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Mokk Pooj:
**Gender, Interpretive Labour
and Sexual Imaginary in
Senegal's Art/Work of Seduction**

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PhD Social Anthropology
The University of Edinburgh

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I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself
and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part,
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Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment,
the work presented is entirely my own.

Véronique Gilbert
Edinburgh, UK
August 2016

Abstract

This thesis examines the evolving gender relationships exposed by and contested through the Senegalese art of seduction, *mokk pooj*. The Wolof expression encompasses a set of feminine attitudes and actions (culinary prowess, docility, eroticism) that reflect values such as *teraanga* (hospitality), *sutura* (discretion), and *muñ* (patience, endurance). These beliefs and the discursive practices that perpetuate them are central to the reproduction of a gendered, normative, patriarchal, polygamous Senegalese sexual imaginary, but are framed within the playful and pleasurable realm of seduction and sexuality. Indeed, *mokk pooj* implies a satisfying sexual life based on a religiously-informed sexual ethics: in a country where 95% of people identify as Muslim, marriage and procreation are divine recommendations, and sexual pleasure is said to make a married couple feel closer to Allah. In consequence, objects and strategies that enhance sexual satisfaction are an integral part of the Senegalese seduction toolkit. Each chapter pays attention to a specific element of the material culture of seduction and explores how it exposes larger gender dynamics. By taking potions and amulets, money, aphrodisiacs, food, and lingerie as the starting point of each chapter, I explore how these objects relate to concepts of social conformity and normativity, love, anxiety, complementarity and agency. In doing so, I analyse the gendered labour – the art/work of seduction – that goes into *mokk pooj*. David Graeber (2012) suggests that within hierarchical relationships, individuals in an inferior position (women) have to constantly imagine, understand, manage and care about the egos, perspectives and points of view of those on the top (men) while the latter rarely reciprocate. While Graeber contends that this ‘interpretive labor’ or ‘imaginative identification’ reproduces an internalised structural violence, I analyse *mokk pooj* as an affective economy in which women’s emotional, interpretive labour, becomes an agentive, albeit conservative, tool of negotiation and power (Mahmood 2005). In imagining and interpreting men’s needs and desires, Senegalese women uphold the Senegalese sexual imaginary that portray them as docile and submissive. However, it is through the apparent conformity and subdued demeanour that *mokk pooj* requires of them that Senegalese women manage to portray themselves as good women and consequently enhance their agentive power of negotiation.

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About Wolof Transcription and Pronunciation

Throughout the thesis, I use specific Wolof words that denote essential concepts and ideas, or have not equivalents in English. The Wolof transcription follows Jean-Léopold Diouf's *Dictionnaire wolof-français et français-wolof* (2003).

I borrow Agnes Hann's (2013) examples to explain the approximate phonetic equivalents of the Wolof letters whose pronunciation differs from English:

Vowels

a	absorb
à	cat
e	get
é	say
ë	bird
i	meet
o	hot
ó	or
u	as in the French 'ou'

A doubling of the vowel indicates that it should be pronounced for a little longer than the normal (short) vowel.

Consonants

c	church, but closer to the French 'tiens'
j	job, but closer to the French 'dieu'
ñ	onion
x	between the English 'h' and 'k'
q	a more guttural version of the Wolof 'x'

A doubling of the consonant denotes phonetic strength.

Proper nouns and names are spelled in French, as this is how they tend to be transcribed locally, for example in the media or official documents such as identity cards. Apart from proper nouns, most Wolof words are rarely written down in practice (Hann 2013: 10).

Acknowledgements

‘Whether it is the dizzy, heady and overwhelming feeling of love for a lover, or the warmth and joy at being near a friend who has shared one’s struggles, it is our relation to particular others that gives life meaning and direction, and can give us the feeling of there being somebody and something to live for. [...] how one loves matters; it has effects on the texture of everyday life and on the intimate "withness" of social relations.’
Ahmed (2004: 139-140)

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Figure 1. *Secrets de femme* at Marché HLM

Chapter 1.

Mokk pooj: an introduction

'Tonight, you become a seductress. And a seductress *must* be prepared. Because it is when you are prepared that it becomes natural,' Kira declared. The other woman sitting beside me nodded in approbation, eagerly waiting to hear more.

'A man is a hunter,' Kira continued calmly. 'He needs to believe that he is making all the efforts to get you, that he's chasing you, when in reality *you* have planned everything, *you* have created this situation without him noticing. He will think it's all natural, that it is happening from his own doings, that he is winning you over. But it was *you* who orchestrated everything from the beginning. That is why we are here tonight. I will give you the rules, tricks and tips as to how to attract, tantalise and win over a man,' she declared authoritatively.

'Would you like a pen and paper?' she then offered the other woman, handing her a sheet of paper as the client was taking a pen out of her handbag. I had already started scribbling in my own notebook.

Kira is a seduction coach. She specialises in helping women acknowledge, develop, and sustain their seduction potential. After studying business and marketing in France, she went back to her native Dakar and launched her own brand of delicate, handcrafted, limited-edition lingerie, offering women a contemporary version of the traditional Senegalese sexy undergarments. In time, she developed cosmetic products such as perfumes and beauty creams, introduced a selection of jewellery and waistbeads, and added an array of sex toys and other erotic paraphernalia to her displays. Eventually, she realised that although Senegalese and foreign women bought her products, they did not necessarily make the most out of them, so she decided to offer workshops and coaching sessions. Her *cabinet de séduction* was born.

I first visited Senegal in May 2007, for a month-long research internship at the end of my undergraduate studies. A small country on the West African coast, Senegal sits on the Atlantic Ocean and shares borders with Mauritania to the North, Mali to the East, Guinea and Guinea Bissau to the South, while the Gambia sits in an enclave in its centre, on a small strip of land along the Gambia River. Inhabited by almost fourteen million people, the country is renowned for its *teraanga*, or hospitality. The cosmopolitan capital of Dakar, home to almost a quarter of Senegal’s population, is tucked into the Cap-Vert peninsula, the westernmost area of the Africa continent. Once a pivotal centre of the Atlantic slave trade, Dakar is now a major commercial regional port and a bustling cultural hub for Senegal and West Africa.



Figure 1. Map of Senegal (CIA 2016)

I still remember getting off the plane right on the runway and being engulfed by an amalgamation of smells: the warm tarmac slowly cooling after a long day under the blazing sun; the salty Atlantic breeze gently reminding us of the proximity of the ocean; the fumes of the old cars driving around the city; the oily and spicy aromas of a traditional meal being cooked. Over time, and after several returns, I would come to associate those smells with Dakar. And every time I have flown back, as I walk off the plane, those familiar smells remind me I have returned to a place I love, and a place I can call home.

One of my most vivid memories from that first experience in Senegal is that of a line of clothes drying under the sun in a stranger's yard. I recall being awed by the colourful fabrics hung neatly on the clothesline, caressed by the warm sunbeams. Piece by piece, as I tried to imagine who wore those clothes, my eyes made their way towards the end of the line. Then, I was stupefied: the last few items drying were a bright red satin bra lined with red fur, embroidered with sparkly beads, its assorted panties, and what looked like a short, see-through, black lace wrapper skirt.

I hadn't expected to see such items openly displayed, especially in a predominantly Muslim country. Truth be told, I had not expected to see such items *at all*. As a young and naïve international development student, I thought of Senegal then as a developing country that needed assistance, and of Senegalese women as dominated, subjugated and longing for 'emancipation' – whatever that meant. I assumed that Islam constricted their freedom, and their sexuality, and that they needed to be 'saved' (Abu-Lubgohd 2002, 2013). I believed a majority of women would be veiled, and I certainly did not think they owned and wore lingerie. I am ashamed to admit it, but I imagined Senegalese women then as an Other so different from me that I would never really be able to relate to, or learn from them. How wrong I was.

Even after two additional sojourns in the land of *teraanga* in 2009 and 2011, I could never have anticipated that I would one day work with a Senegalese seduction coach. For several months into my doctoral fieldwork, I did not even know such a person existed. I used to walk by *Kira Créations* on Avenue Bourguiba regularly, as it was in the same neighbourhood as the language school where I was trying to learn Wolof – Senegal’s vernacular – but it took me a while to notice the shop. The pink colour of the wooden signboard had faded in the bright sunshine, and some of the letters looked like they had been washed away by the abrasive, twirling sand on windy days. On the eve of Valentine’s Day 2014, a friend emailed me a link to an article from *Jeune Afrique* (Ba 2014) from which I learned that *Kira Créations* had been right under my nose all this time.

***Mokk Pooj*: the Art of Seduction**

Throughout West Africa, Senegalese women enjoy a reputation as queens of seduction, and as masters of the art of eroticism. In my several trips to Senegal between 2007 and 2014, I regularly heard comments about the sensuality of the Senegalese wife, and about her abilities to *toppatoo sa jëkër*, to take care of her husband. Rumour has it that West African women from neighbouring countries envy Senegalese women for their tantalising use of traditional wrapper underskirts, waistbeads, incense and aphrodisiacs that send their partners to cloud nine. Apparently, their reputation spread right across the continent; Nelson Mandela was said to have been charmed by the elegance and beguilement of Senegalese women’s attitude (Lo 2011). I met a young female entrepreneur from Côte d’Ivoire who had come to Dakar to import these products and resell them in her hometown of Abidjan, and she was planning to open a seduction cabinet that mirrored Kira’s. Indeed, it is often assumed – at least in hearsay – that if an African woman tries to compete against a Senegalese woman to win a man over, she is wasting her time, money and energy. What’s more, a similar hierarchy of seductive capacities exists within the country itself: the saying goes

that any woman who vies for a man's favours against a lady from Saint-Louis is bound to fail – as *jigéenu Ndar* (woman of Saint-Louis) are notorious for their elegance, distinction, grace and style, both outside the house and inside the bedroom.

The art of pleasing one's husband is referred to as *mokk pooj*, which can be roughly translated as the art of seduction. The second noun, *pooj*, refers to the thigh, a body part traditionally considered sexy and arousing in women which therefore needs to be hidden under floor-length skirts or long dresses. The verb *mokk* takes different meanings (Diouf 2003: 226), but always seems to be used in the passive tense – such as when it signifies that something is understood, acquired, or learned, or when it indicates that someone or something is submissive and docile. Finally, it refers to spices and condiments that have been ground finely into powder, which in Senegalese cuisine is mostly achieved with a mortar and pestle – symbols of intercourse and fertility. As a 'mastery of the thigh' or 'art of the thigh', *mokk pooj* is impossible to translate literally, and the Wolof expression actually describes 'a set of practices of self-presentation and seduction, involving beautifying the body for husbands, preparing a room with incense and clean sheets, and massaging a partner' (Mustafa 2006: 32 n5). It is the art of attracting, pleasing and winning over a man through charisma, seduction, submission, and culinary prowess (Sow Fall 2002: 79), leading to 'marital success based on women's ability to cater to their husbands by providing them with a well-run household, tasty meals and a spicy sex life' (Foley and Dramé 2013: 126).

As these definitions suggest, *mokk pooj* entails more than sexual competence. In fact, to be *mokk pooj* is a compliment paid to women as much as it is a prescriptive, gendered way of being in the public, domestic and sexual worlds. As Beth Buggenhagen puts it, '[d]isplaying the qualities of *mokk pooj* involves being considerate, foreseeing the needs and desires of male companions, and

being docile and obliging' (2012: 114) in a private setting as much as in dealing with business partners. She further adds that being *mokk pooj* is equated to having an expertise in navigating or managing the 'social dance' – in Wolof, a predominantly oral language, *pooj* is very similar to *pecc*, which means 'dance'. In Senegal, this social dance relies heavily on conforming to deep-rooted social mores, or at least in knowing how to negotiate them. Indeed, the everyday arrangements of relationships between men and women underscore the extent to which asymmetrical gender norms are socially and religiously endorsed, nurtured, and internalised – but also contested –, in the urban, contemporary context of Dakar.

A Senegalese Sexual Imaginary

This thesis takes *mokk pooj* as its point of entry to explore what I call the Senegalese sexual imaginary. Here, I borrow from Chrys Ingraham's concept of the 'heterosexual imaginary' (1994; 1999; 2005; 2011). The 'imaginary' is a term used by Jacques Lacan after Louis Althusser's theory of ideology, Ingraham explains: '[d]efining ideology as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (1971: 52), Althusser argues that the imaginary is that image or representation of reality which masks the historical and material conditions of life' (Ingraham 1994: 203). For example, Ingraham's *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture* explores how heterosexual weddings are seen as a joyful celebration and innocuous tradition, and yet participate in the elaboration of relations of power as they perform a work of subtle ideological control, signalling 'that the couple is normal, moral, productive, family-centered, upstanding, and, most importantly, appropriately gendered' (Ingraham 1999: 14). Even though Ingraham's work analyses the American wedding industry, the underlying idea that marriage is a constitutive element of the 'normal' individual and thus a marker of proper personhood deeply resonates with the Senegalese context I present here. Indeed, although I do not engage with heterosexuality as a central analytical concept the way

Ingraham does, my work concentrates on normative conceptions of gender and sexuality as structuring elements of the Senegalese sexual imaginary.

‘Sex’ and ‘sexuality’ are polysemous terms. While sexuality can speak to the personal experience of being sexual and feeling desire, in this thesis it mostly refers to ‘a larger configuration of various aspects of social life, including ideologies and practices of kinship, gender relations and reproduction’, and to ‘the social arena where power relations, symbolic meanings of gender, and hence moral discourses in relation to sexual behaviour, are played out’ (Spronk 2012: 7). Sexuality, then, is simultaneously very personal and very social. ‘Sex’, for its part, can broadly signify a category (male or female sex), an identity (man or woman), and practices (intercourse, eroticism; Spronk 2012: 7). In anthropology the term “sex” is generally taken to refer to the anatomical, biological and physiological characteristics of female and male bodies, and “gender” to the culturally specific symbolic articulation and elaboration of these differences’ (Pine 2010: 319). By disaggregating the biological and the social aspects of sex into distinct domains, the concept of gender has shown that social differences and inequalities do not inherently derive from male and female bodies, but have been made to appear natural and built upon such bodily dichotomies (Viveros Vigoya 2015). Gender, it turns out, ‘is not an attribute but an activity’ (Moloney and Fenstermaker 2002: 194), as exemplified in Judith Butler’s theory of gender as a performative act (re)produced through discourse (2004, 2006 [1990], 2011 [1993])¹ or by Candace West and Don Zimmerman’s view of gender as a ‘doing’, as ‘an accomplishment,

¹ For some seminal work on gender, see Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Haraway 1991, 2006; Ahmed 1992; Moore 1988, 1994, 2007; Di Leonardo 1991; Fausto-Sterling 1992; McClintock 1995; Stoler 1995, 2002; Ortner 1996; Coquery-Vidrovitch 1997; Lamphere et al. 1997; Lancaster and Di Leonardo 1997; Lock and Kaufert 1998; Counihan 1999; Moore, Sanders and Kaare 1999; Collins 2000; McNay 2000; Nanda 2000; Fenstermaker and West 2002; Arnfred 2004; Cornwall 2005; Oyewùmí 2005; Stone 2010. For gender-focused ethnographies, see Weiner 1983; Amadiume 1987; Strathern 1988; Boddy 1989, 2007; Scheper-Hughes 1993; Kulick 1998; Abu-Lughod 1999; Mead 2001 [1928], 2001 [1935]; Busby 2004; Popenoe 2004; Pascoe 2007; Sanders 2008; Masquelier 2009; Arnfred 2011; Spronk 2012.

an achieved property of situated conduct' that emerges from social relations and situations (1987: 126).²

In Senegal, gender roles and the perception and organisation of sexuality are heavily influenced by Islam, the religion practiced by 95% of Senegalese. As a result, the Senegalese sexual imaginary is closely entwined with what Maramé Gueye has termed an 'Islamised [Senegalese] gender ideology' (2011: 69) or a [Senegalese]³ 'gender epistemology' (2011: 66) – that is, 'knowledge and ways of thinking about gender' that are shaped by both Islam and local traditions. By combining Ingraham's heterosexual imaginary with Gueye's Islamised gender epistemology into a 'Senegalese sexual imaginary', I seek to convey the idea that in Senegal, a religiously-informed normative way of thinking naturalises, sacralises and consequently institutionalises heterosexuality and its concomitant understandings of gender and gender roles as 'just the way it is', ascribing men and women specific and often opposite attributes 'while keeping in place or producing a history of contradictory and unequal social relations' (Ingraham 2011: 304). I thus use the notion of a 'Senegalese sexual imaginary' to refer to the way sexuality and gender are most commonly conceived, thought of and talked about in Senegal. Indeed, as I came to understand throughout fieldwork, the Senegalese sexual imaginary is produced and perpetuated through discourse as much, if not more, than through practice. For example, the discursive emphasis placed on a young bride's virginity (Chapter 5) offers a stark contrast to the lived reality of teenage pregnancies and that of *mbaraan* (transactional sex; see Chapter 3). The normative discourses that make up the Senegalese sexual imaginary mask its intrinsic contradictions and help maintain

² For an interesting comparison of Butler's and West and Zimmerman's theories of gender, see Moloney and Fenstermaker 2002.

³ Gueye's work is specifically concerned with Wolof songs, and she therefore talks of an Islamised Wolof gender ideology and of a Wolof gender epistemology. However, for reasons I explain below, my own work does not take into account ethnic differences unless otherwise noted.

a sense of coherence, order and purpose amidst the complexity of lived relationships.

In the Senegalese sexual imaginary, a hierarchical and patriarchal vision of gender roles contributes to the reproduction of not only a hegemonic femininity, but also a hegemonic masculinity. 'Hegemonic masculinity,' Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt write, 'embodie[s] the currently most honoured way of being a man, it require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men' (2005: 832). In Senegal, hegemonic femininity works in the same way for women by promoting a particular, positively-valued way of being not simply a woman, but a *good* woman, a *jigéen bu baax*. Thus, hegemonic gender roles are 'made to seem natural, desirable, and common sense within particular contexts, and in ways that legitimize or obscure unequal gender relations' (Cairns and Johnston 2015: 28). Hegemonic femininity and masculinity are often discerned in gender stereotypes – such as the one that sees women as naturally more nurturing than men, and therefore properly responsible for taking care of others. Cecilia Ridgeway argues that it is when these gender stereotypes are institutionalised by and promoted in media and government policies, and when they are framed as universal – when in fact they represent a dominant group's reality – that they become hegemonic (2009: 149-150).

At this point, it is worth noting that my work concentrates exclusively on heterosexual couples, both out of ethical concern and as a consequence of the normative Islamised gender epistemology that pervades the Senegalese sexual imaginary. As I will discuss in Chapter 7, Islamic views of sexuality consider marital intercourse to be 'an integral part of the human constitution and denying sexual pleasure is not encouraged and perceived to be against human nature' (Odoms-Young and Abdulrahim 2003: 206). However, since marriage must be between a man and a woman – procreation being one of its goals – premarital,

extramarital and same-sex relations are forbidden. In Senegal, although premarital sex is common and even encouraged for men (Chapter 5), and while most women take for granted that men have extramarital affairs, homosexuality is illegal – and homophobia the norm – and it can lead to incarceration. This contributes to a social climate in which gender roles and behavioural expectations are extremely normative, and being labelled as an ‘*homo*’ (short for ‘homosexuel’ in French) or a *góor-jigéen* (literally man-woman in Wolof), the derogatory Wolof term for gay, can bear very negative consequences.⁴ For instance, at the end of August 2015, seven Senegalese men were arrested, prosecuted and convicted of committing ‘acts against nature’ after one of the men’s mothers called the police to tell the authorities her son was gay. The verdict was based on the thin facts that condoms and lubricants were found on the ‘crime’ scene, a private apartment where the men were arrested without a warrant (BBC 2015, DakarActu 2015, HRW 2015, Leral 2015). Following the publication of their arrest and subsequent incarceration, the comments sections of online newspapers were filled with opinions which ranged from congratulatory messages for the mother who had had ‘the courage and strength to give her son up’ to opprobrious threats suggesting all homosexuals should be killed (Seneweb 2015; Leral 2015). The few individuals openly defending people’s right to engage in consensual same-sex sexual practices – let alone to be in a fully committed homosexual or lesbian relationship – were quickly labeled as foreigners and traitors to ‘African culture’ (here considered unified and static),⁵ as it is widely believed that homosexuality is an import from the West; or they were suspected of being gay themselves. Early on during fieldwork, I therefore decided to avoid studying *mokk pooj* within the queer community, a choice motivated by ethical and methodological concerns: I did not want my enquiries

⁴ About the discrimination faced by men who have sex with men in Senegal, see Enel et al. 2009; Dramé et al. 2013;

⁵ On homosexuality in Africa, see Murray and Roscoe 1998; Hoad 2007; and Epprecht 2008, among others.

into illegal activities to put my informants in danger.⁶ In this context, my silence on alternative or non-normative sexual identities is simultaneously telling of the overall heteronormativity of the Senegalese sexual imaginary, and explained by it.

That being said, I am also aware that in the chapters ahead, I often speak of ‘Senegalese women’ or ‘Senegalese men’ in broad, unspecific terms. I do make generalisations based on my findings, but by no means do I mean to reify and crystallise gender roles and identities. In their introduction to *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff highlight how speaking of femininities in the plural rather than in the single form brings out ‘the social production and construction of gender and avoid[s] essentialism’ (2011: 2). However, as discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, the importance bestowed on achieving social conformity – especially through marriage – generates an anxiety that promotes a highly uniform definition of what it means to be a Senegalese man or woman. Therefore, in trying to examine the Senegalese sexual imaginary, I concentrate my efforts on dominant, mainstream conceptions of femininity and masculinity in Senegal, without negating the existence of multiple femininities and masculinities. These nuances become important when we acknowledge that ‘[g]ender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity,’ as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 848) point out. Indeed, as will be explored throughout the thesis, in the

⁶ I did raise the question of homosexuality with trusted friends and informants I came to know better, and they questioned me on how ‘these things work’ in my country. In one particular conversation, my informant – a person I respected profoundly and considered very open-minded – used the story of Nuh’s ark (Noah in the Old Testament) to explain the ‘insanity’ or the ‘disease’ that s/he believed homosexuality represents. For this person, the floods were God’s attempt to eradicate ‘undesirable insects like the homosexuals’ from the surface of the earth. I was shocked to hear such disdain and even hatred in my informant’s words, and since their tone was getting more belligerent as I tried to give my inclusive, opposite point of view, I had to draw the conversation to a close, convinced that my initial decision to avoid this sensitive topic had been the right one.

Senegalese sexual imaginary, hegemonic masculinity and femininity mutually fashion, exacerbate, allow, constrain and also benefit from one another.

The interpretive labour of seduction

My use of the term ‘imaginary’ in exploring the Senegalese sexual imaginary is not simply fortuitous: it is in direct relation to another concept central to this thesis, that of interpretive labour. Borrowing for feminist standpoint theory,⁷ David Graeber suggests that within hierarchical relations, it is usually individuals in inferior positions who have to interpret the needs of those on the top, while the latter rarely reciprocate, since they benefit from such an arrangement. In a deeply patriarchal society like Senegal, what Graeber calls ‘interpretive labor’ or ‘imaginative identification’ involves ‘the constant efforts women end up having to expend in managing, maintaining, and adjusting the egos of oblivious and self-important men’ (2012: 117). This work ‘carries over on every level’ as ‘women are always expected to imagine what things look like from a male point of view,’ creating ‘lopsided structures of the imagination’ (2012: 117). That Kira the seduction coach – in the opening vignette – offered a pen and paper for her client to take notes is indicative of the labourious efforts that are part of seduction, and demonstrates such ‘lopsidedness’ at play.

