

## Choreographic Revival, Elite Nationalism and Postcolonial Appropriation in Senegal

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In the late 1930s, in the small town of Sébikotane in Senegal, the students who had come from all over francophone West Africa to the William Ponty School to be trained as schoolteachers and colonial administrators prepared for the holidays with a task: they had to go back to their “villages” and research their cultural “traditions”. The following school year, they would have to stage plays to illustrate the stories they had been told. One of these students was a young man from Guinea, Fodéba Keita, who showed talent for music, drama and poetry. By 1957, Keita was the artistic director of one of Africa’s first professional dance troupes, the Ballets Africains. Soon to become the national dance troupe of independent Guinea, Keita’s Ballets toured the world with musical plays consciously created to revive the memory of pre-colonial Senegambia. Following tremendous success in Paris in the early 1950s, the troupe was invited on a West Africa tour in 1956-57, the high point of which was a series of performances in Dakar. The Dakarois shows made a deep impression on the political and artistic elite of late colonial Senegal, and were to have a major impact on the emergence of a regional genre of revival musical theatre best described as “neo-traditional” performance.

More than half a century later, the hundreds of dance troupes that have flourished in Dakar and other Senegalese cities continue to draw inspiration from the Ballets Africains and its codification of selected ceremonial practices from across the region. These practices, dances and rhythms in particular, are marketed as a corpus of “traditions” echoing the memory of a glorified pre-colonial past. Though historical research seldom enters the creative process, the invocation of tradition legitimizes what these troupes do. This is a legacy of a time when, following Senegal’s independence in 1960, President Léopold Sédar Senghor (hereafter “Sédar Senghor”) and the intellectual elite in his entourage created a discourse on

tradition to help establish their power both at home and abroad. In the early twenty-first century, choreographers and experienced performers continue to compete for the most authentic historical knowledge or the best training in proper traditional rhythms. The neo-traditional choreographic genre, however, draws on West African musical theatre as it was performed across West Africa, Europe and the US between the mid-1930s and the late 1960s. Was this a revival movement? Who revived what, and what did the movement achieve?

Drawing on the Senegalese case, in this chapter I suggest that the revival of performance (dance, music, drama) was particularly powerful as a medium through which post-colonial elites sought to legitimize their power, and imagine a future for the new nation. This was done in large part by creating the illusion of continuity between the pre-colonial past and the present. Indeed the ways in which post-colonial regimes have sought to establish their power by assuming control over a dominant version of history is well documented (Appadurai 1986 ; Diouf 1992), but less well documented is the role played by musical and choreographic theatre in creating seductive versions of history.

Revival, however, is never static, and as (Livingston 1999:74) points out, “many revivalists [...] change their stance over time”. It is not just that revivalists change, it is also that the way in which revival movements develop often slips out of the control of those who promoted it in the first place. From an anthropological perspective, it is precisely the way in which different forms of power shift over time that matters. Studies of revival or revitalization movements have had a tendency to focus on a single historical moment or a group of individuals. Yet the gradual transformation of revival as its patrons “changed their stance”, or as new generations enter the scene, is equally important.

But is it appropriate to speak of “revival” in this context? The term is not commonly used in studies of dance, even though many dance forms have been promoted as the conscious revivals of past practices<sup>1</sup>. Yet ethnomusicologists and anthropologists studying revitalization

movements have long recognized that such movements always involved the creation of new cultural forms (Wallace 1956). Dance, like music, exemplifies the creation of something new by virtue of the fact that it is different every time it is performed. Changes in the bodies of dancers over time and generations introduce an additional layer of change, and no choreographic element may travel through time in its original form. Choreographic revival projects are therefore illuminating instances of what it means to invoke the past while creating something new. Senegalese neo-traditional performance may be qualified as a “revival” genre because its practitioners consistently invoke an imagined past as a source of inspiration, and describe what they do as a re-staging of “tradition”.

In the first part of this chapter, I look at the development of Senegalese neo-traditional performance in continuity with colonial school theatre, and as element in the politics of nation-building in postcolonial Senegal. In the second part, I move on to the appropriation of the genre by Casamançais migrants as having inadvertently fostered the emergence of a culturalist, separatist discourse in Senegal’s southernmost region. Ultimately, in this chapter I argue that revival is best studied diachronically, as a process.<sup>2</sup>

### <1>Musical theatre in Senegambia during the colonial period

In this section, I chart the emergence of the modern theatrical genre that eventually provided an idiom for the construction of a revivalist discourse on the Casamance region. Musical theatre in Senegambia did not begin with French colonisation. Modern theatre involving drama, music and choreography largely developed on the basis of already strong performing traditions.<sup>3</sup> But it was during the colonial period that elements from these diverse traditions were combined with European theatre in a kind of artistic bricolage to form a codified expressive form. As suggested in the introduction, an important turning point was the promotion of theatre in colonial schools. Naturally, musical theatre was being made outside

modern schools, too, as Karin Barber (2000) has shown in brilliant detail with the emergence of travelling popular theatre in the Yoruba-speaking parts of Nigeria in the late colonial period.

In Senegal, it was the French authorities who made the conscious choice to include theatre in the training of African schoolteachers and administrators. Central to this project was the Ecole Normale William Ponty<sup>4</sup> mentioned in the introduction, which had been set up in Gorée in 1915 before being moved to Sébikotane, east of Dakar, in 1938. In 1935 Frenchman Charles Béart, who was soon to become director, introduced the writing of plays to the curriculum. The aim was to encourage the students to preserve a connection with rural life. Indeed while they epitomised the successful *évolués*<sup>5</sup>, there was also a fear that they might lose touch with the populations they would have to teach or administer. This was evident in Béart's writings at the time:

Some of the students have asked the Director of the William Ponty School to lend them the costumes made for the [end-of-year] party so that they may “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 their rightful place. 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 comfort from the minor worries of the profession in this unselfish and generous activity, – the schoolteacher who will have discovered a new and enchanting legend or who will have transcribed an old epic song will soon forget that he has quarrelled with the major's interpreter. (Béart 1937:14)<sup>6</sup>

The Ponty training probably exceeded French expectations in producing a local elite of schoolteachers who were close to the populations they worked with. Foucher (2002) says of the growing engagement of schoolteachers in politics after WWII that this was due in part to their coverage of the territory and their good relations with the local populations. They were even, he writes, “mobilised by the local populations as intermediaries to communicate with the colonial state, and, not infrequently, as counterweights to the territorial administration” (Foucher 2002:148). This was an unexpected outcome of the French colonial policy. Though there are contested interpretations of the role theatre played in this political awakening in the 1930s (Cohen 2012), and though the student body at Ponty was heterogeneous in its political orientation, it is almost certain that theatre provided some of Francophone Africa’s future elites with opportunities to express anti-colonial sentiments. This was done through imagining and staging the lives of deceased resistance heroes. *Bigolo*, for example, was written and staged by a Ponty student of Casamançais origin, Assane Seck, who later became a Minister of Foreign Affairs in independent Senegal (Foucher 2002). After being demobilised from the French army in 1945, Seck studied in Paris, where he re-staged *Bigolo* with an amateur troupe of African students (Sonar Senghor 2004). Colonial school theatre, then, contained the seeds of revival from the beginning. Imagining the past served to contest power in the present, but in more subtle ways than through overt speech.

