led to their short performance. Unsurprisingly, in each group a male dancer is chosen to speak up; the women remain withdrawn behind their wall of silence. One of them even lies down on the floor when it is her group's turn to perform; she refuses to dance, and it takes much persuasion from the workshop leader to get her to stand up. She may be tired, but it is obvious that she is also frustrated with the process. It is only when the workshop finishes that the dancers seem to return to their usual selves. Later, some of the girls tell me that they do not understand why they have to create everything, why the leader "has not given [them] any steps".

Introduction

In the previous chapter I suggested that the emergence of a new category of performers had been accompanied by expectations of social mobility that the folkloric genre has only partially fulfilled. In later years, an influential minority of artists have experimented with new genres of choreographic performance they felt would be more appropriate to comment on modern urban life. Simultaneously, audiences, festival organizers and artistic promoters in the wider world increasingly expected African performers to demonstrate creativity beyond the now well-known folkloric genre. There is hope, somehow, that African creativity will help refresh a global "contemporary dance" which some perceive as having run out of steam. This is the context in which the creative, individualized performance forms called "contemporary African dance" have emerged. Through their frequent travels back and forth, African performers settled in Europe and North America have encouraged these experiments.

Global performing circuits and the local dance communities, however, have had different agendas. Certainly, dance people have felt the need to express their individual creativity in new ways. But another aspect, which is central to this thesis, is that they have come to regard the "contemporary" genre as an opportunity to achieve the upwards mobility the folkloric genre had only partially delivered. While people attempt to professionalize the trade further in order to engage with audiences and performing arts brokers (*programmateurs*) outside Senegal, back home they hope to be evaluated as "artists", and no longer as *Griots*. The creative practices termed "contemporary dance" seem particularly appropriate for this purpose. Indeed, in people's view they remain linked to the short-lived but prestigious *Mudra Afrique* project (see chapter II). These practices also allow performers to promote themselves as individuals to a higher degree than with the folkloric genre. Moreover, there is the prestige of being engaged into global performing arts circuits on equal basis with artists from the global North, rather than through the straightjacket of "African festivals" or tourist resorts. For the most successful, opportunities to live an existence stretched between Senegal and elsewhere is an equally valuable source of status.

The notion of "contemporary African dance" sits uneasily with anthropology because it maintains the illusion of common characteristics in African cultures, and because it suggests that some dances are not "contemporary", although they are performed in the present. But it is difficult to avoid, not only because it is widely used in the dance world in Senegal and elsewhere, but also because it hints at the recent inclusion of theatrical dances from Africa into global performing arts circuits. In the late 1970s, the term "contemporary dance" emerged to designate a set of styles and techniques derived from Euro-American twentieth-century "modern dance" and more recent experiments with theatre or contact improvisation. The term had an avant-garde connotation which has been partially appropriated by the Senegalese – and other African – dance milieux. But whereas Euro-American "contemporary dance" styles defined themselves as a distanciation from "modern dance" and ballet, the Senegalese experiments position themselves in contrast with folkloric performance, and to a lesser extent, theatre.

I choose to distinguish between "African" and "Senegalese" contemporary dance, because just as there are different national styles of ballet (Wulff 1998), there are also different choreographic styles in different parts of Africa. Whatever similarities that exist between these styles are more likely to originate in common influences of the Euro-American theatrical dance tra-

dition than in similarities in local dance styles. The very notion of "African dance", although widespread in African cities by now, is a Eurocentric construction. But while some choreographers resist it, others find it convenient, perhaps because the category is flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of experiments, much as the category "Celtic music" (Chapman 1994). I should also make it clear that this thesis focuses on "contemporary dance" as a local phenomenon anchored in the everyday life of the performers, rather than as an offshoot of a global movement. I was inspired by Parkin's (1993) reflections on globalization, in which he points out that it is not because Western goods are consumed in every corner of the world that they necessarily carry bits of "Western culture" with them. Similarly, it is not because Senegalese performers draw from French or American theatrical dance that they adopt French or American cultural traits. Rap artists dressed in army trousers, hooded sweaters and caps with the American flag claim their "Senegaleseness", as Carlou-D, rapper with PBS Radikal:

> "When it comes to his influences, Carlou-D says he listens to 'all good music', even though he adds that he is not too keen on the American style. 'I want to stay authentic, Senegalese all the while remaining Hip-Hop'. For him, there is no contradiction. It is absolutely possible to like Hip-Hop without being a fan of the *American way of life*." (Le Quotidien, 29.01.2005, translation from French my own. Emphasis in English in original text.)

Ultimately, what is meaningful to the performers is what enables them to gain status in the local community. Once again, I will trace the development of Senegalese "contemporary dance" through the trajectory of a particular group. The first section, therefore, is dedicated to one of the first "contemporary dance" companies in Dakar, *La 5e Dimension*. This simultaneous front-and back stage portrait hints at the dilemma many performers find themselves in, between the desire to contribute to the development of the profession and the need to pursue individual careers. The second section is a collection of individual cases intended to supplement the first. The third section provides insights into creative sources of inspiration. While pointing at the influence of performance styles from other parts of the world –through visual media and collaborative choreography – I attempt to demystify the idea that people are simply reproducing Euro-American theatrical dance. As shown by the renewed concern with social commentary, the "contemporary" genre is very much grounded in urban Senegalese life. Not only is this perceived as an important point of differentiation from the folkloric genre, but

also, the artists' commitment to "educate" the local audiences has an impact on their status. Collaborative work with foreign artists is also valued for its prestige and because it improves people's chances to access international circuits. The fourth section looks at the interaction between "contemporary" performers and these circuits, and asks how it affects their lives and the type of performance they produce. It also discusses the moral dilemmas people may be confronted with, when their perception of what is acceptable to display on stage differs from the expectations of the performing arts markets.

Trajectory of a "contemporary dance" group

The following narrative was put together from many hours of informal conversations with the performers, doing practical work together or just "being there". I have been given permission to use the name of the group, but for obvious reasons I have taken the liberty to leave out information that may be too sensitive.

Pre-history of the group

The trajectory of *La 5e Dimension* cannot be separated from that of its choreographer and co-founder, Jean Tamba[134]. Tamba was raised in Fass, a fairly small *quartier* bordering the Médina. His father, a Jola migrant from the Casamance, had served in the French army in his youth. He had also been a performer in a small folkloric troupe, at a time when this was not regarded as a profession. Tamba's mother came from a Bissau Guinean family who traced part of its ancestry to Brazil. Like a majority of children in Dakar, Tamba left school after primary education. His family still lives in Fass, where he drops by several times per week. A familiar figure both in Fass and in the Dakarois dance world, he knows a staggering proportion of the city's dancers, as well as many of those who have left Senegal in the 1980s and 1990s.

Like his father, Tamba always had a passion for dancing. As a teenager he went clubbing almost every night, and confessed that he was so addicted to dancing that he "felt sick" if he missed a night. He could not really afford it, but there was never a shortage of young women to buy him and other good dancers drinks. Around 1980, he was recruited in a folkloric

[134] This is my informant's real name.

troupe where a Master Drummer taught him the "traditional" dances and rhythms of the wider region, including from the Mandinka areas of Mali and Guinea. As many performers trained in the folkloric genre, he insisted that he had learned the "real traditional stuff", and not a "modernised version". He was aware that steps, movements and rhythms were transformed when set up on stage, but he insisted that he had been trained by one of the last old masters who were still knowledgeable about "proper tradition". It was also with this troupe that he made his debut as a choreographer. By the late 1980s, Tamba felt the need to move on to something new. While still performing with folkloric troupes, he joined the "Sotiba Boys", with whom he performed on TV and at promotional events. Their style was a mix of "jazz", "modern dance" and moves inspired by American music videos. They were sponsored by Senegal's leading textile manufacturer, Sotiba[135], located at the periphery of Dakar. Most of his fellow dancers moved to Europe or the US as soon as the opportunity arose. In 1989, he decided to "go back to basics" and receive formal training in classical ballet, "contemporary dance", acting and other stage skills. He enrolled at the National School of Arts for the six-year curriculum[136]. Simultaneously, he danced with the "Manhattan Dance School", a recent group led by Ousmane Noël Cissé, a dancer and choreographer trained at *Mudra Afrique*. He took part in workshops with visiting dancers from Europe or the US and created short choreographies.

Genesis of a repertoire

Meanwhile Tamba had met Honoré Mendy, an organizer of cultural events who came from Ziguinchor. They had a common vision and when Tamba graduated in 1995, they created *La 5e Dimension*. Dancers and drummers were recruited among people they knew. Apart from a performer who graduated from the National School of Arts with Tamba, none of the group's

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[135] These were times of serious crisis for the company. For a fascinating history of Sotiba, see Rabine (2002: 135-168).

[136] The School has changed names several times since it was created in the 1950s, from the Mali Arts Centre to the National School of Arts, and in 1972 the National Arts Institute (Snipe 1998). It was later renamed the National School of Arts (*Ecole Nationale des Arts*), and was divided into independent sections. Performers usually talk about the performing arts section as the *Conservatoire*. The curriculum has now been reduced to five years. After Senghor's departure, the school suffered from the massive withdrawal of state funding, and the performing arts section was closed for several years.

current members were among the first recruits. Indeed as in all other "contemporary dance" groups in Dakar, members came and went as performing opportunities and interpersonal relations changed. Tamba explained that setting up his own group was about creating a "free space" to experiment with new styles, for example by mixing steps and rhythms from the regional dances with inspiration from the Euro-American theatrical dance tradition or even movement styles from other parts of the world. He said the idea came when he heard a radio speech by President Senghor in the mid-1980s. Senghor was advocating his famous idea of *enracinement et ouverture* ("rootedness and openness"), and Tamba described this moment as a turning point: "When I heard this speech, I thought: 'that's it, that's the kind of dance I want to do'. I didn't know what it would come to look like, but I knew for sure this was what I had to do." As reflected in his comment, Tamba was always passionate about dance and about his commitment to the Senegalese dance world. As many artists of his generation, he is also nostalgic about the "golden era" of the Senghor presidency, during which dance was granted unprecedented resources for a young African nation. The language of Senghor's version of Negritude obviously had an impact on him and the co-founder of the group. This was obvious in their choice of the term "metiss dance" to designate the new style they were trying to create. Thus the programme of one of the company's pieces, *Bujuman*, reads:

> "If the heart of the [group's] inspiration is in Africa, Asia, India, the Middle East, Europe and America also enrich this blend. 'Metiss dance' materializes the principle of 'enracinement et ouverture' that was dear to the President-poet L. Sédar Senghor; it is universal and able to touch the people of all continents."
>
> (Extract from *Bujuman*, leaflet created for the company's national tour in October 2002; translation from French my own.)

The company's first piece, *Qui suis-je?* ("Who am I?"), was created in 1995 and performed on stage at the CCF (French Cultural Centre) in Dakar. It was described as dealing with "the big questions of identity and human destiny". In 1997 followed *Dina baax* ("Everything will be fine"), also performed at the CCF, in several schools and for the inauguration of the slavery memorial on the Gorée Island. Centred around the spiritual quest of a man who kept believing in a brighter future in spite of misfortune, *Dina baax* had a resolutely optimistic message.

The year 2002 marked a turning point for the group. When I met them in May, they had received funding from the local organization in charge of distributing EU funds for the development of artistic and cultural activities, the PSIC (*Programme de Soutien aux Initiatives Culturelles*). This had been supplemented by private contributions, and as a result the group was able to work on a new 45-minutes piece, *Bujuman*. The creation began in Dakar, and they worked in their usual participatory way: the choreographer "threw" ideas and themes on the floor and "gave" movements to initiate a sequence, then leaving much freedom for the performers to develop it further. His role was very much that of a mentor and a critic. During the summer of 2002, the group spent six weeks finishing the piece in Tubab Jallaw, where Mrs Acogny had lent them her outdoor working space. All the performers had worked there on earlier occasions, and thought there was a special texture to movement that was created on the floor of sand. They rented a house and Tamba's cousin was brought in to cook. Every day they followed the same routine, working hard and pausing only to eat sandwiches and relax. In the evening they ate, made tea, chatted, prayed, watched TV and received occasional visits from the village people. During weekends, wives, friends or relatives came over from Dakar. This was an intensely bonding experience for the group.

Bujuman is the name given to people who are seen roaming the streets of Dakar, living off scrap items and leftovers. According to oral literature scholar Massamba Guèye, who wrote the text for the piece, *buju* means "to fall into poverty" in Wolof. The piece, choreographed for four dancers (three men and a woman) and two musicians, is an indirect critique of a modern urban society which produces so many lives on the margins. The stage is designed to evoke a rubbish area, with old clothes lying about the floor and tins, branches, plastic bags and other discarded scraps[137] hanging from a straw wall at the back of the stage. The piece begins with a solo entrance: from a back corner of the dark stage, a man is seen sitting with both legs stretched in front of him, his back almost turned to the audience. Pushing his body backwards with both hands, he drags himself slowly across the stage, bathed in a beam of light coming from the corner. He is wearing black trousers, a black tee-shirt and a bandana. The music is by Schönberg. Slowly, the man lies on his back and lifts a leg in vertical position. Then he quickly rolls over to one side, comes back to his feet and stands in a frozen walking position,

[137] These were real scraps; on the evening of the Premiere at the CCBS on the 1st of October 2002, I helped the company gather them from the sandy ground on which the stage was erected. As a kind of "performance within the performance", we transformed ourselves into "*bujumen*" to set up the décor for *Bujuman*.

knees bent deeply, arms stretched – one forward and the other backward – and rising slowly. The position is reminiscent of the jazz style but slower, more contained. While he moves about in slow motion, a woman runs onto the stage and stops abruptly in the middle. She is wearing a half-open, multicoloured dress, black tights – or green in some performances – and a soberly tied headscarf. She moves and stops, moves and stops. Both dancers seem to ignore each other, but their movement suddenly takes on the same quality: with both the sternum contractions characteristic of some styles of American "modern dance" and the feel of Senegambian dances, albeit performed at a much slower pace than usual. The woman alternates dancing with walking across the stage, looking for something on the floor. When a third dancer enters, he too, comes forward in slow motion before beginning his own dance. He is wearing army trousers and a tee-shirt. While the woman and the third dancer slowly glide into synchronized movements, the dancer in black, deeply absorbed – or deranged – follows his own pointed finger around, moving in circles. A shopping trolley identical to those used by *bujumen* or street peddlers is standing at the back of the stage. It will be used later, when a *bujuman* in high heels carts his friend around and lets him fall in a burlesque sequence. The music of the piece is a patchwork of Schönberg's complex disharmonies, James Brown ("I feel good"), the experimental music of Danish Pierre Dørge, the *kasag* (Wolof circumcision) rhythms played by two of the company's drummers by beating on a tree trunk with sticks, and at the end, a song in Jola by all six performers.

Without describing the whole piece in detail, I hope to have given a sense of an odd but creative mix of elements. The piece seems to work as a metaphor of the diversity that characterizes the performers' lives – the group is composed of Dakarois who originate from all parts of Senegal, and of both Christians and Muslims – is celebrated. By the time *Bujuman* had its free-entry Premiere at the CCBS (*Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor*) on the first of October 2002, *La 5e Dimension* already had a faithful audience, and the place was packed with fellow performers, friends, relatives, dance enthusiasts and a few critics from the local newspapers. The company had asked me to record the piece on video, and I was unstably perched on two metallic tables piled up on the sand. The performance was due to begin with the 26-minute documentary film by director Mame Daour Wade, in which sequences from the piece alternated with interviews of real *bujumen*. This had to be cancelled due to technical problems, but the piece was a success. As if people had forgotten for a short moment the tragedy that had

just struck the nation[138], the atmosphere was warm and supportive. People laughed heartily during the comic sequences, for example when two drunkards – the two musicians – crossed the stage, holding on to each other and commenting on their lives, or when the performers changed into smelly old clothes and high heel shoes picked up from the floor.

With the support of the PSIC, *La 5e Dimension* embarked on a "national tour" a few days later. The piece was shown in Diourbel, Kaolack and Saint-Louis. The tour turned out to be exhausting, and as all performances were free, it did not generate other profit than the funding from the PSIC. In Diourbel and Saint-Louis, the performers took charge of the promotion themselves, driving around town with a microphone to announce the performance for the same evening. Despite a series of practical problems, they were happy because people outside Dakar, who rarely have opportunities to see "contemporary" performances, had enjoyed the piece. One of the performers reported:

> "There were even older people who came to see us. They had never seen anything like that, but they loved it! They came to talk to us afterwards, they encouraged us. It was *so* good to meet people in this way." (Dancer, Dakar, October 2002)

Back in Dakar, the company took a week or two to regroup before resuming the usual routine of at least three four-hour rehearsals per week. They had now identified the sections that needed "cleaning up", and set to the task with discipline. In January 2003, *Bujuman* was again performed with great success at the CCF in Dakar. There is a certain prestige attached to performing at the CCF, which has a beautiful space at the heart of the city centre as well as qualified stage technicians. It was therefore important for the company that *Bujuman* be successful there. As in Bamako, Ouagadougou, Abidjan or Brazzaville, the CCF in Dakar acts as a space of transition between the local and the global performing scenes. In Dakar, the role of the Centre in promoting "contemporary dance" has come into relief as the current director, a former anthropologist, has a particular interest in the genre. When I met him a few months later, he was still enthusiastic about *Bujuman*, which he spoke of as "a revelation".