Senegalese women’s interpretive labour in *mokk pooj* is rooted in the fact that marriage is of utmost importance in Senegal. In an environment where being an unmarried woman is frowned upon and polygamy⁸ is both common and accepted, socially and religiously, women are in constant competition with one another and with themselves. Not only do they have to get married to attain the social recognition and status granted to married women, but they also have to

⁷ See Stanley and Wise 1993; Hekman 1997; Collins 2000; Stanley 2013; Disch and Hawkesworth 2015.

⁸ The correct term would actually be polygyny, the situation where a man can simultaneously be married to multiple wives. However, I have opted to use polygamy since it is how – using *polygamie*, in French – my Senegalese informants refer to this marriage arrangement.

secure that relationship. In this sense, marriage is seen as the reward of becoming a full, complete woman, but it is also perceived as a challenge: once married, a woman has to do everything she can to prevent her husband from taking on another wife, or, if she enters a polygamous union, to become his favourite spouse. It is through her interpretive labour that a woman accumulates the knowledge necessary to this competitive endeavour. It is by imagining what her husband wants, what he needs, and what would please him that she can best practice the art of seduction that will win him over and over again.

Understood in this patriarchal and polygamous context, *mokk pooj* appears as a form of gendered structural violence – an indirect way for men to control women’s bodies and behaviours – which has been internalised and is constantly reproduced by women themselves. ‘The result is that victims of structural violence tend to care about its beneficiaries far more than those beneficiaries care about them. After the violence itself, this might well be the single most powerful force preserving such relations,’ Graeber suggests (2012: 119). As such, polygamy and the overall normative Senegalese sexual imaginary heighten female rivalry against one another, making *mokk pooj* a ‘weapon of mass seduction’ in a war of affection and status that strengthens men’s hold over women. At the same time, *mokk pooj* and its derivative carnal and sexual pleasures also contain an empowering message: as Kira suggests in the opening quote, women are encouraged to use and magnify their sensual abilities to get what they want from their partner – or, in other words, to use sex and eroticism as a tool of negotiation, manipulation and control. Similar to the *Ssenga* initiation rituals studied by Sylvia Tamale in Uganda, Senegalese *mokk pooj* ‘is fraught with contradictions and ambiguities: amid [its] main theme of subservience are subtexts of defiance, manipulation and control by women’ (Tamale 2006: 91). Indeed, as discussed in more details in Chapter 7, *mokk pooj* is not only an art of seduction, but an important art of negotiation that reflects

women's skillful navigation and clever exploitation of a normative Senegalese sexual imaginary.

As a result, through the interpretive labour it entails, Senegalese women's art of seduction becomes a (re)productive force. Michael Hardt shows how women's domestic, caring work is a form of affective, immaterial labour that 'produces subjectivity, it produces society, it produces life' (1999: 99), which is reminiscent of Arlie Hochschild's theorisation of emotional labour and emotion work as distinct but closely interconnected notions. While emotional labour refers to 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display' that 'is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value' (2012: 29) – especially in the service industry – emotion work or emotion management speaks of 'the exchange of gestures of deference, affection, gratitude or emotional sacrifice in a domestic economy' (Jones 2004: 510). Because *mokk pooj* is enacted in both the public – the 'social dance' mentioned by Buggenhagen (2012) – and the domestic spheres, it conflates emotional labour and emotion work. In this thesis, interpretive labour encompasses immaterial labour, emotional labour and emotion work by stressing the importance of the knowledge accumulated by women – the source of their power of negotiation. *Mokk pooj*, then, can be analysed not only as an art of seduction, but also, and significantly, as its work: the art/work of seduction.

Several of my female informants mentioned that 'marriage is hard work', noting that this work involves the circadian tasks of running the household and taking care of the family, but also incorporates nocturnal activities of an erotic and sexual nature. Of my male informants, those who were still single discussed the difficulties of securing stable employment that would generate a sufficient income to provide financially for a wife and children, while several of the married ones talked about how strenuous it was to be polygamous, both in financial and sexual terms. Yet it is important to note that such statements about the 'work of

marriage' do not mean that women and men do not derive any benefits or satisfaction from it. I believe that my informants' description of marriage as a form of labour offers an accurate and realistic summary of what conjugal relationships in Senegal (and probably elsewhere) are made of: an amalgam of hard work and feelings that coalesce and blur the boundaries between social expectations, mutual responsibilities, personal feelings and self-realisation. The hard work of marriage is both physical and interpretive, and the microcosm of the couple is not only deeply emotional, but also eminently political and profoundly economic.

Marriage in Senegal is based on a gendered division of labour that posits men as breadwinners and women as nurturers and caretakers – even if, in practice, women have always contributed to the production of goods and services through their involvement in the agricultural sector, the formal and informal labour markets, and within the household (Callaway and Creevey 1994: 89). In spite of this, men's work and women's work are perceived as distinct both in nature and in space: 'Women's work is "in the kitchen" [*ca waañ wa*]; you can also say "in the house" [*ca kër ga*], but "for men it's work only" [*góor, waar rekk*]' (Hann 2013: 17), implying a difference in the symbolic and financial contribution men and women bring to the household. What is more,

women's status is still very much defined by their behaviour in the household, rather than by their economic work. [...] As Adjamagbo *et al.* (2004) put it, for women, being publicly seen as earning to support the household means 'working' rather than 'working well' (i.e. within the household). These discourses on the role of married women can similarly be seen as ways of maintaining old gender hierarchies. (Rodriguez 2015: 350)

The fact that women's domestic work is made invisible because it is mostly unpaid speaks directly to Marxist feminist theories that see women's subordination as the consequence of their economic dependence on men. While Friedrich Engels argued that in the capitalist system, women were unequal to men because the latter had control of capital (land, livestock, food, tools, clothes,

etc.) and of the circumstances in which it was used to produce goods within and outside the household, Marxist feminists have built on this idea to assert that ‘women make an important contribution to society through their reproduction of the labour force itself’ (Bromley 2012: 17, emphasis in original). As a result, from a Marxist perspective, social life runs smoothly because the interpretive labour necessary in the production of persons and social relations is relegated to those on the bottom end of the hierarchy (women), whereas the imaginative work involved in commodity production is undertaken by those on the top (men; Graeber 2012: 121).

An Islamised way of life

Senegalese men’s and women’s work and status have been segregated traditionally into distinct spheres, but were also seen as complementary rather than hierarchical in nature – a fact further compounded by the introduction of Islam in the precolonial Wolof, Lebou, Serer, and Tukulor kingdoms. Imported to African soil by traders around the Xth century (Bonte and Izard 2004: 392; Seck 2007: 26), Islam gradually took root first in Tukulor territory,⁹ northeast of the Senegal River, around the eleventh century. The Wolof, by comparison, converted mostly towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the Serer only in the twentieth century. Once constituted of four kingdoms – the Walo, north of the Senegal River; the Cayor, to the south on the coast; the Baol, south of the Cayor; and the Djolof, east of the previous three – the Wolof empire is believed to have been founded in the fifteenth century as a result of the fall of the Ghanian empire, whose population migrated and confined the Serer population to the smaller kingdoms of Sine and Saloum, along the Saloum River delta. Meanwhile, the Lebou managed the Cape Verde peninsula, where present-day Dakar has expanded (Callaway and Creevey 1994: 16-17).

⁹ The Tukulor, called Peulh or Pulaar in French, are of Fulani origin.

Islam developed in Senegal from the end of the nineteenth century, in parallel with and in response to the expansion of the French colonial empire. Most Senegalese Muslims follow a path of Islam called Sufism (Tang 2007: 8), which is perceived as a more mystical interpretation of the Muslim faith based on divine instincts and the sacred emotion of the people, instead of focusing solely on the abstract orthodoxy of texts (Coulon 1981: 7). In particular, Senegalese Sufism is based on affiliation to a brotherhood, a group of people under the spiritual guidance and responsibility of a leader – considered a saint – whose leadership constitutes a religious and social force with an effective political and economic impact (Seck 2007: 29). Four main brotherhoods coexist peacefully in Senegal: the Qadiriyya, the Layene, the Tidjaniyya, and the Muridiyya. Two fundamental principles govern Senegalese Sufism. First, the *marabout*¹⁰ plays a central role as a spiritual guide and master who can intervene in every aspect of the daily life of his disciples, who have pledged him allegiance and submission. Second, relationships of vertical deference and horizontal solidarity are built, both between the *marabout* and his followers (*taalibe*) and among the followers themselves, which regulate the way the society is organized (Villalòn 2007: 173). Therefore, the intervention of the *serigne* in the life of his *taalibe* is seen as necessary to secure their redemption (Beck 2008: 71), but also to ensure their terrestrial well-being via networks of reciprocity. As Christian Coulon explains, we have to understand the platonic, intimate, personal relationship between the *marabout* and his *taalibe* to be able to comprehend Senegalese Islam and its sociopolitical reality (1981: 10).

From 1838 until his death in 1861, the leader of the Tidjaniyya brotherhood, Al-Hadji Umar Tal, led a holy war to purify what were already Muslim areas of Senegal and to conquer others, simultaneously fighting both heretics and the French invaders. His ‘wars of conquest were based in the purification of Islam, the establishment of the "real" faith and expulsion of the perversions he saw in

¹⁰ Also called *serigne* or *cheikh*.

the "so-called" Islamic states he was attacking' (Callaway and Creevey 1994: 21). It is through his *jihad* that most societies in the western Sudan converted to Islam, except in Wolof aristocratic circles. The feudal precolonial Wolof system was based on slave trade (Cruise O'Brien 1974: 86), and various Wolof aristocracies competed against each other in order to possess more land, slaves, and subjects. However, the *marabout*-led Muslim communities forbade the enslavement of people of the Muslim faith, and they 'drew followers in large part because of their capacity to serve as safe havens in an era dominated by slaving aristocracies' (Ware 2009: 27). The public movement in favour of Islam among the Wolof peasantry took roots because of a concordance of particular conditions: Islam did not impose itself from the top, but was a consequence of the population's revolt against the aristocracy in place. At the time, it was an Islam that expressed and channeled a strong social and political dissatisfaction and opposed official, traditional, noble authority, which fought to retain its power (Coulon 1981: 6). The more oppressive central authority became, the more peasants joined Muslim communities and placed themselves under the protection of a *marabout* (Coulon 1981: 61). The prestige and power of Wolof aristocracies slowly crumbled and, by the mid-nineteenth century, they proved incapable of facing French expansion into the western part of the African continent. The credibility and legitimacy of the traditional chiefs degraded with every defeat they endured from the French army; and in 1886, the complete victory of the French military announced the end of combat, and the beginning of an era of extensive colonisation.

Defeated Wolof peoples quickly realized that 'French rule could not be opposed by force, and if it were to be endured then a means of adaptation was required' (Cruise O'Brien 1971: 13). Islam presented itself as an 'African' religion, despite its Arabic background, and became a tool of cultural resistance (Bonte & Izard 2004: 392). Unlike the Wolof aristocrats, *marabout* did not suffer from the humiliation of defeat, and were considered symbols of passive resistance to the French

colonial power. Adherence to Islam and affiliation to a *marabout* was thus a response of traditionally subjugated people to colonial conquest and the collapse of precolonial political structures (Coulon 1981: 70). The figure of the *marabout* came to be a symbol of autonomy that channelled general resentment against the traditional elite as well as the antipathy towards the new Christian European administrators.

It is in this context that Ahmadu Bamba, following a divine revelation that the Senegalese city of Touba was to be the motherhouse of a new order, founded the Muridiyya brotherhood in 1886. Exiled by the French colonial administration, who saw him as a threatening force to its political hold in the region, Ahmadu Bamba came to be seen as a martyr in the hands of the French – which only grew his religious and political power and that of his brotherhood. Wolof Islamisation is mostly attributed to him. Contrary to Umar Tal, who fought the French directly, Bamba never officially opposed the colonisers. In fact, his successors actually partnered with them (Callaway and Creevey 1994: 22-23).

French West Africa colonial scholar and administrator Paul Marty noted, in 1917, that what he called *Islam noir* (Black Islam) was different from the Muslim religion observed in the Middle East – demonstrating that ‘the colonial perception of Islam south of the Sahara [was] defined as the product of spiritual and ritualistic transactions between Islam and African traditional religions. African Islam was seen as less pure, less literate, more magical, and flexible enough to be incorporated into “French Muslim policy” ‘ (Diouf & Leichtman 2009: 1). When it came into power, the French administration imposed a tax that was only payable in cash, regardless of the fact that money was not common and that the exchange of goods was much more prevalent in the previous Wolof economy (which had been based on slavery and herding). While the dry climate and sandy soil were not convenient for widespread agriculture, a few people cultivated peanuts, which seemed to respond well to such an environment – and

which provided a rare source of cash income. The colonial regime thus made peanut cultivation the heart of Senegal's economy. As Villalòn notes, '[t]he imposition of head taxes as populations came under direct colonial rule made peanut cultivation virtually compulsory, no other source being available for procuring the required cash' (Villalòn 1995: 40). At around the same time, the interests of the *marabouts* began to converge with those of the French administration. For the colonial government, a peanut cash crop specialised the colony's economy and responded to the needs of the empire; for the *marabouts*, involvement in peanut agriculture was a way to monetise their charisma (Coulon 1981: 164). Indeed, the *daraa*, or Muslim communities, were based on the exchange of knowledge and spiritual guidance provided by the *marabout*, and the work the *taalibe* produced in return. This work usually took the form of subsistence agriculture of some cereals (mostly millet). Moving to cash crop peanut production allowed the *serignes* not only to increase their own revenues, but also to insure a certain respect of the Muslim religion by the colonial state. Those significant advantages required little or no changes in the organization of the *daara*, already based on the voluntary and complete allegiance of the *taalibe* towards his *marabout*. In return, this complete submission and devotion was justified ideologically by direct access to the charismatic powers of redemption held by the *marabout* (Cruise O'Brien 1974: 85). As a result, the *marabout* benefitted from a free and assiduous work force that harvested a marketable product, which was easily transformed into cash. This new money could then be used to pay the necessary royalties and taxes to the colonial state (Coulon 1981: 166). In exchange for their implicit support of the colonial peanut cash crop, *marabout* were given free access to the necessary inputs for this type of agriculture, as well as financing from the empire for the construction of mosques or pilgrimages to Mecca, as well as – most importantly – public recognition of their social authority (Beck 2008: 52).



Figure 2. Morning Prayer

Women were mostly left out of this confluence of colonial and religious interests. Studying women's economic roles in economic development, Ester Boserup (1970) has shown that 'with every economic "advance" made in the name of "modernization"' women have actually lost in status and material well-being (Callaway and Creevey 1994: 89). Effectively, the French's own beliefs and customs concerning women informed their policies, and in their goal to make the colony profitable, they assumed that peanut cash crop production would be a masculine task. In consequence, women's participation in agriculture – from which they derived a significant personal income they could use as they wished – was belittled, if not made invisible. While men benefitted from access to new tools and techniques of production, women were excluded, which undermined

their productivity and, as a result, their capacity to generate revenues. They became more dependent on men; and when their husbands, brothers and fathers migrated to urban centres like Saint-Louis and Dakar in order to find wage jobs, women not only had to fulfill their traditional obligations, but they were left with the burden of fulfilling men's tasks, with limited productive capacities. Although the number of French living in French West Africa remained small, French culture and Catholicism – which both saw women's roles as subordinate and secondary to that of men – began to spread in the cities, further circumscribing the position of Senegalese women (Callaway and Creevey 1994: 25-27).

The impact of Islamisation on women is nuanced. While it ascribed wifely and motherly duties to women, it reinforced the patriarchal values already in place in traditional Wolof, Serer and Tukulor societies. In Wolof societies in particular, the powerful public roles of women – like the *lingueer*, the mother or maternal sister of the king, the *awo*, his first wife, and the women in charge of traditional religious rites – were undermined by an Islamic vision of gender division. However, the Quran granted women a series of rights such as inheritance and divorce, which were unheard of for women in these pre-Islamic societies. Islam also limited polygyny to four wives, whereas before there were no restrictions to the number of wives a man could take (Callaway and Creevey 1994: 29-32).

After independence in 1960, the newly-formed Senegalese state upheld the precolonial, colonial and religiously-informed gendered division of labour. President-poet Léopold Sédar Senghor wrote of African women as 'Mother Africa', simultaneously emphasising and correlating their reproductive roles in both the family and the nation. Politically, Senghor also urged Senegalese women 'to prioritise their roles as mothers and wives, warning that a failure to do so, for example by outsourcing domestic labour, would threaten the integrity of the nation' (McNee 2000: 97-103 in Hann 2013: 37-38). Regardless of his own beliefs, Senghor and his government introduced the *Code de la Famille* (Family Code) in

1972 to promote secularism and women's emancipation via the unification of the customary, Quranic and French legal practices, which coexisted and contradicted each other in the Senegalese political realm. Dubbed the 'women's code' by its detractors because it strengthened women's position in relation to marriage, inheritance and custody, the Family Code has been a locus of contention since its introduction, and has been largely disregarded by most of the population (Sieveking 2007: 36). In the 1980s, the Senegalese feminist network *Yewwu-Yewwi* – which means 'raise consciousness for liberation' in Wolof – sought to reform the Family Code to make it more egalitarian; and although they succeeded in part, they were quickly accused of representing only women of the educated, urban elite (Latha 2010: 58-59). Their views were also at odds with the Muslim religious clergy, who saw them as a threat. *Réseau Siggil Jigéen* – 'women, raise your head', in Wolof – took an opposite approach, focussing on rights rather than equality. The *Réseau* is anchored in the notion of African Islamic Womanism, 'the belief that the true Islamic understanding of gender is one of complementarity' (Latha 2010: 60). Within this perspective, God's given creation and its inherent differentiation between men and women is affirmed rather than questioned; the demands for women's rights is constricted to their position within the family, acknowledging their 'heavy workload, their huge responsibilities and the fulfilment of their duties, which make them much more "tired" than men', while their obligations and moral responsibilities are framed as different from those of men (Sieveking 2007: 41).

This historical detour has shown that in Senegal, traditional and religious conceptions of femininity and masculinity are linked intricately to definitions of work, and that they strongly inform the Senegalese sexual imaginary. It follows that when my informants refer to marriage as 'hard work', they speak in both figurative and practical terms. While the physical work necessary to the economic, daily (re)production of the family is implicit in the statement, it also refers to Hardt's immaterial, affective labour as a life-producing force. I believe,

however, that Graeber's concept of interpretive labour is simultaneously more encompassing – the interpretive, imaginative work he describes is by definition affective – and more precise, because it clarifies the type of work that is actually performed in *mokk pooj*. The concept of interpretive labour exposes the Senegalese art of seduction as a form of gendered work based on a socially and religiously influenced sexual imaginary; and because it considers *mokk pooj* as a form of work, it does not see women's deference to and care for their partners as a form of subjectification or false consciousness. Interpretive labour allows for an analysis of *mokk pooj* as a form of negotiation of gender relations, as part of an affective economy that is carefully, mindfully managed – thus showing its potential for feminine agency and empowerment.

Through the performance of the art/work of seduction for which they are admired, Senegalese women imagine and interpret men's needs. In doing so, they undertake an interpretive labour that upholds the normative Senegalese sexual imaginary. However, Senegalese women are also fully aware of the power that the apparent conformity and subdued demeanour intrinsic to *mokk pooj* offers them. It is by sustaining *mokk pooj* that they enjoy recognition as a 'good wife', and thus can exert their power of negotiation and subsequently enhance their personal agency. *Mokk pooj*, then, is simultaneously a site of domination, mediation and empowerment: it is through their compliance with *mokk pooj* that women can best manipulate and benefit from the system that subjugates them (Boddy 1989; Abu-Lughod 1990; Mahmood 2001, 2005; Tamale 2006).

***Signares* and the history of seduction**

In Senegal as elsewhere, femininities and masculinities do not take a singular, uniform shape or definition. Differences exist in terms of ethnic and geographic specificities. Conducting my research in the multiethnic, urban context of Dakar, the Senegalese capital, gives way to different findings – and interpretations of them – than if I had done fieldwork in a remote rural village that is more

ethnically homogenous. However, I believe *mokk pooj* – and the Senegalese sexual imaginary of which it is a part – transcends ethnic barriers, in part because of the homogenising properties of Islam. Indeed, following Makhtar Diouf’s observation that ‘as a monotheistic religion, Islam has functioned as a unifying force in Senegal, "de-ethnicizing" society by making the belief in one single god the most important connection between people’ (Diouf 1994: 111–123 in van Eerdewijk 2009: 7), Anouka van Eerdewijk has remarked that ethnicity did not play a major role in her study of young people’s sexuality. For their part, Ellen Foley and Fatou Dramé (2013) considered ethnic differences in their choice of participants for their research on *mbaraan* (transactional sex), but these do not appear in their findings, suggesting ethnicity was not a significant factor of differentiation between participants. Similarly, although Kodou Wade (2008) makes some initial distinctions between traditional perceptions of women’s roles and status in Wolof, Serer, Tukolor and Jola societies, they do not feature prominently in her subsequent analysis of premarital pregnancies in the Dakar neighbourhood of Ouakam.

This lack of ethnic specificity could also be imputed to the ‘growing Wolofisation’ (Tamba and Sané 1999: 99) of Senegalese society – that is, the progression of the Wolof language and culture as a unifying influence and referent in the multilingual, multiethnic Senegalese context (Cruise O’Brien 1998; Diouf 1994). Indeed, despite the fact that ‘[s]ix languages are officially “recognised” in Senegal (Wolof, Serer, Mandinka, Pulaar, Diola, Soninke)’ (Cruise O’Brien 1998: 31), what we hear on the streets of Dakar and on radio and television programs broadcast throughout the country is ‘Urban Wolof’, a ‘Frenchified’ mix of Wolof and French¹¹ (Cruise O’Brien 1998: 38). People who do not speak any Wolof at all find themselves socially and economically marginalised. Not only has Wolof become the language of commerce and everyday interactions between individuals of diverse backgrounds, but the

¹¹ French remains the language taught in schools and used in the government.

steady co-option of linguistic and cultural specificities by the Wolof language has contributed to the fuzziness of ethnic boundaries. Donal Cruise O'Brien recalls how even his local informants struggled in this process of self-identification, which highlights the fluidity of ethnic subjectivities:

Wolof identification is perhaps best seen as a process, one which relates to a range of subjects: urbanisation, migration, religion, statehood. There are no fixed ethnic boundaries here, no lines of battle drawn up by colonial experience, on the whole no primordialism, rather what may be (for the state) a helpful ambiguity and flux. In so far as it is language use which defines the terms of ethnic membership, then the ethnic boundaries are blurred... (Cruise O'Brien 1998: 27)

The ways in which the Wolof language and culture subsumes Senegal's other local languages and ethnicities in a process of amalgamation is noticeable in the realm of seduction and sexuality. *Mokk pooj*, *salagne salagne* (tools), *feem* (strategies) and the material objects used in seduction, such as the *bethio* wrapper underskirts, are all well-known Wolof words, for instance.

The exact origins of *mokk pooj* are unclear. Before Islam took roots in the area, eroticism in Senegal included initiation rituals and sexual education for young men and women:

Families were stewards to an ages-old canon that included erotic games and literature, aphrodisiacs, and arts of the body. Within this tradition, hairstyle, body ornaments, and mutilations transformed the unmarked body of the neophyte into a locus of pleasures, appropriately prepared for touching, penetration, copulation, and orgasm. This was a tactile eroticism more connected with the senses of touch and smell than with the sense of sight. (Biaya 2000: 713)

T.K. Biaya suggests that the current forms eroticism takes in Senegal – and in Africa more broadly (see Nzegwu 2011) – results from the meeting of the enduring traditional practices mentioned above with Christianity, Islam and French colonialism (2000: 711). By the time of its independence in 1960, the secular Republic of Senegal had become a predominantly Muslim country. Today, Muslim Senegalese form 95.4% of the population, Christians (the majority Catholics) 4.2%, and less than half a percent are animists (CIA 2016).