The Ponty plays were interspersed with musical interludes which the colonial administration perceived as innocuous folklore. Mbaye (2004) notes that the French staff controlled and sometimes censured the plays, but this rarely affected the musical interludes. French actor Henri Vidal, who had witnessed the play *Téli Soma Oulé* by Lompolo Koné, echoed this view in a commentary written for colonial magazine *Traits d’Union*:

This is an exclusively folkloric play, which allows the incorporation of men and women dancers who, as direct descendents of the legendary characters, will dance what their grandparents danced in front of the glorious chiefs of their time. (Vidal 1955:66 in Mbaye 2004)

The Ponty plays fostered the development of revival performance in Senegal later on, but this happened through unexpected detours through Western Europe, North America and neighbouring Guinea. Indeed Ponty student Fodéba Keita, born in 1921 in the Maninka district of Siguiri in what was then the colony of French Guinea, was to help transform this youth theatre into national “heritage” throughout Francophone West Africa. At Ponty between 1940 and 1943, Keita already displayed unusual musical and verbal skills: he composed poetry, sang and played banjo in a student orchestra (Cohen 2012). In subsequent years he taught in the colonial capital of Saint-Louis, then returned to Guinea, where he worked as a schoolteacher and youth leader (Goerg 1989 ; Straker 2009). He soon made his way to Paris to study law (Cohen 2012), where he socialised with a cohort of Black students, including Sédar Senghor and other founders of the international Negritude movement. Senegalese students who had moved into theatre, such as Assane Seck, Annette Mbaye d’Erneville and Féral Benga, were also part of the festivities. Benga had risen to fame earlier as one of Josephine Baker’s lead dancers at the Folies Bergères, and in shows at prestigious venues like the Casino de Paris and the Théâtre des Champs Elysées. By the time Keita arrived in Paris, Benga was staging shows at the cabaret-restaurant he had opened in 1938. Sédar Senghor had arrived in Paris in 1928, at a time of excitement and experimentation in the theatre world. Diaghilev had brought his Ballets Russes to Paris following the Russian revolution, where they had become the talk of the town with avant-garde choreographies. Theatre and staged choreography, then, reflected the struggle around the radical political

changes that were taking place throughout Europe, including the contested rise of communism. We do not know whether future president Sédar Senghor saw these performances. Struggling to make ends meet and deeply absorbed in his studies in the first half of the 1930s as he was (Vaillant 2006), it is unlikely that he would have indulged in expensive theatre tickets. Nevertheless, this formed part of the intellectual milieu in which he forged his ideas on the inextricable link between arts and politics, and these ideas would later lead him to support musical and choreographic performance as an essential cornerstone in nation-building.

It was in this highly politicized, cosmopolitan environment that Keita set up his first musical theatre troupe, le Théâtre Africain, in Paris in 1949 (Straker 2009). He had joined forces with musician Facelli Kanté, whom he had probably met in Saint-Louis (Cohen 2012), and six former students from West Africa. He benefited from the support of Sédar Senghor's nephew Maurice Sonar Senghor (hereafter "Sonar Senghor"), himself a former student who had given up his studies for a career in theatre. Benga helped with venues and contacts, and Keita's skills as a stage director, combined with Kanté's music, produced almost immediate success. In the early 1950s, as the troupe began to tour around Europe and North America under the new name of Les Ballets Africains de Fodéba Keita, the choreographic and musical dimension gradually displaced spoken dialogue (Straker 2009), most probably because this was more appealing to international audiences. The repertoire featured choreographed versions of ceremonial practices and everyday movement styles from West Africa, with "special emphasis on the Mandinka folklore of Guinea and Casamance" (Kaba 1976:202), tinged with a Parisian touch. Profoundly influenced by the Negritude movement, Keita conceptualised his artistic production as an exercise in cultural revival:

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. [...] May the Africa of tomorrow refrain from losing 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)

The success of these first years led to the 1956-57 West African tour, at the invitation of the Governor of French West Africa. This was a turning point during which the Ballets recruited a new generation of young performers who were to replace the first Paris-based students. At Guinea’s independence in 1958, the group was renamed Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée and toured the world as the nation’s “cultural ambassadors” under Kanté’s leadership. Keita was appointed Interior Minister in Sékou Touré’s first government, and although Touré later turned against him,<sup>7</sup> he played a large part in designing Guinea’s cultural policy up to the “cultural revolution” launched by Touré in 1968. This was also a time of growing rivalry between Touré and Sédar Senghor over political and moral leadership in the region. But the artists in their entourage knew each other well from the Parisian years, and there was therefore direct continuity between the Ballets Africains and the creation of the National Ballet of Senegal in 1961, a year after Independence and Sédar Senghor’s election as the nation’s first President. I will now examine the role of neo-traditional performance in Senegalese cultural revival and nationalist politics from 1960 onwards.



## <1>Revival, nation-building and the emergence of a modern performing profession

In Senegal as elsewhere in Africa in the decade following the independences, governing elites felt the urgency of gathering linguistically and culturally diverse populations around the idea of a single nation. To establish a stable working state, they needed people to “imagine” the new political entity to which they now belonged (Anderson 1983). Senegal’s cultural policy at the time was almost entirely dedicated to the nation-building project and the concomitant strengthening of Sédar Senghor’s moral authority. Alongside the visual arts, the performing arts became the flagship of this policy. Drawing on her ethnography of music in postcolonial Tanzania, Askew (2002) has argued convincingly that musical performance played a much bigger role in postcolonial nation-building than Eurocentric theories of nationalism had done justice to. The political uses of performance, however, have varied according to musical histories, including during colonial times, and according to the personal preferences of postcolonial leaders. In Senegal, the involvement of musical and choreographic performance in the nation-building project was heavily shaped by the rivalry between Sédar Senghor and Sékou Touré. Behind the scenes, it was also shaped by the trajectories of individuals like Sonar Senghor, who had been steeped in the cosmopolitan milieu of Parisian theatre.