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[138] On the 26th of September 2002, the ferry boat linking Dakar to Ziguinchor in the Casamance, the Jola, capsized with almost 2,000 passengers on board. Most people in Dakar knew someone who had been on the boat or who had somehow been affected by the tragedy. Words fail to describe the state of shock people were in during the weeks following the accident.

At the same time, the group was aware that performing for the cosmopolitan audience of the CCF was a double-edged sword. On one hand it was a necessary step towards international recognition, and on the other hand it was reinforcing the perception shared by many Senegalese that "contemporary dance" was "White people's stuff". There were practical implications following from this: "people in the ministries", they said, often found an easy excuse to turn down their requests for support, arguing that their role was to promote "culture for the Senegalese people" and not for the Whites. Luckily, on the whole the written press was positive about *Bujuman*. This is more meaningful than often assumed in a society in which newspapers are read by a minority, because people know the journalists who attend their performances, and they spend a considerable amount of time telling each other about who wrote what in the press[139]. But they are also aware that few journalists know enough about dance to write as informed critics. As a result, the lack of substance in their reviews is often hidden behind a flowery language that remains obscure to most readers. The following extract of a review of *Bujuman* illustrates this:

> "Interprété dans un décor pittoresque qui dépeint l'univers des récupérateurs, le spectacle résume la vie ordinaire du 'Bujuman'. Si le fil du scénario laisse dubitatif à l'entame de la chorégraphie où le jeu des acteurs cherche à signifier l'emploi des mélodies qui rythment leurs pas, les numéros de dialogue gestuel assortis de mouvements d'ensemble finiront par installer le suspense le long de la prestation. Dans une finesse laissant paraître la partition des acteurs, le spectacle par ses détours captivera le public et les messages lancés ne s'éloignent guère des thèmes ayant trait à l'insalubrité."[140]
>
> (Taxi 02.06.2003, p.7)

The CCF performance did not mark the end of *Bujuman*'s life in Senegal. The group was also asked to perform a short sequence at a charity party organized by the President's wife in a

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[139] Helena Wulff (1998) made similar observations about classical dancers' concern with written reviews. It was her work that inspired me to be aware of the performer-critic dynamic.

[140] "Performed in a picturesque décor depicting the universe of the scrap dealers, the show sums up the ordinary life of the 'Bujuman'. If the progression of the script leaves one doubtful at the beginning of the choreography, where the play of the actors attempts to signify the use of the rhythms that mark their steps, the sequences of gestured dialogue supplemented with group movements will finally let the suspense settle throughout the performance. In a subtlety through which the score of the actors can be perceived, the show, with its detours, will captivate the audience and the messages sent do not move very far from themes related to insalubrity."

five-star hotel. After the CCF performance, photographs of *Bujuman* were exhibited at the Goethe Institute in Dakar. In June 2003, *Bujuman* was shown once more at the CCF, but this time in the context of the *Kaay Fecc* festival of which Tamba is also the artistic director. As every time the company performs for free, the place was packed with several hundred people of all ages sitting or standing all over the outdoor theatre, children piled up in the front rows. Many of them were obviously unused to this style of performance, but once again, it was an enormous success. The group hoped that their success during *Kaay Fecc* would represent a major step towards an international career. Showing *Dina baax* for the first edition of *Kaay Fecc* in 2001 had failed to produce invitations abroad, but there were strong expectations that their time had come.







Fig. 6.1 Rehearsing *Bujuman* in Tubaab Jallaw, August 2002. To the right, breakfast before a long day of work.



Fig. 6.2 *Bujuman* performed during the *Kaay Fecc* festival, Centre Culturel Français, June 2003

A careful international expansion

For several years the history of the company had already been stretched between "centripetal" and "centrifugal" forces. On the one hand, Tamba and his group were dedicated to the development of the profession in Senegal, and on the other hand, they had recognized that they would not be able to make a living from their art without engaging with international performing circuits, preferably on their own terms. This tension was expressed in the simultaneous search for opportunities at home and abroad simultaneously, and in apparently contradictory statements about plans for the group's future.

At home, Tamba, the administrator Honoré Mendy and a dancer and co-choreographer in the company, Papa Sy, were among the initial driving forces of the *Kaay Fecc* festival. The first edition was held in Dakar in 2001, by which time they and a few other dance people, including dance teacher Nganti Towo, had been trawling ministries, international organizations and multinationals for several years to obtain funding. The double objective of the festival was to make a wide range of dance forms available to a wider local audience, while simultaneously making Senegalese performance more visible to foreign artists and agents. Local audiences had to be "educated" about the value of theatrical dance, and the performers themselves had to be persuaded not to "sell" their art too cheaply. In other words, the whole project was not only about creating opportunities abroad, but also about further raising the status of the performer in the wider society. To achieve this, it was necessary to create a "popular festival" which people in Dakar's *quartiers* would eventually re-appropriate for themselves. In 2003 therefore, alongside the main programme at the CCF, the MCDS (*Maison de la Culture Douta Seck* in the Médina) and the National Theatre, much was done to organize events in the low-income neighbourhoods of the city (Fass, Pikine and Dalifort). In all three places, the practical part of the organization was left to local youth associations. The committee was also collecting funds to build a "mobile stage" which could be easily carried to the various parts of the city. Moreover, both in 2001 and 2003, all performances were free. Tamba always insisted on the local dimension of the festival:

> "We had the idea of the festival, because dancers are always waiting to travel to make money. So we thought, OK, we don't have to depend on the *tubaab* all the time. We can make our own festival here, so that people don't have to travel to get work."
>
> (Jean Tamba, Dakar, September 2002; translation from French my own.)

When *La 5e Dimension* taught at the National School of Arts for two weeks in April 2003, the eight dance students were asked to present the "restitution" of their work with the company to the school's leadership. Introducing the final review, Tamba made a short speech in which he stressed the value of a local education for Senegalese dancers. "The *Conservatoire* [the National School of Arts] is our pride because we have been trained here, by Senegalese teachers. We haven't had to go outside to be trained", he said. Likewise, during numerous conversations, members of the company often echoed Tamba's words and insisted that although many of their fellow dancers had left, they had a mission to stay in Senegal and help develop the profession to a level where it would become unnecessary for people to leave. Some of them also stressed that they now had family commitments (three of them had a spouse and children) which prevented them from leaving.

The focus on the "home front" was only one side of the story, however. In practice there was an increasingly uncomfortable imbalance between those who had gained opportunities to travel and those who had not. In 1999, three members of the group, including Tamba, were recruited by Germaine Acogny and German choreographer Suzanne Linke, to take part in the international tour of a piece created in Tubaab Jallaw, *Le Coq est mort*. For two years they travelled back and forth between Senegal and abroad. The seventy-minute piece for eight male dancers was choreographed by Suzanne Linke and sponsored by the AFAA (*Association Française d'Action Artistique*), the *Stiftung Kunst und Kultur* in Düsseldorf and various other French, German and Israeli sources. The tour took them as far as France, Great Britain, Austria, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Portugal, Israel, Canada and the US. However grateful they were for the income generated by the touring and for the experience itself, they eventually quit the show to concentrate on their work with *La 5e Dimension*. All this travelling was too disruptive for the everyday life of the company, and was therefore jeopardizing their future as a group. Meanwhile, in 2000 another performer from the group became involved in a different choreographic piece which, although based in France, toured widely in Europe and Africa.

But by the autumn of 2002, *La 5e Dimension* had yet to receive an engagement abroad as a group. People still bitterly resented the missed opportunity of the previous year, when the company had been invited to perform in Jordan. On the very day of the departure, the transit visas through France they had applied for were refused, and they were forced to stay in Dakar.

At this point, therefore, the rhetoric about commitment to the "home front" was mixed with frequent complaints by those who had not yet travelled that they were "tired of waiting". "*Dina baax, dina baax... ba kañ?*"[141] one of them repeated ironically. Part of the group's everyday life consisted in informal meetings before or after the rehearsals, and these were also occasions for much joking and derision to alleviate the frustration. Sitting in a circle on the floor or slowly walking a couple of miles through the traffic-ridden city centre, those who had been lucky to travel told and re-told anecdotes from the various destinations. Places were compared at length; some were praised because people had been welcoming, the food plentiful and the women had shown great admiration for the "Black dancers", while others were loathed because they had found the local people to be racist or too aggressive. The others laughed, made appropriate comments, and it was obvious that these accounts reinforced their determination to make their way out of the country. One of them boasted that he would have left the country by the end of the year, even if he had to swim or borrow a pirogue. Another confessed half-jokingly that he was considering taking a *tubaab* as a second wife, to which some of his friends replied that two wives would shorten his life by ten years at the very least.

In the autumn of 2002, a *yendu*[142] was held at Tamba's house to discuss the future of the company. I was kindly invited to join as a friend of the company's, and because I had helped with various practical tasks in connection with *Bujuman*. All the performers came, together with the administrator, Mendy, and a stage technician who had worked with the group. The company had recently recruited a manager, a young woman with some experience in Dakar's artistic scene, and she was also present. A couple of hours were spent chatting, exchanging gossip and eating a lunch of *yassa* rice and chicken from a common bowl, before serious discussion of the group's future started. For obvious reasons of confidentiality I cannot divulge everything that was brought forward, but it was during that meeting that the objective of leaving Senegal, one way or the other, was most clearly formulated. As had been discussed earlier in a less organized context, some of the performers proposed that people attempt to find their way to Europe individually and re-group there.

In 2003, the networks steadily developed and nurtured by Tamba and his group finally came to use. In July, they went to France for a week and performed during the arts festival *Les*

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[141] "Everything will be fine, everything will be fine... but until when?" The irony, of course, lay in the implicit reference to the company's piece before *Bujuman*, *Dina baax*.

[142] *Yendu* literally means "to spend the day".

arts dînent à l'huile[143] in Douarnenez, in Bretagne. A month earlier, there had been rumours in the group that something was underway, but no one was quite sure what it was. Tamba had asked his performers to make sure they had up-to-date passports[144]. The fact that the performers were left in the dark until shortly before departure was not uncommon. Organizers – group managers or choreographers – often avoid mentioning plans to travel, partly for fear of the consequences of people's envy, and partly to avoid disappointment. I was not able to follow the company in Bretagne, but we spoke over the phone while they were in France. They were thrilled by the welcome they had received, and described their performances as great successes. They particularly enjoyed performing outdoors in the town centre, where they felt a real sense of connection with the enthusiastic audience. Unlike many of their European counterparts, they did not consider dancing on a town square degrading, because the audience numbers and response was far more important. Back in Dakar, many dance people were surprised to see the whole group return. This was unusual in a performing world in which groups touring abroad commonly lose up to a third of their numbers as people disappear at the first given occasion. One of Dakar's biggest folkloric troupes, the *Ballet Mansour Guèye*, famously disbanded almost entirely during the group's last US tour a few years ago. But among *La 5e Dimension* and their friends, people insisted that they were "real professionals". For artists of their calibre, they argued, simply "vanishing" into the crowd was counter-productive, because living as an illegal migrant would compromise their future career. In fact, experienced performers like Tamba were perfectly aware of the fate of many illegal migrants, and they did not hesitate to tell their friends that if they were to leave, they ought to "do it properly". They warned the young dancers against "going to live like rats" in Europe, as so many others before. Indeed the dance world was ripe with stories of fellow performers who had ended up living so miserably that they could not face the humiliation of the return.

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[143] *Les arts dînent à l'huile*, a bi-annual festival promoting the arts of a different nation every time (the 2005 edition will feature Brazil), belongs to the generation of fairly small "alternative" festivals which have multiplied in France in the 1990s. In Bretagne they are often connected to a revival of regional "Celtic" culture – hence the interest in "world" arts. The name *Les arts dînent à l'huile* ("the arts dine on oil") is a double entendre which plays on several levels. It can be read aloud as "*les sardines à l'huile*" ("sardines in oil") and therefore brings back echoes of the old connection between Breton identity and the sea. But it also suggests that this is a place where the arts are free to do completely unexpected things, such as... dining on oil!

[144] The 15,000 FCFA fee for a passport being quite significant by local standards, people do not usually have a passport ready unless they need it.

In December 2003, the group left for its second trip to France. Tamba had a relative in Paris who put them in touch with a Senegalese workers' association in Grenoble. The association invited *La 5e Dimension* to come and perform for the "Senegalese week" they organized. For the group this was even more significant than the first trip, because there was more to the event than performances of *Bujuman*: on several occasions they were invited to teach Senegambian dances to school children and give talks on life in Senegal. They were deeply moved by the enthusiasm they encountered, particularly from children and teenagers. They felt more valued and listened to than they ever did in Senegal, and quite apart from the financial benefit, this was absolutely essential to them. They told me with great pride that they had challenged many of the stereotypes the children had about Africa by telling them about urban life. The performers themselves had been surprised at the children's ignorance, because at the same age, they knew a great deal more about Europe than the children knew about Africa. People who had seen performances by "African dancers" settled in France had been surprised by the company's creativity, and had made favourable comparisons with the usual "traditional stuff". This had comforted them in the idea that they had the talent required for an international success. Back in Dakar they kept exchanging memories, anecdotes and jokes about their experiences in Grenoble for several weeks after the trip. They were all the more enthusiastic about having worked in schools as they realized that similar engagements elsewhere might provide opportunities to tap into funds for education rather than the usual – declining – European funds for "culture and the arts".

The year 2003 also marked a more trivial, yet important turning point in the company's active networking, when Tamba asked a relative to introduce him to the internet. The group had acquired an e-mail address some time earlier, and in tune with the group's egalitarian spirit, everybody knew the password. Yet for some months Tamba had been forced to ask people to accompany him to a cybercafé so that he could follow up on contacts abroad. But by early 2003, he was able to do it himself. Still in 2003, he was invited to South Africa for a few days to take part in the follow-up of a Danish/South African/Senegalese cultural project he had become involved in the previous year. In early 2004, he was contacted by the Goethe Institute to take part in a two-week "study tour" in Germany that was aimed at promoting contacts between representatives of the world's performing arts and German artists and agents. Tamba was one of only two or three African choreographers in a delegation of more than thirty.

But the emergence of international opportunities for *La 5e Dimension* did not mean that the local audiences were neglected. After all, opportunities to perform abroad were profitable, and people obviously drew a great deal of prestige from them, but the bread-and-butter of the company's life remained in Senegal. Throughout 2004 therefore, extracts of *Bujuman* and new, shorter choreographies were presented in Dakar, including for the African American-funded "Ebony Festival" on the Gorée Island in June. This was another prestigious event for the group, not only because it took place on the UNESCO-classified World Heritage site of Gorée, but also because the festival was organized by Americans, because there was a social dimension attached to it (the worldwide campaign against Hiv/Aids) and because the festival also billed such big names of international music as Youssou Ndour, Rachid Taha, Jimmy Cliff, Ralph Thamar and Jocelyne Labylle (Le Soleil 07.06.2004). But by then, two performers had already made their way to Europe, and the group had to spend time training new recruits. Yet Tamba was philosophical about it, since losing people to other continents had become part of the ordinary trajectory of any dance group. It was not to be taken for granted that these movements would eventually serve the company's interests – a few years earlier, one of the female dancers had married and moved to Spain, but the group was never invited to perform there – but given that the two members who had left this time had been loyal for many years, they were likely to be more beneficial this time around.

This account of the trajectory of a dance group classified as working within the "contemporary" genre is in many ways exemplary, because it highlights the multiplicity of motivations in people's careers in the performing world. Beyond a passion for the dance and the deep satisfaction of being acknowledged as a talented artist, social status, i.e. the social recognition of people's upwards mobility, is obviously essential. As already mentioned in relation to the folkloric genre, money is important, but not sufficient, in allowing people to gain status. A whole range of other practices are equally important, even though they often mean that people are caught between showing loyalty towards their local community (e.g. caring for the welfare of group members, working to professionalize the Senegalese performing world, "educating" Europeans about life in Africa) and engaging with the outside world (e.g. touring abroad, marrying foreigners, organizing workshops in Senegal for "dance tourists"). It may seem odd that I have avoided specifying whether people's objective was to travel for shorter periods of time or to migrate altogether. In fact, this was a conscious choice, because I found that people did not always find the difference to be relevant. For many young performers, the ideal is to

have "one foot in Europe [or in the US]"; the metaphor is appropriate because people often intend to maintain close ties with their relatives and performing circles in Senegal, and keep travelling back and forth. They do not always succeed in doing so, but this is the ideal model. As migration scholars have pointed out (e.g. Riccio 2001), it is important to break earlier scholarly dichotomies between "sojourners" and "settlers", or between travellers and migrants. The individual trajectories sketched in the next section will at once illustrate this point and supplement the story of *La 5e Dimension*.