Biaya further contends that while it has transformed traditional practices – sex education and rituals are mostly a thing of the past – this synergism of faiths rooted in (post)colonial, cosmopolitan and secular modernity has allowed local forms of eroticism to exist and grow: ‘[o]n one hand, processes and structures of global exchange in Senegal have been brokered by the cosmopolitanism of Islamic urban culture. On the other hand, metropolitan Judeo-Christian values have been inscribed into Senegalese modernity by French colonization and the Senghorian postcolonial state’ (Biaya 2000: 711).

In Senegal, this blending of influences is reflected in the figure of the *signare*. The word comes from the Portuguese *senhora* and initially referred to African women who, as early as the XVth century, were becoming the partners of Portuguese traders who travelled extensively along the West African coast. Later, in the late seventeenth, throughout the eighteenth and into the early nineteenth centuries, the term came to be applied to women of African or mixed racial descent who married French colonial administrators and employees of trading companies temporarily, usually just for the duration of their postings on the islands of Saint-Louis (close to the Mauritanian border) or Gorée (just off the coast of Dakar). These unions were known as *mariage à la mode du pays* (marriage in the local fashion), since they closely resembled Wolof kinship and marital practices – including the male provision of bridewealth, housing and gifts of slaves, gold and jewellery to the woman and her family. The ceremony itself was a blend of Muslim and traditional practices (Crofts 1994: 217). Importantly, the children born from these temporary unions were recognised, took their father’s last name and inherited from both their parents (Crofts 1994; Jones 2005; Foley 2010: 23).

Marriages in the local fashion were regarded negatively by the French empire. In writings dating from the precolonial period, the Senegalese *signares* were primarily depicted as ‘seductive and sexually desirable objects who [sought] their

own gain at the expense of France through manipulation of male desire' (Crofts 1994: 217). What was forgotten from these early accounts is that *mariages à la mode du pays* also benefited European men on personal and professional levels (also see Stoler 2002). In addition to the practical aspects of being cared for on a daily basis by an exotic and hypersexualised 'Oriental' woman (Said 2003) – as they were portrayed in French continental circles – from a masculine point of view, these unions were part of a survival strategy. Following Nathalie Reyss' research (1983) on *métissage* (mixing of races, creolisation) in Saint-Louis, Marylee Crofts contends that health was a major factor prompting these marriages: 'One in three Europeans died within the first year of arrival in Senegal... and those depending on African women with knowledge of local medicines to treat ailments such as diarrhea, stomach disorders, malaria and hepatitis were the ones who survived' (1994: 219). Professionally, European men benefited from their local wives' contacts, and the reverse also held true. *Signares* women were indeed accomplished businesswomen who accumulated significant personal wealth in gold and slaves from the trading expeditions they sponsored. These marriages facilitated trade relationships between foreign visitors living on the coast and inland African producers (Jones 2005: 35), both sides profiting from the deals that ensued. By marrying foreign men, African or Euro-African *signares* expanded their businesses and strategically became part of the social and economic colonial elite of Gorée and Saint-Louis. But, as Crofts reports, it is important to remember that however strategic interracial *mariages à la mode du pays* were – for both foreign men and local women – they were also based on affection and mutual respect (1994: 20).

Signares women quickly learned to navigate the multiple worlds they inhabited – practicing a form of interpretive labour – and through their deft combination of European etiquette with local customs and *savoir-faire*, they became 'famous for the art of hospitality, cultivated entertainment, fine dining, fashion, and urbane demeanor' (Ross 2008: 11). As the informal practice of *mariage à la mode*

du pays faded – it had almost disappeared, much to the advantage of legalised Catholic church weddings, by the 1870's (Jones 2005: 27) – the Senegalese *signares'* business acumen also tended to be forgotten, although the term was still used to designate *métis* women and their female descendants. As Crofts mentions, '[e]ven today, very few people associate the word "*signare*" with appropriate ideas of economic power, with intelligence and knowledge of how to conduct a successful business' (1994: 216-217). Indeed, what the *signares* are mainly remembered for nowadays is their beauty, elegance and sophistication. In *Culture and Customs of Senegal*, Eric Ross suggests that 'Senegalese women project an aristocratic demeanor, expressed in stately stature, elegant clothes, and a refined manner. Some have traced this tradition to the famous *signares* of Saint-Louis and Gorée, who set a high standard for subsequent generations of urban women' (Ross 2008: 76-77).

Today's *mokk pooj* and the late *signares'* sensuous cultivation of life are closely connected. The importance of hospitality, good food and the care of the self through beauty practices are all elements found in the Senegalese art/work of seduction practiced by most women, regardless of their ethnic association. However, in the Senegalese sexual imaginary, Laobe women seem to have replaced the *signares* as particularly talented producers and transmitters of an erotic knowledge. According to Cheikh Ibrahima Niang (1996) and Abdoulaye Ly (1999a; 1999b), the Laobe are a nomadic ethnic group of Pular (Fulani) origin. Laobe men are well-known for their woodwork and craftsmanship, which might explain why the group is sometimes thought to be a caste – part of the hierarchical, inherited and endogamous work-based social stratification system that is found throughout Senegal (see Chapter 3). However, it is Laobe women who are held in highest esteem: they are renowned especially for the creation and distribution of sexual strategies (*feem*) and erotic objects (*salagne salagne*) that are central to *mokk pooj* (more in Chapter 7). So while most women practice *mokk pooj*, in the Senegalese sexual imaginary Laobe women are incomparably

skilled at it, making them highly sought-after wives and lovers (Niang 1996: 212; Arnfred 2003). Their reputation as masters in the erotic arts is such that they have become significant producers of a material and immaterial culture of seduction – to the extent that 75% of the women interviewed by Niang and his colleagues reported buying their erotic products from Laobe saleswomen (1996: 215).

The Senegalese art/work of seduction appears to draw from both *signares* and Laobe women in that it combines a way of being – focused on elegance, distinction and eroticism – as well as an array of objects that complement, enhance and magnify this simultaneously demure and ostentatious behaviour. According to Ross,

[é]légance encapsulates the public persona every woman aspires to attain. The importance of maintaining this public demeanour can hardly be overestimated. Women spend a considerable part of their disposable income on fabrics, clothing, hairstyles, accessories, and jewelry, as this is how they express their aspirations and actual social status. (Ross 2008: 77)

In such a view, Senegalese women's elegance is mostly instrumental and directed towards others. While I believe women do pay attention to how they present themselves in order to be admired and to impress, Ross eschews an important element of women's search for beauty and elegance: taking care of oneself is a way to *bëggë sa bopp*, to show self-esteem. By making themselves look and feel beautiful, women augment their sense of self-worth – in their own eyes and those of others, as discussed in Chapter 2 – and their own confidence, from which derive their capacity to seduce others. *Bëggë sa bopp*, to like oneself, is a necessary part of a women's *mokk pooj*. Ross reifies and oversimplifies Senegalese women's art/work of seduction to practices of consumption when he limits *élégance* to its material forms.

***Mokk pooj* and sexuality in the literature**

Ross' oversight might be explained by the fact that Senegal's art/work of seduction has not been documented widely. Studies on Senegalese eroticism and sexuality are relatively scarce, much as they are when it comes to the literature on similar topics in Africa more broadly. As Rachel Spronk remarks in her ethnography of young middle-class Kenyans' negotiations of sexual pleasure in Nairobi, scholarship on sexuality in Africa and in the Global South has begun only recently – and on a small scale – to analyse Africans' sexual mores as something other than a societal problem (HIV/AIDS, female genital cutting, fertility, etc.), or as fundamentally different from sexuality elsewhere, and from the Western world in particular (2012: 19-28; 2014: 5). In addition to perpetuating stereotypes about a unique African sexuality, promiscuous African men and disempowered African women (Spronk 2012: 23), by taking demographic, medical or developmental approaches,¹² these studies have eschewed matters of pleasure, sensuality, eroticism and love that are also part of the sexual experience – a gap that recent works like *Love in Africa* (Cole and Thomas 2009), *African Sexualities: a Reader* (Tamale 2011) and Spronk's *Ambiguous Pleasures* (2012) hope to fill.

Until anthropology 'rediscovered' sexuality in the 1970s – as a result of critical feminist efforts to review existing theories and conceptions of sex, gender and identity, and in conjunction with the reflexive turn taken more broadly by the social sciences in the early 1980s (Vance 1991) – the discipline studied sexuality mostly in relation to social structures and symbols (Spronk 2014 : 4-5) and under the umbrella of other topics such as kinship and reproduction. Nowadays, the

¹² In Senegal, the study of gender and sexuality has tended to be subsumed under questions of kinship practice (Ames 1955; Rabain 1979; Diop 1985; Linares 1988; Fainzang and Journet 1988; Garenne and van de Walle 1989; Dial 2008; Neveu Kringelbach 2016), demography (Antoine, Djire and Laplante 1995; Antoine and Nanitelamio 1995; Adjamagbo, Antoine and Delaunay 2004; Mondain, Legrand and Delaunay 2004; Antoine 2006; Mondain, LeGrand and Sabourin 2007), migration (Venables 2009; Melly 2011; Buggenhagen 2012) or health (Niang 1996; Bourdin 2009; Ansari and Gaestel 2010; Fullwiley 2010; Jaffré 2012).

anthropology of sexuality¹³ is a domain of research in its own right, and ‘the majority of studies focus on theorising difference and agency within normative systems from a cross-cultural perspective, in which the (variable) relationship between gender and sexuality and the question of identity remain fundamental questions’ (Spronk 2014 : 5). This thesis locates itself in this growing body of literature on sexuality in Africa and in anthropology more broadly.

With regards to eroticism and *mokk pooj*, the literature is very limited. In 1988, Franco-Senegalese anthropologist Sokhna Fall published a coffee-table book, *Séduire: cinq leçons sénégalaises* [Seduction: Five Senegalese Lessons]. Marketed for a non-academic audience, Fall’s book follows the main character, referred to as ‘l’Étudiante’ [the Student], in her apprenticeship of seduction *à la sénégalaise* and her efforts to win over the object of her affection, a young man named Samba. Filled with beautiful photographs of women in their best attire and traditional lingerie, the half-novel, half-seduction handbook illustrates – in five sections that Fall terms ‘lessons’ – how Senegalese women cultivate an elegance they can harness and translate into seductive skills.

Eroticism and female sexuality appear as important sub-themes in studies of *sabar*, traditional dancing. Audrey Dessertine (2010) contends that these female dances constitute a diffuse form of sexual initiation¹⁴ through which girls and young women learn proper feminine and wifely behaviour, by observing and then participating in the sexually explicit dances. Suggestive rolling of the eyes and unequivocal thrusting of the hips – in ways that are reminiscent of orgasm and intercourse – are part and parcel of *sabar*. In those high-spirited events, women duel to show off their dancing skills, and as the competitive element

¹³ Some influential work on sexuality includes Foucault 1990; Giddens 1992; Vance 1992; Lyons and Lyons 2004; Parker and Aggleton 2007; Donnan and Magowan 2010; Seidman et al. 2011; Jolly et al. 2013.

¹⁴ My female informants never mentioned *sabar* as a source of information on sexuality; rather, they cited friends, the internet, porn, TV shows and films, and Facebook groups. A few men talked about their innate, masculine knowledge of sexuality, or of having being initiated by an older woman. They also mentioned pornographic movies as a source of information about sex.

intensifies, so does its erotic charge and the boldness of its participants – who often unveil layers of sexy *bethio* (wrapper undershirts, see Chapters 6 and 7) or even briefly and defiantly lift them up so high that they show their genitals (Morales-Libove 2005; Neveu Kringlebach 2013).

T.K. Biaya's work on eroticism (1999; 2000) is to this day one of the few to discuss in detail the erotic bodily practices central to *mokk pooj*, while his work on Senegalese urban youth sexual practices, the construction of new forms of masculinity and femininity (2001), and the Dakarois urban culture of leisure (2002) remain relevant almost two decades after its redaction and publication. Together with Mamadou Diouf's (2002) and Francis Nyamnjoh's (2005) pieces, this body of work paints a gloomy picture of the effects long-lasting economic crisis – '*la crise*' – has had on young, 'ordinary Africans [who] seek belonging as consumer gatecrashers and zombies' (Nyamnjoh 2005: 297). They pay particular attention to the new forms of gendered and sexual interactions *la crise* has brought about, highlighting how resources like money, food and women have concentrated in the hands of older, richer, polygamous men. In their accounts, young unmarried men are left feeling emasculated (Diouf 2002: 284) – a disempowerment exemplified by the panic over 'penis snatching' or 'penis shrinking'¹⁵ that spread across West Africa in the late 1990s and well into the first decade of the new millennium (Bonhomme 2009).

Although these insightful pieces have triggered an interest and paved the way for more substantial research on sexuality in Senegal, most recent works have continued to concentrate on the impacts of *la crise*. Specifically, *mbaraan*, the local Wolof term used to refer to transactional sex (discussed more extensively in Chapter 3), has been at the centre of the latest research (van Eerdewijk 2006, 2007, 2009; Salomon 2009; Fouquet 2011, 2014; Adjamagbo and Koné 2013; Foley

¹⁵ According to Bonhomme, penis snatching/shrinking generally happens in public, at daytime, when two unknown men shake hands (or brush against each other) and one of them suddenly feels that his penis is gone (2009: 20).

and Dramé 2013; Hannaford and Foley 2015). This focus on economic exchange is part of a larger trend¹⁶ in recent work on sexuality in Africa, but its corresponding material element is also tied to the Senegalese sexual imaginary of *mokk pooj* in particular ways that will be explored throughout this thesis.

The chapters ahead

I came to understand that in Senegal, the sexual imaginary is constituted in a variety of material objects that help manage relationships and the flow of emotions – and contradictions – they inevitably produce. With the exception of Chapter 2 – which discusses the ethics and methodologies of conducting research on sexuality in Senegal and reflexively contextualises the research setting, the challenges I faced and the ways I overcame them – each of the upcoming chapters takes a material object as its starting point. The idea of organising the thesis in such a way emerged somewhat organically from the collection of lingerie, beads, aphrodisiacs and love potions I ‘followed’ during fieldwork and brought back from Dakar, and from the prominent place they take in my informants’ own accounts and descriptions of *mokk pooj*. Although some of these articles may look sensational to the outsider – some lingerie items are especially graphic – they are actually commonplace, most of them being readily available and openly displayed in marketplaces or specialised shops. Even food becomes a material object crucial to the Senegalese sexual imaginary: when asked to define *mokk pooj*, one of the first things most informants mentioned was the importance of a woman’s cooking – reminiscent of the saying in English that the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. The material culture of seduction – and the way people talk about it – is an integral part of the everyday Senegalese sexual imaginary, not an exception to it. As Lisa Overholtzer and Cynthia Rubin posit, ‘[e]veryday life is material. Ordinary materials (cooking

¹⁶ See Tchak 1999; Hunter 2002; Arnfred 2004; Reddy 2004; Mills and Ssewakiryanga 2005; Hoad 2007; Undie and Benaya 2008; ole and Thomas 2009; Tamale 2011; Bhana 2013; Haysom 2013; Castro 2014; Mojola 2014; Decker 2015.

pots, clothing, tools, etc.) and ordinary spaces (houses, yards, streets, etc.) are a key means through which people learn about their world' (2015: 3). In my case, I would add that the ordinary space of the bedroom and the ordinary artefacts of seduction are a key point of entry into understanding the interpretive labour that perpetuates and disrupts the Senegalese sexual imaginary and the imbalanced power relationships inherent to it.

That being said, my thesis is not about material culture *per se*. The attention I pay to objects such as money, potions and amulets, food, aphrodisiacs and lingerie does not go into analytical detail about their material characteristics or affordances, and I do not engage with the theories of material culture that have arisen in the past thirty years or so (see Tilley et al. 2006; Myers 2007). Instead of looking at the materiality of these things, I concentrate on how people describe the practices to which they are put and the processes in which they are implicated, thus highlighting the discourse they generate. Indeed, the extent of my participant observation was somewhat limited, as I did not follow my informants in their bedrooms, nor did I inquire about specific details of their sexual relationships. Apart from food, I did not witness the active use of the erotic objects of *mokk pooj*. I did, however, conduct a series of semi-directed interviews (with the help of a research assistant; see Chapter 2) which I informally triangulated through countless casual conversations with friends, with Kira the seduction coach, or with lingerie and aphrodisiacs saleswomen, for example. As a consequence, most of the data that makes up the evidence on which my analysis rests is grounded in my informants' discursive interpretation of *mokk pooj*.

Organising each chapter around a specific material element allows me to zoom in on a particular set of objects and the practices and narratives that revolve around them while still acknowledging the ways they are constitutive of and interconnected in the Senegalese sexual imaginary, for the divisions I have made

between materials are for the most part arbitrary. For instance, although I have chosen to discuss aphrodisiacs and *maraboutage* (witchcraft) practices separately, in day-to-day life the line between them is far from clean-cut: the saleswoman who sold me aphrodisiacs and cosmetics also offered her customers little knotted ropes meant to ‘attach your man to you,’ a magico-religious process usually performed by *marabouts* who themselves sometimes had vagina-tightening herbs or penis-enhancement creams for sale. Likewise, not only is the division between aphrodisiacs and *maraboutage* fuzzy, but both are also closely intertwined with food, which is itself tied to money. When one of my informants told me that ‘making love without beads is like eating couscous without sauce,’ he conflated the realm of food with that of lingerie. *Mokk pooj* mixes all of these elements into a coherent and potent interconnected system of thought, beliefs, actions and discourses that concomitantly (re)produce and sustain a normative Senegalese sexual imaginary. The materiality of *mokk pooj* anchors it in reality, in the concreteness of the everyday, and in the at times boringly mundane transactions and negotiations that are part and parcel of relatedness, of being with and for others.

Chapter 3 introduces Senegalese marriage practices through the lens of money. During fieldwork, when I asked people to discuss the differences and similarities between past and present marriage customs, my male informants overwhelmingly lamented a time long gone where ‘women married for love’ and criticised the fact that nowadays they marry for money. I deconstruct and historicise this discourse by describing how mutual provision is the basis of a domestic patriarchal contract. I discuss how the caste system and the prevalence of bridewealth payments have traditionally structured marital patterns, and equated money and gifts to a display of masculinity. I thus trace the emergence of the vilifying discourse about women’s greed to *la crise* and the increasing difficulty for young men to marry. In this context, I build on recent studies about transactional sex in Africa, and suggest that its Senegalese equivalent, *mbaraan*,

points to how different and at times competing forms of love – filial, companionate and romantic – are at play.

In Chapter 4 I discuss how *gris-gris*, love potions, *maraboutage* and occult practices help women manage the anxiety brought about by a normative Senegalese sexual imaginary and the desire for conformity it triggers. I suggest that material objects of *maraboutage* make tangible the intangible difficulties and dangers that come with intimacy and trust (Geschiere 2013). As such, they help manage deeply personal yet social issues such as celibacy, infertility, polygyny and conflict with in-laws by ‘attaching’ one’s love and attacking rivals, while offering a way to protect oneself. As a result, *maraboutage* participates in women’s interpretive labour, and in their search for happiness and wellbeing through conformity.

Conformity and ideals are also at the forefront of Chapter 5, in which I contend that a woman’s feminine capital, her social value and ability to gain and retain respect, is closely related to her virginity – real or fake. Vaginal cosmetics and aphrodisiacs that are said to make a woman ‘a virgin again’ constitute a starting point to explore the double sexual standards upheld in the Senegalese sexual imaginary, and conceptions of femininity and masculinity that derive from them. I suggest that men’s demands for a virgin bride are illustrative of a masculine fragility and anxiety about their virility. Women’s use of aphrodisiacs to enhance their own feminine capital by boosting their partner’s ego is a clear example of interpretive labour.

Chapter 6 explores the interpretive skills women deploy in foodwork. As a central element of *mokk pooj*, food is intrinsically linked to sex and gender roles within a (re)productive household. While a man has to be a breadwinner and provide money to feed his family, a woman’s role is to transform this money into food and energy that her husband can use in the bedroom as sexual strength to feed her

orgasms – which ideally leads to procreation. Women's interpretive and physical foodwork thus contributes to creating and feeding femininity and masculinity, and highlights the cooperative, complementary nature of gender roles in the Senegalese household.

The complementarity of men and women is also an important aspect of the Muslim sexual ethics in which the Senegalese sexual imaginary is rooted. However, the lingerie, beads and incense that are constitutive of *mokk pooj* highlight the inequality underlying gender relations, and the ways that the threat of polygamy and the importance of *liggéeyu ndeye* [the work of the mother] reinforces women's interpretations of and compliance with their husband's needs. At the same time, it is through this conservative reproduction of life that women can negotiate unsatisfying elements of their relationships, demonstrating that agency does not have to be defined in terms of opposition, resistance or subversion but that it can also be part of a 'conservative reproduction of culture' (Farquhar 2006: 154).

I return to this important point in the conclusion, where I discuss women's interpretive labour within *mokk pooj* as the source of a self-producing agency.

Chapter 2.

'I hope you get a taste of the black snake before you leave':

fieldwork and erotic subjectivity

'So you lived in Senegal for almost two years doing research on sex. Have you slept with a Senegalese man?' the host asked.

I was being interviewed on prime time radio, on one of the most listened-to stations in Quebec city, to promote a public talk I was going to give the following week. Earlier that day, the host's research assistant had sent me a list of questions they were planning to ask me during the twenty-minute interview. That question had not been on the list.

I felt like I had been punched in the face, and it took me a few seconds to recover from the blow. Meanwhile, the host and his two collaborators, an all-male panel, did nothing to help me get back on my feet: they obviously relished the surprise, and the sensationalist intrusion into my personal life. My silence and palpable discomfort must have made for a good radio moment.

'You know, the main research method in anthropology is participant observation. But sometimes, there are limits to how much one can participate,' I managed to answer. All three men burst out laughing, and, somewhat stupidly, I joined them in relief.

I was not surprised by the radio host's impudent question. Over the course of my fieldwork, and after leaving Dakar and returning to Scotland, I learned quickly that my research methods were of great interest to a lot of people –within and outside the academic world – who wondered how one investigates such private matters as sexuality, seduction and eroticism. As a matter of fact, what was

questioned was not so much *how* I did such research, but *how far* I went in doing it, and whether I did indeed 'do it'. Apart from close friends, most people have been too polite to question me as bluntly as the radio host did, but I have had to answer various forms of that same question, asked with or without innuendo. What shocked me was that he was bold enough to ask me about my private, sexual life on live prime time radio, as if it were a public matter. I wish I had been quick enough at repartee to call him out on his sexism. Had I been a man, I doubt he would have dared ask me the same question. I was also angered by his choice of words: he did not ask me if I had been *in a relationship* with a Senegalese man, but if I had *slept* with one. His question was laden with stereotypes and prejudice.

In the days following the interview, I felt a growing sense of unease. Not only had I been unable to recognise and fight the sexism and racial stereotypes the radio host was perpetuating with his question, but my politically correct, evasive response had completely obliterated what actually happened during fieldwork. By shying away from an honest response, I had erased my relationship with Modou from both my life and my fieldwork narrative, as if it had not happened. I, a self-proclaimed feminist who had become so open about other people's sexual practices, an anthropologist-in-the-making who spent most of her fieldwork buying countless lingerie items and aphrodisiacs of all sorts, couldn't acknowledge my very own experience and sexual subjectivity.

I met Modou – a pseudonym he chose himself – through common friends. Giving more details about him, such as his line of work, would make him easily recognisable. We have agreed that I can write about our relationship – we are still good friends – as long as he remains unidentifiable, a wish I have granted out of respect for him and in line with the Senegalese value of *sutura*, or discretion around private matters. Although he does not feature prominently in the chapters to come, Modou does appear here and there. While I have been very

hesitant to use elements of our relationship as data, I have come to realise that our relationship did – and still does – inform and illuminate my comprehension of the Senegalese sexual imaginary in ways I could not have experienced otherwise. From our first encounter to the ways we managed our relationship, from the good times we had to the topics we argued about, from the expectations we had towards one another to the way we ended our relationship, ultimately, I learned as much about him and the Senegalese sexual imaginary as I did about myself, both as a researcher and as a woman. When I shied away from confronting the radio host on his sexism and prejudice, I felt that not only was I letting Modou down by negating our story, I was annihilating the woman I had become during fieldwork.