One of the major projects of the period was the creation of the National Theatre, which consisted of the National Ballet, the National Drama Troupe and the Traditional Instrumental Ensemble. The Daniel Sorano Theatre, a modern theatre inaugurated in 1965 ahead of the 1966 World Festival of Negro Arts, would later house the three troupes. Sonar Senghor, who had returned to Senegal in the late 1950s, was appointed director. He and Keita remained friends, and by the early 1960s the Ballets Africains had performed in Dakar three times, lastly in March 1961 (Paris-Dakar 1961c). In 1959, in this twilight period of French colonialism, future President Sédar Senghor wrote a long commentary in the Socialist Party

magazine *L'Unité Africaine*, in which he praised Keita for his faithfulness to African rhythms and movement patterns. This was clearly an opportunity for Sédar Senghor to articulate his ideas on “Black African dance”, which he saw as embodying the “emotional” nature of African cultures:

Black African dances stay very close to the sources. They express dramas. For the Black African, dance is the most natural way of expressing an idea, an emotion. When taken by an emotion – joy or sadness, gratitude or indignation – the Black African dances. Dance so different from European ballet. Nothing intellectual. Neither pointe shoes nor straight lines nor elaborate arabesques or *entrechats*. These are earth-bound dances, bare feet flat on the ground, pounding the ground without either exhaustion or rest. (Léopold Sédar Senghor, quoted in Sonar Senghor 2004:66)

Two years later, the creation of the Senegalese National Ballet was clearly designed to outshine the Guinean troupe. Sédar Senghor believed he could win the upper hand over Touré on his own turf, the arts. He had already built up a strong legitimacy as an intellectual and a connoisseur of the arts by virtue of his engagement in the Negritude movement, his poetry and a higher degree in French grammar. Though he was not much of a dancer himself (Vaillant 2006:204), it is evident from Sédar Senghor’s poetry that he regarded dance as a quintessential African art. His *Prières aux Masques Africains* ends with an allusion to Africans as “people of the dance”: *Nous sommes les hommes de la danse, dont les pieds reprennent vigueur en frappant le sol dur* (“We are the people of the dance, whose feet regain strength by pounding on the hard ground”) (Senghor 1956).

In official discourse, the National Ballet was meant to recover the regional history, and to celebrate the nation's diversity. The idea of "performing" history was appealing to local audiences used to the verbal art of praise-singers, or *griots*<sup>8</sup> (*gëwël* in Wolof), whose performance traditionally centred around West African epics like the oral history of 13<sup>th</sup>-century Mande king Sunjata Keita, founder of the Mali Empire. In practice however, there was never a simple transposition of performing practices, past or present, to the stage. The choreography was the product of Sonar Senghor's theatrical ideas, heavily shaped by his Parisian years, of the dances his young performers had grown up with, and of the troupe's creative work. Dancer Ousmane Noël Cissé, who was with the Ballet in the late 1960s and throughout much of the 1970s, remembered a typical working day:

The day would start with a class taught by Sonar Senghor. Then every dancer, from Dakar or from elsewhere, would take turns to teach the others some of the steps they knew from home. Sonar Senghor would then select and re-arrange the moves into a choreographic sequence. Later in the day, we'd rehearse for the shows. (Ousmane Noël Cissé, interview, April 2011, Dakar)

This could not have been a simple work of historical recovery, since the dancers were usually young and did not possess great knowledge of the region's history. They came from various Senegalese regions, but mainly Dakar (including members of the long-established Cape Verdean community and students from the School of Arts), as well as Casamance, the Louga region in central Senegal and the Sereer-speaking Siin-Saalum south of Dakar. The diversity of the nation was thus *de facto* celebrated. But there was also an implicit hierarchy among the different ethnicities. Following the Ballets Africains, a substantial proportion of the dances were inspired by ceremonial practices from Casamance, from where talented

performers were recruited during Sonar Senghor's scouting trips. His first trip, in fact, had been paid for by French Director of Information Services Pierre Fromentin a couple of years before Independence (Sonar Senghor 2004:57). After 1961, the idea that the key to a new Senegalese theatre was to be found in the southern region was therefore in direct continuity with late colonial cultural policy.

But this was also because Casamance was perceived to be at the margins of a nation dominated politically and economically by northern Wolof speakers. As a forest-covered, wet tropical zone in a country made up mostly of dry savannah, and being separated from northern Senegal by the Gambia, the southern region had already suffered from a lack of easy access to the French colony's privileged cities in the north.<sup>9</sup> For nation-building to succeed, those linguistic minorities at the margins had to be co-opted into the nationalist project *and* be imagined by the Wolof-speaking majority as forming part of the nation. Something similar was happening in Guinea with the rise of militant theatre during the "demystification" campaigns of 1958-62 in Guinea's forest and northern coastal areas (McGovern 2004 ; Sarró 2009). Like in Guinea, the forest areas were not only marginalized in the development of infrastructure, they were also regarded as resisting modernization because Islam had not yet succeeded in displacing traditional religious beliefs and practices. Emphasizing these practices in national revival performance therefore served the double purpose of symbolically including them in the nation-building project, while at the same time displaying the "backwardness" of their traditions. This implicitly pushed the idea that the model for a modern future lay in northern Senegal's strongly Muslim society. But unlike in Guinea, as we shall see later the Senegalese revival genre was later appropriated by urban migrants from these very forest areas to serve their own purposes.

Meanwhile, how was the national revival genre constructed for the stage? The work of the Senegalese Ballet had two main components: the first was a series of tableaux that

combined music, song, drama and choreography, with a conscious emphasis on re-creating images of past Senegambian rural life, but without necessarily involving a coherent narrative. The tableaux included such recent introductions to the region's musical repertoire as guitars and banjos. The backdrops were made of rural landscapes painted in Paris (Paris-Dakar 1961b) and West African printed fabrics (Paris-Dakar 1961a), probably manufactured in Dakar by the Sotiba factory established in 1958. The choreographic tableaux, in short, displayed a rather modern outlook.