Individual trajectories into the "contemporary" scene

The diversity of individual trajectories into "contemporary dance" is revealing of the continuing quest for status among lower-middle class city-dwellers, whether or not they come from *ñeeño* backgrounds. But this quest also interacts with a generational conflict that is played out at different levels in the dance world. I have identified three generations of performers whose interests in the "creative" genre, as "contemporary dance" is also called, only partly overlap. I should also mention that the term "generation" in this context relates to the length of people's experience in the dance world rather than to their age, even though both are obviously linked.

The first generation consists of a handful of men and women spread throughout West Africa, Europe and North America. In the dance world they are regarded as the pioneers of "contemporary African dance". In the 1970s and 1980s, they were already experimenting with various dance forms and advocating the professionalization that is now taken for granted. They all know each other, and with the notable exception of Souleymane Koly and Marie-Rose Guiraud in the Ivory Coast, most of them have established their careers away from Africa. As the former leader of *Mudra Afrique* and creator of the *Ecole des Sables* in Tubaab Jallaw, Germaine Acogny enjoys a special status in this generation. Others include Koffi Kôkô (from Benin, based in France), Peter Badejo (from Nigeria, based in the UK), George Momboye, Alphonse Tiérou (both from the Ivory Coast, based in France) and a former *Mudra Afrique* student now settled in France, Irène Tassembedo (from Burkina Faso, based in France). Some of them, for example Peter Badejo, worked with another precursor, Kenyan dancer/choreographer Elsa Wolliaston.

In Senegal, there are few performers left of the second generation, as most of them moved to Europe in the 1980s and early 1990s. They consist of people like Tamba, who were inspired by the first generation. Some of the migrants have returned disillusioned about their chances to achieve successful careers in Europe. Among those who still perform, some resent what they see as the first generation's "betrayal". The "elders" were spoiled, they argue, because they had the benefit of novelty and began working at a time when there was money for the arts. But they failed to pave the way for those to follow. On the whole, the second generation has been unsuccessful in displacing the supremacy of the first. Those who have remained in Africa – or who live between Africa and Europe – have nevertheless joined forces with the previous generation to develop the dance profession in their home countries.

The third generation, the most numerous, consists of young performers and choreographers, often trained in the folkloric genre, who have turned to "contemporary" styles within the past decade. They are not afraid of being provocative or experimenting with the most unlikely combination of styles, sometimes borrowing from theatre, "contact improvisation"[145] and even the martial arts. Although choreographers from the first two generations need their energy and creativity, some of them criticize the young people's hurry to make a name for themselves. Relationships become particularly tense when young dancers set up their own group, as is increasingly the case, and therefore compete with the more experienced performers – sometimes former mentors. The informants portrayed in the following stories belong to the first and third generation. The second generation is not included in this section because there are few of its representatives left in Senegal, but Tamba, whose trajectory I sketched earlier, is one of them. The performers portrayed here are not necessarily linked to *La 5e Dimension*, and all names have been changed.

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[145] "Contact improvisation" is a movement style developed in the US in the 1960s and 1970s, and often described as "post-modern" dance and "counter-culture". For an excellent history of "contact" in the US, see Novack (1990).

The first generation

From Dakar to Moscow, at the service of "National Culture"

In the 1960s, Amadou enrolled at the National School of Arts to be trained as an actor. A French woman was teaching classical ballet in the dance section, and driven by curiosity, he attended one of her classes. After the initial shock of novelty, he quickly became passionate about ballet. He told me of his thoughts at the first encounter: "I was shocked. I had never seen anything like this. I thought 'What is this? Gymnastics?' " But he kept coming back to the classes. The teacher found him to be talented, and asked for him to be transferred from the acting to the dance section, from where he simultaneously pursued acting. When Amadou graduated, he was the "first ballet dancer trained in Senegal". In the early 1970s, he and a few young actors founded the first private theatre troupe, the *Tréteaux Sénégalais*. Amadou wished to experiment with new ways of incorporating dance into Senegalese theatre as a narrative element in its own right, rather than as an "added decoration". His objective was to create "a new aesthetics of dance in modern Senegalese theatre"[146]. The *Tréteaux Sénégalais* was successful with the local audiences, and toured the Senegalese regions for ten years. But according to Amadou, the group was too radical for Senghor's regime, and without state patronage they barely survived. The state made an exceptional donation[147] when the group decided to set up *Chaka*, a play by Senghor on the legendary Zulu king.

By the early 1980s, the socialist Senegalese government had signed a bilateral agreement with the USSR. One of the important points was a programme of cultural and artistic exchange between the two countries: while selected Senegalese artists and intellectuals would be invited to study in the Soviet Union, Soviet counterparts would sojourn in Senegal. Amadou was selected, left the ailing theatre and made his way to the Soviet Union. For five years he studied choreography at GITIS, the State Institute of Theatre Arts in Moscow. Coming from a country with no classical ballet tradition, and having had a late start by the standards of the ballet world – he was 19 – he struggled to catch up with the level expected of the GITIS students. But the people he met believed in his choreographic creativity, and he went on to win the second prize at a choreography competition in Moscow. In the wake of the event,

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[146] Personal communication, Dakar, April 2003.

[147] The donation was of 1 million FCFA, a considerable amount at the time.

Amadou was asked to create pieces for the Theatre of Odessa and elsewhere in the Union, from ballet to popular *variétés*. When he returned home he had become an ambitious choreographer, keen to integrate the world of state-sponsored "culture". When his application to the National Theatre was turned down, he went to teach at the National School of Arts, where a Russian dancer also taught for a few months. Amadou was sent back to Moscow for a two-year course in pedagogy. Having completed the course, he returned to Dakar and from there, he began a doctoral research on the transformations of tradition in Senegambian dances. Twice he went back to Russia, financing his trips by selling jeans and other items in Moscow which he had bought in Dakar. He did not complete his research but became the head of the performing arts section at the National School. Every year he also worked as a choreographer of large state-sponsored *sons-et-lumières* shows. He insists that young Senegalese dancers must be trained in the techniques of ballet and "contemporary dance" as well as in "traditional" styles to have any chance of pursuing a decent career.

Amadou's family have always been opposed to his choice to become a dancer. When he was selected to study in Russia, they agreed to let him leave on the condition that he took the opportunity to "pull [himself] together and do something proper" with his life. In their view, "dancer" was not a profession. The fact that he is in a leadership position in a state-owned institution and is now able to make a decent living from his activity has not fundamentally altered their position. Changes in the world order since Amadou's time in the Soviet Union also widen the gap with the new generations of dancers: he was trained in the Russian ballet school and speaks Russian, whereas they look towards the US and learn English.

The third generation

From football to dance

Pape is in his late twenties. He has always lived in Dakar in the family compound, but his parents came from the Lower Casamance. For many years his father worked at a petrol station, and after retiring he went back to the Casamance. After primary school, Pape attended a football school in the hope of becoming a professional player. Having realized that he had little prospect of becoming a great player, and with the encouragement of a friend dancer, he

joined a small folkloric troupe in Dakar. There he received his training and learned a wide range of Mandinka dances.

In 1998 Germaine Acogny, who was looking for talents for her newly opened *Ecole des Sables* in Tubaab Jallaw, came to see the troupe. She noticed Pape and encouraged him to join her three-month workshop. In Tubaab Jallaw, Pape met other dancers and subsequently joined a newly formed "contemporary" group. He found it "liberating" to experiment with new ways of moving. He also contributed to the collective creative process with his knowledge of folkloric dances. Pape was proud to have had the courage to leave the safe routine of the folkloric troupe and follow his own path. He had grown tired of doing the same year after year. When he had left, his fellow dancers had mocked him because he was going to do "White people's dance", but now, he said, they felt unhappy and limited in their careers.

The desire to be more innovative in his performance, to take part in the creative process, and also to travel to Europe, all played an important role in Pape's decision to move on to the "contemporary" genre. When I met him, he was satisfied with the artistic freedom he had gained and enjoyed his group's "family-like" atmosphere, but he was also eager to perform abroad. Meanwhile he was teaching folkloric dances to foreign students, and occasionally taking groups of tourists to the Casamance. Eventually, he met a young European woman who had come to Senegal to dance, and by the end of 2003 they were married. Within a couple of months, he had moved to Europe with her.

Pape says his family has never been against his dancing. They were initially worried that he might turn to the kind of decadent life they assumed most artists led but, he told me, they realized that their worries were unfounded when he kept "living as a good Muslim". He was not the only dancer I met who had come from sports, particularly football. This is significant because an increasing number of Senegalese boys are also attracted to football as a vehicle of social mobility. Football, however, only provides success for a very small minority.

A socially conscious muse

Unlike most "contemporary" dancers in Senegal, Coumba, a luminous woman in her late twenties, did not begin with the folkloric genre. Her father was an acknowledged choreographer in the jazz- and contemporary styles. At the age of eight she was already learning jazz dance, classical ballet and "modern dance". It was only later that she became initiated to the

"traditional" style. As many Senegalese dancers, she felt that she ought to acquire a solid basis in some African dances. She joined one of the largest folkloric troupes in Dakar for a short while in the early 1990s. Since then she has pursued a brilliant career in both the contemporary and the folkloric genres, performing with the best companies around and taking part in numerous workshops.

In 2003 she created two pieces jointly with an American choreographer who already knew Senegal well. They performed at the CCF in Dakar for a fairly small but enthusiastic audience. It was probably the first time that someone had raised the sensitive topic of house employees in a performance. Coumba thinks of herself as socially conscious, and for her "contemporary dance" is as an appropriate medium to explore social issues. She also performs with a company on a more permanent basis, and although she enjoys it, her objective is to have her own company.

From athletics to an international career as a dancer

Marie is a talented dancer and an athletic woman in her late twenties. When I met her she lived with her parents and relatives in a middle-class house in one of Dakar's *quartiers*. Her three sisters are dancers too, but being the eldest, Marie has the role of a leader among the siblings.

Sports were an important part of Marie's upbringing. Her father was a boxing champion in his youth, and as a teenager she was a talented athlete. Between competitions she discovered dance with a folkloric troupe, and when they offered her to go on tour through Senegal, she went on the road. She knew that her decision to leave school to dance would be met with disapproval by her parents, and therefore she left without telling them. Returning home after a few weeks was a painful experience, and the only time her father hit her, she said. But she had become addicted to dancing, and she kept training with the troupe. Yearning to try something new, Marie joined one of Mrs Acogny's workshops in Tubaab Jallaw. Following this, she joined a "contemporary" company, of which she soon became a pillar. Yet as working with a Senegal-based group is seldom enough to make a living, in 2000 she auditioned for Black Spring, a piece by French-Algerian choreographer Heddy Maalem. The show, based in France but regularly touring Europe, the US, Israel and Africa, consisted exclusively of Black dancers. Marie was selected and started sharing her time between Senegal and international

tours. She says that the "contemporary" genre has transformed her perception of what is beautiful and what is acceptable to see in a woman's moving body. It also allows her to explore new facets of her personality. And quite importantly, it has opened doors for her to the outside world. She has toured extensively with Maalem's piece and is now married to someone she met during the making a short film on the performance. In late 2003, she moved to Europe with her husband.

Marie feels that her status in the dance community is not always a protection against attempts to exploit her. With her strikingly athletic body, she featured prominently in the five-minute long opening sequence of the film on Black Spring. Lying on white sand against a dark background, and wearing cream-coloured shorts and bra, she rolled slowly to the side. She seemed to be discovering her own body as her hands moved across her neck, face, shoulders and legs. Her perfect dark skin shone in the light, and the whole scene was very moving. As I watched the video with her, she spontaneously told me how difficult it had been for her to do this for the camera. She was afraid that people would deem her performance vulgar. She only reconciled herself with these images when a senior woman dancer told her that the scene was beautiful, and that there was nothing wrong with it. After the film had been viewed by professionals in Europe however, Marie received a couple of phone calls inviting her to audition for new shows. Then the shock came: people wanted her to dance naked! She recalled a particular occasion when the choreographer had told her that the "raw energy" emanating from her would be a stage success if she was naked. She declined all the offers. "This is all they see in us, Black dancers", she said; "Had it been a White girl, they wouldn't have asked!" This was an exemplary illustration of the element of exploitation that is also present in global performing circuits. And sadly, this is not far removed from the stereotypes Féral Benga and Habib Benglia were confronted with in Paris in the 1930s.

Waiting for discovery

Moussa was in his early thirties. He had been raised in one of Dakar's *quartiers* by his mother, of whom he spoke often. Moussa had gone to school until the "troisième"[148] and had then trained to be an electrician. For a year after completing his apprenticeship, he earned a decent

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[148] This level is roughly equivalent to the first year of the GSCEs in the British system.

living practising his trade. At the time, Moussa enjoyed dancing hip-hop with other boys of his age. Encouraged by a friend who performed with a folkloric troupe, he joined as an apprentice. He soon realized that he was happier drumming and dancing than dealing with electric cables, even when the money was short. After a few years, conflicts split the group in two, and Moussa went to join another troupe in Dakar. He says this was where the leader really taught him to dance. Moussa stayed for eight years and then moved on to a competing troupe of 20-35 performers. Aside from his commitment there, he organized dancing and drumming workshops for European students, traded drums[149] made by friends, and acted as an agent for a professional musician. He had also taken part in several *Kaay Fecc* workshops, where he had started working with the "contemporary" genre.

When I first asked him what he thought of the genre, Moussa gave me a series of contradictory answers. On one hand, he wished to acquire more technique in the "contemporary" styles because he felt that he had nothing more to learn within the folkloric genre. One the other hand, he insisted that as an African dancer, it was his duty to "master the traditional dances" before engaging in anything else. Compared with his usual way of speaking, the latter part of his answer sounded less spontaneous, almost as if he had borrowed the words from elsewhere. In any case, a few months later he was engaged in a "contemporary" project. He had met an American dancer/choreographer who had come to Senegal to learn the Senegambian dances, and having recruited three more dancers and two drummers, the pair produced a joint creation for the 2003 edition of the *Kaay Fecc* festival. Despite tangible tensions during the rehearsals, the piece was fairly successful with the audience and Moussa expected to be contacted by some of the international agents, festival organizers or choreographers who had come to the festival. He had also performed with his folkloric troupe, but he knew that in order to be singled out, he had to show himself as a "contemporary" dancer and a choreographer. When engagements failed to materialize after a couple of months, he was bitterly disappointed. Furthermore he resented the fact that the American choreographer had chosen to bring one of the drummers to the US with her. After the festival, Moussa created a small company of his own and continued to perform with the folkloric troupe.

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[149] As an overwhelming proportion of drummers make their instruments themselves, drums are almost always sold to foreigners or to members of the Senegalese Diaspora who ship whole containers of drums to Europe, North America and Australia.

Given that none of the performers portrayed had been trained in the "contemporary" style, it may be difficult to imagine how choreographic works emerge. In the next section therefore, I attempt to paint impressions of how people turn their experience into "contemporary" inspiration.

Contemporary inspiration: from the "techniques" of tradition to face-to-face encounters

From what has been said so far, nothing suggests that "contemporary" Senegalese performance is anything but an imitation of Euro-American dance styles. In fact, although undoubtedly influenced by its Euro-American counterparts, the Senegalese genre is very much rooted in people's everyday life. As Barber and Waterman (1995) warned us with the convincing example of Yorùbá music styles, the "modern" elements of a cultural form should not be confused with the "exogenous" in the sense of something disconnected from people's local lives and imposed from outside. If Senegalese "contemporary dance" seems "creolized" – a metaphor performers themselves use, e.g. with *La 5e Dimension*'s *metiss dance* – it is because the performers' lives are constantly stretched between Senegal and elsewhere, not because they reproduce a style that has nothing to do with them.

"Our tradition is a very modern tradition"[150]

It is the paradox of "contemporary dance" that its creators often have elaborated discourses about their creative use of "tradition". While many of them are trained in the folkloric genre, the transition to more individualized choreographic work goes with an increased concern for reviving elements of local "tradition", transforming them or abandoning them altogether. This renewed concern with "tradition" does not simply take place at the level of discourse; in practice, young choreographers often speak about doing "research on tradition", preferably in remote rural areas. Whereas with the folkloric genre people took it for granted that "tradition" was the prime material for inspiration, with "contemporary" performance people have become more articulate about it. I argue here that people's claim of a direct genealogy with

[150] This is a reference to Waterman's (1990) article on popular music and pan-Yoruba identity.

"traditional" forms of performance allows them to reclaim a moral high ground and legitimize their role as social critics.