I understand the methodological curiosity and ethical concerns around doing anthropological research on seduction and sexuality: initially, I was very reluctant to date Modou because of such considerations. As Fran Markowitz points out rightly, '[i]ntimacy is what all anthropologists desire in the field and also what they fear most – that nebulous line between being "in" and going native, retaining objectivity and an autonomous sense of self versus doing and feeling as informants do and thereby losing part of the self in the process' (1999: 168). I spent a lot of time and energy denying my desires and attraction to Modou, feeling I was doing something wrong and doubting my motives: was I using him? He too, wondered if I dated him only to have something to write about. So the fact that other people might wonder about it too is no surprise; and whether their queries about my romantic involvements in the field stem from ethical concerns or gossip curiosity does not matter *per se*. One way or another, they raise the same questions about how we come to know what we know, and those questions demonstrate that the anthropologist's professional and personal lives can hardly be disentangled.

While I was troubled by the radio host's question and my reaction to it, I am much more concerned by the fact that colleagues and professors – among them, some prominent scholars well known for their work in sexuality studies – strongly suggested that I refrain, *especially as a woman*, from even mentioning my romantic relationship in my writings, for fear that it would impinge on my credibility as a researcher, or that I would become known for my sexual encounter rather than my ethnographic, intellectual skills. However, I believe that perpetuating the unwritten academic policy of keeping one's head in the sand, and maintaining the aura of secrecy that surrounds romantic and sexual relationships in ethnographic work – what Esther Newton qualified as the 'black hole enveloping this nonsubject' (1993: 4) – is only doing the academic community a disservice.

Far from being a confessional tale of my romantic and sexual life in the field, the goal of this chapter is to simultaneously contextualise my research and discuss how, in my study of sexuality in Dakar, methodological concerns and ethical conundrums could not be dissociated from my embodied, anthropological self – well beyond the question of being or not being romantically involved with a local man. In reality, I have come to recognise that my entire fieldwork was permeated by my gendered, sexualised self.

Shifting subjectivities

As Julie Cupples points out, '[a]cknowledging the impact of sex and sexuality on fieldwork is fraught with complexities' (2002: 388), and even more so when the topic of research is seduction and sexuality itself, as questions of ethics and methods inevitably surface. What is acceptable, ethical, moral? Are work and pleasure necessarily opposed? If not, what degree of involvement can be managed without compromising either our work or our relationships?

Reflecting on my fieldwork, I now realise that the line I had drawn initially between my personal and professional identities was much thinner – if it actually ever existed – than I wanted to believe. The walls I put up around me in order to be a respectable, professional and objective researcher were made more of fragile wallpaper than the thick concrete I wanted them to be. Eva Moreno, in a very intimate and reflexive paper describing her rape by her research assistant, sums up the reality of the field, at least as I have experienced¹⁷ it:

In the field, the false division of time and space between the "professional" and the "private" that underpins the supposedly gender-neutral identity of the anthropologist collapses completely. In the field, it is not possible to maintain a fiction of a genderless self. It is not possible to be an unmarked "anthropologist". In the field, one is marked. One is perceived to be, and one perceives oneself to be, a gendered anthropologist – a female anthropologist or a male anthropologist. (1995: 246)

My own gender, marital status and sexuality were often front and centre in my data collection strategies, prompting conversations and initiating debates or inquiries – something I had not expected before embarking on the rite of passage of my doctoral fieldwork. When preparing and leaving for Senegal, I knew that I would have to deal with flirtatious, complimentary, and at times very persistent men. But since my initial plan was to conduct research on food and kinship, at the time I was more concerned about how to stay away from these tricky situations. I never considered I could use them to my professional advantage and turn them into data.

Focusing on ethical practices in research, the academic environments where I've been trained – both in Canada and in the United Kingdom – never really acknowledged the positive and productive power of an assertively gendered and (almost) unreservedly sexualised anthropologist. On the contrary, the emphasis

¹⁷ I am not trying to equate my overall very positive experience of fieldwork to that of Moreno's sexual assault, but to highlight how gender can be a significant element that cannot be overlooked.

has always been on trying to erase these and other markers of identity, in a quest for objectivity, all while promoting a reflexive stance. During my pre-fieldwork evaluation, one of the examiners asked if I was considered pretty in Senegal, and how I would play down my (relative) attractiveness, positing my exterior body, my physical self, as a problem. At the time I answered that I would – as so many other female anthropologists before me have done and keep doing – dress and behave conservatively and pay special attention to how I might interact minimally with men.

Although I understand my examiner's concern – she did not want me to get into situations of rivalry with other women, especially if I were to live in a polygynous family – this situation also expresses a need to conform to the dominant patriarchal and sexist standards of academia by negating, or at least downplaying, indicators of my gendered and sexual identities. As such, it is a perfect example of Dorothy Smith's concept of bifurcated consciousness, which describes the split between the world we actually experience and the dominant view we must adapt to, for example the masculine, academic standpoint: 'it establishes two modes of knowing, experiencing, and acting – one located in the body and in the space that it occupies and moves into, the other passing beyond it' (in Moreno 1995: 250). As a female anthropologist, I have to acknowledge how my positionality and subjectivity impacted the information I gathered, but I should do so in a way that complies with current academic ideals of objectivity, leaving emotions and bodily sensations behind. However, simply describing one's background doesn't necessarily constitute a reflexive stance that contributes to the analysis, as Evelyn Blackwood points out: 'the ethnographic experience is more than an identification of positionality or subjectivity; we occupy multiple positions and identities that transform over time, forcing us constantly to reconstruct who we are in relation to the people we study (1995: 55).

Blackwood's reference to the multiple positions and identities we occupy and to the fact that we need perpetually to renegotiate them echoes Cupples' argument that our positionality shifts continually during fieldwork because it is fundamentally interactional and dependent on how we socialise, and with whom (2002: 383). I could certainly write my thesis from a more detached standpoint and avoid most references to my personal gendered and sexual experiences in the field by simply acknowledging that at the time of research I was a single, straight, white, tall, curvy, educated, comparatively wealthy Canadian doctoral student brought up in a nuclear Catholic family. These markers of my identity have remained the same, but the way I behaved and highlighted or downplayed some of them was definitely not static and changed quite significantly – but mostly unconsciously – over the course of fieldwork.

It should be noted that by being straight and white, I may have a little more latitude to speak of my relationship publicly and academically than otherwise. In being relatively open about my erotic subjectivity (Kulick and Willson 1995) and (limited) sexual participant observation (Bolton 1995: 151), my goal is not to transform this thesis into a pornographic fieldwork confessional – but rather to de-exoticise fieldwork relationships and confront taboos surrounding the very existence of desires and strong physical and emotional feelings, whether on the part of the anthropologist or of members of the community he or she studies. Sensual emotions – whether of attraction or repulsion, of curiosity or disinterest – and sexual desires and relationships do happen in academic research, as Paul Rabinow's *Reflections on fieldwork in Morocco* (1977) and Bronislaw Malinowski's posthumous *Diary in the strict sense of the term* (1989) exemplify. Both men were heavily criticised for breaking the taboo against sex in the field, and while Malinowski revealed his lustful thoughts and carnal desires, Rabinow acted on them (Markowitz 1999: 163). But is it necessary, useful or even possible to separate such experiences from our analysis? Such feelings and experiences can disturb us profoundly on both personal and professional levels. Because of

the silence that surrounds these encounters in most written ethnographies, we are led to believe that similar experiences do not happen to other researchers – thus making us feel inadequate or guilty for feeling those emotions in the first place. Even when the researcher tries to portray him or herself as an asexual being in the field as in the resulting text, 'the not-there, the unsaid, the absent presences, that structure the said and the done' (Kulick 2005: 616) all participate in the construction of a subjective, (a)sexualised anthropologist.

According to Markowitz, the deafening silence and moral ban on the anthropologist's sexuality in the field stems from the Victorian tradition of our discipline (1999: 163), from an era when, as Michel Foucault reminds us, '[s]exuality was carefully confined', 'absorbed into the serious function of reproduction' and when, '[o]n the subject of sex, silence became the rule' (1990: 3). This heritage was 'later upheld by a postcolonial concern for establishing and enforcing a code of ethics to protect the people of anthropological investigation from exploitation' (Markowitz 1999: 163).

At the same time, this silence hides a fascination with an exotic, imagined, sexualised Other that has been central to the development of the anthropological discipline and essential to the colonial enterprise (McClintock 1995; Stoler 1995, 2002). In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Edward Saïd (2003 [1978]) discussed the importance played by sexuality in the colonial imaginary, where it created and sustained the myth of a 'third world sexual liberalism' that led to 'understandings of the Other as both racialized and sexualized' and 'racist fantasies and desires to possess the Other' (Cupples 2002: 384). In Africa, a continent often pictured as a 'paradigm of difference' (Mudimbe 1994, in Spronk 2012: 24-25), this Othering and its concomitant reduction of intimate relations to sex is particularly problematic – especially as missionary, colonial and Western representations of the hypersexualisation of the dominated 'Other' have dehumanised Africans and served to justify degrading policies (Thomas and

Cole 2009: 4). Even if it was set in a very different context and geared at entertaining an audience, I believe that the radio host's curiosity about my sexual experience in the field is illustrative of a similar process of exoticising that reproduces colonial and neocolonial stereotypes about promiscuous African men (Spronk 2012: 23) who take advantage of naïve Western women.

Foreign, loose and rich

In my previous Senegalese sojourns, I had experienced a few episodes of sexual harassment¹⁸ – defined as 'unwelcome sexual verbal and physical advances, lewd remarks, jokes, and gestures, which create a hostile social atmosphere for women (and, less often, for men)' (Gearing 1995: 192). Wary of similar encounters, when I began fieldwork I tried to behave and present myself as a morally virtuous, conservative, genderless, desexualised individual, 'assuming the asexual pose I thought necessary to anthropological inquiry' (Markowitz 1999: 162) by creating a distance between my informants and myself.

My defensive attitude was based on the fact that I wanted to avoid the stereotype of the loose and foreign woman – terms that, according to Dubsich (1995: 31) have become almost synonymous, a conclusion corroborated by Gearing's, Morton's and Moreno's experiences, among others (Kulick and Willson 1995). I was aware that my presence in Dakar, combined with my obvious ethnic difference, would immediately be framed within a certain pattern of interaction pre-determined by my host community's past relationships with foreigners. 'Local people make sense of the ethnographer's presence in terms of their culture's accumulated store of encounters with outsiders; and ethnographers cannot make sense of their own presence without considering its position in the larger pattern of those encounters' (Killick 1995: 88). In Dakar, and particularly

¹⁸ A 'friend' who tried to kiss me as I was laying in bed, so sick with food poisoning I did not know what day it was; a complete stranger stroking and pinching my buttocks (not once, not twice, but three times!) as I was walking in the market; another man, in his car, following the bus I had hopped on and trying to get my number and my address when I got off.

around the tourist areas of Saly and la Petite Côte (Salomon 2009), or around the resorts of Cap Skirring in Casamance (Venables 2009), it is not at all uncommon to see foreign women with their Senegalese lovers or boyfriends. Some foreign women visit the country specifically looking for sexual encounters with an exotic, potent African male. As Jill Dubisch points out, 'there is a mutual feeding on stereotypes' (1995: 36) anchored in the exoticising of the different Other.

One of the ways I tried to circumvent people's perceptions of me as a sex tourist or a loose woman was through the way I dressed, as other female anthropologists have done (Dubisch 1995). Before leaving Edinburgh, I had bought several long dresses that would cover my legs up, and made sure most of my tops had sleeves or at least wide straps. I even put a t-shirt or a tank top on over my strapless dresses until my host mother asked why I was doing so. I told her I did not want to offend anyone and wanted to make sure I was always properly and conservatively dressed. Although she understood my concerns, she assured me I did not have to layer up or be too self-conscious. Basically, she believed I could wear anything I wanted, especially during the extremely hot and humid days of *hivernage*, the rainy season that typically runs from July to October. Moreover, without dressing provocatively, she made me understand that I had to put some visible effort into the way I looked when I left the house. Appearances are important, and the art of dressing well, *sañse*, smelling good and, for women, putting on make-up and flashy jewellery, are a way to show respect and consideration to the people you visit or encounter. It is also a way to express your self-esteem, to show that you care about yourself and about how others perceive you, which is an essential component of the art/work of seduction. Contrary to what I was trying to do – that is, to depersonalise myself (Markowitz 1999) in order to blend in and not attract attention – my host mother taught me that I had it all wrong: in Dakar, the point of dressing up is precisely to catch people's eye, to positively and more easily open channels of communication between individuals. By making an effort not to stand out or appear too feminine, I was,

in the eyes of my hosts, giving the impression that I did not care about myself – nor, as a consequence, about them.

Once I became less conservative in my clothing, had some dresses made in beautiful and colourful *wax* fabric, and put a visible effort – albeit unsuccessful – into taming my frizzy hair, I noticed a subtle but interesting change: it turned out that attracting attention had a positive impact on my research. Maybe because I felt less contrived and more natural, or maybe because of my more pulled-together style, I felt and looked more approachable, and it was therefore easier to meet people and interact with them – which boosted my confidence as a researcher and, I have to confess, as a woman. Slowly but surely, learning about Senegalese women's mastery of seduction subtly but inevitably feminised and sexualized me.

When people began to know me a bit better, it became easier to fight the stereotypes and convince them of the seriousness and professional purpose of my presence in Dakar. Being a Canadian from Québec was a slight advantage: there is a relatively large Senegalese community in Montreal and Quebec City, as people value the quality of the higher education provided in my native country and try to obtain scholarships or to find a way for their children to attend university there. Moreover, not being French meant I did not quite fit into the former coloniser / colonised dichotomy;¹⁹ and to my surprise, people always reacted positively and warmly when they found out where I came from, often having assumed I was French (or American).

Nevertheless, as Linda Malam comments accurately, 'it takes more than a few conversations to transcend an image that someone holds of your "type". Particular bodies come to be aligned with and signify particular subjectivities,'

¹⁹ Although it could certainly be argued that some development projects sponsored by the Canadian government or NGOs definitely reproduced similar modes of interaction and power dynamics.

and as a young *tubaab* (foreign) woman, my body was indeed read by some Senegalese men and women 'as a strong signifier of a particular type of femininity' (2004: 178). Not only was I a young foreigner – which was reason enough to label me as 'easy' or 'loose' – but my body type and physical appearance also fitted the Senegalese beauty standard of the *femme Coca-Cola*: a curvy woman with a small waist and plumper behind, a shape similar to the small glass bottles of the bubbly drink. To a certain extent, I was perceived as physically desirable *and* assumed to be promiscuous – despite the fact that, as Éva Huseby-Darvas observed in her own case, I walked too fast and without rolling my hips, and I openly questioned men's authority, which definitely made me less desirable (1999: 148). This combination of attractiveness and assumed loose morals prompted as many declarations of love as unexpected marriage proposals and direct sexual advances, most of the time from complete strangers. One day, for example, early on in my fieldwork, I was waiting for a friend in the supermarket (the only air-conditioned store in the neighbourhood). She was a bit late, and to kill time I slowly roamed the aisles, stopping in front of the toothpaste section. I started surveying the shelves carefully in search of a specific product when a fifty-something man, dressed in a beautiful, colourful traditional *boubou*, came up to me and said, 'I wish you'd look at me as intensely as you're looking at this toothpaste,' smiling and eyeing me from head to toe suggestively. 'Maybe you could be my third wife?' he continued. Blushing and embarrassed, I mumbled something and retreated to another aisle, not knowing what to say or do. I tried to be what I thought I ought to be – that is, the quintessentially detached, emotionally neutral asexual anthropologist; so in the first months of fieldwork, when men approached me, I replied coldly and even rudely, or I simply ignored them, feigning not to understand French or Wolof. In my interactions with women, I played the naïve and chaste researcher, not wanting to create unnecessary rivalries.

There was, of course, something comforting in rejecting masculine attention in the name of ethics, as it prevented me from confronting my own feelings of desire and, most of all, vulnerability (Markowitz 1999: 168). My initial reaction to compliments and flirting was one of doubt, suspicion and distrust, as I thought that men who had just met me could not *love* me (which they said they did) in the sense that I understood the meaning of love. The Senegalese flirting and dating scene was so different from what I had experienced in Canada or in Scotland that it took me a very long time to understand how relationships come to be, how marriage arrangements are made, what constitutes a good partner, and how gender is performed in everyday life, all elements I hope to convey in this thesis. Without my own – mostly unintentional – involvement in it, I doubt that I would have gained the same insights.

As Andrew Killick points out, it was certainly not easy to interpret

local perceptions of me as a romantic possibility. Malinowski (1989) wrote as if he had unbounded faith in his powers of seduction, and the only struggle was to keep himself from using them; but those of us who are less sure of our prospects have to ask why it is that certain people are romantically interested in us, while others are not. (1995: 98)

I often wondered which part of me made me most attractive: my obviously different ethnicity, my perceived wealth, my plump figure, or the fact that I represented a potential visa or passport to a Western country (see Morton 1995: 169, Killick 1995: 90). I knew of a few women who had been swept off their feet, duped and heartbroken by handsome young men they had met abroad, and I did not want the same story of extortion and heartbreak to be part of my experience. I feared being used and taken advantage of in an emotional sense as much as in a monetary one, and worried that my friendships were based on my ability to provide financial gain, gifts or social status. At times I found it difficult to develop strong, amiable bonds with some of my informants, especially when they requested that I lend them money – a request far removed from my own Québécois culture, where money is a taboo subject and substantial amounts are

rarely lent between friends. Blackwood points out that in our use of the term 'friend' for our informants, we try to embody a neutral identity from which a balanced, equal relationship would stem; when in fact, 'the category of "friend" that we so readily apply to cross-cultural situations actually masks a much greater complexity in our field relations' (Blackwood 1995: 53).²⁰ The truth is that those relationships remain imbalanced. In the name of what I see as friendship, I took great pains to downplay the disparities that made those power relationships obvious, especially regarding money. However, my reticence to associate friendship with money matters meant that I did not fully engage with the local definition of friendship and all it entails. I was often confronted with the uncomfortable situation of being asked to 'lend' a considerable sum or to buy expensive electronic items as a proof of friendship, or as a reminder of a close bond. In my eyes, such requests actually undermined the relationship by commoditising and instrumentalising it; but in my interlocutor's opinion it was simply normal, and had the potential to strengthen the relationship by inducing a mutual debt reminiscent of Mauss' spirit of the gift (2015).

In retrospect, I can see the irony of the situation and the foolishness of my behaviour regarding money matters. Although one of my professional goals in Dakar was to study the economic aspects of seduction in order to question the transactional sex framework so often applied to African relationships, I had tremendous difficulty letting go of my own Western assumptions – in which patron-client relationships that rely upon cash transfers are *not* the norm – and accepting that money *does* play a significant role in most, if not all, Dakarois relationships (Hann 2013: 69; Moya 2015; see also Chapter 3). That being said, I did help out a few friends who I knew were in dire situations; and although I never paid for information *per se*, I always made sure my presence and incessant questioning would not impede people's work. When I interviewed sales persons at their market stalls or on the street, I would often buy something to compensate

²⁰ On friendship, see also Bell and Coleman 1999; Desai and Killick 2010.

them at the end of our discussion; I amassed an interesting collection of lingerie, aphrodisiacs and incense that way, and often managed to combine my informal interviews with my shopping sprees at the market where I bought my daily essentials. When I participated in one of Kira's workshop, I paid the fee like any other participant.

Erotic subjectivity

Although I didn't like to be perceived as 'a commodity for future wealth and prestige' by my informants, this feeling was only 'a mirror reflection of the view taken by anthropologists, who have implicitly conceived of the field as a commodity that they trade for future academic prestige' (Willson 1995: 262). Considering fieldwork as a dynamic process of mutual benefit helped me move on from my fear of being both exploited by and exploitative of my informants. Eventually, I realised that my cold and dry attitude didn't do anything to curb the stereotypes ascribed to me, and maybe even fed others, such as being uninterested, distant, and detached. In sum, by trying to be objective and gender-neutral, as I believed the female anthropologist ought to be, I was my own worst (research) enemy and cut myself off from interacting with people.

Gradually and unconsciously, my fieldwork behaviour changed. Indeed, my shy, defensive attitude towards flirting men slowly transformed into a sense of comfort and ease. I allowed myself to perform my femininity in a way that conformed more with the Senegalese fashion. I stopped being offended by men catcalling me or trying to get my number, and even started enjoying it, as many Senegalese women do: I felt desirable and desired, sexy and feminine. I realised that playing the game of seduction was much more fruitful (and fun) for my research than trying to avoid it, even if I was ultimately still rejecting men's advances. In other words, I accepted 'that erotic subjectivity in the field is a potentially useful source of insight. This is because erotic subjectivity *does* things. It performs, or, rather, can be made to perform, work. And one of the

many types of work it can perform is to draw attention to the conditions of its production' (Kulick 1995: 5). I began to better understand the Senegalese sexual imaginary because I let myself experience it.

Accepting compliments and exchanging a few polite and friendly words was more respectful and culturally sensitive than simply ignoring men. On such occasions, humour became an invaluable research strategy that helped me initiate conversations and build rapport, which often led to informal interviews. For instance, when I was asked what I was doing in Dakar, I usually replied, in my best Wolof accent, that I was there to learn and write a book about *mokk pooj*, the art of pleasing and seducing a man. Most people asked me to repeat myself, surprised that, for one, I could speak Wolof, and two, that a young female *tubaab* knew about and investigated such a specific – but crucial – element of Senegalese culture. When they realised they had heard properly the first time around, most people burst out laughing and immediately started sharing their opinions and thoughts. Meanwhile, I was able to position myself as a researcher and also as a feminine and sexual being. My experience echoes Julie Cupples', who explains that

[o]ver the course of my fieldwork, my sexual and gendered subjectivities shifted and I found myself renegotiating my femininity and performing it more self-consciously. Gender is performative (Butler 1990) and these shifts and renegotiations are particularly valuable in highlighting the performative nature of gender. (2002: 386)

Navigating people's perceptions became easier as months went by; gradually, I got a better grasp of what was expected of me and how to respond to the various queries regarding my personhood. Even if it made my relations with men and women a bit more difficult to negotiate, I never lied about my real relationship status in the context of my research – as, for example, when I conducted interviews or went to the market to discuss things with the vendors of lingerie and other erotic paraphernalia. From an ethical standpoint I felt it would have been deceitful. What's more, how could I ask people to openly discuss their most

intimate secrets, hopes and fears while lying to them? How am I now supposed to report those private matters in the printed, accessible form of a thesis if I can't be honest about my own experiences and the impact they have had on the multiple ways I gathered information? As a result, when informants questioned me about my own sexual experiences or "how it is done in my country", I responded as best as I could, and without taking a condescending tone, advocated for safe sexual practices and the respect of non-heteronormative sexual practices.

My marital status and my sexual life were of great interest to most people I met, men and women, as theirs were for my own work. Even if it is usually expected for single Senegalese women to be virgins upon marriage (see Chapter 5), my informants did not have the same attitude towards me; and so the 'loose woman' stereotype turned to my advantage, in a way. I was inevitably constructed as a sexual actor (Dubisch 1995: 30) and therefore sexually cognisant. If I were neither married nor a virgin, why would I be willingly celibate? 'So... You've been here for about six months now and you don't have a Senegalese boyfriend yet?' asked an incredulous Doudou right after I had stopped recording and switched off my phone. We had been discussing and meandering in the market for almost an hour: he was a *rabatteur*, a peddler making a commission when he managed to get visitors, mostly tourists, into the market stalls of Avenue Ponty.²¹ 'But surely you've been with a Senegalese man, right?', he continued. When I replied negatively (I had not yet met Modou), he seemed both amused and concerned: '*Les hommes Sénégalais, on est chaud!!* [We Senegalese men, we're hot!!]. You should get a boyfriend here, especially with all these questions you're asking ... You have to try it. I hope you get a taste of the black snake before you leave,' he concluded, a mischievous smile on his face. He, too, played on stereotypes, referencing that of the potent, well-endowed African man.