By contrast, the work of revival was made most evident in the second component, choreographic sequences in full-length plays staged by the National Theatre. In the 1960s the plays explicitly aimed at salvaging the nation's historical memory from the destructive influence of colonialism. Just as with the Ponty theatre, this was very much an imagined rural life. Urban life rarely appeared, and when it did, it was done in such a way as to expose the moral ills city dwellers had inherited from French colonialism: greed, corruption, and a taste for mimicking European lifestyles at the expense of hard, honest work. Those who shaped Senegalese neo-traditional performance, therefore, unintentionally prolonged the colonial vision of rural Africa as timeless (Castaldi 2006). Past and present were collapsed in a single fantasy centred on the lives of historical figures of the old Wolof kingdoms. The iconic play of the period is Cheikh Aliou Ndao's *L'Exil d'Alboury* (1967), which Sonar Senghor describes as "the first great encounter of the Daniel Sorano Theatre team with Senegalese epic theatre" (2004:101). His recollection of the play, which he helped to stage, illustrates the post-independence emphasis on salvaging the past from the "lies" of the colonial period:

Following the enthusiasm that greeted this work, we can say that it has strengthened the rehabilitation of our national heroes initiated by Amadou Cissé Dia in *Les Derniers Jours de Lat Dior*. Colonial biographers had distorted their

faces to the point of painting our authentic history as kinglets and other operetta characters. This was the rehabilitation of the men who have made our country's tradition, but also a celebration of the virtues which have always guided our people: courage, a sense of honour. (Sonar Senghor 2004:101-102)

Just as the Ponty theatre had included musical sequences, the postcolonial plays often included musical and choreographic interludes. There had been other urban dance troupes since the 1950s, and common to all "ballets" at the time were recurring references to the ceremonial practices of a distant, timeless past. Historical references to collective farming with musical support from *griots*, or to the authority of the elders over the youth, were contrasted with a negative portrayal of "witchcraft" and pre-Islamic beliefs more generally. This contrast displayed one of the aims of the revival genre promoted by the Senegalese state: to legitimize the power of educated, mainly Muslim urban elites by showing the urban youth what to leave behind to transform Senegal into a modern, yet morally strong nation. The local and regional competitions held on a regular basis in the presence of Youth Ministry officials provided many opportunities to glorify the work of these troupes in the national printed press. Unsurprisingly, prizes were often awarded for plays praising the hard work of rural farmers and fishermen, their struggle with supernatural powers, or the moral superiority of pre-colonial kings (e.g. Dakar-Matin 1961).

The early audiences were often the French-educated youth and the urban middle class. Livingston (1999) suggests that revival movements are usually middle-class projects. This was certainly the case in Senegal, where, at least initially, the urban elite paid to congregate in the cushioned seats of the National Theatre, elegantly dressed in suits, evening gowns and Senegalese festive dress, in one gesture showing off their taste for the high arts and their commitment to the Senghor regime. If this strategy seems to have worked well with the elite,

at least in the first decade that followed Independence, the resonance of this theatre with ordinary citizens is more difficult to assess. Sonar Senghor (2004) writes at length about the National Theatre's efforts to popularise its work by staging performances in workplaces and in Senegalese towns outside the capital, but these very efforts betray the elitist character of the institution.

The National Theatre did, however, foster the performing arts as an attractive profession for youths with the right skills. As opposed to the first generation of Ballets Africains performers, by 1970 one no longer needed to be articulate in French to join the National Ballet or one of the many Dakarais troupes that had multiplied in the 1960s. Recruitment, therefore, was not restricted to educated youths, even though much of the audience was urban and educated. Whereas musicians and singers tended to come from *griot* families, dancers came from more diverse backgrounds, including high-status families who were often opposed to a dancing career. Opposition was especially strong in the families of Muslim clerics. Yet from the 1970s onwards, neo-traditional performance attracted increasing numbers of youths who sought an alternative route to "the good life": a travelling lifestyle, a stable income, and unrestricted opportunities to socialize with the other sex. For in addition to the pleasure of dancing, the National Theatre represented the opportunity of acquiring the status of a civil servant modelled on the state-employed status enjoyed by the actors of the Comédie Française in Paris. There was also touring around the world several months per year, and daily allowances on top of a very decent salary.

In addition to promoting images of rural Africa as timeless, the genre was a collage of performing practices borrowed from different parts of the region, and therefore also "placeless". This way of using dances from various parts of West Africa as metonym, as small parts signifying a coherent whole, is intensely visible in a 1954 book by photographer Michel Huet and Fodéba Keita. Opening with a single verse from the poem by Sédar Senghor

mentioned earlier and a preface by Keita, *Les Hommes de la Danse* features photographs of ceremonial life across West and Central Africa, all the way to Chad. But the captions consist mainly of Keita and Huet's poetic reflections on the role of dance in African rural life. The bibliography at the end suggests an inspiration from the writings of known European anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, colonial administrators, art critics and travel writers. The book renders visible Keita's and Senghor's fantasy of a pan-African essence, a vision that was at the heart of choreographic revival as it was conceived in the 1950s.

Paradoxically, the pan-African outlook in revival, by virtue of its openness and flexibility, paved the way for the appropriation of the genre for alternative agendas. As we will see, this flexibility enabled urban migrant troupes to construct their own version of revival from the 1980s onwards, once the state had lost much of its capacity to control cultural production.

#### <1>Performance and the emergence of Casamançais regionalism

As with so many nationwide projects throughout Africa after the independences, what transformed the Senegalese cultural revival project was the economic downturn of the 1970s, following the first "oil crisis" in 1973. In 1981-1991, the first Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as a condition for the loans meant to prevent the country from complete economic collapse were being implemented. Sédar Senghor passed on the presidency to his Prime Minister Abdou Diouf in 1981, and Diouf's successive terms in office until the election of Abdoulaye Wade, in 2000, could be described as the governance of economic austerity. Most importantly in relation to our theme, the neo-liberal agenda contained in the "adjustment" did not make space for cultural and artistic state patronage on the scale of the previous two decades (Diop 2004). The weakening of the state would create resentment from those parts of Senegal whose economic development was cut short by the new policies, and make space for



Casamançais regionalism to flourish. As we shall see, the revival theatre of the 1960s and 1970s provided urban migrants from Casamance with the tools to fill this growing regionalism with cultural contents. In the process of appropriating this theatre, Casamançais migrants transformed it into a subtle, multifaceted yet powerful revival movement. But rather than a consciously planned strategy, I suggest this happened as a gradual process stretching over several generations of performers.