The discourse on the "modern tradition"

There are two distinctive aspects of the discourse on the "modernity of tradition" in the dance world. The first aspect is people's claim that the best "African contemporary dance" will emerge from re-using the techniques of traditional dances to create a new genre. Traditional dances are thus constructed as a kind of language, from which syntax and a vocabulary can be extracted and re-combined to create a "new language". This is not a new idea: in the 1970s Germaine Acogny was already using the same words to describe the *Mudra Afrique* experiment, as echoed in Senghor's preface to her book:

> "Before going further, I would like to call attention to Madame Acogny's vocabulary, since it characterizes the négritude of her dance. The purpose of *African dance* is to ensure that students correctly perform certain dance figures which Madame Acogny invented, based on Black African folk dances. In doing so, her procedure is the same as that of European choreographers who invented the figures of classical ballet."
>
> (Léopold S. Senghor, dated 1980, quoted in Acogny 1994: 6; English version included in the book, emphasis in original text)

This view is shared by young choreographers in Senegal and elsewhere in Africa. Thus the words of *Kaay Fecc* director Nganti Towo echo those of Senghor:

> "We use tradition to create different stories, another kind of writing. We don't have to appropriate the Western techniques. We can use our own techniques. If we isolate tradition, we can create an alphabet to write our own dance. [...] We do not wish to devaluate or ignore tradition. [...] We simply want to allow the youth to use a different kind of writing, to learn about traditional dance and take from it what can be sold internationally, so that they are able to earn a living." (Walfadjri, 26.10.2002, translation from French my own)

Of course one could argue that such a project has little to do with tradition because from the moment performance is transferred to a new context, a new entity is created. One could also

argue that the notion that a bodily activity such as dance can be decomposed into sets of "techniques" is a Eurocentric idea, which can ultimately be traced to the industrial revolution and its corollary concern with "technique" and "efficacy". But what is relevant is the invocation of tradition in the discourse on "contemporary" performance. In my view, the underlying concern is to reaffirm the authenticity of the dance even when all dimensions are being transformed: context, contents (the "different stories"), and to a certain extent, form.

The second aspect is the idea, shared with dance people elsewhere on the continent, that what makes performance "traditional" is its capacity to comment reflexively on contemporary social life. Similar claims are made by Senegalese rap artists, who routinely trace the genealogy or their verbal art to local genres of poetry – e.g. women's *taasu* and men's *taaxuraan* – rather than to American rap. In dance, people invoke inspiration from regional forms of total theatre, such as the Malian *koteba* ("big snail" in Bambara), which mixes song, dance and theatre in a bittersweet farce. A consequence of this view is to consider "contemporary" performance as being at least as locally grounded as the folkloric genre. Although it is not always verbalized, the latter is sometimes regarded as obsolete because it has become detached from people's lives. The words of two informants illustrate this:

> "We don't live in huts any longer, do we? Our parents and grandparents did, but our lives are different. So we need to develop a dance that will talk about living in the city, about our lives today."
>
> (Dancer, Tubaab Jallaw, July 2002)

> "Our tradition is to dance what people do in life. So what we [contemporary troupes] do is also tradition, isn't it? In thirty years people will say that what we are doing today was tradition. But tradition is not fixed, it is moving all the time."
>
> (Choreographer, Dakar, April 2003)

The same choreographer insisted that what "traditional" (i.e. folkloric) dance troupes were doing was "folklore" and not "tradition". Surprisingly, he compared Senegambian folklore to classical ballet, which in his view was more traditional because it was older:

> "People talk about tradition [in dance], but the first ballets in Africa, that was with Fodéba Keita in 1950. But if you compare with classical ballet tradition in Europe, which goes back

to Louis XIV, it is very recent! Even our traditional dances, they are 100 or 200 years old perhaps... It's nothing!"

(Choreographer, Dakar, April 2003)

On a different occasion, a choreographer in his early thirties showed me how he had used the basic step of the Lebu spirit possession ritual, the *ndëp*, and transformed it into something new. The *ndëp* is based on the repetition of small jumps and shuffling steps. He had simply extended the scope of the jump, but the result was an entirely new movement, both visually and from the point of view of the energy deployed. He commented in the following words:

"You see, this is the *ndëp* step [showing me the step]. Now, if I do this [throwing the legs higher]... Is it still the *ndëp*? Of course it is not. Have I got the right to do this? I do, because I am creating something new, but I use the tradition to do that. And I am saying something that is closer to me."

(Choreographer/dancer, Dakar, September 2002)

Paradoxically, these considerations do not depreciate either the folkloric or the popular dances, as the same performers may continue to practice them. Rather, by widening their repertoire of skills, people seek to increase their chances of gaining engagements. The renewed interest in reviving "tradition" and put it to new uses encourages some of the younger performers and choreographers to romanticize rural life and the knowledge of the "village elders", much as in nineteenth-century Europe. Nketia (1996) identified this phenomenon when he argued that "some Africans [...], including artists, who are conscious of what they miss in their traditional culture now make the effort to go back to their 'roots' in order to gain knowledge and understanding that would enable them to appreciate traditional cultures or facilitate their participation in those cultures. The creative artists and performers among them, however, may do so in order to transfer their knowledge and experience to the contemporary context of creativity in which they operate." I found his observation to be particularly accurate, as many of the young performers I met had always lived in cities, but spoke with great intensity about "going back to the village" and learning "real tradition" from the elders. Unsurprisingly, the Casamance is the privileged focus of their interest in "traditional knowledge". This comes across very clearly in the following extract of a project proposal by a young Sene-

galese choreographer based in Dakar. His intention was to travel through Senegal for two months and present his "contemporary" work, while simultaneously learning about the local performing traditions. Although funding applications are always embellished, the text reveals a romantic view of rural life:

> "The main objectives of the tour are to create exchanges with local artists and to encourage the development of local artistic initiatives, in a rural context where professional performances are otherwise unusual. Workshops will be organized in each part of the country and will result in pieces being performed in public spaces chosen by the elders. An artist will be chosen in every village and will follow the company to Dakar, where he will present a 5 minute-performance inspired by the dances of his region of origin. The selection will be based on the artist's knowledge of his own cultural heritage. [...]
>
> During the tour we will visit villages, because the villages targeted are those that have retained their ritual and ancestral traditions. [...] We will begin with the village of Ngor, with its well-known Lebou culture illustrated by the *Ndëpp* or mystic healing. We will go on to the region of Thiès, very marked by the *Diamba dong*, the dance of the leaf; then, the region of Louga with its Linguères (queens), the region of Diourbel with its holy city Touba, the pure "Khin" of the Baye Fall, the faithful servants of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba. The next step will be the region of the Sine Saloum with the tradition of the *bakk* and the Sérère *pangol*, the dance of the wrestlers. The region of Kolda will take us through the village of Sarayoba and its Fulani; the region of Tamba [Tambacounda] through the village of the Bassari, the sons of the chameleon with their grace and their wisdom; the region of Ziguinchor [...] with its cultural and ethnic diversity with the Diola, the Socé, the Balante etc."
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> (Excerpts from project proposal for a national dance tour, August 2003; translation from French my own)

Social commentary

The second aspect of the discourse on tradition, i.e. the view that the "contemporary" genre remains close to tradition as long as it is able to comment on social life, means that recent choreographic works often carry a conscious message of social criticism. As discussed in chapter V, this is much less the case in folkloric performance.

Among the individual trajectories for example, I mentioned Coumba's piece on female house employees, created jointly with an American choreographer. Other recent works have

commented on the *bul faale*[151] generation of urban youths disillusioned with the legacy of the previous generations (*Bul Faale* by Kakat'art and Esther Baker, presented at the CCBS and the CCF in September-October 2002), marginalization and mental illness (*Kanassu ou les marginaux* by Pastëf, presented at the Daniel Sorano theatre for *Kaay Fecc* in June 2003), the Rwandan genocide (*Fagaala* by Jant bi, shown in Tubaab Jallaw in January 2004) or the passing of time (short choreographic pieces by Mrs Acogny's students, presented in Tubaab Jallaw in May 2003).

My primary example, *Bujuman*, suggests that we are all victims of the madness of urban life, all potential "*bujumen*". At one point the *Griot* style of public announcement is used: two men walk across the stage, each carrying a drum strapped in front of them and taking turns to shout the most unlikely series of events, from weddings and name-giving ceremonies to a public meeting of unionized *bujumen* ("association des *bujumans* agréés", in French in an otherwise Wolof text). In fact, irony is present throughout the piece, as when a *bujuman* who had thought to "elevate" himself by climbing into a shopping trolley and asking his friend to push him around, falls when the trolley gets stuck on the floor. As evident in the praise songs of the Griots, humour and irony are effective devices in performance, and by no means new in West African traditions. The piece is also full of details which implicitly challenge the image of social status quo displayed in the folkloric genre. Gender differentiation, for example, is significantly reduced: the only female performer plays the same *bujuman* role as her male counterparts and her clothes are as shabby as theirs (see fig. 6.2), which goes very much against the urban concern with women's manufactured beauty. Her movements only have a slightly different texture. She is not, in fact, moving in any way that could be exclusively associated with a woman. At one point she steps into high heels shoes, but so do the three male dancers. Towards the end of the piece, when five of the six performers change into several layers of rags picked up from the ground – one of them changes into a suit – there is no difference between

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[151] In urban Wolof, *bul faale* means "don't worry about it" or "leave it". The term was popularized by the first Senegalese rap group to enjoy an international success, Positive Black Soul, with their 1994 cassette entitled *Boule Fale* (as often in music and the media, the French transcription was used). Wrestler Mohamed Ndao "Tyson", who has inspired many Senegalese youths with his "rags-to-riches" trajectory, has since become the symbol of the "*bul faale* generation". Breaking the rules of the closed world of Senegalese wrestling, he trained by himself and ignored the prejudices against him; the term *bul faale* characterizes this attitude, which is very similar to *La 5e Dimension*'s *Dina baax*. For illuminating texts on the *Bul faale* generation, see for example Havard (2001) and Diouf (2002).

the clothes she and the men haphazardly collect. The message of course is that the bottom of society is equally miserable to all, a message reinforced by a poignant interview with a female *bujuman* in Mame Daour Wade's film, in which she talks with empty eyes about selling her body to survive.

There are echoes of some styles of American "modern dance" and the "contact improvisation" style which emerged in the US in the 1960s and 1970s, in which movement was consciously un-gendered – or at least was meant to be. According to Novack (1990), these styles defined themselves in opposition to the highly gendered ballet tradition, and by doing so they both reflected and announced more fundamental transformations of gender relations in American society. Although "contemporary dance" in Senegal is far from having reached the popularity of "contact" in America at the time, there are similarities. Indeed in all the "contemporary" performances I have watched in Senegal between May 2002 and January 2004, I have seen none in which gender differentiation was remotely as marked as with the folkloric genre. The social commentary that is embodied in much "contemporary" performance, and people's invocation of tradition contradicts the functionalist view held by some scholars, that African theatrical dance has been emptied of its social substance. Nicholls' work is an example of this stance:

> "Pop culture has also served to displace traditional dance by providing new contexts and new forms. The influence of Western thought has now limited the functions of dance to mere recreation in many African cities.
>
> In Africa, the decline of traditional art means more than a loss of entertainment or a diminishing of aesthetic. Indigenous cultures are functional social instruments which have been developed over the centuries to meet practical needs. [...] Impoverishment in many rural areas in Africa can be directly attributed to the decline of traditional culture of which music and dance is an integral part."
>
> (Nicholls 1998: 42-43)

Later in the article, Nicholls makes direct reference to theatrical dance as part of this "impoverishment":

> "The separation of form and function is observed in the process of artistic trivialization that is occurring throughout Africa, from Ritual Art-to-Folk Art-to-Tourist Art. Each stage

represents a loss of authenticity, a loss of aesthetic quality, and a corresponding loss of historical significance and cultural relevance."

(Nicholls 1998: 53)

It is true that stage performance is a very different phenomenon from rituals or the dances of everyday life, and it is also true that theatrical dance emerged as a part of the colonial project, but this does not mean that theatrical dance in Africa has nothing to say about the society it is produced in. To support the idea that we are dealing with a phenomenon grounded in local life, albeit a rapidly changing one, I now turn to other dimensions of the creative process.



Fig 6.3: The *Bujuman* performers wearing the rags they have collected from the ground in the final tableau, Tubaab Jallaw, August 2002







Fig.6.4 The group *Pastëf*, from Dalifort, in rehearsal in the local school courtyard for *Kanassu*, Dakar, May 2003

The visual media

In her multilocal study of ballet culture, Helena Wulff (1998) discusses ballet dancers' interest in the performances created elsewhere in the world. Personal and professional connections as well as "guesting, touring, competitions, galas, festivals and new technology, especially ballet video" all generate a "constant transnational awareness" in the ballet world (Wulff ibid.: 18). In Dakar, professional dance people also do their best to keep up-to-date with global movements in theatrical dance, but this does not mean that they necessarily imitate them.

Keeping up-to-date with performance elsewhere in the world has become easier with the recent explosion of so-called "new information and communication technologies" – one of the current "buzz" terms in the Senegalese media – in urban Senegal. The use of the internet, for example, has rocketed in the past ten years[152]. In urban areas, video players have made their way into thousands of Senegalese households of all social strata. For dancers however, getting hold of videotapes remains a problem. Most of what is available has been brought back from tours abroad, given by guest performers or taped from cable TV. A handful of people own most of the tapes, which are then eagerly circulated between groups and individuals. People watch the tapes together when visiting each other at home. Whether watching local performances – including their own – or pieces from abroad, the praise, criticism and laughter that always accompany these sessions work as much as an artistic inspiration as a moment of intense sociality. Whenever there are interpersonal tensions, watching a dance video also allows people to find a common ground and spend time together despite the odds. In much of Senegal, the same could be said about football or the immensely popular Brazilian soap operas.

Given the neglect of the arts by the state since the Structural Adjustment Programmes initiated in the early 1980s, state-controlled dance institutions are no better off than the others in terms of communication technology and visual media. In fact, the availability of the media and the physical conditions of the dance section at the National School of Arts provide an image of the poor status into which the performing arts have fallen since the mid-1980s. The dance section is located on the edge of the school's run-down building on the Avenue Faidherbe, trapped between one of the biggest mini-bus terminals in the city ("Gare Pedersen"),

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[152] This is partly due to governmental- and donor-funded development policies for the internet in Senegal. According to the USAID, the country has "some of the lowest wholesale costs for Internet in Africa and some of the highest national bandwidth (44 Megabits) levels seen in the developing world" (http://www.usaid.gov/-info_technology/ied/senegal.html).

Chinese trinket shops and a web of small, dark automotive parts/repair shops smelling of oil and rust. To access the dance room, one must push hard on a rusty metallic door, and cross a courtyard where women cook and do the laundry. The only luxury in the dance room is a large mirror. There are grey bars across the grey walls for ballet work, but the floor is of concrete covered with small tiles – much too hard for intensive practice. There are no toilets; the single shower must be used instead. The walls in the small room adjacent to the dance area are covered with old photos of ballet dancers in Senegal and elsewhere in the world. This is the office of section leader Martin Lopy, a former ballet dancer with an extraordinary dedication to the school. Lopy was trained at the school and performed as Germaine Acogny's partner for her choreography based on a poem by President Senghor, *Femme Noire*, in the mid-1970s. When I walked in on a mild day of April 2003, he and Tamba were absorbed in watching a video recording of the *Rencontres chorégraphiques* in Madagascar. This was in no way an everyday situation; to show dance images to the students, Lopy must occasionally bring his own video player from home. When I asked him once if there was anything I could bring back from Europe, he asked for "any dance video" I would be able to find. Beyond the understandable frustration with the lack of resources, dance people's increasing awareness of what is going on elsewhere in the world has also generated a sense of being isolated in a remote corner of the global artistic scene.

Germaine Acogny's *Centre international de danses traditionnelles et contemporaines africaines* (also called *Ecole des Sables*) in Tubaab Jallaw, on the other hand, is funded by a wide range of "partners", including private individuals and organizations (e.g. Nestlé Sénégal), the Ford Foundation, US-based Arts International, the UNESCO, the French AFAA (through its programme *Afrique en Créations*), the European Union, the Goethe Institute, the British Council and various European embassies. There, state-of-the-art video equipment is available for the young dancers to film their own work. In May 2003, the "restitution" marking the end of the three-month professional workshop, attended by a large crowd of village inhabitants, performers from Dakar, journalists and embassy officials, featured choreographic pieces and short films made by the dancers. The centre also has a significant video archive, constantly enriched by the tapes the dancers are required to bring from their home country. The internet was also put to good use there. In 2003, the recruits included a number of students from the arts school *Dasarts* in Amsterdam, with whom the centre had an exchange programme. Every day, short

filmed sequences were posted on the *Dasarts* website for the students left in Amsterdam to follow the Senegalese workshop.

Pas-de-deux with foreign artists[153]

Joint collaborations with dancers and choreographers from other parts of the world also have a tremendous influence on the development of the "contemporary" genre. But this should not be mistaken as an instance of reproducing what European, American or Japanese artists do; in most cases there is a true exchange of styles and inspiration. I would even argue that the fact that Senegalese artists experience these collaborations as taking place on an equal basis – at least on the artistic level – is an essential part of what makes them attractive. Unsurprisingly, another important motivating factor is the perceived opportunity to travel and integrate global performing circuits on more advantageous terms than with the folkloric dances. I will come back to this point later in the chapter.