²¹ It has been renamed Avenue Georges Pompidou, but to most people it is still known as Ponty.

If men sometimes showed an inclination towards me, women seemed to be concerned about the fact that I was not yet married at thirty years old, and were even more worried that I did not have children (see Chapter 3). Although being a foreigner gave me a certain leeway, I was perceived as suspicious. In that context – similar to what Cupples (2002: 387) and Malam (2004: 181) have described for their respective fields – personal relationships with women were at times difficult to navigate. Though it was rarely expressed openly, I was often perceived as a potential rival by both married and unmarried women, a competition fed by the ‘loose foreign woman’ stereotype and by my single status. Once, I was verbally harassed over the phone by my friend Blaise’s girlfriend. I had sent him an invitation to my birthday party, a friendly, generic message I had copied, pasted and sent to about twenty people, both male and female. A couple of minutes after the message had been sent, my phone rang; and as I saw Blaise’s name appear on the screen, I expected the call was to tell me whether he could make it or not. As I answered, his girlfriend Kiné started yelling at me, calling me a slut and a prostitute (in French and in Wolof), insisting that I had been hitting on Blaise since our mutual friends’ wedding (though in reality, I had barely spoken to him on that day). I could have hung up, but I tried to clarify the situation by telling her she was also invited, and naming all the people she knew that would also be there. It only made things worse, and she added that ‘if you want to be fucked by a Senegalese man, you just have to find your own and leave other women’s partners alone’.

She suddenly hung up, and a few minutes later Blaise called me back, as apologetic and ashamed as he could be. He had gone out to the corner store across the street and left his phone on the bed, and she had opened his messages. He was mortified by her behaviour – in part because it was not what is usually considered a legitimate and acceptable form of jealousy (as jealousy over the differential financial distribution of resources between co-wives would be; Hann 2013: 135-140), but rather an uncontrollable, violent and inadmissible outburst.

Even though I was simply being friendly in what I considered the safe space of my circle of friends, this event echoed Patricia Caplan's observation that 'sexuality will be constructed for us, even if we attempt to put our sexuality aside in the interests of maintaining some form of detachment or objectivity. We do not only position ourselves in the field, we are also positioned by those whom we research' (1993, in Cupples 2002: 383) – including by those who are not officially part of our project.

In day-to-day situations unrelated to my research, I took the liberty of pretending I had a husband in order to ward off unwanted advances by men; but they often assumed he was not with me in Senegal, and replied that "he would never know" if I cheated. My best tactic was to introduce myself with my Senegalese name, Aïcha Ba. It was given to me as my host mother's sister's name was the same as mine (Véronique), and when she converted to Islam before getting married she had been given the Muslim name Aïcha. It is customary for foreigners who spend a lot of time with Senegalese people to be given a local first name, and since we already shared a legal name, it only made sense that I also took the same Muslim name – which I got into the habit of using with my host family's last name, Ba. My new name proved handy in several situations, as it situated me a network of relations and gave me some legitimacy. For example, when I was driving around town, I was often stopped by police officers who wanted to check that my papers were in order. It is understood that even if the driver has committed no infraction, s/he should give a bribe to the officer to speed things up. I never had to give money, but the first few times I was stopped and introduced myself as Véronique, the officers asked for my phone number. The power dynamic in such situations was difficult to deal with: as representatives of the law, they had complete power over me and my right to stay in the country or to drive my car, and I felt I couldn't blatantly lie to them. But as time passed, I started to reply in Wolof and to introduce myself as Aïcha Ba while handing over my official Canadian identification papers. Surprised, the officers

assumed I had acquired the name by being married to a Senegalese man, and I strategically decided to neither confirm nor invalidate their assumptions.

Living arrangements

As I picked up on the intricacies of gender relations and the proper ways of presenting myself, I gradually eased into my new life in Dakar. After living with the Ba family for the first three months – I was taking intensive Wolof lessons in a nearby language and culture school – I moved from the middle-class neighbourhood of Sicap Baobab to a new developing area of Ouakam, which used to be a traditional village. I lived there with two young French women, both primary school teachers, for about nine months. The apartment was conveniently located close to the local markets and to the street children's organisation where I had conducted my master's degree fieldwork in 2011. Several of my friends still worked there and were incredibly helpful throughout this research as well. However, despite its proximity to different amenities, our apartment was surrounded by construction sites, and as much as I enjoyed the independence it granted us, it also lacked the community vibe I had experienced in Baobab. At the end of the school year, two of us moved to a smaller flat in Sacré-Coeur 3, a more central area of the city, since our third flatmate was leaving the country. The neighbourhood was friendly and vibrant, and I quickly felt that the neighbours, the house guards and the *boutiquier* were watching out for us, as were the landlord and his family who occupied the first and second floors of the building.

Living in a rented flat rather than with a family had pros and cons. On one hand, sharing the daily activities of my host family allowed me to witness the quotidian reality of a Dakarois life, to improve my understanding of Wolof and get accustomed more easily. I participated in familial and neighbourly gatherings,

religious celebrations and everyday tasks. For my first Tabaski,²² I spent the entire day helping out with cooking a feast, under the watchful eyes of Eva, my host mother. It was one of the first times I could fully participate in cooking, since most of it was done while I was attending my Wolof classes. Eva seemed impressed by my cooking skills – although she assigned me what I considered very simple tasks such as dicing onions and peeling carrots – and she later commented on my being a good, capable woman, a sign of the gendered roles ascribed to women (Chapter 6). I was confident that this recognition took me a step closer to being better integrated into the family dynamic, but when it came to eating and sharing the food we had prepared, I was seated and served with the men and distinguished guests, in spite of my protestations. I did not want to be treated differently, but I had to accept that depending on the situation, I was either feminised or androgenised. As I would experience throughout fieldwork, being a *tubaab* had precedence over being a woman. While it sometimes frustrated me, at times the interpretation proved useful, especially when I wanted to interview men and benefitted from a freedom of speech – both to voice my opinion and to talk about taboo topics – a lot of Senegalese women don't have, at least in public or with strangers.

After having lived on my own or with flatmates for more than a decade, I had a lot of difficulty being told what to do and sometimes having my schedule organised by Eva. However, it was ultimately the lack of privacy that got to me. Although I had my own room, I felt it was inappropriate for me to spend much time there on my own unless I was sleeping. Even doing my Wolof homework or writing fieldnotes felt disrespectful, and the more reserved, introverted part of my personality struggled. I understood that my need for solitude was badly perceived and equated to being sick or even mentally deranged. One day, we were almost ready to leave the house to attend a wedding when I suddenly felt

²² The local name for the Muslim celebration of Eid al-Adha, or the Feast of the Sacrifice, which commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son as an act of submission to God (Brisebarre 2009).

nauseous and experienced severe cramps, which subsequently led to two days of fever and frequent runs to the bathroom – a stomach flu that seemed to be a rite of passage for newcomers in Dakar. Eva was reluctant to leave me alone and almost missed her nephew's wedding, but I insisted that she go anyway. She argued that she could not leave me alone while I claimed that I did not mind, and that in fact I *wanted* and *needed* to be left on my own to rest. She replied that this was the very reason I should not be left by myself: why would anyone in their right mind ever *want* to be alone? We finally agreed that the neighbours' daughters would come over and watch TV to keep an eye on me. Over time, the impossibility of having physical and mental private space became overwhelmingly difficult to bear and prompted my decision to move out.

Living with flatmate(s) in a rented apartment granted me a more independent lifestyle and the possibility to experience the ways that gender roles and expectations mark everyday practices outside the family setting. In Sacré-Coeur 3 we occupied the fourth floor of the building, and when my flatmate or I had to carry up heavy ten-litre water cans or the very heavy gas canister for the stove, our male neighbours insisted on doing it for us because they considered it to be too heavy for a woman and, ultimately, a man's job. Their help was more than welcome. At some point, however, I realised that our behaviour was scrutinised and the object of speculation and suspicion. Living on our own, my flatmate and I did not benefit from the social network and moral guarantee a family would have provided to two young single women. One day, my flatmate came back from paying rent to our landlord and told me that he had mentioned – in what he tried to frame as an innocent remark, though it was actually charged with judgment and reproach – that he 'had noticed that several men come and go from your apartment at any time of day or night'. His insinuations had some ground: in the days leading to his commentary, we did have a plumber stopping by a couple of times to fix things around the flat. We also regularly had friends over, and some of them happened to be Senegalese and *tubaab* men. Our landlord's comments

highlight how women's behaviour is policed and judged (see Chapter 5), and although being foreigners certainly granted us some leeway, the fact that he felt the need to comment is an example of how gendered, heteronormative expectations of femininity and what constitutes proper womanhood actually restrict women's autonomy – even in the urban, somewhat more anonymous, and yet clearly regulated, context of Dakar.

Working with an assistant

Our landlord's concern over our male visitors was also potentially based on the fact that the research assistant I hired regularly came to the flat so we could work on our interviews and transcriptions. El Hadj was a young master's student in his mid-twenties, and he was highly recommended to me by a professor from the Université Cheikh Anta Diop. When we started working together, I introduced him to the neighbours and the landlord in order to avoid hearsay and gossips. However, their perceptions, of our (professional) relationship and our informants' perceptions, were out of our control. I understood enough Wolof to get the innuendo directed at my assistant when we were out and about together.

I hired a research assistant in the hope of circumventing some of the difficulties posed by my gender and by the fact that I did not feel confident enough to conduct interviews in Wolof despite the language classes I took. El Hadj's help was invaluable in several ways: on top of conducting interviews with men on my behalf, some in French but mostly in Wolof – according to the interviewee's preference – he spent considerable time with me translating the interviews he or we conducted. In doing so, he provided me with important background information and additional details that have helped me paint what I hope is an accurate picture of the Senegalese sexual imaginary. In addition, El Hadj became my bodyguard. Being aware of my gendered and sexualised self made me police my behaviour in specific ways, but mostly just in the context of my research. I always made sure not to go to an interview with a male informant by myself,

especially when the meeting took place in their home, and either El Hadj or my friend Badara accompanied me. I also visited a female clairvoyant with El Hadj at my side for both translation and protection purposes: after a particularly emotional experience with a marabout, I felt vulnerable and needed the reassurance a friendly presence could provide (see Chapter 3).

The fact that El Hadj was a young single man proved to be beneficial and provided very interesting data in itself. When he interviewed older, married Senegalese men, they tended to take a fatherly tone and seemed to want to teach him about 'life'. For example, when he questioned them about polygamy, the answers he received were quite different from the ones I got: he was told that having more than one wife was a way to ensure one could always have sexual intercourse, whereas I was referred to the religious precepts of the Quran and the importance of marriage in Islam.

Working with El Hadj was at times difficult, however. Listening to the interviews he conducted without me, I often wished he had prompted the interviewees more on one topic or another. While we were transcribing, I also realised that he sometimes amalgamated ideas rather than translating the exact words a person had said, thus 'pre-editing' some of the data. I figured this out when, shortly before leaving Dakar, we got into an argument because he mentioned an informant's previous bragging about his big penis. I felt confused, as I did not remember such comments from the transcription we had been working on for the last few days. When he was adamant that the interviewee had talked about his impressive phallus, we listened to the recording while reading the transcription, and it became obvious that my assistant had been – purposely or otherwise – editing out some details. I thought I had made it clear at the beginning of our collaboration that he needed to be as specific and as precise as possible in his translation of our informants' comments, but it may not have been the case. From some semi-serious sexist jokes or comments he made, I

sometimes had the impression that El Hadj found it difficult to take orders from me, a woman; but I have no doubt that he has always acted in good faith, and I take full responsibility for the possible mistranslation or misinterpretation of our informants' words. That being said, I believe the overall essence of their comments has been preserved, and that by triangulating the formal interviews with casual conversations among friends and close informants, additional sources of information (magazines, newspapers, online medias, TV shows, etc.) and participant observation I conducted in multiple sites (markets, family homes and events, the university campus, tailors, beaches, restaurants, bars and clubs, etc.), I have managed to minimise my and my assistant's biases.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted Evelyne Blackwood and Julie Cupples, who both stressed the importance of acknowledging the researcher's erotic subjectivity and its shifting contours during fieldwork. I have tried to illustrate how this advice has proven both beneficial and necessary, from a methodological and ethical point of view. It is by juggling my multiple positionalities as an erotic being and gendered anthropologist that I managed to gather the data that forms the basis of the chapters to come. I would add that my subjectivities are also dependent on my data, and the way I analyse and interact with it: my positionalities have kept shifting long after I came back from the field. They are contingent on the ways my own personality has evolved, grown and transformed in the process of fieldwork, and on the ways I feel and live out those changes in my day-to-day life. Anthropological fieldwork is not considered a necessary rite of passage without reason: it is a transformative endeavour, whether we like it or not. In my case, dealing with my shifting erotic subjectivities has been challenging but liberating on several levels; and unlike some colleagues who felt that they lost themselves in the process of fieldwork, I often felt and still feel that in the sixteen months I spent in Dakar, I actually found myself. 'This may be', Kate Altork suggests, 'one of the most distinct and unnoticed advantages of the

fieldwork endeavour: the opportunity to know the self better, particularly in terms of gender considerations, by seeing oneself reflected in the eyes of others' (1995: 131-132). Fieldwork not only helped me unravel the multifarious facets of the Senegalese sexual imaginary, it has made me question, challenge and refashion my own.

Chapter 3.

'Women don't love men anymore' :

love, money and kinship

'Women don't love men anymore', stated Monsieur Samb, a married man in his fifties. My assistant El Hadj had asked him if he had noticed a difference between marriage nowadays compared to unions of the past. 'Today, marriages are all based on gain, *les mariages sont toujours par intérêt*. It's all about benefits and wealth, all about *xaalis* [money]', the former driver sighed. El Hadj quickly prompted the elderly man, asking what he meant by money matches. 'Well... when you go and ask a girl's hand in marriage, what the girl's family will ask is "This man, does he work? Does he have a proper job? What does he do?" You'll know if they are materialistic or not. And when you work, they will make the wedding happen quickly. So, you know, these women, they don't love you, they love your money', the man concluded.

Monsieur Samb's opinion was widely shared by the men El Hadj and I interviewed. They seemed to be longing for days gone by when 'people married for love, not for money'. Their discourses marked a clear distinction between past and current modalities of relationship, idealising a past where marriage considerations were apparently void of structural and monetary concerns. In these conversations, love and money were most often than not presented in opposition to one another, and women were held responsible for the changing nature of marital relationships.

The discursive incompatibility between love and money contrasts with the reality of relationships in Senegal on two important points. First, most people explain that love does not lead to marriage, but is actually born from it: love is a habit. Second, money and gifts have always been part and parcel of relationships, and

through bridewealth, of marriage in particular. Indeed, analysing money and value in Dakar, Ismaël Moya points out that

money is the most valuable form of relationship, and mediates not only commodity or economic relations, but all social relations. Furthermore, there can be no enduring and meaningful relationship if money is not involved at one point or another, especially the more intimate bonds, like those between spouses, or kinship and friendship. (2015: 157)

So if money and close relationships are as entangled as Moya posits, how can we understand the widespread masculine discourse that glorifies a 'loving' past and vilifies women as marrying only for *xaalis*, rather than for love?

In this chapter, I argue that the discourse about greedy, materialistic women obscures the patriarchal set up women have to work within and ignores the interests men have in women. I suggest that the intertwining of love and money is rooted in the 'patriarchal bargain' (Kandiyoti 1988) that is constitutive of the Senegalese sexual imaginary. This bargain posits that 'men's financial provision is supposed to be matched by women's conjugal, reproductive and domestic provision' (Mojola 2015: 223; see also Le Cour Grandmaison 1979; Attané 2009). As Emma Dowling suggests, it is a domestic contract in which each partner takes care in order to be taken care of, but in which women's domestic 'labour of love' is naturalised and thus, made invisible (2016).

By situating the nexus of love and money in a broader system of relationship building and marital transactions in Senegal – a system in which marriage remains a collective enterprise that foregrounds filial love – I show how money and gifts have traditionally been part of alliance practices and used by men to express their interest in and ability to care for a wife. As a consequence, I suggest that *mbaraan*, the local form of transactional sex, is not an entirely new phenomenon – as Monsieur Samb's assertion that 'women don't love men anymore' implies – but represent a continuity in the interpretive labour women perform when it comes to choosing a suitable husband.

***Mbaraan* as interpretive work**

The suggestion that ‘women don’t love men anymore’ is part of a larger social commentary on ‘changing moral economies’ (Rodriguez 2015) in which men have trouble ‘converting up’ their means of subsistence into prestige wealth (Bohannan and Bohannan 1968: 234-237). For the last fifteen years or so, anthropologists in Senegal have witnessed what they consider a significant change in the way men and women interact and manage their romantic involvement (Biaya 2001; Nyamnjoh 2005; Perry 2005; van Eerdewijk 2006; Dial 2008; Gueye 2010; Fouquet 2011; Foley and Dramé 2013, Neveu Kringelbach 2016). Such change, they contend, is most likely linked to the difficult socioeconomic environment brought about by *la crise*, the economic crisis. Indeed, at the beginning of the 1970s, the country faced serious economic difficulties due to a severe and prolonged drought that hit the West African region. Combined with the overexploitation of agricultural land, the drought prompted the decline of peanut production (Beck 2008: 77), a crop on which the economy of the country had been based since French colonisation. In the early 1980s, the implementation of structural adjustment programs by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund – which are based on economic liberalisation, currency devaluation, deficit reduction through austerity policies, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, augmentation of exportations, increase in foreign investments and an overall disengagement by the state – had a profound impact on both men and women, and contributed to the impoverishment of a majority of the population. Because so many farmers and land-owners from rural areas lost their main source of income, many sought refuge in the capital city. Dakar quickly became overurbanized, lacking ‘the necessary resources (economic growth and basic services provision) to support its growing urban population’ (Bradshaw and Schafer 2000: 98).

Despite one of the most successful political transition to democracy in 2000, and the development and growth promised by former President Abdoulaye Wade,

the Senegalese economic situation doesn't seem to have improved much. Unemployment rates continued to skyrocket, reaching 48 percent in recent years (CIA 2016), and the expression *vivre sénégalaisement* [to live in a Senegalese fashion], has become a way 'to refer to the day to day difficulties inherent in poverty, but also the ways of getting by, the art of making do without the situation being fundamentally modified' (Coulon and Cruise O'Brien 1989: 160). For a country of almost 14 million inhabitants and a gross national income per capita estimated at US\$ 2,400 a year (CIA 2016), the generalised economic crisis 'feels both newly urgent and exasperatingly routine (...) and has generated profound social uncertainty, as adulthood, marriage, and the establishment of families are delayed or put on hold indefinitely, as gendered roles and normative values are questioned, and as the legitimacy of both nation and state are undermined' (Melly 2011: 364). The considerable changes *la crise* has stirred up in the social fabric, rites of passage and modes of belonging, are often referred to as a crisis of masculinity since '[y]ounger men are told to maintain certain definitions of masculinity that they do not believe are realizable anymore. The practical and legitimizing foundations of the patriarchal ideology have disintegrated [...] but the ideology lives on, affecting young men's sense of masculinity' (Spronk 2012: 62; see Silberschmidt 2004; Mills and Ssewakiryanga 2005; Masquelier 2005; Perry 2005).

In Senegal as elsewhere on the continent, the impacts of the economic crisis are obviously felt by women as well and often serve to explain the rise of transactional sex relationships,²³ that is, 'intimate relationships where money and gifts are exchanged but in which issues of love and trust are also considered at stake' (Mojola 2014: 8). In the past decade or so, a growing body of literature has aimed to historicise and complicate the transactional sex framework through

²³ See Tabet 2004; Broqua et al. 2014; and Illouz 1997; Zelizer 2005 regarding the co-constitution of money and love in Western societies.

which African intimate relationships have been scrutinised.²⁴ For example, Lynn Thomas and Jennifer Cole's *Love in Africa* (2009) has shown how love and money have always been entangled and that the recent critique about their commingling cannot be reduced to a sign of moral decay, or to the Westernisation of local social norms.

In Senegal, the local Wolof term *mbaraan* refers to 'a practice by which women maintain a dating relationship with two or more male partners as strategy for economic support' (Foley and Dramé 2013: 121). While the literature on transactional sex often presents it as a survival strategy or as a mean for women to access consumer goods, in Senegal *mbaraan* cannot be reduced to the exchange of 'stuff for sex', despite claims that what makes a man attractive to women can be summed up by the 5Cs of cars, clothes, cell phones, phone credit and cash (Reece 2015) or 'the 4Vs: villa, voiture, voyage, virements' [house, car, travel, bank transfers] (Biaya 2001:80; Nyamnjoh 2005: 304).²⁵

Over the course of fieldwork, I asked the same questions relentlessly: 'What makes a good husband? What makes a good wife? What should you look for when you consider getting married?' The responses were surprisingly constant across generations, and within genders: while men said they look for a 'docile and submissive' wife 'who cooks well', women tended to hope for a faithful and honest husband, a 'rare species' which 'is increasingly hard to find, nowadays', as several single and married women noted semi-jokingly. Most of my female informants were acutely aware that men's sentiments are unreliable – especially

²⁴ This correlation between affect and materiality in Africa has been the focus of much academic attention, especially in trying to understand the complex dynamics facilitating the transmission of HIV/AIDS (Dilger 2003; Thornton 2009; Mojola 2014). Despite the very low 0.5% HIV prevalence rate in Senegal (UNAIDS 2015), discussions about transactional sex remain relevant as they underscore 'the vital role that gifts play in fuelling everyday sexual relations between men and women' (Hunter 2002:100).

²⁵ Men who can come up with at least one of these elements, but preferably all of them, are described as *thiof* – the name of a prized pricey fish used in the national dish of *thiep bu jën* – a good catch.

in the context of polygyny and the overall sexual freedom men enjoy (see Chapter 5). That men have the ability to engage in multiple simultaneous relationships makes women aware of their own precariousness. In consequence, my female informants added, you need to marry a man who can ‘take care’ of you, that is, provide for you economically. It thus follows that women’s dating multiple partners simultaneously and asking them for money and gifts is not just a materialistic endeavour. It is a way to assess whether the suitor in question is ‘husband material’: whether he has a strong enough financial backbone to support a wife and children in the long run. In that sense, women’s demands can be seen as a safety net, but also as a way to manage their affections, prioritising investment in someone who is worth it – that is, marriageable.²⁶ Importantly, because most people see love as a sentiment that grows from marriage and not necessarily a factor leading to it (a point I will come back to momentarily), women tend to say that it is ‘better to marry someone who loves you rather than someone you love’ because he will care – and thus provide – for you. It thus follows that when men like Monsieur Samb criticise women for marrying ‘out of interest’, they are not completely wrong. What this criticism fails to acknowledge, however, are the masculine expectations that parallel women’s financial demands: in the Senegalese sexual imaginary, the patriarchal bargain rests on women’s provision of the 4Cs – cooking, copulation, children and care.

In this context, *mbaraan* can be interpreted as women’s active negotiation –their interpretive labour – of the ‘contradictory opportunities and constraints that [they] face as they grapple with unfulfilled material, emotional, and sexual expectations within marriage’ (Foley and Dramé 2013: 122).²⁷ *Mbaraan* is not just

²⁶ That being said, I do not want to suggest that Senegalese women only enter relationships with marriage in mind – although they frequently do, and marriage is part of the socially expected course of life. Sexual pleasure and companionship can also be important factors, although the importance of virginity at the time of a first marriage discourages women’s premarital sexual experiences.