Given the history of school theatre mentioned earlier, it is no coincidence that Casamançais are over-represented in the Dakarais performing world. My own estimates in 2002-03 put the proportion at approximately one-third, whereas Casamance only represented 12.5% of the country's population at the time (ANSD 2006). This is related to the popularity of school theatre in Casamance as early as the 1940s (Foucher 2002), following the appointment of Ponty-trained schoolteachers throughout the region. As a result, many of the migrants who came to work in Dakar in growing numbers from the 1950s onwards already had first-hand experiences with theatre. Over time they emphasized the musical and choreographic dimension of theatre, in part because this removed the problem of the choice of language in dialogue-based plays, and in part because the dances and rhythms which were being codified in neo-traditional ballets were regarded as the most distinctively Casamançais elements in this youth theatre.

As I hinted to earlier, one of the most pressing challenges in post-independent Senegal has been the integration of Casamance into the nation. Casamance is a linguistically, culturally and religiously diverse area where Jola speakers are dominant in Lower Casamance, in the Ziguinchor region. But the Middle and Upper parts of the region, around Kolda and Velingara, are more diverse, and there Mandinka- and Pulaar-speakers are in a majority. The region has suffered from a low-intensity separatist conflict since 1982, launched by the MFDC (*Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance*) in

Ziguinchor. By 1990, the movement had mobilised armed forces and started a conflict still to be resolved at the time of writing in 2012. Despite its claims to stand for the whole of Casamance, the MFDC is mainly a Jola movement (Foucher 2002), an important point in relation to the representation of the region's ethnicities in Casamançais revival performance.

The idea of separatism in Casamance is not new, however: a movement named MFDC had already been formed in 1949 in Sédhiou, but scholars of the region disagree on whether or not the current MFDC is in direct continuity with the old one, as well as on the movement's root causes<sup>10</sup>. One of the most common explanations is the marginalization of the region in the French colonial system, followed by the Senegalese government's neglect of its economic development. Though these factors have undoubtedly generated huge resentment, they do not, on their own, account for the rise of a strong regionalist discourse and an armed rebellion. Drawing on Anderson's (1983) notion of imagined communities, Foucher (2002) argued that it was schooling and massive migration to Dakar that allowed a Casamançais, and particularly Jola, consciousness to crystallize in Lower Casamance. These two latter factors also explain the rise of Casamançais neo-traditional performance from the 1950s onwards, which points significantly to a strong link between schooling, migration, and regionalist revival as constructed through performance.

As early as the 1950s, migrants from the Lower Casamance to Dakar were actively organising into hometown associations. Migrants from the rural settlement of Thionck Essyl, for example, set up the ARTE (*Association des Ressortissants de Thionck Essyl*) in 1952. Now considered a commune in its own right, with a population of more than 8,000 inhabitants, Thionck Essyl is a wet-rice farming area, and mainly Muslim (De Jong 2002, 2007). Thionck Essyl is also in the heartland of the separatist movement. According to an older member whom I interviewed, by the late 1950s the migrant association included young men and women organised into two separate structures, each gathering members from the

different Thionck Essyl wards representing the families (identified by patrilineage) considered to be indigenous to the settlement. Whereas many of the women worked as house employees or stayed home with their children, the men worked as civil servants, often in the police or the army, or as employees in the private sector.

Throughout the 1960s, the ARTE organised family ceremonies and other festivities in Dakar for Thionck Essyl's migrants, and gradually for Jola-speakers from all over Casamance. The most gifted performers among them led dance events which included different styles depending on the context and the participants: Jola *bugarabu* dances for family ceremonies, Cuban styles for youth dance evenings. Those who had attended secondary school at the Lycée Djignabo in Ziguinchor in the 1960s had already developed a passion for Cuban rhythms there. Saliou Sambou, who was to become a prominent national politician and Governor of Fatick, then Dakar much later, remembered these dances so vividly that he performed a entire song by Johnny Pacheco during our interview in April 2011. Pacheco's *Pachanga* dance craze was all the rage in Ziguinchor and in Dakar in the 1960s, and Sambou remembered his Saturday evenings at the Djignabo boarding school as boys-only Cuban dances. When Sambou and others moved to Dakar to become university students or state employees, the Jola-style *Pachanga* swung all the way to the capital.

In Dakar in 1972, in the midst of the performing effervescence created by the National Ballet and the other urban troupes, the ARTE decided to set up its own troupe, Bakalama. Original plays were written by Sambou and other students from Thionck Essyl, and those with dancing skills choreographed versions of the dances they had been performing for Jola audiences. Several of the members had already done theatre at Thionck Essyl's primary school. Just as the National Theatre was staging the nation's past, so Bakalama would stage Jola history for much wider audiences. Sambou was explicit about the aim of the new troupe:

The problems between Casamance and Senegal are fundamentally problems of cultural misunderstanding. If the Senegalese knew us, they would like us. We need to show who we are. We set up Bakalama at the time so that people would come to understand us.

(Saliou Sambou, Interview, April 2011, Dakar)

But what form did revival take in this emerging regional performing genre? Men who belonged to the first generation of performers say they knew many dances from village festivities, from their time as initiates, and from attending women's dances as children. Indeed according to these men, before the male Jola initiation a boy is not yet fully gendered, and as a child is allowed to watch some of men's as well as women's secret rituals (cf. De Jong 2007 on the male initiation in Thionck Essyl). The music included regional rhythms performed on Jola drums, as well as some of the cherished Cuban styles played on modern instruments, including a saxophone. By the early 1980s, the younger performers were the children of the founders, and some of them had tried their hand at modern dance, American jazz and American street dances. They created new steps which integrated these movement styles to the troupe's Jola choreographies, and according to some of these performers, their creations are now regarded as "traditional." The troupe performed in various public spaces in Dakar, including school yards and during theatre competitions. But it was important to the group that they also performed in Thionck Essyl, where a substantial share of the earnings was redirected. Not everyone was happy with the troupe's work, however: some of the young men's parents feared that their engagement with the troupe would compromise their university education or wage-earning jobs, even more so because some of the youths were also active in football teams. In addition to the distraction from education, some of the

families feared that the young women would become difficult to control. The young migrants responded by demonstrating their loyalty to Jola “traditions.”

Over time, the Casamançais neo-traditional genre became less experimental, and more explicitly focused on Jola history and traditions. In Bakalama’s case, Cuban rhythms and modern dance moves receded to the background to make space for distinctively Casamançais (mainly Jola and Mandinko) instruments and rhythms. The movement style made increasing space for the characteristic Jola dances, in which both legs alternate in a rapid and powerful stomp, feet flat, with the knees bent and the body leaning forward to a 45-degree-angle. In this style, the arms are held away from the body and, by contrast with the aerial style of the Wolof *sabar*, the energy appears directed to the ground. In short, the themes, cultural practices and movement styles reworked for revival performance emphasized the Jola-ness of the genre.