Creative collaborations between African performers/choreographers and dance people from other parts of the world are not a new phenomenon, but from being isolated cases in the 1970s and 1980s, they have gained a great deal of momentum in the past decade. By the mid-1990s, a number of African dancers had made their way into European and American dance companies, while others had established their own groups and schools away from Africa. In 1993, French choreographer Mathilde Monnier went to Burkina Faso to create *Pour Antigone* which went on international tour. Although she was the acknowledged choreographer of the piece, the African dancers she recruited did contribute with their creativity. Most importantly, as far as I know this was the first time that an established European choreographer was spending time in Africa to create a piece and then bring it to prestigious theatres around the world. In 2000 the piece was still touring; for its New York premiere at the Lincoln Center Festival, the cultural services of the French embassy described it in these words:

> "Ten years ago, French choreographer Mathilde Monnier was inspired to work with dancers from Mali and Burkina-Faso to explore the relation between the dynamics of Greek tragedy and those of modern Africa. The result is 'Pour Antigone', an exquisitely seamless

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[153] In this section I have kept the artists' real names.

union of the ecstatic loose-limbed power of contemporary African dance and the austere sensuality of European post modern performance."

(From the website of the French Embassy in the United States: http://www.frenchculture.org/perfo/events/lcf/monnier.html)

Mathilde Monnier went on to recruit two dancers from Burkina Faso, Seydou Boro and Salia Sanou, in her company. Boro and Sanou have since established their own company in Burkina Faso and have launched *Dialogues de Corps*, an annual choreographic festival which attracts dance people from all over Africa. Salia Sanou is also the current director of the *Rencontres chorégraphiques* in Madagascar. Since *Pour Antigone*, other European choreographers have travelled to Africa to work with dancers and musicians. Senegal is a favourite destination because its dance world is already well connected to Europe through people like Germaine Acogny. The connections have extended to North America, where there is a long-standing interest in African performance. As a result, Dakar and Tubaab Jallaw have become busy destinations for collaborations between Senegalese and European, American or Japanese performers and choreographers. In fact, the process is almost becoming a genre in itself. I witnessed eight such joint pieces during my fieldwork alone, ranging from creations of a few minutes to full-evening performances, and more projects were being planned. In 2002-03 for example, American dancer, choreographer and scholar Esther Baker created a full evening performance with Senegalese Djibril Diallo, shown at the CCBS and at the CCF in Dakar. American choreographer/voice performer Reggie Wilson taught during a *Kaay Fecc* workshop and created a piece in Dakar with Congolese Andreya Ouamba; it was performed during the 2003 *Kaay Fecc* festival. An Italian choreographer set up a performance jointly with *Sobo Badé* from Tubaab Jallaw, shown both in Tubaab Jallaw and at the CCBS in Dakar. American-Nigerian choreographer Onyekwere Ozuzu created a piece with Mamadou Diagne; *Lu tax/Why* by *Doudou & Onye* was shown during the *Kaay Fecc* festival at the National Theatre. For her piece *Manifest*, presented at the National Theatre, Austrian artist Editta Braun had recruited Ibrahima Sène, a Senegalese martial arts expert. The local audience at the National Theatre was obviously puzzled by the experimental combination of dance, physical theatre, rope-flying, karate and excerpts from Manfred Wöhlcke's "Soziale Entropie", but I felt waves of enthusiasm pass through the audience at every acrobatic exploit or comic situation. A significant number of collaborations take place at Mrs Acogny's centre in Tubaab Jallaw, which since 1998 has seen

a constant flow of guest choreographers and performers from Europe and Japan. Students also create pieces together, such as *Stück* by Togolese Pierre Sanouvi and German Annette Vogel, performed at the CCF for *Kaay Fecc* 2003.

In most cases these collaborations only last for the time of the piece, and stop when the foreign partner leaves. There are at least two possible interpretations of this phenomenon. One perspective may be to regard it as an extension of the exploitative practices which have already been debated at length in the World Music industry. In this view, the inequality of wealth and access to performing circuits between artists from the "North" and those from the "South" can only result in unfair exploitation of the creativity of the poorest. The other perspective, in which I situate my analysis, is to view these collaborations as artistic exchanges in which both parts find inspiration, enrich their experiences and seek to promote their individual careers. The collaborative process in itself is sought after as a valuable and formative experience, even though issues of ownership, interpersonal relations, money and differences in people's expectations often result in conflict. Moreover, local artists often mention how good they feel about remaining in control of the process. Rather than waiting hopelessly for an invitation to perform abroad, working with foreign choreographers and dancers for prolonged periods of time – from a couple of weeks to several months – allows people to try out new ideas, learn new techniques and use the partner's eyes as a mirror of their own talent. Naturally, there is always a hope that these projects will somehow open the door to the global performing circuits, as in Moussa's case. For many people there remains also, unfortunately, a certain prestige that follows from working on equal terms with a *tubaab*. But what happens when people's careers eventually take them out of Senegal and into these global circuits? Is it the salvation they expected or just a momentary taste of the dream? And is the growing popularity of "contemporary African dance" a fashion of the moment or is it supported by wider cultural and political interests? These are some of the questions I attempt to tackle in the next section.

New careers and the globalization of "contemporary African dance"

The booming circulation of "contemporary" performances from Africa raises important questions with regard to the nature of the phenomenon. Beyond the endless debates on whether or not the term "contemporary African dance" is appropriate, what is this new genre, if that is indeed what it is, really about? And most importantly, how does it affect the lives of the per-

formers, in Senegal in particular? In this section I focus on a pan-African event which has grown to become a point of reference in the space of just a decade: *Sanga*, a bi-annual choreographic competition held in Madagascar.

Sanga[154] *and Francophone institutions*

As a result of an intense lobbying by some of the pioneers of African dance in France, including Alphonse Tiérou, the first *Rencontres chorégraphiques africaines* were organized in 1995 in Luanda by the French *Afrique en Créations* programme – then a branch of the French Cooperation Ministry. The programme has since become integrated into the state-controlled AFAA. In 1999, the civil war had resumed in Angola, and therefore the competition was moved to Madagascar and renamed *Sanga – Rencontres chorégraphiques de l'Afrique et de l'Océan Indien.* The explicit objective of the event is to support the development of "contemporary dance" in Africa. This objective is articulated around four main dimensions: financial support, touring, professionalization and media exposure. In 2003, the jury consisted of a president (film director Abderhamane Sissako from Mauritania) and ten members, including European and Canadian media people, representatives of the AFAA and AIF (*Agence Internationale de la Francophonie*), the director of the National Arts Institute from the Ivory Coast and three African choreographers. A total of 82 applications from 30 African countries were submitted to the jury, 11 of which were pre-selected to come and present a piece in Antananarivo. This was a significant increase from the previous edition, when 63 applications from 24 African countries were submitted to the jury, and 10 competitors were pre-selected (*Sanga 3* programme). But as I will now discuss, behind the official praise of the whole enterprise, patrons and Africans dance communities often have very different attitude towards the event.

A view from afar[155]

Financial support to choreographic creativity in Africa is one of the two pillars of *Sanga*. In 2003, each group pre-selected received 3,000 Euros[156] towards preparation for the competi-

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[154] *Sanga* means "summit" in Merina.

[155] This section is primarily based on data from the Sanga 3 and Africalia'03 programmes and from the websites of French and Francophone cultural institutions, the AFAA and AIF in particular.

tion. The first prize received a fully paid tour but nothing in cash, at least not directly. In practice, touring always involves the payment of a fixed amount per day towards the artists' expenses, the attractive *per diem*. The second prize received 5,000 Euros towards a new creation, and the group selected for the Trophée RFI-Danse received 3,500 Euros. The second pillar of the competition is touring for the winners. The AFAA organizes tours in Europe for the first three prizes, and in addition an African tour is arranged for the first prize and the Trophée RFI-Danse. Limited to France until 2001, in 2003 the European tours have been extended to Spain, Italy and the UK. Media exposure and an incitement towards professionalization are also regarded are beneficial side effects of the event. For the latter, it is taken for granted that the process of application, which requires groups to submit photographs, a video and a written description of their work, will encourage the candidates to learn how to promote their work in accordance with international standards.

From the point of view of the funding bodies – including French and Francophone institutions such as the AFAA and the AIF – the event is part of a larger project with cultural, economic and political repercussions. Although I do not have sufficient data to uncover the politics of the event, it is important to re-frame it in the wider context of Francophone cultural politics. Indeed *Sanga* is not the only African arts event sponsored by these institutions. They are also the main sponsors of the MASA (Market for African Performing Arts), held every other year in Abidjan since 1993, and several other "markets" and biennales of "contemporary" African arts: the plastic arts biennale *Dak'Arts* in Senegal, the cinema festival FESPACO (*Festival Panafricain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou*), and the *Rencontres de la Photographie Africaine de Bamako*. One of the explicit objectives of the AIF is to help "preserve cultural diversity" in the world. The AIF is the main executive body of the OIF (*Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie*)[157], of which the General Secretary is former Senegalese President Abdou Diouf. The agency's mission with regard to cultural diversity is described on its website[158] as part of the battle against the objective of the WTO (World Trade Organization) to deregulate trade on a global scale:

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[156] Approximately £2,000 in late 2004.

[157] The OIF is a voluntary association of nations committed to promoting French language and Francophone cultures. It has been established in several stages since the creation of the *Association Internationale des Parlementaires de Langue Française* (AIPLF) in 1967, and has now 49 member-nations.

[158] (http://agence.francophonie.org/actions/arts/ini-diversite.cfm)

> "Les négociations du cycle de Doha de l'Organization mondiale du commerce visent notamment une libéralisation des biens et services culturels. La Francophonie juge qu'une telle libéralisation, sans un mécanisme de régulation qui en garantisse la maîtrise, entraînerait une uniformisation culturelle, portant une atteinte fatale à la diversité culturelle, notamment dans les pays les moins développés."[159]

It is therefore tempting to ask whether the French/Francophone promotion of the contemporary arts in Africa is part of a political agenda aimed at counteracting the growing American interest in African affairs. France is not the only nation involved in supporting contemporary arts in Africa, but it may not be a coincidence that the other major player, Belgium, is also a former colonial nation. In March 2003, a four-day festival of contemporary African performance, *Africalia*, took place in Brussels. This was the third edition of a series of events initiated in 2001 by Eddy Boutmans, the Belgian Secretary of State for Federal Development Co-operation. Thirteen "contemporary dance" companies from eleven African countries took part in the festival (*Africalia'03* programme). The synergies with *Sanga* were obvious, as most of the groups or individuals dancers present were or had been participants in *Sanga*. The Madagascar event had worked well as a "launching platform". The objectives of Africalia are described in terms of "professionalization" and "structural development", but the overall concern with "culture" and the arts as an important element in the negotiation of a new world order can be perceived too:

> "[Africalia is] an innovative first time happening that stems from a real desire on the part of the Belgian federal government to place south-south and north-south culture exchanges at the centre of its sustainable development co-operation efforts. [...]
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> In 2002 Africalia contributed to the realisation of about sixty projects in Africa[160]. These covered the fields of: Visual arts; Applied arts (fashion and design); Performing arts (theatre,

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[159] "Among other points, the negotiations of the Doha cycle of the WTO aim at liberalizing cultural goods and services. From the point of view of the *Francophonie*, such liberalization, without a regulatory mechanism to guarantee its control, would result in cultural standardization, and thus strike a fatal blow to cultural diversity, particularly in the less developed countries."

[160] According to Africalia's website (http://www.africalia.be/), for 2004/05 the projects selected will be attributed 10-50,000 Euros.

dance, music, and street animations); Storytelling; Cinema and documentaries (radio and television); Literature, comic strips and illustrations; Cultural heritage; Architecture/ urbanism. [...] The encounters and experiences that this circulation makes possible will, *in fine*, contribute to the professionalisation and structural development of this sector."

(Extracts from *Africalia'03* programme)

The broader political implications of such events as *Sanga*, the MASA or *Africalia* may appear far removed from the concerns of the artists, yet as I will now discuss, they are not: people's ambivalent attitudes towards these events emerge partly as a response to their perceived political dimension.

A closer view

In the Senegalese dance world, every *Sanga* competition raises both hope and fury. This may appear surprising given that the event takes place at the other extremity of Africa, but in fact many dance people feel closely connected to the event. This is undoubtedly due to the historical connection between Senegal and the *Rencontres chorégraphiques*. Mrs Acogny was the director of the *Rencontres* as well as the director of the dance section of the *Afrique en Créations* programme – a branch of the AFAA in Paris – between 1997 and 2000. Moreover, dancers and choreographers from all over Africa who have passed through her workshops have come to occupy a prominent place in the event (4 choreographers out of 11 selected in 2003). In 2003, four Senegalese groups applied, and one was selected.

If the event is already acknowledged as a "rite of passage" for dancers and choreographers with international ambitions, it is also the object of passionate debates in the professional dance *milieux* of major African cities. In Dakar, a handful of informants were enthusiastic supporters of an event they described as a "great motivation" for people to work harder. They also argued that *Sanga* was a major place to show the rest of the world that the young artists of the continent were doing "art" and not necessarily "African art" as they were expected to. But many more displayed an ambivalent attitude. They recognized that the *Rencontres*, commonly called "Tana" – for Antananarivo – provided a unique window for the choreographic works of the continent, but they denounced what they saw as the re-appropriation of African arts by Europeans. They deplored the competitive side of the event, a "White people's inven-

tion", which they held responsible for the standardization of choreographic creativity. "Everybody is doing the same all over Africa now, because they have seen what works in Tana and they want to please the jury", one informant said. Some even refused to apply on the grounds that the rules of the competition – which restricted the length of the piece and the number of performers – would act as a straightjacket. With *Sanga* in mind in particular, one informant even argued that the concept of "contemporary African dance" was a French invention:

> "It was an idea of the French to create contemporary African dance. They've put a lot of money into it [...]. I think they want to civilize us because our African dances disturb them. Our culture disturbs them... They talk about 'globalization'. There is a lot of money in it, so the dancers throw themselves into it without thinking. But there is no African contemporary dance, no African classical dance etc. There are African dances, period [*un point* c'est *tout*]."
>
> (Personal communication from choreographer, August 2004; translation from French my own.)

Another informant was even more articulate when echoing widespread complaints about the event:

> "For Tana, everything is biased. As long as we Africans do not put our own systems in place to evaluate our own works [*oeuvres*], we will only be able to watch and put up with it [*subir*]. Unfortunately, it is once more the law of the richest, and the results of this competition are open to discussion, to say the least. Whose interests do they serve in the end? [...]
>
> The danger is also that we are forced into a certain rhythm which has an impact on the creation process. You don't become a good artist in two years! They glorify [*on porte aux nues*] young artists who do not necessarily have the creative maturity, and who are still 'searching'. The other danger is that the artists begin with the wrong end: [the competition] favours the product but not the creation process. [...] In 2003, everybody had lots of accessories, fake artefacts [*artifices*] which tried, unsuccessfully, to hide the lack of sophistication. We must [...] concentrate on the substance [*la matière*] and possibly evaluate it later, if necessary. Is it so necessary to compete? The good thing is that the creation of all these festivals in Africa will make it possible for artists to present their work in a healthier environment, without all this pressure.

> But at least, Tana is a means for people to see what is going on in the dance scene in Africa. It was the first event to show 'contemporary' African dance, and in a way it is inspiring for African artists, given the conditions of creation and diffusion they are facing back home. And it has launched a good number of companies on the international stage."
>
> (Personal communication from choreographer in Dakar, October 2004; translation from French my own.)

In November 2003 for *Sanga* 3, an unexpected turn of events crystallized the debates on experimental dance forms, and their political dimension was brought to the fore. While the Nigerian *Ijodee* won the first prize for "Ori" ("the head"), the second prize was given to the Mozambican *Projeto Cuvilas* for its "Um solo para cinco" ("a solo for five"). The piece featured five women who, in the words of journalist Ayoko Mensah, brought the audience "into a playful female world, intimate, on the edge of dream and reality" (Mensah 2004[161]). After having performed a kind of game of musical chairs, the dancers leave the stage, only to return carrying metal buckets and... naked! Each of them dances a solo, and the piece ends up with the women throwing themselves into a big mud-filled bath tub (Mensah, ibid.).

When I returned to Dakar in December 2003, the dance world was in ebullition about the "Mozambican affair". I met only one person who was thrilled by what he welcomed as a sign of the "liberation" of the African body, thus echoing the opinion of a number of European observers in Madagascar (e.g. Le Monde 18.11.2003). A French anthropologist I met at a conference a few months later was equally enthusiastic about the event. On the whole however, the reactions of the Senegalese dance people ranged from puzzlement to anger. Most were unimpressed by what they regarded as a form of White voyeurism of naked Black bodies. The most extreme among them spoke about "engineering", arguing that "Africans would never dance naked on a stage" if not "strongly incited" by Europeans. The agency of the Mozambican choreographer – who was himself quite surprised to have won a prize – was irrelevant because by breaching a taboo common to all African cultures, he had positioned himself as a sell-out to European interests. His statement, therefore, could not be taken seriously. The affair almost developed into a diplomatic crisis, as the jury had ignored the Malagasy law forbidding nakedness to be displayed in public. The winners were due to perform during the closing ceremony, to be attended by Malagasy President Marc Ravalomanana and transmitted on the

[161] Translation from French my own.

local TV. After much negotiation between the organizing committee and the government, Cuvilas was asked to "cover his dancers lightly" (Mensah 2004). Needless to say, when he refused, the government censured the piece from the closing ceremony. According to informants who had attended the event, *Sanga 3* ended up in a dreadful atmosphere. From the point of view of the participants, it did not help that the written material they had been asked to send for the programme was grossly edited by a French journalist. Whereas the organizers presumably took it for granted that the programme should look as "professional" as possible, for some it was a humiliating detail, suggesting that Africans were unable to write proper presentation material themselves.