²⁷ This is consistent with Cole’s (2009) and Hunter’s (2009) findings in Madagascar and South Africa respectively: they both explain how economic hardships ‘have made it difficult for one relationship to fulfill all emotional and material needs’ (Thomas and Cole 2009: 27–28).

about sex, rather it encompasses much broader forms of courtship. A focus on transactional sex narrows the focus entirely on what women *want*, and fails to recognize that men ultimately benefit from such transactions in multiple ways beyond sex. In order to understand the relationship between money and love, and the supposedly new tensions that have emerged between them, let us examine their ‘proper’ interaction when ‘women loved men.’

Marriage and brideprice

‘In Islam, marriage is essentially based on sentimental considerations,’ said Iman Ravane Mbaye when I questioned him one Ramadan morning on the relationship between love, marriage and money. ‘It is neither mercantile nor based on pecuniary interests. Sometimes it happens that a girl will marry a man who’s well off, who has a good social position, who’s rich. Then it’s only material. But these are often marriages in which the wife doesn’t find happiness,’ he added. ‘But what about an arranged marriage where the man and the woman don’t know each other? How can there be sentiment?’ I asked. ‘There are no feelings, but there are no material considerations either. And with the parents’ opinion weighing on both sides, husband and wife make efforts and in time, they begin to think highly of each other, and positive sentiments may grow.’

Much like Monsieur Samb longs for a loving past, in saying that there are not material considerations involved in arranged marriages Iman Mbaye seems to forget, or at least to elide, the long-standing importance of bridewealth – payments made by the groom to the bride and her family – in Senegal.

Broadly speaking, there are three instances of marital payments: payments made to the father of the bride or a male relative, which would be returned to the husband in case of divorce if there were no children; payments to the bride herself (which are also given to her parents);²⁸ and payments to the bride’s mother to cover the cost of her trousseau, which would ideally go to furnishing the matrimonial home. (Irvine 1978: 87, cited in Buggenhagen 2012: 121)

²⁸ I also discuss bridewealth in relation to virginity in Chapter 5.

While it used to be paid in cattle,²⁹ brideprice is now monetised, and the father's share has mostly disappeared.³⁰ Based on data collected in rural Senegal villages in 1998, Frederic Gaspart and Jean-Philippe Platteau (2010) then estimated that the average amount of money requested as brideprice was of 51,000 francs CFA. During my urban fieldwork Dakar, I heard of amounts of anywhere between a symbolic 25,000 francs CFA to the high 200 to 300,000 CFA range. In early July 2016, a young man posted in a Facebook discussion group that his girlfriend's family had asked for a *dot*³¹ of 500,000 francs CFA, an amount he said he could eventually gather; however, he wondered if he could approach the family to offer to pay in several pre- and post-wedding instalments without delaying the nuptials.

In spite of the rising amounts of money involved in bridewealth and the fact that it varies according to the prospective bride's social status, beauty, education and previous marital status (virgin, widow or divorcee), Abdoulaye Bara Diop warns against considering the practice as one akin to 'buying' a wife. Instead, he sees its increase in value as mirroring an overall improvement in the social recognition of Senegalese women. He contends that bridewealth is a sign of a slow process of feminine emancipation in which women are not simply exchanged as they were in the past, but valourised and therefore able to choose between potential suitors, thus creating a bidding war between them. A man has no choice but to provide what a woman and her family want if he wants to get married. In

²⁹ Hutchinson (1996) discusses the significance of cattle and wealth for the Nuer.

³⁰ Beth Buggenhagen suggests that whereas senior men used to control marital exchanges by managing younger men's labour force and access to land and cattle, in the monetised era, senior women benefit from marriage payments much more than the bride herself. She makes the hypothesis that because older women 'are seen as having more authority in the ritual sphere and thus as having control over young women's productive and reproductive potential' (2012:125), they have taken over marriage arrangements as a source of wealth and have consequently reinforced their social position while undermining junior women's possibility for autonomy. As a result, Buggenhagen argues, 'it is not a coincidence that the increased monetization of bridewealth has gone hand in hand with an increasing emphasis upon an ideology of love' (2012: 127), as discussed above. Young women are thus torn between their familial and motherly allegiances and their sexual and emotional desires.

³¹ My informants talked about bridewealth as the *dot*, a French word that translates as dowry but can actually represent different types of marriage payments (van Eerdewijk 2009: 12).

consequence, he has to show that he deserves his bride by proving his love and commitment through a series of generous gifts (Diop 1985: 95, 105).

Bridewealth is only one of a myriad of ways in which alliances are formed and preferential partners identified. In his book on tradition and change in the Wolof family, Diop (1985) offers a comprehensive study of alliance practices in relation to precolonial, colonial and early postcolonial societal transformations – practices which, as Beth Buggenhagen (2012: 115-116) shows in her compelling ethnography on Senegalese women's wealth and personhood, still hold true today. Diop explains that in the traditional Wolof kinship system, a marriage arranged and sealed by the young couple's parents³² is part and parcel of a larger system of socioeconomic exchange governed by tradition. The well-behaved bride and groom, raised to uphold social order and respect of elders as cardinal values, would not dare oppose such an all-encompassing apparatus (Diop 1985: 98). According to Diop, matrimonial exchanges (through preferential unions) traditionally follow preferential cross-cousin relationship patterns (1985: 61-62). Since cross-cousins do not belong to the same lineage, their alliance is the most effective way to comply with the incest taboo as they are the most closely-related individuals who can marry without being of the same line. As such, cross-cousin marriage (*ngën ci jabar*) is preferential because it reinforces the kinship group's cohesion, uniting the wife of gold (*wurusu jabar*), daughter of the groom's mother's brother, to the husband of silver (*xaalisu jëkër*), son of the bride's paternal aunt (Ames 1953: 45; Diop 1985: 81-82; Buggenhagen 2012: 116).

Since spouses are not preassigned but preferred, there exists a certain degree of flexibility within the matrimonial exchange system, leaving some room in the choice of partner. Spouses are not blindly matched, and personal sensibilities and compatibility of character are considered (Diop 1985: 98) in order to prevent

³² Even though male kin act as representatives of the bride and groom during the *takk* (religious ceremony), women of the family – especially mothers – play an important role in the process, especially when it comes to choosing a bride and the deliberations that precede the union.

divorce and the dislocation of kinship ties. However, carefully taking into account the future spouse's character does not mean disregarding one's lineage and family links: arranged marriages are believed to be more durable because the couple benefits from the support and intervention of kin members when it comes to resolving conflicts (Ames: 1953: 45-47; Buggenhagen 2012: 116).

Later in our conversation, Iman Mbaye, clad in a shiny white damask *grand boubou*, cogently explained what seemed to be obvious to him and, as I was to find out over the course of fieldwork, to several of my informants as well. He went on to explain that arranged marriages are often based on familial reputations. The saying goes that before seeking a wife, one should look for good in-laws, *Bala nga wuti jabar, wutal goro*. When a young, hard-working and well-behaved man starts thinking about marriage, Iman Mbaye suggested, it is not rare that he will be directed to visit this or that family of good repute to identify a young woman to marry – the idea being that all women from the chosen family share its good morals and education, and that any of them would therefore make a chaste, submissive and respectable wife. 'These are not the sentimental values we were talking about; these are much more fundamental values on which marriages are based', the imam concluded, 'and in time, they'll get to know each other and discover one another's qualities, and love, or an indissoluble attachment, will come into being'.

Love grows

Theoretical discussions about romantic love have long been avoided in the social sciences, especially in sociology and anthropology, probably because 'insofar as anthropologists perceived emotions as a part of individual psychology and private experience, they considered love epiphenomenal to the proper subject of anthropological research' (Cole and Thomas 2009: 6). However, with the development of an anthropology of emotions in the 1980s, and as a result of 'the increasing theoretical reach and sophistication of the study of gender' (Padilla

et al. 2008:xiv), love slowly made its way into the academic world, although infrequently and inconsistently (see Jankowiak and Fischer 1992; Lindholm 2006). In 1959, Goode remarked that the term *love* 'is practically never found in indexes of anthropological monographs on specific societies or in general anthropology textbooks' (Goode 1959: 40), and his statement still holds true today. Anthropologists have a long history of discussing kinship and marriage patterns in very structural and functional terms, leaving matters of the heart out of the equation. Lindholm (2006: 7) suggests that anthropology's disciplinary inferiority complex and hope to be recognised as an objective science might have discouraged many researchers from studying 'soft' or 'feminine' topics like love, or even emotions, and to focus on quantifiable objects of study like social organisation and economics. Moreover, early ethnographers often failed 'to distinguish between love and sexual intercourse' (Jankowiak and Fischer 1992), conflating questions of emotion with reproductive and instrumental motives.

Building on the premise that romantic love is universal, Jankowiak and Fischer analysed two hundred and fifty ethnographic and folkloric cross-cultural accounts and, despite important methodological difficulties, came to the conclusion that 'romantic love constitutes a human universal, or at the least a near-universal', but that sociocultural norms dictate how – and if – it is expressed and acted upon in any given society. They suggest that drawing a 'distinction between private experience and cultural expression of that experience' will enhance our understanding of the multifarious ways in which love is culturally defined (Jankowiak and Fischer 1992).

When I met with Iman Mbaye, I believed he was referring to practices of an older generation; but as I soon learned, the belief that love grows, or is learned over time, was quite common. Frequently, I heard stories of people who had married after dating for just a few months, sometimes only a few weeks, and sometimes without ever having met. Over the course of fieldwork, when I was semi-jokingly,

semi-seriously asked why I had not married a Senegalese man yet and responded that I had only been in Dakar for a short period of time, the usual comeback was that time didn't matter: once you're married, you have an entire life ahead of you to *learn to love* each other.

The implications of this widespread statement are twofold. First, it refers to the idea that feelings of mutual attachment and respect can grow from an arranged or expedited marriage, as Iman Mbaye suggested. It is also strikingly similar to Jennifer Hirsch's Mexican informants, for whom marriage, in the 1950's and 60's, was discussed in terms of 'a bond of obligation, held together by an ideal of respect and the mutual fulfillment of gendered responsibilities. [...] *Love, if it existed, was the result of living well together*, but it was not necessarily the goal' (Hirsch 2008: 94, my emphasis). Second, the assumption that you can learn to love each other might also be traced back to the traditional belief that wives aren't expected to love their husbands, but to get used to them: '*Jigéen du nob, daffy miin*' (Dial 2008:84). Interestingly, Swahili Muslim women in Zanzibar also refer to 'getting used to' their husbands when discussing love in their arranged marriages (Thompson 2013: 73), as do men and women in Tanzania (Marsland 2016, personal communication).

This conception of love as a matter of 'getting used to' someone is a point that Vieux highlighted during his interview with El Hadj. When asked to define what love is, the twenty-nine-year-old single man replied that for him, 'Love is to become used to someone. If you are used to a person, you can love her. If you have a sheep you feed every day, if one day it doesn't see you, it will bleat and cry and wonder what is happening. Love, that's what it is, it is getting used to a person. It's something that sleeps within us, and if you have the will to love, she might have it too. That's what love is, a habit. Sometimes you can go out with a girl, and in the beginning you don't love her, but love comes with time, that is to say that love is a force of habit' he concluded.

Such vision of love as a sentiment that grows contrasts with that of love as the basis of marriage expressed by Monsieur Samb. Interestingly, though, Vieux doesn't restrict the 'habit' of love to women, as the aforementioned Wolof saying appears to do: as a man, he infers that his feelings grow out of habit, of sharing time with someone, too. Besides, his comment about having 'the will to love' frames love as a shared understanding and responsibility to wake up what 'sleeps within us', that is, to engender and foster relatedness.

Ndeye Fatou, a young married woman in her early thirties, describes love in the following terms:

Love is a feeling that we can't explain, it's a feeling of *épanouissement* [elation, happiness] when you're with the one you love. It's a feeling of security to be with the man you love. It's a passion... indescribable, that elevates you... [...] In fact, love is like fire: if you activate it, it can last. It's a feeling you have to rekindle, to revitalise. It's like a flower that you have to water so it blossoms before it wilts. For me, real love never wilts because you have to sustain it, to keep it alive.

Much like gender is socially and culturally constructed, love is generally 'naturalized' – made to appear natural, essential, and immutable through its representation and reproduction in cultural systems of meaning (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995, in Padilla et al. 2008: ix). In the Senegalese sexual imaginary, the fact that 'love grows' or that one 'learns to love' disrupts this normative understanding of love. By comparing love to a flower that needs to be watered, Ndeye Fatou hints at the labour – both physical and interpretive – involved in relationships. She suggests that love grows *from* and *into* a feeling of material and thus emotional security. While she infers that love grows before it blossoms, highlighting that much like a flower or a fire, it needs to be taken care of so it can live, she also presents love as something simultaneously beautiful and fragile – a flower – as well as comforting, but strong and dangerous – a fire. In doing so, she implicitly distinguishes between and conflates companionate love – which is based on a strong and enduring affection grown from a long term relationship –

and romantic love, this ‘intense attraction that involves the idealisation of the other, within an erotic context, with the expectation of enduring for some time into the future’ (Jankowiak and Fischer 1992).

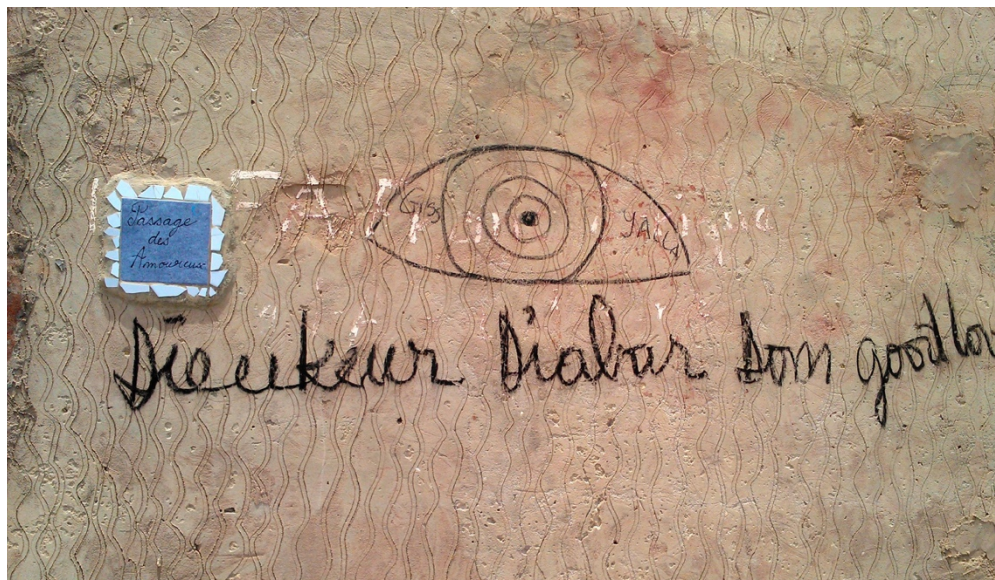


Figure 3. ‘Husband Wife Child Good Love’

Similarly to English, which differentiates sentiments in the verbs *like* and *love*, and contrary to French – in which an all-encompassing *je t’aime* blurs together an array of feelings – in Wolof there are three main verbs used to express love and affection: *sopp*, *bëgg* and *nop*. These verbs cannot be used interchangeably, however. The first one, *sopp*, excludes romantic attachment and denotes consideration, but also respect and admiration, as towards a religious leader or a celebrity. My friend Awa gave me the following example: ‘*Dama sopp Viviane Ndour*’, which means she likes the famous singer, and finds her fun.

The difference between *bëgg* and *nop* is not clear-cut, and both take on a more personal connotation. *Damala nop* [I love you] only expresses romantic feelings and implies carnal desire: it is the verb used to say you are in love with someone. One can therefore say *Damala nop* to a potential or actual girlfriend, boyfriend, or spouse, but not to friends. In such a case, as for expressing your affection to

your mother, *Maman damala bëgg* [Mom, I love you] is preferred. Indeed, *bëgg* it is used to express filial love between parents and children, or between friends: it conveys a deep affection. However, *bëggel* is the noun used to refer to romantic love, as the verb *bëgg* also means to want, or to desire, which might explain why it is used so much in Senegalese love songs (Dial 2008: 44-54).

When I asked people to explain the difference between the verbs *nop* and *bëgg*, the distinctions they made varied slightly but usually followed the pattern described above. While *nop* was clearly reserved for a romantic partner, the confusion surrounding *bëgg* – used to express both romantic and filial love – is I believe illustrative of the fact that when it comes to marriage and the choice of a partner, competing forms of love are at play. Love does not lead to marriage, it is the product of a successful marriage.

In the Senegalese context, the idea that one can learn to love or that love can grow posits companionate love as an ideal, while romantic love is perceived as holding a dangerous, disruptive potential which must be carefully managed. Goode posits that a culture's attitude towards love in relation to marriage dictates kinship patterns and, consequently, has a significant impact on the sociopolitical organisation of society. Indeed, though romantic love seems to have 'taken on a life of its own' and to have become an ideal young people strive for (Padilla et al. 2008: xviii) – in Senegal as elsewhere – it is not necessarily positively regarded or encouraged, especially when it comes to the choice of a conjugal partner. When marriage is seen as a necessity and a duty, 'romantic passion, conjugal love between husband and wife [may be] considered both absurd and impossible' – in large part because the community's development and survival supersedes individual desires (Lindholm 2006: 11; see also Vaughan 2011).

In her study on divorce in Dakar, Fatou Binetou Dial recalls that traditionally, a woman's expression of her love and desires is seen as dangerous and therefore,

forbidden. Since she is perceived as naturally unable to control both her sentiments and her bodily desires, familial and social control prevents amorous excesses (2008: 84). Indeed, Iman Mbaye agreed that arranged and sometimes forced marriages between individuals who have never even met are meant to ‘avoid deviations’, that is, to preempt a young man’s union with a woman of whom his family does not approve, a woman who is not his equal (especially in terms of caste, as I will discuss below) or has a bad reputation. Likewise, he contends that a girl’s parents might force her to marry a given man when she gets too much masculine attention and therefore risks letting someone ‘*arracher son coeur*’ (steal her heart) – meaning, implicitly, that they fear she will become sexually active before marriage (see Chapter 5) and transform into a *fille de nuit*, a prostitute. A woman’s sentiments could also be the reason of a prolonged celibacy: ‘It is common that a girl will be stubborn and say, “it’s him or no one,” simply because she has been bewitched, or because she is too attached to him, and if she does not get him, she risks not getting married at all. So this is why parents agree to compel their child into marriage’, the imam explained. Although he spoke broadly, I understood that it was more often than not daughters who were coerced into marriage, implying that they were more susceptible to succumb to the danger of love. Truth be told, for a girl to marry someone of whom her family does not approve, or for her to be rejected by her husband’s family, can bear significant consequences. For example, Évelyne Miquel-Garcia and Sokhna Ndiaye (2009) describe such repercussions in an article relating three young wives’ suicide attempts following their passionate love marriage. In all three cases, the love story that led to marriage was perceived by the families involved as a scandalous transgression, as a treason against the collective, familial ideal on which marriage should be based.

What slowly becomes obvious through these discourses is a hierarchy of values and types of love that centres on the preeminence of the family over the

individual. Indeed, marriage in contemporary Senegal is rarely a matter of pure individual choice, and still results from a collective endeavour:

Among the Wolof in particular, kinship is central to the individual. Consequently, decisions are made according to what is best for the whole community. Seniority is respected and those who are older are expected to be wiser. Thus, parents oversee marriage choices seeking the best for the family in particular and the community in general. This shows that the individual does not live in isolation from the rest of the community. His/her decisions are influenced by the rest of his/her kinship [group] because the outcome of a person's choice does not affect him or her only. The life of every member of the family is interwoven with that of others. A disgraceful act does not just shame its agent but the whole kinship [group]; likewise, a happy and honorable moment is a source of prestige for all. (Gueye 2010: 71)

It nonetheless follows that an arranged marriage can be framed in terms of love, because love has become, for the younger generation, a way to express their views on and their consent to marriage. For example, Dial (2008: 118–119) cites the 'lack of love' as one of the causes invoked by couples who divorce, adding that most of the time, the lack of love actually refers to a 'lack of choice' in the marital partner. It is also interesting to note that in popular discourses, polygamy is often framed in terms of love: although most women do want to be their husband's only wife and put great effort into it (Chapter 7), women in polygamous unions are said to prefer being the second wife, the *ñaareel*, because they are more likely to have been chosen out of love by the husband himself rather than to have been selected by his family because she fits their requirements. Such statements must be read as more than gossip and urban legend – certainly the truth in them was evident to me during my research. One day towards the end of fieldwork, a friend and I visited the Gandiol national reserve in the vicinity of Saint-Louis, up on the west coast, and as we were walking around looking for animals to photograph, I discussed my research with our guide Tapha, a tall and fit man in his mid-thirties. He told us he had been married to his cousin when she was in her late teens, and that they had since had three healthy children. 'But', he pointed out, 'I have never really loved her. We agreed to the marriage to please our parents.'

And now, after three children, she has changed, even her body doesn't attract me anymore. So I am hoping to soon have enough money to take a second wife, someone I will choose myself, someone I love', he added softly. The sun was coming down slowly after a long, hot day; in the twilight, and in Tapha's poignant words, the deep personal implications of a rigid marital tradition of arranged and preferential marriages dawned on me.

Diop (1985: 101) contends that a discourse based on romantic love is a sign of the emancipation of the younger generation, who claim greater independence, reminding us that '[a]round the world, young people increasingly talk about how affective bonds create marital ties, deliberately contrasting their loves to those of their parents and grandparents' (Hirsch 2008: 100). With regards to the Kenyan context, Rachel Spronk (2012) clearly illustrates how this change of mentality and rising individualism is fraught with tension, highlighting the inner struggles young middle-class men and women are faced with when balancing their individual preferences with tradition.

In Dakar, referring to love as a key criterion in choosing a spouse can also be seen as a way of expressing individuality by having a say in who one marries, as Tapha suggested – even while simultaneously respecting tradition and honouring one's elders. In that case, 'I love you' may be translated as 'You suit me, and you'll suit my family' (Miquel-Garcia and Ndiaye 2009: 16), as Monsieur Sy explained:

When you decide to get married, you have to think about how your wife will please your kith and kin, not only yourself. The happiness of marriage, it's not only to have sex. That's why when you're looking for a wife, you have to look for a woman who's polite, has a good heart, is kind. So when you are not home, she will take care of your family members as if they were hers. As if her father-in-law was her own father. But nowadays, it's really hard to find a woman like that.

The good wife

What Monsieur Sy's statement underscores is not so much an inherent danger in personal, individual desires and sentiments, but the sense that the family's interests are as – if not more – important, and should prevail. His description of how to select a good wife is similar to many others that El Hadj and I collected. It points to how marriage is traditionally conceived of in the Senegalese sexual imaginary and stresses the importance of choosing a 'good wife',³³ a wife whose willingness to take care of her in-laws as if they were her own family is evidenced by her character. But how is one's character measured in an arranged marriage or in a union where the man and woman barely know each other? In such cases, one's family line, caste and *gaaf* become ways to assess a woman's suitability as a wife.

Family

The Wolof kinship system is traditionally cognatic: both the mother's and the father's lineages define one's identity and place in society. The matrilineal line, *xheet*, includes all parents, ascendants and descendants, male and female, as well as socially related individuals such as slaves and client castes; but it can only be transmitted through females (Diop 1985: 17). *Askan* and *gir* are the equivalent on the patrilineal side, but as Bonnie Wright (1989) and Patricia Tang (2007: 53) discuss, the words also relate to ethnicity, origin, family inheritance, and caste, a fundamental element I will come back to shortly.