Just as with the neo-traditional genre promoted by the National Theatre, images of the past were used to comment on the present. Also, the mode of secrecy cultivated by people from Lower Casamance to maintain their distinctiveness within the nation (De Jong 2007) was invoked as proof of the authenticity of this urban performing genre. The real origin of Bakalama’s name, for example, became shrouded in mystique. According to the most common contemporary explanation, Bakalama means “calabash” in Jola. It is an analogy with the calabash tree, with its strong core and with far-reaching roots, and is meant to symbolize the members’ attachment to the hometown. But according to another version, retold by one of the founders, the troupe was named after a *griot* who used to come and entertain the Thionck Essyl youths as they worked in cassava fields on Sundays. He used to carry a small calabash, and the name stuck, he said. Yet other individuals have told me that no uninitiated person could know the real meaning behind the troupe’s name. In a way which

mirrors De Jong's (2007) analysis of Jola ways of being modern, secrecy is always assumed to form an important part of the troupe's cultural production.

Though the aesthetics of the plays have changed over time, the idea of revival still runs through the repertoire in the form of a celebration of historical resistance heroes and a selection of regional traditions. A closer look at the selection of individual figures and practices to be celebrated, however, points to a different kind of revival from the national and pan-African revival performance that was originally promoted by the state. Indeed while the National Theatre staged epics on Wolof-speaking heroes like Alboury Ndiaye in Cheikh Aliou Ndao's play, the Casamançais plays placed regional figures at the centre of the region's history. One of Bakalama's most successful creations, for example, was *La Reine de Kabrousse*, a play about Aline Siteo Diatta, a Jola prophetess whose cult was violently suppressed by the French in 1942. The choice of a Jola martyr, who has often been invoked by the separatist movement as embodying the region's historical refusal to accept any form of political or spiritual domination from either Europeans or northern Senegal (Foucher 2002), is significant here. The choice of a young Jola woman as a heroic fighter for the autonomy of the Casamance region as a whole is also a highly political choice, which legitimizes the version of history according to which the Jola are the region's real autochthones, without having to make this explicit. The practices represented as "authentic" in Casamançais plays are also, often, subtly portrayed as essentially Jola. Bakalama's 1980 play *Gambacc*, for example, staged the inter-generational tensions that continue to affect Jola male initiation in a context of Islamization, rising levels of formal education and migration.<sup>11</sup> One of the key plays in the troupe's repertoire is *Kañaaalen*, named after a Jola sorority of women who have had difficulties bearing many healthy children beyond infancy.

By contrast with the fluid character of these practices in social life, there was active selection and exclusion of elements for their stage versions. Songs and texts were thus

performed in Jola and in French, and Wolof language was consciously excluded. In fact, over time the language problem was solved by removing spoken text altogether: in a trajectory strikingly parallel to the Ballets Africains in the 1960s, choreography gradually displaced drama. But this also reflected a generational change in the troupe, and the fact that with decreasing levels of education following the “adjustment” policies mentioned earlier, by the 1990s many of the younger performers struggled with the French texts from the plays written by students in the 1970s. Moreover, when the troupe performed abroad in non-French speaking contexts, choreographic pieces were more appealing than verbal plays.

Work in the rice fields, an important marker of Jola culture in Lower Casamance, featured prominently but groundnut cultivation was seldom alluded to, despite the fact that groundnut farming had been widespread in the region since the 1930s (Mark 1977). Some of Bakalama’s founders had even worked seasonally in groundnut farms before coming to Dakar. But groundnut farming was associated either with the Wolof-dominated Senegalese state or with Mandinko farmers. In the few plays when groundnut farming appeared, therefore, as in Toumani Camara’s *Manding Mousso, la Révolte de la Femme Mandingue* (“The Rebellion of the Mandinko Woman”), it was represented disparagingly, as a factor in the oppression of women. The implication was that, as an experienced Bakalama performer told me, the rice field cultivation that is at the heart of Jola economic and spiritual life was superior because men’s and women’s work in the rice fields is complementary, and equal. Among the Mandinko, he explained, only women own rice fields; men own groundnut fields, and are idle most of the time, he continued. The implication, of course, is that societies who do not have the cultivation of rice as a central structuring activity are less morally and spiritually fulfilled than those who do, like the Jola. Islam did not appear explicitly in the performances either, despite the fact that Thionck Essyl is mainly Muslim and that most of the troupe members over the years have been Muslims. Practices perceived as essentially

Jola, such as the male initiation, have consistently been portrayed as timeless and untouched by world religions, despite the incorporation of Islamic dimensions throughout the twentieth century (De Jong 2007 ; Thomas 1965).

Costumes, by contrast, have often been less the result of conscious choice than they have reflected the multiple experiences traversing the lives of troupe members. Costumes may be handed down from previous generations of performers, or designed by urban tailors with little knowledge of Casamançais history. There are nevertheless distinctive Jola elements. In *Kañaaalen* as I saw it performed in Dakar in 2003 during the Kaay Fecc international dance festival, the main character , a young woman who turned to the sorority after getting married and failing to get pregnant, was seen on stage carrying a calabash decorated with a hanging fringe of beads (see video example 1). [INSERT OWM AUDIO SYMBOL HERE.] This is characteristic of the calabash carried by real-life *añaalena*, the sorority initiates, during community-wide family ceremonies (see figure 1). In other plays, women dancers wore an indigo-cloth outfit and long necklaces of beads criss-crossing their chests (see video examples 1 and 2) [INSERT OWM AUDIO SYMBOL HERE], both being strongly associated with modern Jola female ceremonies. But there are also older costumes inspired by the Guinean Ballets Africains, as well as Mandinko and urban Senegalese styles.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Though Casamançais performers often present what they do as standing for a single Casamançais identity, in continuity with the regionalist discourse, Jola performance is subjected to much less aesthetic manipulation than rhythms and dances from the region's other linguistic groups, a point already noted by Peter Mark (1994) in his fine ethnography of a performing arts festival in Mlomp, Lower Casamance, in the early 1990s. When Bakalama performed a Mandinko piece called *MBalia* for a Dakarois audience at the 2007 Kaay Fecc festival, for example, the choreography featured Mandinko rhythms and the dancers wore



light blue satin outfits of a modern design; thigh-length tunics and wrap-around skirts for the women, tunics and baggy trousers for the men. The general impression was that of a modern, urban Senegalese style with inflections of Wolof elegance (the “shiny” aspect of the fabrics). When the same piece was performed at the Thionck Essyl festival the same year, the performers wore simpler batik-decorated outfits which gave the piece a rural, rather than urban, feel. Such fluidity rarely applies to those elements of performance constructed as distinctively Jola.