Thus contrary to what is often assumed from Europe, performers in Africa may be caught up in a daily struggle to earn a living, but this does not prevent them from being concerned with the contents of their art, and the representations of Africa projected onto the world stage. This is because far from being disconnected from people's social reality, what takes place on stage is in constant interplay with it. As Schieffelin (1998) has argued, the western perception of performance as an artifice detached from other areas of life is anchored in the Aristotelian division between performers and audience. Senegalese performers do not find this distinction to be relevant at all times, because ultimately, their most important "audience" is the local community they live in.

The status and dilemmas of the new performer

As a closure, we must therefore take a step away from *Sanga*, and once again interrogate the relationship between transformations of the dance in urban Senegal and the status of the performers involved. Although "social status" is multidimensional and complex, I find it useful to look at three important dimensions: socio-economic status, gender identities and the figure of the performer in the urban Senegalese imagination.

The socio-economic status of the "contemporary" performer

For many "contemporary" performers, the perspective of making a better living than with the folkloric genre is an important motivation to make the shift. As we have seen with *La 5e Dimension* and the individual stories, success in the "contemporary" genre opens up possibilities

to travel more extensively than is the case with the folkloric genre. According to several informants, the *per diem* rate for European tours varies between 15,000 and 25,000 FCFA, which in some cases comes on top of the performing fee (*cachet*). This is consistent with the rates I remember working as a volunteer for the "Images of Africa" festival in Copenhagen in 1996, and compares favourably with the rate of 6,000 FCFA per day *Kaay Fecc* was able to offer in Dakar in 2003. The significance of such events as *Sanga* and *Africalia* becomes clearer when one knows that these are the spaces where innovative performance is constructed as "contemporary". For the "contemporary" style, the patrons are often national or international agencies supporting "culture and the arts" (the AFAA is a prime example), and the circuits are prestigious theatres rather than African festivals and hotels. For example, Suzanne Linke's *Le Coq est mort*, which involved three of the dancers from *La 5e Dimension*, was billed in such prestigious places as the *Théâtre de la Ville* in Paris and the Jacob's Pillow Festival in Massachusetts. *Duas sem três*, by two dancers from the Cabo Verdean *Raiz di Polon*, won the special prize of the jury in Madagascar in 2003, and was then invited to perform at The Place for the Dance Umbrella festival in London (together with first prize *Ijodee*). Kettly Noël's *La Compagnie*, from Mali, and Auguste Ouedraogo's *Compagnie Tâ*, from Burkina Faso's (who took part both in *Kaay Fecc* 2003 and in *Sanga 3*) are programmed at the Barbican Centre for March 2005. In Madagascar, the gathering of mainstream French media and representatives of prestigious circuits was unprecedented. Mensah (2004) mentions more than fifty theatre- and festival programmers from Africa, Europe and North America. Her comments on *Sanga* as a "market" are revealing:

> "One must say that although the competition is the object of harsh criticism, in parallel the *Rencontres* emerge more and more openly as a market of African choreographic creation. The unprecedented presence of prestigious programmers at this latest edition is a sign: directors of theatres (Théâtre de la Ville in Paris, Haugesund Theater in Norway, Barbican Theatre in London, Stadsschouwburg in Amsterdam), festivals (Montpellier Danse, Biennale du Val de Marne, Budapest Autumn Festival, Tanzfestival in Germany), choreographic centres (French, German, Portuguese, American...) and of course the representatives of funding agencies (Africalia, IETM, Multiarts Projects and Productions) or institutions (Mairie de Paris, Conservatoire Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris...)."
>
> (Mensah 2004, translation from French my own)

Some of the programmers had already "bought" performances by the winners, such as the Choreographic Centre of Essen; others had come to look for the treasures of creativity that will, they hope, help revive the Euro-American dance scene. For now, *Sanga* is the most straightforward route towards an international career, but it is not the only one. In the case of *La 5e Dimension*, the first opportunity to perform outside of Senegal was with a French festival which promotes itself as alternative and forward-looking, and therefore particularly interested in "contemporary" arts. For the largest part, folkloric troupes do not have access to these circuits. Another important aspect in the political economy of dance is that "contemporary" groups are usually smaller, and therefore for an equal fee, more cash is available for every individual. From an average size of 5-8 against 15-20 for folkloric troupes, the difference is significant indeed. Getting visas to travel abroad is also easier for smaller groups, because in the view of embassies they are less likely to serve as a cover for "migration candidates"[162]. Moreover, the "contemporary" groups tend to have fewer dependents ("apprentices") who must be paid, too.

From Dakar, dance people follow up on competitors' touring opportunities, and the perspective that one might be the next in line feeds into hopes of a better life. Together with a markedly different performing style, all these elements combine to shift the status of the "contemporary" performer away from that of the Griot. Relatives of the performers involved sometimes find "contemporary" choreography to be closer to theatre, which has more of the aura of a "real profession". Performers from *La 5e Dimension* told about their struggle, in the early days, to convince friends and families to come and see the performances. Initially people did not take them seriously but, one of them said proudly "when they finally came, they loved it". "They were so surprised, they said 'we didn't know you were doing *this* kind of thing!' and they wanted to see more" he added.

It is also significant that "caste" is rarely mentioned in these groups. It all works as if the issue is being displaced as the performing profession takes on a new character. It is comparable, perhaps, to the difference between "traditional" woodworkers and "modern" carpenters; whereas the former are still expected to belong to the *lawɔe* status group, the latter include a majority of *géér*, and this was already the case in the mid-1960s (Silla 1966).

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[162] A case in point is Congolese musician Papa Wemba, who was arrested in Paris in February 2003, when he arrived at the airport with almost 200 "musicians". Many of them had not brought any instrument with them. It emerged that his "fee" as a human trafficker was as high as $3,500 per person.

Gender transformations

The transformation of performance styles is also accompanied by changes in gender identities and relations. It would be tempting to ask whether these changes simply reflect similar transformations in the wider Senegalese society or whether they also affect them, but this would be a misleading question; if we accept that the performing world is a part of society and not outside it, then the interplay works both ways.

By comparison with the folkloric genre, the "contemporary" creative process seems to make more space for women dancers. Their contribution is also more openly acknowledged. It is particularly revealing to watch rehearsals by women involved in both genres – usually with different groups – because I have found that they often behaved differently in each context. One gifted woman dancer in her early twenties, for example, was working simultaneously with a major folkloric troupe and with a smaller "contemporary" group. Despite her important role in the folkloric troupe, she always seemed shy and slightly withdrawn during rehearsals. Whenever she started dancing she livened up, but between sets she seemed respectful of the authority of the two leaders and of the more experienced male dancers. With the smaller group by contrast, she enjoyed more of an inspiring status. When I saw her rehearse she did not have a very long experience of the "contemporary" style – a year or two at most – but even that was more than most of the others. They were men with diverse backgrounds, from the folkloric genre to theatre, sports and acrobatics. When the choreographer asked the dancers to improvise on a particular theme, she retreated inwards and experimented with her own movements in a very different style from what I had seen her do with the other troupe. Not yet confident about their own improvisation abilities, some of the male dancers glanced over to her, trying to follow her movements. Even though she did not look back, she obviously enjoyed this. At times she showed them a move she had come up with, beaming with pleasure. This would not normally happen in a folkloric troupe, for the simple reason that men and women perform different choreographies and sing different songs. The fact that "contemporary" styles promote less differentiated gender identities opens up possibilities for women to come to the fore in the creative process. Increasingly, women also perform solo or in all-women pieces created by themselves or under the impulse of a woman choreographer. Thus for the opening ceremony of *Kaay Fecc* 2003 attended by President Wade's wife and representatives of the funding institutions, Fatou Cissé danced a beautiful solo choreographed for her by Gacirah Diagne.

As could be expected from what has been said in chapter IV, such transformations do not always take place smoothly, and conflicts erupt in mixed-sex contexts when men feel threatened. In one "contemporary" group for example, the choreographer told me that there had been more women dancers in the past, but that having too many women in the group was problematic. For example, it was disturbing for the group if they got married or pregnant before having completed their engagements. If the husband demanded that they stop performing, everything was put on hold until suitable replacement was found. Romantic affairs within the group were also a destabilizing factor, and moreover, he added, "the guys don't like it when you criticize them in front of the girls". In a different group headed by a woman choreographer, an argument over authority and discipline between her and some of the dancers ended up with two of the girls storming out of the troupe altogether. One of the male dancers threw himself to the floor, the whole body contracted in a nervous reaction looking much like an epileptic fit. I could see from the relatively calm attitude of the others that it was not epilepsy, and that they had seen this before; a friend told me later that this was a common expression of anger among young Tukulor men. In any case it was evident that the situation would not have degenerated in this way, had the leader been a man.

A less visible phenomenon is the entry of women performers into the domain of relationships with foreigners. Until recently, the bulk of migrants from Senegal to other parts of the world were men, and the smaller number of women who migrated as well, were joining already settled husbands. If the performing world is any indication, this is changing fast. A growing minority of women performers are determined to take control of their lives and careers, and they cannot see why the opportunities their male counterparts have had access to for years – using marriage with a *tubaab* as a visa – should not be available to them as well. The increasing circulation of people with an interest in the arts between Senegal, Europe and North America, is multiplying the occasions for them to meet foreigners. I do not wish to suggest that all relationships between Senegalese artists and *tubaab* are simply instrumental, because instrumentality does not prevent genuine feelings to develop simultaneously. It is not my point, either, to venture into the complex psychology of these relationships; people have different motivations in every case. But there is definitely a gender shift in what used to be a male-only territory, and it is this shift which I find important to pinpoint. These transformations will undoubtedly affect male identities, because male and female identities are mutually constructed.



Fig. 6.5 Fatou Cissé performing a solo piece by Gacirah Diagne at the opening ceremony of the *Kaay Fecc* festival, Dakar, May 2003



Fig. 6.6 Dancers after a fashion show/"contemporary" performance for the opening ceremony of *Kaay Fecc*, Dakar, May 2003. Most of them are also experts in the regional folkloric styles and in *sabar* dances.

"New figures of success"[163] or traitors?

From what has been said so far, the way towards an improved social status would seem quite straightforward. One would simply have to acquire new performing skills and engage in more individualized choreography. Yet the choice is not as simple as it may seem. First of all, not every performer finds the "contemporary" styles appealing or easy to switch to, as shown in the vignette. Second, people are always caught in a dilemma, not only in the wider world but also at home. Indeed if they move too far away from what local audiences regard as Senegambian forms of expression, they are at risk of being classified as "sell-out" to the *tubaab* and marginalized. Ayoko Mensah has expressed this dilemma very well:

> "Nothing is easy for these choreographers, neither materially nor artistically. If they stay too close to the traditional forms, they are blamed for not innovating; but if they turn their back on them, they are accused of being uprooted."
>
> (Mensah 2001: 6, translation from French my own)

In some cases, the resistance displayed towards events like *Sanga* should also be understood in this light. Being seen to resist French "cultural imperialism" in particular, may allow people to keep a moral high ground, which can then be used to fend off accusations of being "uprooted". But the equilibrium is always fragile, and in practice the social pressure to remain "African" or "Senegalese" can be very confusing. This should also help demystify the widespread idea that "contemporary" artists operate in a complete freedom of mind. One dancer/choreographer told me that his "dancing body [spoke] the language of an African" and that he felt therefore compelled to "create using African dances to have anything interesting to say". Yet what he meant by "African" was never very clear. There are aesthetic elements which people recognize as distinctively alien to their performing traditions, such as the purposeful disconnection of music and movement, patches of silence or very slow movement. But most of the time, contrary to what Thompson's (1974) list of common traits in African dances suggests, people find it difficult to distinguish "African" elements from those which are not. An obvious way of working around this, is to keep practising the folkloric styles simultaneously with the more innovative genres. In any case the necessity to appear faithful to the

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[163] This is borrowed from the title of Havard's (2001) article.

community is ever-present as expressed by a 22-year old dancer from Burkina Faso, who also took part in *Kaay Fecc* 2003:

> "My point of departure is traditional dance, and I continue to do traditional dance alongside contemporary dance. But I am able to dissociate both dance types, even though I sometimes mix the styles of expression. As long as I can keep both dance forms separate, I can also preserve my original expression and I don't lose myself. I am also determined to stay in my country and go on working. But of course I would like to go on tour abroad, if I get the chance."
>
> (Berlingske Tidende, 08.07.2002, translation from Danish my own)

Accusations of doing "White people's stuff" are sometimes used as an idiom to express resentment towards performers whose careers are picking up. This is very closely related to the ambiguous position of the migrant in Senegalese society: on one hand young men are expected to leave to make money[164] and be able to support their family, and on the other hand resentment quickly follows if they are successful. If they are not, they are just ignored. Nearly all migrants or former migrants I interviewed were caught up in a web of expectations they experienced as a burden. They complained that their relatives and friends were too greedy because they had no idea how hard they worked in Europe. Money was not the only concern: they also felt the pressure to show a close attachment to the community, either by accepting an arranged marriage, by investing in a local project (a two-storey house, a shop, a well, a clinic) or both. But when returnees spend generously, people also speculate about the migrant's activities abroad and make comments such as "tainted money does not last". This is important in order to understand the anxieties most performers face if they leave Senegal for longer periods of time, or appear to pay too much allegiance to White people's expectations. The status of dancers is rising with the transformation of the profession, but "contemporary" performers are more exposed to criticism than others because what they do is "tainted" by outside influence.

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[164] In Senegalese regions with a high degree of migration, it is almost impossible for young men to marry without having worked abroad first, because of the enormous inflation in bride prices. There the returnees are ironically called "venants" ("the coming ones") or V.I. ("Venants d'Italie"). The implication is that a "venant", a term that is also used of fridges and all kinds of goods, is a valued commodity.

Concluding remarks

Whenever I show videos of Senegalese "contemporary dance" in Europe, people are always surprised to find similarities with movements they associate with Europe or North America. Somehow it does not fit into their expectations of dance from Africa, and yet most performers involved describe their work as something as least as close to them as the folkloric genre they were trained in. Their claim that the innovative genre draws on older forms of performance should be taken seriously, but as has long been the case with cultural forms in Senegambia, there are many other sources at play. In fact, innovation in dance performance is the result of a dynamic interaction between artistic expression (the need to comment on contemporary society rather than on an idealized past), the need to earn a decent living, the disengagement of the Senegalese state, the dynamics of the global performing arts markets and such external political agendas as the French involvement in promoting – controlling? – African "culture".

This leads us to ask whether "contemporary dance" is an instance of the "global structures of common difference" discussed by Wilk (1995) and Amselle[165] (2001) among others. I wish to build further on their work by making two important points here. The first has to do with the now common criticism of some of the early literature on globalization, which was the absence of localization in the global phenomena described. Or rather, it was assumed that global phenomena or products travelled from "the West" to other parts of the world. I have tried to avoid this pitfall by locating the history of theatrical dance in Senegambia, with roots both locally and in Paris. Taking this history into account, can we not say that West Africa, too, has contributed to generating the global performing arts structures as we know them now? My second point is informed by Wilk's analysis of beauty pageants in Belize, in which he argues that the globalization of cultural forms works as the outwards envelope of very diverse contents. In Belize for example, people have appropriated the beauty pageants for local political purposes. This is where we must return to the historical status of the performer in Senegambian societies, which I problematized at the beginning of the thesis. From of the point of view of many choreographers and performers, the most important departure from the folkloric genre is that individual creativity allows them to further improve their social status. There are multiple parameters involved in this shift: success on the "contemporary" scene might bring

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[165] Amselle (2001: 24) talks about the media "through which [different cultural systems] are forced to express themselves".

additional income, and also, people's integration into the global performing circuits brings prestige in the home communities. Those who make their way to such events and places as the Jacob's Pillow Festival, the Théâtre de la Ville or Dance Umbrella, are regarded as precursors who bring Senegalese creativity to the world scene. In this sense, the local audiences – both real and virtual – do not only work as a "filter" (Morphy 1995); they are also the audiences from whom social recognition is sought, at all stages.