Meen corresponds to uterine filiation, from Ego to the grandmother or great-grandmother. The word *meen* actually refers to maternal milk, a substance through which kinship is created (Carsten 1995; Fortier 2001, 2007); the prohibition against incest (Lévi-Strauss 2002) includes the interdiction to marry someone who has been breastfed by the same mother or wet nurse (Diop 1985:

³³ My informants, men and women, all agreed that it is the man's job to court a woman, and that the reverse would be highly inappropriate.

21). It is unclear in Diop's work, however, if this *parenté de lait* – quite common in Islam (Fortier 2001, 2007; Parkes 2005) – is derived from the introduction of Islam in Wolof culture, or antecedent to it. *Meen* is paralleled on the agnatic side by *genô* (belt) (Diop 1985: 15–17). While the father's hereditary contributions are the bones (*yax*), nerves (*siddit*), courage (*fit*), and supernatural vision (*nooxoor*), the mother's side transmits blood (*derat*), flesh (*soox*), character (*jiko*), intellect (*xel*), a predisposition to certain diseases, and witchcraft abilities (*ndëmm*) (Diop 1985: 18–20; Tang 2007: 58). Patricia Tang (2007:58) suggests that 'today, although families tend to be patrilocal and children are given the last names of their fathers, both lineages are considered important', but goes on to note that '[a] child is thought to inherit more from his mother than from his father, as blood,³⁴ flesh, character, and intelligence are arguably more important than bones, nerves, and courage'.

Most of the elements of traditional kinship mentioned above are part of an abstract regime of representations, given that the influences of Islam and the French colonial administration have, in practice, transformed a symbolic system of dual descent into a predominantly single, patrilineal one. However, one's character, and especially a wife's character – which is assimilated to and believed to be evidenced by her caring work, *ligéeyu ndeye* (literally, work of the mother), towards her husband (as discussed see Chapter 7) – still has a significant impact on who is considered a suitable potential wife.

Caste

While one's character is inherited from the matrilineal bloodline and the mother herself, it is also linked directly to one's caste – a system of social organisation that was abolished officially with Senegal's independence in 1960 (Tang 2007:

³⁴ The importance of blood is evidenced by the expression *bokk derat*, to share the same blood (Diop 1985: 19). It is also conveyed by the verb *bokk* (to share, to have in common; Tang 2007:58), the noun *mbokk* (kinship/relative) or the saying *mbokk la nu/ noo bokk*, 'we are parents, we are related' (Diop 1985: 32).

52). Despite its official disallowance by the State, however, the caste system continues to have a significant impact on people's lives – especially with regards to alliance practices and related lifecycle ceremonies (Buggenhagen 2012). Fainzang and Journet (1988: 21), in their ethnography on polygamous Soninke and Tukolor Senegalese couples living in France, even contend that caste affiliation is still of the utmost importance in choosing a marital partner. What's more, this hierarchical stratification of society is not limited to one people in particular, but encompasses all of the major ethnic groups in Senegal.³⁵

Although systems of social hierarchy have prevailed among several ethnic groups throughout West Africa, the use of the term 'caste' to describe them is contentious, since it 'originates in reference to Indic societies' and its applicability to other societies is thus questionable (Tang 2007: 47). However, since my informants readily used the term to describe how Senegalese society is stratified, I will follow them in its usage. In *Homo Hierarchicus*, Louis Dumont (1970: 21) defines caste as a

system [which] divides the whole society into a large number of hereditary groups, distinguished from one another and connected together by three characteristics: *separation* in matters of marriage and contact, whether direct or indirect (food); *division* of labor, each group having, in theory or by tradition, a profession from which their members can depart only within certain limits; and finally *hierarchy*, which ranks the groups as relatively superior or inferior to one another.

In Wolof society, the three principles of separation, division and hierarchy are found, as 'one's employment is linked to membership in an occupational group, which is inherited, endogamous, and linked to a system of knowledge and power' (Buggenhagen 2012: 7). In her work on Wolof genealogies, Judith Irvine (1978: 653) lists eight categories that make up the caste system, but I found that in general my informants discussed it in a binary matter – reducing the work-based

³⁵ Of those, Callaway and Creevey (1994: 17-18) assess the Tukolor to be the 'most rigidly organized; social distinctions were stricter than in any other groups', whereas the 'Serer are said to have been the most democratic' – with the Wolof, which currently forms 39% of the population (CIA 2016), falling somewhere in between.

segregation of people into either *géer*, noble, or *ñeeño*, which designates the broad group of artisans that ‘includes griots [*gévël*], blacksmiths, jewellers, leatherworkers and all the trades of hereditary specialists requiring specific skills to ‘transform’ matter into something of value in social relations’ (Neveu Kringelbach 2014: 39). I believe this amalgamation is a sign that the occupational subgroups that constitute the caste-like system nowadays are less restrictive than they used to be in terms of actual profession, especially in urban areas (Dial 2008: 35).

In the citation above, Neveu Kringelbach’s emphasis on the different items of value created by the *ñeeño* and their significance in terms of social relations draws out the debate about whether or not sub-Saharan work-based social stratification is inherently hierarchical. Most studies of caste systems tend to concentrate on the profound inequalities and restrictions that mark relationships between their constitutive groups. Wright, among others,³⁶ warns that we should be wary of analysing the Wolof and West African stratification system only in terms of hierarchy: while nobles are usually better off³⁷ than casted individuals, she argues that the relationship between castes is one of cooperation and complementarity, ‘best understood as a set of groups differentiated by innate capacity or power sources’ (Wright 1989: 2). In accordance with Wright, Tang explains that despite his or her lower status, it is the *gévël* griot

who upholds the *géer*’s status by praising him and telling him about the greatness of his ancestors, and so on. The *gévël* has tremendous power in speech, and if a *géer* is not seen as being sufficiently generous, the *gévël* has the power of publicly insulting or embarrassing the *géer*, thus lowering his/her status. (Tang 2007: 53-54)

³⁶ In her ethnography on some of Dakar’s most prominent Wolof griot percussionist families, Patricia Tang (2007: 47-56) offers an extensive description of the caste system and its different interpretations by theorists Panzacchi (1994), Tamari (1991) and Diop (2012 [1981]).

³⁷ I would say that it might still be the case at least socially, but not necessarily financially.

My friend Soumaya, a young single woman born to a noble Tukolor mother and noble Serer father, highlighted the mutually beneficial relationship her late mother entertained with her *griotte*: ‘When my mom had a problem, she would call her and she would come over right away, listen to her and give her advice. When there was a wedding or a naming ceremony, the *griotte* would accompany my mother and sing her praise, and then my mom would pay her in exchange. I remember them sitting together in my mom’s room and talking for hours at a time. They were best friends, really’.

It is worth mentioning that Islam does not sanction the caste system, although Iman Ravane Mbaye told me that the Muslim faith does promote marriage between people of equal standing in order to avoid discord between partners. As a university professor, he explained, he used to give the following example to illustrate this point: if a poor rural man living in a small village wanted to marry the President’s daughter, who has been pampered all her life, Islam could not condone such a union as it would be morally wrong to demote her from her privileged status and urban lifestyle. When the couple disagrees or fights, the risk that the freeborn spouse might denigrate and castigate the lower-ranked partner are high, reinforcing the imam’s recommendation that couples should be formed by equals.

However, knowing that caste heredity and line of work is passed on from the agnatic line (Diop 1985: 23), it is generally the man who marries ‘below’ his rank – contrary to the imam’s example – as it would have less impact on his children’s status. Children born from a noble woman and a leatherworker, by contrast, would most likely take on their father’s lower standing, becoming *enfants mélangés* – mixed children whose social status is imprecise or undetermined (Ndiaye 1993, in Tamba and Sané 1999: 95). Monsieur Pouye’s explanation of how Senegalese reconcile Islamic and emic perspectives on caste, marriage and children was enlightening on this score. According to this elderly man, who

manages the university mosque, people can marry whomever they want regardless of their caste – *but* they have to be conscious of the potential risks and ramifications: ‘The Prophet told us to be careful about where we pour our water, as it can have consequences. For example, if you marry a griot, a *gégwël*, everyone knows they talk a lot... so if you have children, obviously they will talk a lot too. If your wife is a *griotte* and you don’t like it, obviously it will create problems. Some say that as a *gээр*, if you wear your caste friend’s clothes, or if you have sexual relations with a caste woman, you might lose prosperity, you’ll lose money and opportunities. These are all rumours, but if you’re a *gээр* and you love two women, and one is caste and the other is not, you’d better marry the *gээр* to avoid having problems in the future.’

Indeed, problems often arise when a caste man wants to marry a noble woman. Parents usually refuse such a union on the basis that it would ‘kill their blood’, consequently emphasising how arranged marriages contribute to the preservation of the matrilineal *meen* – through which blood is inherited – by insuring that the couple is from the same caste group. To wed a cross-cousin presents the undeniable advantage of respecting the endogamous rule to marry within one’s own caste and the exogamous imperative to marry outside one’s own lineage (Diop 1985: 82; Dial 2008: 68). Caste endogamy not only limits sources of conflict (at least in theory) and guarantees that the spouse comes from an appropriate family, but it also serves as a predictor of one’s character, as Irvine eloquently describes:

Of central importance in the ideology of the caste system is the assumption that an individual's birth and genealogical background are primary determinants of his character and future behavior – genetic substance and moral nature are culturally viewed as the same thing. Persons who cannot, or will not, account for their antecedents are suspect, because low rank, witchcraft, and "evil ways" are all hereditary. When marriages are being negotiated, evidence of ancestry becomes especially important, for the moral nature of the children and the safety of the partners from dangerous or polluting contacts are at stake. (Irvine 1978: 653)

Usually, caste affiliation 'is revealed through one's surname, and people formally introduce themselves by surname. For example, names such as Mbaye, Mboup, Ngom and Samb are typical *gëwël* patronyms, whereas Diop, Fall, and Ndiaye are typical *gëer* patronyms' (Tang 2007: 52). However, the saying that a last name does not live anywhere, '*Sànt dekkul fenn*', seems to disrupt the traditional order of things; it suggests that nowadays, one's last name is no longer sufficient evidence of one's ancestry, as exemplified by the fact that hiding one's caste status before marriage can be invoked as a satisfactory reason for divorce (Dial 2008: 125).

Inversely, '*Lu la réer ci juddu feeñ ci jikko*' is a popular adage which means that what is unknown about a person will be revealed by close examination of his or her *jikko*, or character. In fact, 'emotional restraint is closely associated with high social and moral status' (Neveu Kringelbach 2007: 1), and while nobles are perceived to be restrained, cool-headed and dignified individuals, the *ñeeño* are said to be 'more publicly performative, morally lax and greedy' (Mustafa 2006: 32 n4). Caste women's sexual mores are also believed to be more relaxed than their noble counterparts, and female *gëwël* (griot) in particular were often mentioned to me as being very knowledgeable in the sexual arts – a statement potentially correlated to their participation in young women's (brief) sexual education on their wedding night (see Chapter 5).

So we are faced with two interconnected but somewhat antithetical proverbs that underscore the asserted relationship between lineage, caste membership, character and behaviour. While one's surname used to locate a person reassuringly within a broader network of kin, related to a specific social stratum which also assigned one's career path, the fact that 'a surname does not live anywhere' implies that ancestry is no longer a reliable guarantee of one's moral qualities. Actual comportment, however, is still regarded as a strong indicator of a person's character, and as I mentioned earlier, is believed to be specifically

indicative of a woman's disposition to provide the 4Cs of cooking, copulation, children and care – her share of the patriarchal bargain.

Gaaf

Although the relationship between lineage, caste and character is not specifically gendered, the emphasis placed on knowing and anticipating whether or not a woman will make a good wife prior to marriage certainly is, as an extensive corpus³⁸ of gendered-specific *gaaf* shows. *Gaaf* are a person's physical and behavioural attributes, from which it is possible to predict the sometimes positive but usually negative, even maleficent, outcomes of one's relationship with that person (Sow 2008: 173). *Gaaf* take on the value of signs, omen or predictors of one individual's fate in relation to another. They are based on the belief that one's external body is reflective of one's spiritual, metaphysical being, so much so that the shape of one's feet, one's hairline and hairiness, and one's gait, become – to the initiated – considerable factors in determining if a young woman will make a suitable partner (Badini 1979: 800 in Sow 2008: 36).

Monsieur Gueye, as well as several of my slightly older informants, provided me with clear examples of what *gaaf* are. He explained that before getting married to each of his two wives, he made sure to investigate them by paying them surprise visits, or by asking a friend to stop by their home, to see how they were behaving 'naturally'. He contends that if a woman stands up with her hands on her hips after offering you a glass of water, she will give you several children. Also, a woman whose right foot points slightly outwards will bring you and your children good luck and positive opportunities; whereas if you walk in on your fiancée while she is braiding her hair, you will die before her.

Similar to the examples provided by Monsieur Gueye, there exists – in Senegal and elsewhere in West Africa – a plethora of *gaaf* or *gaaf*-like beliefs related

³⁸ Sow (2008) provides a comprehensive list of *gaaf*, superstitions and omens.

especially to marriage, fertility and potency. They underscore how women's bodies incarnate matters of life and death – that of the individual and of the community – both in the physical and metaphysical realms, granting them an incommensurable power. It is no wonder, then, that the choice of a wife has been carefully managed and controlled via a set of regulations, observations and practices dealing with kin, castes and character: the more that can be known about a woman's background, the easier it is to calculate the risks of integrating her into one's household, as new couples usually live virilocally, with the husband's family.

Indeed, Sow (2008: 46) posits that *gaaf*, as favourable or unfavourable signs, refer not only to an individual and collective Senegalese imaginary, but are in fact inscribed in a concrete, lived reality of relationships. They are part and parcel of an ensemble of sociocultural representations that concern a couple's health, wealth, happiness and equilibrium, as much as it involves the bride and groom's families, ancestors and descendants. Marriage, then, is not simply a matter of uniting a man and a woman, but of combining and optimizing feminine and masculine life forces in the most (re)productive fashion possible.

The good husband

While a man's choice of a wife is based on her ability to care for him and his parents, a woman's choice rests on similar considerations. Whereas women show their ability to love through their provision of the 4Cs – cooking, copulation, children and care – *after* marriage, men's economic provision should come *prior* to marriage, as the reason to care and love. As such, the 'problem' Monsieur Samb expresses is not so much that 'women do not love men anymore', but that the love he talks about is not the pragmatic, filial love that leads women to marriage; it is a love that comes from a successful marriage, one in which both husband and wife fulfill their part of the domestic contract.

In her study on marriage and divorce in Dakar, Fatou Binetou Dial suggests that, contrary to Western beliefs and practices that posit romantic love as the basis of marriage, what is at stake in Senegalese unions are first and foremost considerations related to social status and financial stability, and then feelings of love (2008: 30). However, I believe it could be argued that even in marital decisions focused on status and money, love is still an important decisional factor: it is simply that the love for one's family takes precedence over the romantic, passionate love of a partner.

Dial's views are akin to European conceptions of love during the Enlightenment, when love was seen as rational and controllable because human beings were believed to be innately reasonable. On the other hand, in Romanticism, the opposite beliefs prevailed, and any love that was not an uncontrollable passion was not *love* (Beall and Sternberg 1995: 429). Likewise, Dial contends that two types of love coexist in Senegal – and throughout the African continent (Vaughan 2011: 12-13): *un amour collégien*, a passionate love, the prerogative of young people who do not place a high value on economic and class status; and *un amour raisonné*, a reasoned (and reasonable) feeling based on pragmatic evaluation (2008: 30). As I have discovered, in Dakar, talks of love and marriage often oscillate between these two registers, one justifying and in reality even engendering the other.

On the streets, in the medias and during the interviews El Hadj and I conducted, Senegalese women tended to talk about love in contradictory ways. On one hand, they said that *aimer par intérêt*, loving out of (monetary) interest, was incompatible with 'real' love, which is about sharing a sentimental bond, making plans for the future, and being emotionally and physically present for one another, ideally in an exclusive and abstinent way (van Eerdewijk 2006: 45-46, 57). On the other hand,

[t]he ideal boyfriend also expresses his genuine love by literally taking care of her: by giving presents and gifts, and by giving money. The vast

majority of the girls receive money and presents from their boyfriend(s). The ideal is that he loves her so much, that the boyfriend wants to give everything he has to her. Also, he has to give her everything to please her and make her love him. In contrast to the incompatibility of love and material interests in the ideal notion of love, a boyfriend who gives presents and money is conceived by girls as desirable. It is important here that the girl does not ask for gifts, but that the boyfriend gives it of his own accord. (van Eerdewijk 2006: 47)

As a matter of fact, a man's capacity to provide for a family and to work hard in order to do so are qualities that women find very attractive (Thomas and Cole 2009: 24) because they show how much a man cares, how much he loves his wife and family. In the case of Senegal, Dial explains how society recognises and legitimises men's sentiments of love and their expression, usually through gifts; while women's love has to be kept secret and never exteriorised, making her a recipient of the men's gifts and affection (2008: 82). As such, we have to think of 'material provision and emotional attachment as mutually constitutive' (Thomas and Cole 2009: 20–21) – and also constitutive of specify gender roles and hierarchies – rather than as opposed concepts.

This co-constitution of affect and exchange holds true beyond Senegal. Similar patterns have been described in Madagascar, where *fitiavina* (love) is 'part of long-standing cultural practices that explicitly treat affect and exchange as mutually constitutive and distributed across social networks' (Cole 2009: 113). Likewise, in his study of changing sexuality patterns in South Africa, Mark Hunter's female informants mentioned that if 'money can't buy love', 'gifts can foster love, and these gifts can sometimes be consumer items' (Hunter 2009: 147). In Nigeria, married men involved in adulterous affairs with younger women assert their masculinity by taking care of both their wife and lovers:

It's not only about the sex. I like to buy them things, take them nice places, give them good meals, and make them feel they are being taken care of. I like the feeling of satisfaction that comes taking care of women, providing for them." Masculinity proven by provisioning a girlfriend parallels the way men talk about taking care of their wives and families.

It foregrounds the connections between masculinity and money and between gender and economics more generally. (Smith 2009: 170)

In their ethnographic research with Senegalese families in Senegal and in France, Fainzang and Journet (1988: 137) contend that men's continuous offering of gifts (money, *boubous* [dresses], and jewellery given spontaneously, without being part of a ritual or ceremony) is considered the legitimate and preferred expression of love and affectivity. Bearing in mind that, in Senegal, 'emotional restraint is closely associated with high social and moral status' (Neveu Kringelbach 2007: 1), we have to consider gifts and money as the favoured and most socially acceptable way to express one's love, and the very criteria by which one's affection is measured.

Although Monsieur Samb clearly states that *women* do not love men anymore, what is also interesting in his reflections – which resonate with most if not all of my informants – is that women's financial concerns are actually extended to their families who, knowing that a husband's wealth will be redistributed in their family via their daughter – inquire about a man's work. As such, a woman's choice of partner is strongly dependent on her love and affection for her family and her capacity to care for her parents and kin more generally.

And yet, despite the familial component central to the interconnection between money and love in the Senegalese sexual imaginary, it is only young women who are vilified. This condemnation is exemplified in the August-September 2010 issue of *Dakar Life*, a lifestyle magazine published in Dakar. That particular edition was themed around the problem of *mariages éclairs*, short-lived unions followed by divorce, which are also called 'Kleenex marriages' in reference to the disposable quality of the tissues. Page after page, the different articles – mostly excerpts from journalistic interviews – present women as intrinsically materialistic, an opinion also expressed in the survey that opened the edition. When asked 'What factors explain *mariages éclairs*?', 68.3% of the 710

respondents answered something along the lines of ‘women today are too materialistic’, ‘it’s a *mariage par intérêt*’ (marriage based on money/interest/gain), or that it is a ‘*mariage contrat*’, a loveless, contract-based union (Nzale 2010).³⁹

The remainder of the magazine – like many other popular media productions in Dakar – portrays women as demanding, hard-to-please victims of fashion and new trends, people who love money and commodities more than the men who provide them. What is left out from this unilateral description of Dakarois lifestyle, however, is masculine consumption, and the ways that men, too, spend considerable sums on themselves. Though less ostentatious, men’s consumption is by no means less significant. Generally speaking, men give as much importance and consideration to their appearance as women do, but their spending is less obvious because they spend on sport activities to sculpt their body, or on perfume and clothes that are more subdued than women’s accessories.

As a matter of fact, the main difference between the two types of consumption, I believe, is that female consumption is more visible. Hair extensions, make-up, jewellery and sexy clothes, among other things, participate in a gendered, simultaneously individualised and social process of creating and perpetuating beauty through which Senegalese women affirm and confirm their femininity, enhance their sexual availability, and showcase their essential (re)productive social role. Indeed, women’s display of wealth should not be read as a sign of thoughtless, conspicuous consumption, but as a form of interpretive labour in

³⁹ Of the selection of interviews, only one man admitted to marrying his rich, Paris-based cousin as a way to fill his pockets:

I had little jobs here and there... Since I couldn’t get by, I thought of getting married with my cousin Penda. It was a way to fare better. I knew it would work, my uncle is conservative and had always suggested that I marry Penda, as it is done in our tradition. When I talked to him about it, he readily agreed, and Penda didn’t object. That’s how our relationship began. She became my fiancée, we phoned each other a few times, and a month later, our wedding was celebrated even if she was still in Paris. (Diop 2010: 12)

which women showcase their men's success and ability to provide for them: they are responsible for performing their men's expressions of love. In fact, through this display women not only communicate and enhance their husbands' provision, they also create prestige and wealth of their own. For example, the Wolof word *rafet*, which means beautiful, refers to a person physical appearance, good behaviour and character (Morales-Libove 2005: 182; Mustafa 1997), and to make oneself *rafet* through *sañse*, dressing well, shows self-respect as much as consideration for others. As such, material wealth is a 'medium for a relational life' (Guyer 2004: 70), meaning that wealth in things and money can be used to acquire status:

Indeed, material wealth is essential to be able to – or to allow others to – sustain kin; answer requests for money; accommodate and sustain dependants in one's house [...]; ostentatiously display expensive goods and clothing (*sañse*); and make gifts to others at family ceremonies, among other things. These practices show prosperity, generosity and 'wealth in people' (Guyer 1993), including the strength of one's networks (Heath 1992; Buggenhagen 2012). (Rodriguez 2015: 348)

In that light, it makes sense that women see their material and monetary demands as legitimate, since their role in marriage is framed in terms of work – the 4Cs. While the 'copulation' is technically reserved to the husband,⁴⁰ the cooking, children and overall care aspects of their work involve the extended family. Significantly, the display and redistribution of wealth contributes to the creation of a social, relational wealth that showcases both men's and women's ability to love one another 'properly'. Indeed, the fact that the extent of a boyfriend or husband's emotional investment should be demonstrated through gifts correlates with the idea that wealth needs to be shared, not kept (Buggenhagen 2012). It is also amplified by the fact that a man's role and duty in marriage is always presented, socially and religiously, as that of provider and breadwinner – men's side of the patriarchal bargain – since according to the

⁴⁰ Foley and Dramé (2013) and Hannaford and Foley (2015) discuss how married women also engage in *mbaraan*.

Quran and local sayings, the husband is responsible for housing, clothing and feeding his wife/wives and children.

Competing loves

So if marriage is supposed to be based on an intertwining of material provision and filial considerations, why is it that ‘women do not love men anymore’? I believe our interview with Ndeye Fatou – the educated, eloquent, married mother of two young girls who earlier compared love to a flower – is illustrative of the complexities and contradictions inherent to contemporary marriage arrangements in Dakar. Indeed, Ndeye Fatou’s cryptic interview below reasserts the preeminence of one’s family and community of kin over individual choice.