This visual collage was paralleled by a sonic impact on urban audiences who had come to know Casamançais rhythms and instruments from the ceremonial practices of their migrant neighbours. By the early 1980s, dozens of Casamançais troupes existed in Dakar, and the popularity of their choreographic and musical production was such that this was what most northern Senegalese knew about the region. Success during tours abroad heightened the genre’s popularity back home. In short, the Casamançais plays created during the decade leading up to a full-blown separatist movement in the region thus differed from state-sponsored revival theatre in that despite a visual collage that made them appealing to audiences throughout Senegal, they celebrated distinctively Casamançais, and often specifically Jola, cultural practices. The genre’s success in Dakar and other Senegalese cities has contributed to the articulation of a unified Jola identity (in contrast to the heterogeneous character of Jola communities until the mid- twentieth century). It has also, perhaps inadvertently, reinforced the perception that the Jola were the original inhabitants of at least parts of the Lower Casamance region, and that the neighbouring populations were “strangers”. There is indeed striking continuity between the culturalist discourse of the MFDC separatist movement analysed by Foucher (2002) and Casamançais revival performance. This is evident in the contents of the plays and dances as well as in the performers’ constant slippage between Jola identity and a broader Casamance regional

identity. Several authors working in the region have suggested that the framing of the MFDC as a regional rather than an ethnic movement served to legitimize the separatist discourse in a state where ethnicity carried little political weight (Faye 1994 ; Lambert 1998). In his analysis of the MFDC's manifesto, Darbon (1985) also noted that although the authors make a point of explaining the marginalisation of the Casamance as a whole, the references that permeate the text are Jola: Jola heroes, Jola movements of rebellion, the destruction of forests, rice fields and fishing environments. He notes that Mandinka- and Pulaar-speakers are never mentioned, even though they are in a majority east of Ziguinchor. Similarly, when performers spoke to me about their work, they used "Jola" and "Casamançais" interchangeably. Yet, the stories they bring to the stage are first and foremost Jola stories associated with a very particular geographic environment: the forest and wet-rice fields. Those linguistic groups perceived as not indigenous to the forest areas, such as the Pulaar-speakers (Fulani) or the Mandinko, are either absent, or represented in subtly unflattering ways and in choreographic tableaux of everyday life rather than in historical or epic form. Revival performance by Jola troupes in Dakar draws on a discourse of Jola autochthony and provides substance to it at the same time.

But there is also a malleable side to the genre that makes it appealing to very diverse audiences. On the one hand it appeals to local audiences in the hometowns, and this is important to the performers. Bakalama members have told me how moved they were whenever they performed *Kañaaalen* in Thionck Essyl, and women from the sorority spontaneously joined in the songs. This was one of the reasons why it was important to preserve rhythms people would recognise. On the other hand, Casamançais performance has consistently engaged with Senegalese nationalist imagery, which is unsurprising given that it developed as an appropriation of nationalist theatre. The plays, for example, often use the narrative progression common in European classical ballet, which also informed the work of

the National Theatre during the making of its repertoire in the 1960s: the setting of the scene and introduction of the characters, followed by drama, and a joyful *dénouement* during which all the participants dance together. Casamançais performers have often moved back and forth between the National Ballet and regional troupes, and Bakalama has represented Senegal at folklore festivals abroad on several occasions. A Wolof *sabar* programme was even introduced to the company's repertoire in the early 2000s. The best instance of the malleability of the genre is a type of performance called *animation*, a choreographic sequence without a narrative, modelled on the National Ballet's tableaux (see figures 2 and 3). An *animation* could be crafted at short notice to suit the length of time available, the space and audience. The various elements of performance, from the dress to the spatial arrangements, instruments, songs and costumes, were also put together in a flexible manner depending on the context. Thus in April 2011, Bakalama performed an *animation* for the International Dance Day held at one of the state-owned cultural centres in Dakar. The event had been sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, and in a context of growing opposition to the Abdoulaye Wade regime ahead of the 2012 presidential elections, Bakalama's dominating presence seemed to signal its allegiance to the Ministry. There was noticeable difference from earlier *animations* I had seen by the group, however: in this tense political context, the Jola character of the performance had been toned down through a choice of urban Senegalese outfits (figure 3), rather than the more distinctively Jola elements (the headdress in particular) worn by the troupe on the exact same occasion in April 2003 (see figure 2 and video example 2). [INSERT OWM AUDIO SYMBOL HERE.]

[INSERT FIGURES 2 AND 3 HERE]

Despite the urban, even Wolof dress style, the movement style and the rhythms were distinctively Jola, to the great enjoyment of a standing audience composed of young

performers from other urban troupes, media people and neighbourhood residents. In this politically sensitive context, the troupe momentarily broke down existing boundaries of ethnicity and political orientation through a skilful arrangement of elements of performance. The enjoyment of audiences also contributes to the genre's effectiveness in important ways, and there are always moments when young audience members from very diverse ethnicities feel compelled to join in for a brief spell of dancing (see video clip 2). [INSERT OWM AUDIO SYMBOL HERE.] Indeed it is largely the ability of Casamançais performance to engage diverse audiences and interests in multiple locations that makes it so powerful.

#### <1>Transnational mobility and revival

The final point I wish to make is that revival is a process that stretches not only in time, but also in space. Revival movements are often fostered by the mobility of the actors, and one needs to take their full trajectories into account to understand how revival changes over time and space. In the present case, it is significant that Casamançais neo-traditional performance emerged with massive migration to Dakar, and to a certain extent also to Ziguinchor.

Casamançais mobility within Senegal has been well documented by scholars of the region.<sup>12</sup>

What is less clear is what happens to the cultural work of hometown associations when people continue to move further away from Senegal. More research is needed to provide substantial answers to these questions, and my research on these issues is on-going.