Another important element in the quest for status is the access to more recent forms of success, such as the opportunity to live an ideal life stretched between Senegal and wealthier parts of the world. In the more extreme cases, the choice of a performing career is instrumental in a carefully planned migration strategy, comparable to enrolling in a football school or even converting to the Mouride *tariqa*. So far, men have largely been the focus of the literature on Senegalese migration, because they constitute the overwhelming majority. But a closer look at the performing world indicates that young women's desire to travel or migrate too, may have been overlooked. Migration is a particularly revealing domain, because it is increasingly used as a way to reconcile individual ambitions with people's duties towards their community. There is an obvious connection with the "contemporary" styles here, because whereas it is not always appropriate to display individual ambitions verbally, the innovative styles allow the performers to promote themselves as individuals. It would be tempting to ask, in this context, whether this is evidence of the shift towards "individualization" scholars of Africa have been increasingly concerned with (e.g. Marie 1997).

Realizing individual ambitions entails adjusting one's skills to the new conditions of the profession. Aside from the mandatory training in various dance forms – *Kaay Fecc* has organized workshops in contemporary dance, jazz, dance and theatre, Brazilian capoeira, hip-hop and "choreographic writing" – people feel increasingly obliged to learn communicative, administrative and law-related skills. As shown by the case of *La 5e Dimension*, maintaining contacts with performers and agents outside Senegal has become crucially important, and people acknowledge that they must be able to write letters, e-mails, speak French, and preferably some English. Given the imbalance between men and women's literacy in Senegal, male performers are at an advantage there. Company managers must also be able to design, write, and produce promotion material (leaflets, press books, videos, CVs, and more recently, websites) and funding applications. Since very few groups can afford a manager with these skills, choreographers try to cope by themselves or draw on the expertise of local arts agents. But needless

to say, this constitutes a serious obstacle in people's career opportunities. To take a concrete example, applying for a choreographic residency in France paid by the AFAA requires – among other things – a complete set of bank details, but most groups do not even have a bank account!

From the point of view of the global programmers, there is growing interest in "contemporary" choreography from Africa. As if to echo the early twentieth century, when Picasso and other artists "rediscovered" African art, and later the World Music phenomenon, they are turning to Africa for new inspiration and new "cultural products" for the audiences. Folkloric performance, by contrast, no longer has the aura it enjoyed from the 1960s to the 1980s. An important question scholars working on performance in Africa need to ask, and which dance people are already asking, is how the current interest from performing circuits and the new patrons (European states, multilateral institutions, regional councils, NGOs, luxury hotels, multinationals) is affecting creativity, and whether this is a momentary fashion or a more enduring interest. Is dance from Senegal and elsewhere in Africa in the process of being locked up in a new "ghetto"[166], or do the current developments indicate that African artists are determined to regain control over their contribution to the wider world? As the multiplication of "socially conscious" dance festivals such as *Kaay Fecc* shows, this is not just an economic issue. From the point of view of the Senegalese performers, there is also a genuine desire to break away from what is perceived as artistic isolation. People wish to contribute to the development of the global arts scene, because they feel that artistic production is a domain in which young Africans can make their voices heard in a world order that ignores them. Incidentally, the local political elites are largely associated with the "world order" in question. This may be why social criticism never looms far beyond the surface of artistic innovation.

Of course, the performing arts have been at all times a privileged medium of political expression, but every place and time produces a different sense of urgency. Within the dance

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[166] In his second book on dance in Africa, Ivorian dancer and scholar Alphonse Tiérou (2001: 52) remarks that "the continuous use of the term 'ethno-dance' for African dance, more than thirty years after the Dakar festival (1966), demonstrates the will to prevent it to be perceived as a true art, perhaps with the secret objective to lock it into the frozen ghetto in which African art as a whole has been held for many years [...]." In fact, in Europe I have not come across this term for many years; in courses and performances, terms like "African dance", "traditional African dance" or "Afro-jazz" are much more common. Despite the authoritative claims running through Tiérou's book, the idea that "African dance" has been locked up in a "ghetto" since the early colonial days is not new.

community in early 21st-century Europe for example, there is sometimes a sense of emptiness, a sort of nostalgia for a time when performance was politically engaged. By contrast, South Africa under the apartheid regime produced a prime example of a political theatre. At the Market Theatre which opened in Johannesburg in 1976, music, song, dance and theatre performed by "Blacks" and "Whites" were set up in politically charged plays. These were impossible to pin down because as one of the founders explained, nothing was made explicit:

> "The artist had to assume an added responsibility to his people and the struggle. No longer could he hide under the pretext of being just an entertainer but had to stand up and also be counted. And thus the so-called 'protest' theatre was born. [...] This form of activity in the arts created a new breed of writer, poet and performer. If the message was right and acceptable to the people, structure and quality of the work could be compromised. To avoid prosecution by the apartheid government, none of these works were put to paper as this would provide evidence that could be used against them. Workshop collaborations in play-making became the new method of creating work."
>
> (Kani 1996)

South African theatre now faces the challenge of re-defining its purpose in post-apartheid society, but it was precisely the political contents that made it so appealing to Western audiences in the 1980s. In Senegal, it would be more appropriate to use the term "social criticism" rather than "protest". Choreographers feel they must engage with the social problems they are confronted with every day. At the same time, they are aware that this is appealing to national and international audiences alike. After all, when applying for funding they know the themes which are most likely to attract interest. This is already the case with Hiv/Aids, which was one of the main themes of the 2003 *Kaay Fecc* festival[167], and is often used as a theme in popular concerts. Environment, too, is increasingly discussed, as people have identified it as a growing topic of concern in the NGO world.

I should also note a geographical shift of interest in the wider world. For young Senegalese, North America has become the new favourite destination, and this is evident in the dance world as well. The National Ballet was a precursor, as since the 1970s every US tour has seen

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[167] The UNDP's (United Nations Development Programme) Hiv/Aids campaign team was one of the festival's sponsors.

a haemorrhage of performers. France is no longer as attractive as it used to be, but by default, people still welcome the opportunity to travel there. Given that a renewed interest in African arts is simultaneously taking place in the US, Senegalese-American choreographic collaborations, tours and personal relationships are likely to multiply in the coming years. It is certainly no coincidence that most of the recent scholarly and artistic interest in the contemporary performing arts of Africa has come from the US[168]. Many of my informants have picked up on this. Perhaps this should be seen in continuity with the African-American interest in the performing arts of Africa that was already blossoming in the first half of the twentieth century. Katharine Dunham and Pearl Primus for example, both dancers and scholars, went to Africa to research the "roots" of Black bodily expression. Primus even choreographed for the National Dance Company of Liberia in the 1960s, and in the same decade Dunham came to Senegal. In the late 1970s, Alvin Ailey's star dancer Judith Jamison came travelled to Dakar to teach at Mudra Afrique, and it is likely that she did some research on the regional dances. There are also signs of a growing American interest in the Muslim world, and some of my informants were planning to apply for American funding for collaborative projects between American artists and their counterparts in the Muslim world. Does this indicate the emergence of an American grassroots movement that is attempting to bridge the perceived cultural gap through the arts?

Finally, I would like to formulate a reservation which has to do with the nature of anthropological writing. As we analyse our data within a "community of thought" and read the work of others, it is tempting to see strategies in everything people do. But as Parkin (1996) and others have remarked, actors do not always make their choices in a rational or conscious way, even when a rational trajectory emerges from the outcome of their actions. In urban Senegal, innovation in dance performance provides a good example of how people's response to change is not always a neat set of strategies, but rather a contradictory and chaotic process of trial-and-error.

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[168] For example, the "Inroads into Africa" conference organized in New York City in June 1996, by Arts International and Arts 651, formulated the explicit objective to "begin to address the many questions surrounding US/Africa exchange through direct dialogue with the US arts community" (Kwabena Nketia 1996). In February 2004, a five-day conference/performance festival dealing mostly with "contemporary" African dance, Movement (R)evolution Dialogues, was held at the University of Florida.

Conclusion:

Dance, power and the risks of the game

At the beginning of the thesis, I proposed to explore how particular dance forms changed through time and space. I asked how these transformations affected social relations in urban Senegal, with a particular concern for the social status of the performers. I wondered whether looking at the dance could tell us anything we would not have known by other means, through spoken language in particular. I also introduced this research as an attempt to break down the Aristotelian dichotomies between the world of choreographed performance and the mundane world of everyday life, and between "high arts" and "popular arts". Finally, I suggested that the study of dance in urban Senegal provided fresh insights into the complex interplay between the local and the global in performance. To conclude this thesis, I will address each of these points in turn.

Transformations of the dance through space and time

Transformation processes in themselves are worth highlighting. In this study, I have suggested that the transformation of dance forms was not only genealogical, i.e. involving changes from one generation to the next, but also relational, i.e. the outcome of a complex combination of factors pertaining both to the local society and to the wider world. Moreover, "indigenous" and "exogenous" elements in performance are not always what they seem to be; as Barber and Watermann (1995) have shown with Yoruba music, local and global influences are often so entangled that it becomes irrelevant to differentiate them. For example, whereas at first sight "contemporary" Senegalese performance may appear as an imitation of Euro-American theatrical dance, I found that the genre had roots in the movement styles of Senegalese urban life, in theatre and in regional folkloric performance as well as in the Euro-American tradition. Transformation from one dance form to the other does not happen so much as a rational strategy, as through the complex set of interactions the performers are involved in, from dancing with their neighbours, relatives and age peers to following the fashion in popular music, watching videos, working face-to-face with foreign artists, and experimenting with move-

ments inspired from the local ceremonial life. Local interactions remain the most important element, but global influences are also part of the "kinaesthetic atmosphere" (Novack 1990) in which dance forms develop, borrow from and comment on each other.

An aspect of transformation which comes across in this thesis, but is rarely mentioned in the literature on performance, is the crucial agency of individual artists. These are individuals who, like Jean Tamba, are driven by passion to expand their skills and engage with a great diversity of genres, either in different contexts or at different times in their lives. It is the combination of passion and of this multiplicity of experiences which allows them to act as charismatic figures for their peers, and driving forces in the transformation of performance.

Change is also a highly selective process. Not every new experiment becomes integrated into social practice, and new forms are never appropriated by all individuals at the same time. Resistance to change may even become an idiom of contest in itself, as when choreographers refuse to present their work in competition, or when young dancers surreptitiously introduce improvisation at the end of set pieces.

Performance and social relations

The interplay between the transformations of performance and social relations is the central aspect of this study. I begin with social mobility, which is one of the main concerns of my informants. Most studies of social mobility deal with the ways people acquire new skills – often through formal education – and move to a different "class" or category than the one they were born in. But this study shows that social mobility may also take place when people gain status by performing in more creative ways and in different places than most of their peers. Women, for example, may gain status in their community by being more creative in performing risqué movements, or being more expensively dressed than most during dance events. This is far from trivial, because this kind of status enables individual women to widen their networks. This in turn enables them to mobilize credit and harness support in times of crisis.

When people choose dance as a profession, the question is whether any social mobility is possible for them, given the traditional perception of the public performer as a low-status Griot. I have argued that the transformations that occurred in the Senegalese dance world since the 1970s have contributed to creating new hierarchies, alongside the traditional "caste", age, gender and place of origin. In the 1960s, scholars of the region were divided about the future of "caste" in the "egalitarian" post-colonial project. With the Tukulor case in mind,

Wane (1969), argued that surface compromises did not affect the hierarchy as such, because when it came to important matters, everyone remained respectful of the rules imposed by genealogy. Silla (1966) argued that the "caste regime" would soon become obsolete. This may be too extreme a view given the persistence of a degree of endogamy. But the rise of a new category of artists, with more money, more opportunities to travel and wider networks in the local society, undeniably affects the older stratification model. To recognize this, it is important to remember that "power relations take many forms, have many aspects, and interweave" (Abu-Lughod 1990: 48). In the past two decades in particular, entering the world of "contemporary" performance has allowed the more successful artists to gain power by engaging with global performing arts circuits, earning more from international touring and performing in more prestigious places than with folkloric performance. Collaborative work with foreign artists has brought them prestige, as they contributed to the creative process on equal basis with their European, American or Japanese counterparts. Moreover, the shift has opened opportunities for artists to promote themselves as social critics, in a similar way as Senegalese rap singers. Notions of *ñeeño* "pollution" have also changed because when people perform together, they inevitably come in close physical contact. As a result, dance has become a more acceptable occupation for the children of high-status *géér* families, and the relevance of genealogy in social stratification is giving way to such criteria as wealth, individual prestige and mobility in the wider world. The performing profession is not unique in contributing to this change, but it is particularly significant because until recently, the Griot-performer association seemed to represent the last bastion of the Senegambian "castes".

When dealing with change however, it is also important to take notice of enduring aspects. These remind us that change is neither a linear process, nor a phenomenon that affects all individuals equally. Social mobility may work downwards as success contains the possibility of its own downfall, and the rise of some is bound to leave others behind. Thus women's dance events are not a domain in which the "traditional" stratification is easily challenged, partly because the leaders of women's associations are mostly *géér*, and partly because their interaction with the musicians still follows the patron-client model. Moreover, not everyone is interested in change; people are well aware that status comes at a price. Some of the practising Griots, for example, nurture the perception that they are the best performers, even though this means that they are perceived by the *géér* as having no pride and no restraint (*kersa*). Many drummers from Griot backgrounds who play during *sabars,* wrestling events, in pop music bands and

dance troupes are thus able to claim superior expertise in the profession. From a *géér* perspective, change may appear limited when people are labelled as "losers" by their relatives if they fail to earn a decent living within a few years.

Since power is always gendered, gender is also an essential dimension in the transformation of social relations. In this thesis, I have argued that gender relations are re-negotiated in different ways through the different dance forms. *Sabars* and other events organized by women are particularly relevant here, because their outwards façade of conservatism is misleading. In practice, I have shown how urban dance events have become increasingly dominated by women, who are keen to exclude men – and some women – from their sociality. The duality of inclusiveness and exclusiveness is almost perfectly symbolized in the circular structure of the dance described in chapter IV, which may be equally re-created in a public space or in the intimacy of the house. Once women are on their own, or at least in a territory in which interaction takes place on their terms, they are able to extend their control to such essential domains as the socialization of children and young girls, marriage negotiations, plotting against rivals and husbands, and increasingly, engaging in trade and coaching each other into small-scale business. But alongside the celebration of female solidarity, dance events are also moments of intense female competition. This is achieved through fashion, sexually explicit dancing and elaborate manipulation of the body. The body is groomed, bleached, dressed, perfumed, and sometimes purposefully fattened to transform it into a status symbol. The sexual explicitness of the dance is not as much for the benefit of men – as would be suggested by much of the joking that goes on amongst women – as it is an instrument in female competition for status. Men also compete indirectly through their wives, even though they are not keen to admit that they know what goes on in the dance. The dance is not a by-product of competition: it *is* social competition, of a kind in which women hold a great deal of agency. Meanwhile, they maintain a façade of compliance to the authority of men and elders. This façade does not mean that gender relations remain unchanged, but they do not change through open confrontation or feminist discourses. Many men live in an ethos of uncertainty which renders them incapable of providing for their families, and they resent women's newly gained economic power as well as their almost exclusive control over ceremonial life. Women did contribute to their household's income in the past, but the drying up of the waged sector in the 1980s has given women's contribution a new weight, which some have used to assert their socio-economic power. As a result, gender relations in urban Senegal appear as fairly aggressive. But

more research on changing male identities, in continuity with the recent work initiated by a few scholars (e.g. Biaya 2001, Havard 2001), would be essential to complete the picture. More research on the status of Senegambian women through history would also shed light on processes of change, as was done in the specific case of Jola women (Hamer 1981, Linares 1985 & 1988, Lambert 1994). The question of how Islam and colonization have affected the status of women in the history of the region, for example, remains the subject of much speculation.

Meanwhile I should stress that "power" is not equally available to all women. For example, those who belong to thriving associations and are able to mobilize enough credit to set up successful businesses are seldom the poorest. Differentiation is also evident in the professional world, where women dancers without any formal education – often those from the poorest households – find it difficult to move from the strongly male-dominated folkloric troupes to the more egalitarian "contemporary" genre. For those able to move, the "contemporary" dance milieu stands in sharp contrast to both women's events and folkloric performance: there, talented women come to the fore in the creative process and promote themselves as individuals *without* feeling obliged to maintain the appearance of submission. This may explain, in part, why a significant proportion of these women are getting married to foreigners; their aggressive assertion of their individuality is easily perceived as a threat by Senegalese men. What the dance shows, perhaps, is that power is not only gendered; changes in the power balance between the different categories – whether defined in terms of gender, age, class, "caste" or other – is also a trade-off between different domains of social life.

If women are gaining power through their associations, dance events and in the more innovative genres of stage performance, it would be tempting to ask whether some might use these activities as a platform to move further into political life. In fact, women's sections of political parties have existed for some time, but at the highest levels they have been dominated by highly educated women from privileged backgrounds. Diane Barthel (1975) has shown that the post-independence female elite were the daughters of men who were already educated and held posts in the colonial administration. Unless more Senegalese women gain access to education, it is therefore unlikely that they will massively choose the route of political activism. Rather, they may follow different routes, as the transversal movements I have observed in which women's party sections had reconverted into "civil society" organizations. This pragmatic conversion placed them in a better position to compete for development money chan-

nelled through local and foreign NGOs. But I have not worked specifically on women in Senegalese politics, and therefore these are only preliminary observations.