As far as Bakalama is concerned, the troupe has been a transnational organisation since the mid-1990s at least, and increasingly so since the turn of the century. There are now former Bakalama performers settled across Europe, North America and Australia. Yet the troupe has retained its links with Thionck Essyl and its emphasis on Jola tradition. The organisational form has shifted however, and the troupe is now able to present multiple faces

to the world. Inwardly, it remains an extension of the original troupe, and those members who have managed to establish stable lives abroad help the Senegal-based troupe to find touring and teaching opportunities in their countries of residence. Outwardly however, it appears more as a loose network of well-trained artists capable of travelling across the various countries of residence to teach workshops in drumming and dancing. This is facilitated by the use of the internet, Facebook and Youtube in particular. But does this affect the regionalist consciousness the genre has helped to foster?

In recent years the regional character of the performers' work abroad has in fact become more explicit than it was when Casamançais performers started teaching and performing away from Africa in the late 1970s and 1980s. During those years, following the pan-African model described earlier, neo-traditional performance was marketed as "African" or "West African" to audiences and students who often knew little about these cultural forms. But the global resurgence of discourses of local belonging (Meyer and Geschiere 1999) and the emergence of networks of European and American amateurs has encouraged Casamançais performers to re-assert their regional identity. This is mainly done through dance and drumming workshops, gradually described with more regional specificity. This is evident, for example, in the way in which Bakalama members living abroad present their artistic network and workshops:

Jamo Jamo Arts is a collection of professional artists, musicians and craftsmen who aim to provide an excellent cultural experience at home and abroad. Led by Fodé Mané in Australia, and his brother Landing Mané in the UK, we aim to educate, entertain and inspire!!

We invite you to experience the energy and soul of Senegal with Jamo Jamo Arts. Fodé Mané is a dynamic and inspirational teacher and performer of West

African drum and dance. Formerly a lead dancer, drummer and choreographer with the award winning traditional performing arts troupe Bakalama of Thionck Essyl, based in Dakar, he is renowned for his graceful and energetic style of dance, his exceptional teaching abilities and his infectious smile. [...] With a repertoire of Guinean and Senegalese rhythms, songs and dances, specialising in Bougarabou rhythms native to the Casamance region and to his culture, he is an exceptionally talented artist with a rich cultural tradition of dance and music.

(Jamo Jamo Arts Australia website 2009)

In many cases, it was only after performers had spent years abroad that they realised how powerful the regional culture discourse could be within the growing global concern for disappearing local worlds. Over time, the effect of successful Casamançais performance abroad has been a further strengthening of regional consciousness back home. This is an essential factor in understanding the resurgence of regionalism in all its complexity.

The choice by migrants from the Lower Casamance to Dakar in the 1960s and 1970s to imagine and stage “tradition” came from the influence of colonial school theatre and Senghorian post-colonial cultural policy. What was being staged in theatrical and choreographic form was a crafted collage of ceremonial dances from the region, combined with epic narratives and autobiographical elements from the lives of the troupe members. The plays and choreographic pieces of troupes like Bakalama contributed to creating representations of the Jola as the rightful and autochthonous inhabitants of the region, and of Casamançais society as a diverse yet bounded, timeless whole. What started as youth theatre gradually became the very image of regional culture, both in Casamance and outside the region.

But why did performance encounter so much success with migrants, and why did this success grow over time rather than dwindle? After all, the performers currently working with Casamançais troupes have never experienced colonial school theatre. Many are under 30, with no living memory of the Senghor years, and little experience of living in rural Casamance for longer periods of time. Yet, Casamançais revival performance is thriving, both in Dakar and among the Senegalese diaspora. The key to this, I suggest, is to be found in performance's ability to encapsulate a multiplicity of messages (Askew 2002). This malleability helps us to understand why revival movements tend to be performed rather than fixed in written or material form, even though text and objects may well form an important part of the performance. In this case, creative performing work has provided several generations of migrants with the social and symbolic capital they needed to become successful and respected citizens in all the contexts their lives traversed, from Casamance to Dakar and beyond. It has also enabled them to pursue a regionalist agenda that was not fully explicit in the early days of Casamançais hometown associations in Dakar. Unlike overt political action, performance has enabled the same people to derive power from positioning themselves differently in different contexts. Looking at revival movements over time and space also helps to challenge the notion that revival movements necessarily involve a conscious strategy shared by all actors from the beginning. Not all actors participate with the same degree of consciousness, and much of what happens is conceptualized as revival in retrospect, once the movement has gained momentum and power.

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<sup>1</sup> Among the best known examples of dance revival are a range of Indian classical dances revived by Indian middle classes in the first half of the twentieth century, such as *Bharatanatyam* (Meduri 2005).

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<sup>2</sup> This chapter draws on material gathered over 18 months of fieldwork in Senegal, France and the UK between 2002 and 2011. Part of this research was generously funded by an ESRC postdoctoral grant in 2005-06. While in Dakar I followed several neo-traditional dance troupes, had informal conversations with and conducted interviews with performers, their families and audience members. I was also part of the organising team of the Kaay Fecc biennial dance festival in 2003 and 2007, which facilitated access to dance troupes. The archival research was greatly facilitated by the digital newspaper database “When States Use Culture” on Bob White’s webpage ([www.atalaku.net](http://www.atalaku.net)).

<sup>3</sup> See for example Labouret and Travélé (1928) on Koteba comedy theatre in Mali, Diop (1990) on traditional theatre in Senegal, Samb (1975) on the *mbànd* travelling theatre, Charry (2000) on Mande music, or Kaba and Charry (2000) on the *Mamaya* music genre in the Kankan region in Guinea.

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent study on the role of the Ponty plays in the formation of an elite urban culture in Francophone West Africa, see Jezequel (1999).

<sup>5</sup> The term referred to African individuals who were literate, educated in the French system, wore European clothes and displayed modern lifestyles.

<sup>6</sup> All quotations from French sources are my own translation.

<sup>7</sup> Touré had Keita arrested for alleged complicity in plotting a coup in 1969. In 1971, Keita was executed alongside several other former regime officials at the Camp Boiro military jail which he had helped to establish.

<sup>8</sup> In Wolof, Haalpulaar and Mande societies, praise-singers (*griots* in French) belong to the men-of-skill categories alongside artisans. Their status in relation to the “freeborn” majority is highly ambiguous.

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<sup>9</sup> During the colonial period, the “four communes” of Dakar, Rufisque, Saint-Louis and Gorée benefited from privileged access to French citizenship, education, and resources for trade and economic development.

<sup>10</sup> For a comprehensive review of the different approaches, see Foucher (2002).

<sup>11</sup> See De Jong (2007) for a beautiful ethnography of the male initiation process in Thionck Essyl as a way of incorporating modernity.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Hamer (1981), Linares (1992) and (2003), Lambert (2002), and Foucher (2002).