A window to the "unspoken" in social life

The third issue has to do with whether or not the dance tells us anything about social life that we would not have known otherwise. It is obvious that many of the points made above would have remained hidden from view with a purely verbal approach. As competition for status and power does not take place according to a set of neatly defined strategies, it is impossible to verbalize it while it is taking place. Moreover, what people say often contradicts what they do in the dance. For example, whenever I asked young women why they lifted their skirts and performed risqué movements in front of the drummers – professionals also do this occasionally – or made sexually explicit gestures in front of their friends, they replied that this was for fun, to make others laugh, or simply because they enjoyed it. No one mentioned the competitive element, and yet it is very visible in the dance.

But the construction and maintenance of local/ethnic identity, for example among Jola communities in Dakar, is probably the area in which the discrepancy between performance and language is the most obvious. The Jola performers described in chapter V speak Wolof; many of them are practising Muslims, and are undistinguishable from Wolof speakers in everyday life. Performances, whether on stage, in rituals or in family ceremonies, are the only moments during which the memory of the region of origin is maintained. Moreover, going back to the Casamance to perform alongside village troupes is also an occasion for people to socialize with their community of origin, and show that they remain connected to the place. As Mitchell (1956) sensed early on, for migrants it is often through performance, rather than through language, that "place" is imagined. But the dance world also shows that people's ethnicity is not relevant at all times in everyday life: it is an extremely diverse community when it comes to ethnicity, religion and even citizenship (people of Congolese, Cameroonese, Guinean and Ivorian origin are prominent in the Dakarois dance milieu), and despite some tentions, this diversity is experienced as a strength rather than a problem. People learn the dances from each other's region, and regard this as an extension of their repertoire of skills. Diversity is not just celebrated as a matter of ideology, it has pragmatic advantages. This is also what urban Senegambian life is about, and perhaps always was. Looking at the world of performance,

therefore, enables us to gain insights into the categories which are meaningful – or meaningless – to people, beyond the explicit discourses on ethnicity.

Bridges between everyday life and the dance

The fourth point of conclusion is the dichotomy between the world of performance and that of everyday life. This is not to say that there is no difference; people themselves do not confuse the stage and the house, or the dance circle and the street, any more than the Kaluli of Papua Guinea confuse ritual with reality (Schieffelin 1985). But in Senegal, that which takes place in the dance is more strongly connected to the life of the dancer than in most European contexts. This is evident with the women's events, but it is also valid with staged pieces. "Contemporary" performers, for example, may gain status in the community because they innovate, appear as social critics and "educators", travel and perform in prestigious places, but there are also risks attached to bringing outside influences into their creativity. Finding the point at which people's respect turns into contempt for doing "White people's stuff" may be a difficult and straining exercise. I would argue that the hovering risk of being classified as a "traitor", like the Mozambican choreographer mentioned in chapter VI[169], should not be simply attributed to people's conservatism in the face of innovation. Rather, they are concerned with the kind of images of Africa projected on stage. In a sense, those who are given the opportunity to represent their culture abroad should take great care to preserve people's dignity. At a deeper level, people are concerned with the tension between the individual and the collective, i.e. between people's individual ambitions towards a successful career and the vital preservation of social solidarity. Individual ambitions are by no means a new phenomenon, and the importance of the individual in African societies may have been underestimated in anthropology. But from the local point of view, individualism has become more problematic with people's increasing mobility. In the performing world in particular, global circuits expect people to promote themselves as individuals. This is important because in the end, it is status within the local community that matters. Dancers and choreographers who go to great lengths to achieve international careers, but on whom local audiences turn their back, may feel that

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[169] There were other examples in Senegal, of performers/choreographers who lost much respect in the profession for having moved too far into doing what people perceived to be "the kind of stuff that White people expect to see". In some cases this was mixed with a resentment of people's success abroad. I have not described these cases because they would have been too easily identifiable.

they have lost what they were searching in the first place. This parallels the migration literature of the past decade, in which it has become increasingly recognized that migrants were seldom exclusively concerned with "making it" in the host society. For Senegalese migrants, too, what matters is to be able to come back and be a provider rather than a dependent, set up a business and build a several-storey house. Bridges between the mundane and the world of performance, therefore, matter in more ways than one.

Senegalese dance on the global scene: a chimera?

In a broader sense, this study also highlights the complexities of "globalization" processes in performance. Most studies dedicated to globalization focus on commodities or artefacts. Performance raises different sets of issues, because the movement across space of people and performance affects social life in different ways. When Senegalese performers engage in collaborative work with artists from other parts of the world, such face-to-face relations affect them in deeper ways than buying global commodities, even though I am not denying the power of commodities once re-contextualized locally[170]. In this thesis, however, I have also hinted at the risks of globalization when it is experienced as reinforcing existing imbalances of power. As suggested in chapter VI, the renewed global interest in the dance forms of Africa may be seen as part of a more general movement towards exploiting the creativity of cultures perceived as having preserved their traditions, in order to revive the performing arts industry. This is obviously comparable to the "World Music" phenomenon. Although there is much to be gained for successful individuals, performers feel rightly ambivalent about this.

First, many resent having to label what they do in terms of identity, whereas this is not expected of White, European or American choreographers. People are perfectly aware that in the dance world, being White and from the North is the "unmarked" identity against which everything else must be defined. They do not yet feel free to promote themselves as "artists *and* African" rather than as "African artists". Second, people are aware that the global interest may be a momentary fashion, the outcome of which they do not control. This is also why they are keen to develop the interest of local audiences, for example through dance teaching in schools or a mobile stage. Global arts markets, they know, can be treacherous. There is a

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[170] Lambert's (1999) study, for example, is a fascinating analysis of how Jola women have used commodities to gain discreet control over female labour migration.

parallel here with the dilemma described by Howard Morphy (1995) with regard to Australian Aboriginal artists who wished to sell their paintings through the "primitive arts" market. They were told that their work had to be "authentic" to be acknowledged, i.e. that it should have been produced for use in their traditional society, rather than to be sold as art. But in the late 1970s, the same artists were told that the export and sale of "authentic" Aboriginal paintings was forbidden. So, they could not produce art for sale because it would not be valued as art, but neither could they sell the art produced for their own rituals. Given the almost exclusively European – particularly French and Belgian – patronage of "contemporary African dance", one may equally wonder whether this will turn out to be a new, momentarily fashionable ghetto for African performance, or whether this is a genuine opportunity for talented dancers to integrate mainstream circuits.

The relevance of this thesis could be taken further through more research on what Senegalese – or West African – dance forms become once people move across space. There are numerous West African dance troupes and schools in Europe, North America and Australia. Senegalese communities in French cities and in New York organize private *sabars* and run clubs which are central spaces of socialization for the African Diaspora[171]. But moving across space with the dance is not always a success story, and following the trajectory of some of the hundreds migrants who have not been able to continue their performing careers would also be illuminating. Some of them return to Senegal and keep quiet about their experiences. Others have not been seen for years. Bouly Sonko, the Casamançais director of the National Ballet, says he meets some of them when the Ballet travels to the US for its annual tour: "They get to know when we are in town, so they call me and ask to meet up. Before we meet they go off to borrow a car, a shirt and a clean pair of trousers. They have a lousy job in a restaurant somewhere, or no job at all, but they pretend to have made it. I know they live in terrible conditions because they never invite you to their house, never. I've seen this go on for many years, you know..."[172] As Judith Jamison suggested, dance is about never-ending aspiration. In Senegal, this is more the case than she ever imagined; in many ways, you *are* what you dance.

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[171] In Paris in the 1980s for example, the unavoidable meeting places for the African youth were either Congolese or Senegalese clubs, such as the Timis ("twilight" in Wolof) or the more exclusive Keur Samba ("Samba's house").

[172] Bouly Sonko, personal communication, Dakar, January 2004.

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Appendix # 1: Glossary of Senegambian words

Añaalena (Jola)	Women who are undergoing or have undergone the *kañaalen* ritual (see below).
Afééru jigéen (Wolof)	'Women's business'.
Basin (French)	Damask cloth.
Beeco (Wolof) or 'petit pagne' (French)	Thin wrap-around skirt usually worn as underwear during dance events, or as part of the female training dress in folkloric dance troupes.
Boroom kër (Wolof)	'Master of the house'.
Boubou (French) or mbubb (Wolof)	Loose robe cut from a large square of fabric, sometimes with cut-out sleeves, and worn with a wrap-around skirt underneath.
Bujuman (Wolof)	Designates a vagabond, or someone who lives off collecting discarded scrap items.
Bukut (Jola)	Jola male initiation ritual.
Ceebu jën (Wolof)	'Rice with fish'; very popular dish made of rice boiled in water, oil and tomato concentrate, served with fish and vegetables.
Cosaan (Wolof)	'Tradition', 'origin', 'past'.
Curaay (Wolof)	Local incense, mostly used by women, made of shredded fragrant seeds or woods, and blended with perfume extract.
Dahira (Wolof)	Arabic etymology; a form of Muslim neighbourhood association, particularly active in urban Senegal.
Diriyànke (Wolof)	A voluptuous woman who lives comfortably, maintains a network of admirers, takes great care of her appearance and often has her own business activities.
Fecc/Fecckat (Wolof)	'To dance'/'dancer'.

Géér (Wolof)	The highest of the two main social ranks in Wolof stratification; occasionally characterised as 'freeborn' in the literature, and often as 'non-castés' in Senegalese French.
Géwël (Wolof)	Social category of the praise-singer and entertainer in Wolof stratification; constitutes a category within the larger 'ñeeño' rank.
Griot (French), fem. Griotte	Broader category of the praise-singer/entertainer/performer and oral historian throughout Senegambia. In this thesis, 'Griot' is often used rather than 'Géwël' to avoid restricting the analysis to the Wolof.
Jembe (Mandinka)	Style of drum of Mandinka origin, played with both hands.
Kaay Fecc (Wolof)	Dakar's international dance festival held bi-annually and established in 2001; means 'come and dance' in Wolof.
Kañaalen (Jola)	Jola sorority of women who have undergone a long ritual process after failing to become pregnant, undergoing several abortions or losing several young children.
Kasag (Wolof)	Wolof male circumcision ceremony. The term is also used for the dances and drumming rhythms associated with the ritual.
Kersa (Wolof)	A highly valued attitude which would be best described as a mix of deference and restraint. 'Kersa' is perceived to be one of the most significant marks of status in Wolof society.
Mbalax (Wolof)	Highly popular Senegalese music style popularized in the 1970s-1980s by Youssou Ndour and other musicians of his generation. The 'mbalax' style combines traditional 'sabar' drumming rhythms with modern instruments and rhythms derived from funk music, hip-hop, Cuban music and other influences.
Mbaraan (Wolof)	Mostly urban practice which consists in maintaining one or more admirers who occasionally give money in return for sexual favours, or the hope of gaining them in the future.
Mbotaay (Wolof)	Association; traditionally used for age-sets.

Ñeeño (Wolof)	The lowest of the two main social ranks in Wolof stratification; occasionally characterised as 'men/women-of-skill' in the literature, and often as 'castés' in Senegalese French.
Pagne (French) or Sér (Wolof)	Cotton cloth used as a long wrap-around skirt, and an essential item in Senegambian women's dress.
Sabar (Wolof)	The term 'sabar' is used to designate a type of dance event, a series of drums, a set of rhythms and a range of dance styles; a 'sabar' is structured as a circle inside which a formation of drummers challenge the participants to take turns to dance. The interaction between dance and live drumming follows a complex call-and-response pattern.
Sanga (Malagasy)	Pan-African choreographic festival and competition held in Madagascar in 1999, 2001 and 2003; means 'summit' in Malagasy.
Sañse (Wolof)	'To dress well'; from the French 'se changer'.
Sutura (Wolof)	A highly valued attitude according to which one should keep quiet in the face of conflicts and shortcomings in the family; quality of being discreet (Arabic etymology).
Taille Basse (French) or taay bas (Wolof)	Two-piece dress including a long skirt (fitted or wrap-around) and a tight-fitted top with sleeves.
Taasu (Wolof)	To sing/recitate a specific Senegambian style of individualised poetry, mostly sung by women in Wolof society.
Tama (Wolof)	Small drum that is tied underneath the arm of the player (the 'tamakat'); the 'tamakat' pinches the strings surrounding the drum with the carrying arm, while beating the drum with the fingers and a stick.
Tariqa (Wolof)	Generic designation for a Sufi 'brotherhood'; from the Arabic 'path'.
Tooroɓe	The higest-status social category in the Fuuta Toro (Tukulor 'Clerics').

Tour (French) or túr (Wolof)	Urban form of association based on kinship, neighbourhood or friendship, with a fixed number of participants and meeting on a regular basis.
Tubaab (Wolof)	Mostly used to designate a White person, but may also be used as a socio-cultural category denoting a privileged social position. Thus a wealthy, educated Wolof person may be called 'Wolof tubaab' in some contexts. African Americans are called 'tubaab' because they are regarded as belonging to the privileged global North.
Xeesal (Wolof)	Chemically-induced skin bleaching.

Appendix # 2: Dance groups encountered in and around Dakar

Group name (main style)	**Rehearsal site (when permanent)**	**Extracts from repertoire[173] (year of creation, when known)**
Ambassadeurs de la Culture Africaine, Les (folkloric)	CCBS, Dakar	
Andreya Ouamba and Reggie Wilson (contemporary)	Temporary collaboration in 2002-03	Tales from the Creek (2003)
Artéa Danse (fusion of folkloric and jazz)	Keur Jaraaf, Dakar Point E	Le Cimetière des Masques (2000) Dakar Cabaret Show (2002)
Bakalama (folkloric)	CCBS, Dakar	Kañaalen Garour ou l'Initiation
Ballet Mansour Guèye (folkloric)	Dakar	
Ballet National La Linguère (folkloric)	Théâtre National Daniel Sorano, Dakar	Pangols Kuuyamba
Ballets Africains de Sangomar (folkloric)	Dakar Ouakam	Bara
Ballets et Rythmes de Pikine (folkloric)	Centre Culturel Léopold Sédar Senghor and youth meeting house in 'Guinaw Rail', Pikine	
Cinquième (5e) Dimension, La (contemporary)	Centre Aéré du Port, Dakar	Qui Suis-je? (1995) Dina Baax (1997) Bujuman (2002) Styx (2005)
Compagnie Fatou Cissé (contemporary)	Dakar	Xalaat
Davidson Boys (folkloric and urban dances)	Dakar Khar Yalla	Takussanu Khar Yalla
Diallaw'Arts (contemporary)	'Ecole des Sables', Tubaab Jallaw	Maady Kaan
Diamants Noirs (TV competitions)	School yard, Pikine	
Doudou & Onye (contemporary)	CCBS, Dakar (temporary collaboration in 2003)	Lu tax/Why? (2003)

[173] In cases where no choreographic piece is mentioned, it is either because I have not collected data on the group's repertoire or because the group is too recent to have yet performed full-length pieces.

Group name (main style)	Rehearsal site (when permanent)	Extracts from repertoire[174] (year of creation, when known)
Esther Baker & Fatou Cissé (contemporary)	Temporary collaboration in 2003	Mbindaan (2003)
Etincelles, Les (children)	Centre Bahai, Dakar Point E	Les Maîtres de la Rue (2003)
Forêt Sacrée (folkloric)	CCBS, Dakar	La Casamance au Clair de Lune
Jalloré Danse Théâtre (contemporary)	Saint-Louis	Ëgg
Jant bi (contemporary)	'Ecole des Sables', Tubaab Jallaw	Le Coq Est Mort (1999) Fagaala (2004)
Jant bi (folkloric)	School yard, Pikine	
Kakat'Art (contemporary)	ASSEA, Dakar Fass	Pur-Sang (2001) Bul Faale (2002) Os Sacré (2003) Freemangron (2003/04)
Kibaro Baleya (folkloric)	Dalifort	Doudoumba
Kolaam Sereer (folkloric)		Mariage Sacré
Makou Group	Pikine	
Pastëf (contemporary)	School yard, Dalifort	Kanassu ou Les Marginaux (2003) Nunu neen (2005)
Pirates de Dieupeul (music videos/formerly TV competitions)	Dieupeul, Dakar	
Premier Temps (contemporary)	Dakar	Pression (2003) Impro-Visé 2 (2004)
Savog (contemporary)	Tubaab Jallaw	Stück (2003)
Sinoméew (folkloric)	CCBS, Dakar	Nawoon Démb Kotéba
Sobo Badé (contemporary/theatre)	Espace Sobo Badé, Tubaab Jallaw	Et Chaise et Maths
Takku Liggey (folkloric)	Centre socio-professionnel des handicapés moteur, Mbour	Yewu
Yéel'Art (contemporary)	Tubaab Jallaw	Banc Jaaxlé (2003) Adama (2004)

[174] In cases where no choreographic piece is mentioned, it is either because I have not collected data on the group's repertoire or because the group is too recent to have yet performed full-length pieces.