When asked her opinion about the caste system that prevails in several Senegalese ethnic groups, Ndeye Fatou assured us that she ‘personally believes that all human beings are born equal’. A second later, however, she added that since she lives in a society ‘that has its own specific realities’, and that she herself is a *gээр*, a noble woman, she would not accept her children marrying someone of an inferior caste. She then explained that ‘Anyways, nowadays we are not bound by this tradition anymore. So many people get married with a caste person. This superstition tends to disappear.’ ‘So what is the first thing parents have to consider when a man comes to ask their daughter’s hand in marriage?’, El Hadj asked. Ndeye Fatou looked irritated: ‘Who I marry is not my parents’ decision! Since I am the one concerned, before introducing someone to my parents, I talk with him, I try to get to know him. And depending on what he shows me, on how he behaves, that’s when I decide to present him to my parents, or to not get more serious, to not take things to another level.’ Sensing the incongruence in our interviewee’s answers, El Hadj prompted Ndeye Fatou to explain herself further, wondering what she would do if her child told her she was in love with a man from a caste. Would she let her get married? ‘We live in a phallocratic society’, she responded. ‘Who my children get married to is not my

call. Traditionally, it's the father who gives away his child. It's true that he should consult me first, but he has the last word.'

The disjunctions in this excerpt from our interview with Ndeye Fatou highlight the complex nature of marital choices in Dakar. One cannot marry whoever one wants. In dismissing her noble daughters' potential relationships with men from a caste group, she reveals that love rarely transcends familial and social structures, and is consequently not a sufficient basis for marriage on its own. Her emphasis on selecting whom she would introduce to her parents, however, locates her in the realm of modernity, and foregrounds young people's dating practices and increasing demands for autonomy in choosing a conjugal partner – a choice that is nevertheless constrained by the father. What's more, by expressing her belief in equality and disregarding the caste system as an ancient tradition, Ndeye Fatou constructs herself as a proper Muslim woman. Like so many other Dakarais men and women I have met, Ndeye Fatou navigates the constrictions, restrictions and contradictions she faces when it comes to tying the knot by acknowledging her religious beliefs, her attachment to traditional and family values, and her autonomy, all at once. At the same time, these overlapping acknowledgements produce those very contradictions, and switching between them as necessary allows to take advantage of the indeterminacy they represent when they're brought together and to be able to strategically evade one's position.

As exemplified by the *Dakar Life* magazine, the vilifying discourse on 'materialistic women' is used by men as a way to minimise their struggles in coming to terms with the patriarchal bargain they have created and have trouble upholding. Several of my male informants appear to see their marriages as zero-sum equations, where if the woman gains, the man consequently loses. Women's demands are thus posited as excessive because they highlight men's roles as breadwinners and *böröm kerga*, heads of household, but mostly because

they emphasise men's inability to fulfill that role. Men's blaming rhetoric about greedy materialistic women is thus not linked to a change in women's attitude towards marriage *per se*; it is rooted in their difficulty to fulfilling their side of the bargain.

The paradox between what is perceived as feminine greed versus masculine roles and responsibilities parallels the negative discourse exposed by Buggenhagen (2012) and Moya (2015), among others, regarding lifecycle ceremonial exchanges in Senegal. Birth and marriage ceremonies, in particular, are presented in male and religious discourse as expensive, wasteful affairs in which women spend considerable amounts of money not only to dress up in order to attend those events, but also to take part in the ceremonial exchange practices that lie at their core, the *ndawtal*. To summarise and simplify an otherwise complex system of gift-giving, women are expected to give back at least twice⁴¹ the amount of cash and cloth they have received in a previous ceremony.

Buggenhagen argues that much like *sañse* [dressing well] described above, far from simply being extravagant consumption practices, lifecycle ceremonial exchanges of money and cloth embed women in social and kinship networks and help them *create* value both in the financial and moral sense of the term, rather than dissipating it:

Upon entering into marriage, women developed their opportunities to publicly demonstrate and constitute their value through gift exchanges during family ceremonies and feasts. During their married lives, women established their economic power and lineage identity through the distribution and recapturing of cloth wealth during these events (2012: 206).

⁴¹ Moya explains that giving back 'twice' as much is based on Wolof conceptions of reciprocity, in which the initial gift is 'given back' and the giver honoured (*teral*) for it with an identical one (2015: 159, n5).

Although religious and political leaders, men and even women themselves condemn ceremonial gift-giving as an immoral and ostentatious practice that contradicts Muslim principles of restraint and temperance – and everyone agrees that in the long run, such expenses are detrimental on both personal and a community levels – they nevertheless endure. Moya suggests that the problem these ceremonies represent is resolved through a discursive trope: ‘Condemnation of ceremonies represents the way contradiction is resolved in the realm of moral discourse and justification. My interlocutors condemn ceremonies when they have to justify them’ (2015: 166).

In a similar process of justification/condemnation, when it comes to marriage, women’s financial demands are framed as a form of conspicuous consumption that goes against both romanticised versions of the past in which love prevailed, and against Islam’s precepts. This discursive response is a way to circumvent the fact that men have more and more difficulty complying with their religious and patriarchal duties to provide food, shelter and clothing for their wife (or wives) and children, and their uneasiness with women’s increased economic power and personal independence – since women are increasingly present in the public work sphere. Men’s authority is contested, and as Perry notes in the case of rural Senegalese men,

[their] assertions of power nonetheless belie the instability of their status. Patriarchy is “a matter of inimical opinion and interest and therefore open to contestation” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 24). Men must verbally promote their ideal vision of male authority precisely because this vision is open to negotiation [...]. (Perry 2005: 208)

It thus follows that men resort to a discourse about romantic love to hide their own shortcomings and promote their authority by undermining women’s respect of their side of the domestic contract and their demands that men do the same. As such, women’s monetary demands may be framed as a form of interpretive labour through which they disrupt the status quo, but also as a way to highlight the importance of what they bring to their marriages.

Conclusion

Monsieur Samb's statement that 'women do not love men anymore' points to how '[t]he discrepancy between changes in gender and sexuality on one hand, and the continuation of patriarchal ideologies on the other hand[,] invokes strong moral reactions' (Spronk 2012: 61). Indeed, condemnation of women's financial expectations within relationships aim to hide the effects of the ongoing economic crisis on men's capacity to live up to the standards and roles they had set for themselves in the patriarchal bargain that underlies the Senegalese sexual imaginary.

Moustapha Tamba and Ibou Sané (1999: 109) contend that in Dakar, the choice of partner does not only obey the 'laws of love', but is based on a concordance of social, cultural, economic and geographical interests between spouses. Their sociological survey, although rigorous, does not actually engage with love as an analytical concept, and fails to see that behind the structural interests that may bring a couple together, different forms of love are at play. Indeed, for Senegalese to invoke love as the basis for marriage conveys an expression of sentiment, but also concerns about status, money, age, and family relations (van Eerdewijk 2006: 53). As such, filial love can grow into romantic love, when the proper conditions are met, that is, when both men and women respect their domestic obligations and succeed in their mutual provisioning of care. In this context, 'love' – filial and companionate – rests 'on a complex blend of the material and the ideal, compunction and choice' (Thomas and Cole 2009: 24).

The commingling of romantic love and money in relationships in Africa has been the recent focus of much attention. For example, *Love in Africa* (2009) has made a great effort to complicate the transactional sex framework through which African intimate relationships are academically scrutinised, in order to show how money and love have always been entangled – as I have also illustrated for the Senegalese context. I have taken this correlation further by

exposing how multiple forms of love can be integrated within this framework, for even if the sexual, embodied element of ‘transactional sex’ happens between two individuals, its material components involves a much broader network of kin.

In the Senegalese sexual imaginary, *mbaraan* and courtship often go hand in hand, and while women assess whether a man would be able to fulfill his role of provider and breadwinner through their financial demands, it would be reductive to assume that men are simply looking for sex. The transactional sex literature fails to problematise what men want – what I have termed the 4Cs of cooking, copulation, children and care – and seems only to concentrate on what women expect from their relationships: throughout the African continent, women are said to be longing for ostentatious material objects such as houses, travels, cars, clothes, cell phones, phone credit and cash (Biaya 2001; Nyamnjoh 2005; Reece 2015). However, the display of these objects is also what showcases a husband’s wealth, success and prestige and creates wealth in people and relationships. As such, I suggest that rather than being seen as a sign that ‘women do not love men anymore’, women’s financial expectations should be seen as an integral part of the domestic, patriarchal contract they have to work within – a bargain that insures their economic wellbeing – and as an example of the interpretive labour they perform to enhance and uphold their husband’s social status.

Chapter 4.

'You have a *jinne* lover' :

maraboutage and wellbeing

We had been talking for almost an hour and a half when the female diviner Awa Konté grabbed what used to be a mustard jar from under her desk. I could see it was filled with a beige powder, similar to the other jars filled with fine, loose grains and herbs displayed on the high shelf behind her. Holding a small, transparent plastic bag in her left hand, she scooped a few spoonfuls of the powdered product into it, and then proceeded to pour in a small quantity of liquid – which I later found out was simply tap water – from a purple, plastic wine glass. She quickly twisted the bag on itself so the mixture would not come out and handed it to me, telling me to cup it with my two hands. The four of us – Awa the *gisaanekat*⁴² (clairvoyant), her husband and 'manager', El Hadj (my assistant and translator), and myself – were silent for a brief moment. All eyes were on me, and I felt uncomfortable, not knowing what to expect.

'What do you feel?' Awa asked.

'Well, it's warm in my hands,' I replied, as I could feel the heat. 'It's getting really warm, actually.'

'The longer you hold it the warmer it will get,' the clairvoyant confirmed.

Surprised, I asked if it was going to get much warmer than it already was. Awa quickly responded that it would: 'There could even be smoke,' she warned.

⁴² From the Wolof verb *gisaane*, fortune-telling, itself derived from the verb *gis*, to see. A diviner is also referred to as a *seetkat*, from the verb *seet*, to look (Diouf 2003: 147, 308).

Whispering in my ear, El Hadj asked furtively if it was really as warm as I said it was, or if I was just being a bit dramatic. ‘It is warm,’ I whispered. ‘It’s not boiling, but it’s getting really hot.’ Awa’s husband then instructed me to give the small parcel back to the diviner so she could tell me what she saw.



Figure 4. Awa Konté at work

My palms were sweaty and warm, as was the room around me. We had been sitting in Awa Konté’s dark, windowless, fan-less and tiny office. I had contacted Awa Konté, one of Senegal’s few female *marabout* – a charismatic individual who possesses a certain intellectual and practical religious, esoteric, and/or magical knowledge (Sow 2009: 76), also called *seriñ* – after seeing her on a TV show. She had agreed to receive El Hadj and I and to answer our questions. At the end of our interview, without my asking for it, she had decided to display her talent and show me how she works. I gave her the little pouch back and tried to dry my hands on my trousers. She held it between her fingers, gently kneading it as she closed her eyes, concentrating: ‘*Par exemple, com moom mi, amul liggéey...*’, she began.

I did not understand the rest of the sentence, but I immediately felt somewhat relieved: in a mix of French and Wolof, Awa had just said I had not been *maraboutée* [bewitched], which El Hadj confirmed: ‘She says you don’t have any bad spells cast on you...’

‘*Am na cat...*,’ Awa continued.

‘... but that you have a *mauvais oeil* [evil eye] upon you.’ El Hadj translated.

Awa repeated: ‘*Am na cat, am na faru jinne.*’

‘And also, that you have a *jinne* lover.’

Over my different trips to Senegal, and especially during fieldwork, I had often heard stories about *jinnes*. *Jinnes* are good or evil spirits resembling humans, who live in a parallel, invisible world – dwelling ‘everywhere upon earth and in the seas’ (Mommersteeg 1988: 507) – and who sometimes decide to make a foray into human territory. Amber Gemmeke explains that ‘The Arabic term *jinn* refers to the spirits described in the Qur’an in many suras, amongst others in the famous *Surat al-Jinn* (72). The *jinn* described in the Qur’an is created out of fire and forms part of the same cosmic order as God, angels, and saints’ (2008: 173), thus making it part and parcel of the Muslim belief system. Often translated as *diable* in French, a *jinne* isn’t necessarily evil, as the English equivalent – devil – would suggest (Gemmeke 2008: 87n70, 2012: 84 n9). However, as I was to learn, ‘having a *jinne* lover’ could prove problematic if he or she interfered in human life.

El Hadj carried on translating what the *marabout* read from the warm pouch: ‘She says you have a *jinne*. That there are people who love you, but when they

come, they can't stay, they leave. You can't stay with a man for very long, maybe you argue, or it just doesn't work out.'

'But how do you know that? How do you feel it?' I questioned the clairvoyant.

'*C'est ma vision*. That's what I see,' she replied simply, in French, in a tone that prevented any contestation.

Getting slightly worried, I continued: 'But is it a good or a bad *jinne*?'

She remained very evasive in the answer El Hadj translated: 'Everything she sees, she is the only one here to see it. Nobody else sees it. She can't explain why. It's her gift.'

'But what does having a *jinne* mean?' I asked again, as a mild anxiety crept over me.

'She says it prevents you from finding a husband. And that these days you lose your temper. That's all because of the *jinne*. It's a male *jinne*, he loves you and he feels jealous.'

As Awa continued a more detailed diagnosis in Wolof, I wondered how much of it I actually believed. Despite the room's simple furnishings – a desk, two chairs and a shelf – it made quite an impression on me. A large red *carré magique* ('magic square', or numerical square)⁴³ – a square piece of fabric covered in Arabic scriptures – hung from the shelf on the back wall, as did an oversized picture of a famous Muslim religious leader. On the red fabric, an array of little *gris-gris* had been sown: the dark leather pockets – which contained carefully packaged

⁴³ See Mommersteeg (1988) for a detailed account of amulet production and a thorough description of the general rules and beliefs underlying Islamic esoteric practices.

herbs, paper, roots, animal hair, etc. – were about one square inch in size and less than half an inch thick. Each had ‘esoteric power attached to it to the benefit or harm of a person’ (Gemmeke 2008: 7n2). On Awa’s desk, an impressive three-legged sculpture made of worn-out zebu horns tied up with red cloth contrasted with the shiny, white-tiled walls. Beside an empty calabash stood a red mirror, the frame of which was covered with cowry shells. In front of the female *marabout* lay a large, handwoven tray on which more cowry shells and a small horn had been thrown. Seated behind her desk, Awa Konté herself appeared to be a small woman, but she exuded an air of undeniable confidence. I wondered how much of her ‘gift’ was true, and how much was just a money-making scheme. Since the *marabout* had volunteered this mini *séance* herself, I had not asked her any specific question before she started analysing the powder mixture. Nevertheless, her reading seemed spot on: I was indeed single and interested in meeting someone. Could having a jealous *jinne* really be the explanation of my previous failed relationships? Could she help me fix this problem, and if so, how?

This chapter explores *maraboutage* as an integral part of the Senegalese sexual imaginary, and its perception as a legitimate tool to create, manage and protect conjugal relationships. I suggest that the practice of *maraboutage* is empowering for its users, although its very existence is also a source of anxiety. Inspired by Harry West – who contends that in Mueda (Mozambique), ‘sorcery discourse constituted a tangible force in the world, inverting (kupilikula) the invisible force it simultaneously attested to’ (2007: 58) – I focus on how the material components of *maraboutage* make tangible, concrete, and real otherwise mystical, intangible realities. In doing so, I demonstrate that the result of the *maraboutage* is in fact secondary to its actual execution. Magico-spiritual practices help their users perform the emotional and corporeal work of managing their own feelings of anxiety, fear, and jealousy, in an environment where keeping up with social expectations is vitally important. This interpretive labour is enacted on three different, but not mutually exclusive, registers: in

Dakar, when it comes to love, *maraboutage* is about attacking rivals, ‘attaching’⁴⁴ one’s love, and simultaneously protecting oneself.

Maraboutage

In French, the word *maraboutage* is used to describe the magical intervention a marabout performs through incantations, prayers, knots, or other esoteric and mystic procedures, in order to satisfy multiple and varied demands either for oneself or on behalf of another individual (Sow 2013: 32). Because it implies exercising a secret influence on someone else’s life, *maraboutage* has a somewhat negative connotation, although it can also bring positive outcomes. Discussions regarding *maraboutage*, and whether it is good or bad, *halal* (acceptable) or *haram* (forbidden), are omnipresent in Senegal’s media, and a favourite if controversial topic among Senegalese (Gemmeke 2008: 13; Foley 2010: 109).

A practitioner of *maraboutage* is called a marabout. The term originated in the XVIIth century from French and Portuguese translations of the Arabic *murābiṭ*, or holy man (Oxford Dictionaries 2016). Traditionally, to be considered a marabout involved reading and writing Arabic and having a deep knowledge of the Quran, which more or less circumscribed the role to men. Indeed, ‘fueled [sic] by the assumption that beyond concerns related to marriage and household duties women need only learn a few Qur’anic verses for their prayers’ (Bop 2005: 1110), Senegalese women were not – and still aren’t – as educated or trained in Islamic knowledge as men could be.

Nowadays, ‘marabout’ is an honorific title that still connotes ‘piety, wisdom and modesty’ (Gemmeke 2008: 27), but it is no longer strictly reserved for Muslim male religious pundits. It applies to a variety of *borom xam-xam*, possessors of knowledge. As an all-encompassing term which, in contemporary Senegal,

⁴⁴ From the Wolof *takk*, which connotes marriage.

concurrently refers to a Muslim brotherhood leader, a Quran teacher, a traditional healer, a witch doctor, a soothsayer, a magician, and so on – roles usually held by men – it is now also used in reference to women like Awa Kōnté or the handful of Dakarois marabout women practicing in Dakar. The title pertains to ‘someone who can’, a *borom mën mën* – that is, any individual who combines the ability to assemble and fabricate amulets, charms and potions with the power to heal, and to intercede and mediate between God (and other occult forces) and human beings (Sow 2009: 71). When someone mentions paying a visit to the marabout, the context and reasons given for the consultation may help to identify which type of marabout will be or has been seen, but not always: most marabouts, Gemmeke (2008) illustrates, combine different types of knowledge in their practice, for example by mixing cowry shell divination and the use of Quran verses and traditional herbal medicine.

Cheikh, a male marabout who had been recommended to me by my housekeeper Rokhaya, did not see any contradiction in resorting to multiple techniques. ‘In the Quran, it is clear that it is God who created rocks, mountains, and trees... In the Quran, God talks of plants, so it is from His creations that we make syrups and powders, it is His roots that we mix with holy water. So it is not *fétichisme* (fetishism) or sorcery, it all comes from God,’ he asserted. Indeed,

Islamic esoteric knowledge as practiced in Senegal (and the whole of West Africa) include [*sic*] amulet and potion making with Qur’anic texts and with Arabic geomancy, astrology and numerology, as well as dream interpretation, divination and prayer sessions, and advice on alms-giving. Amulets, mostly used for protection and success, are made of Qur’anic verses; quadrants (*turabu* or *khatim*) are written on paper, sewn in leather and worn on the body or placed there [*sic*] where they should protect. Potions are mostly used for healing, the granting of a wish, or the elimination of an enemy. They are made of the ink of Qur’anic verses washed of [*sic*] a wooden slate. The verses then are incorporated by drinking or ‘penetrated in the skin’ by washing. (Gemmeke 2008: 107)

Cheikh's claim that his *maraboutage* is religiously informed, in opposition to that performed by charlatans and sorcerers, points to the fact that *maraboutage* is a polysemic term, and the various practices it encompasses blurs the boundaries between African animist religions, Islam, witchcraft and traditional healing. Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders discuss such confusing confluences of different occult practices under a single overarching term in the introduction to their edited volume *Magical interpretations, material realities: modernity, witchcraft, and the occult in postcolonial Africa* (2004). The term 'witchcraft', they contend, is most often used interchangeably with – or in reference to – notions like 'the occult', 'magic', 'enchantment', and 'sorcery', while it makes use of 'medicines', 'tools', and 'rituals'. Furthermore, problems of translation, tone and historicity also contribute to the ambiguity of the term. For example, in French, 'witchcraft' translates as *sorcellerie* – a word that, in part due to its similarity with the English word 'sorcery' and to a colonial view of African beliefs as backwards, 'often conjure[s] only negative images and associations in the western mind' (Moore and Sanders 2004: 4); whereas local understandings point to a much more ambiguous and contextual evaluation of what occult forces imply, mean and actually do in people's lives. In Senegal, *maraboutage* is regarded with similar ambivalence, as both a positive and negative force that has the power to play a significant role in a person's life course: 'the same techniques may be moral and approved in one context but immoral and outlawed in another' (Kriger 1947: 12 in Moore and Sanders 2004: 4). It is possible that the moral elusiveness of *maraboutage* rests on a differentiation between being its subject or object, between being controlled or being in control. As I will describe below, *maraboutage* is a legitimate way for a young single woman to find a husband, especially when she uses potions and amulets to make herself more attractive or receptive to the romantic attention of others. However, if she tries to *marabout* (to charm) a specific individual through potions or incantations that he might consume unknowingly, the morality of her actions can be contested. This distinction is exemplified by the Wolof term used to describe *maraboutage*, the

word *liggéey*, which translates literally as ‘work’. One of few academics working extensively on Senegalese occult practices, Ibrahima Sow (2013: 32) explains that generally speaking, this ‘work’ is the work done on someone, sometimes the client him or herself, and sometimes a third party whose ability to act mindfully is altered in consequence.

The ambiguous nature and effects of *maraboutage* emerge in Ellen Foley’s work on the contemporary Senegalese healthcare system, where *maraboutage* is discussed as a socially appropriate strategy to achieve wellbeing. Foley shows how Islamisation, French colonisation and diverse local ethnomedical traditions ‘have produced a therapeutically rich and diverse setting in which to pursue good health’ (2010: 101). She further contends that people recognise easily which ailments call for biomedical treatment (*garab u tubaab*) and which are more likely to be cured with *garab u Wolof* (Wolof medicine; 2010: 98), and that most people have recourse to multiple therapies, at times simultaneously. This strategy is called *lambatu*, that is, ‘trying everything possible and going back and forth between a variety of treatments and practitioners’ (2010: 113; see also Fassin 1992). Significantly, for Senegalese Muslims, the quest for spiritual, physical and material wellbeing is inscribed in a religious frame of reference that has come to suffuse traditional healing techniques in such an extensive way that Muslim prayers and mystical knowledge are now part of – and almost indistinguishable from – *garab u Wolof* (Foley 2010: 109-111). T.K. Biaya suggests that ‘no undertaking in Senegal is begun without resort to talismans, spells, and rituals, in addition to a visit to the church or the marabout’; and as a result, he claims that no matter what percentage of Senegalese identify as Muslim or Christian, 100% are also animists (2000: 711).

Construing *maraboutage* as an integral part of Islamic and traditional healing frameworks of wellbeing that inform one another allows for a better understanding of its significance and role in people’s lives. Sow (2008, 2009,

2013) analyses the practice as a cathartic way for individuals to manage the uncertainty and anxiety triggered by various life events: unemployment, illness, divorce, celibacy, infertility, poverty, and so on. Consulting a marabout, he argues, amounts to a cry for help, a recognition of one's own fragility and vulnerability to which the *seriñ* can oppose comforting answers and measures. The marabout symbolically takes the drama out of his client's hands by providing a safe space to exteriorise anxiety and fear, while he concretely suggests ways to put things right – thus restoring, even if only momentarily, a sense of wellbeing. *Maraboutage*, then, is the opposite of Robin Horton's (1970) description of witchcraft as a "closed" system, incapable of engaging meaningfully with people's social worlds' (in Moore and Sanders 2004: 5). Echoing Edward Evans-Pritchard's (1937) famous description of Azande witchcraft, *maraboutage* might be understood as an organised, rational system of thought that 'explained the inexplicable' and 'dealt with the Big Questions in life' (Moore and Sanders 2004: 6). However, while Evans-Pritchard considered that Azande witchcraft 'offered explanations for misfortunes, explanations that addressed the 'why' more than the 'how' questions' (Moore and Sanders 2004: 6), *maraboutage* concentrates on the 'how' more than on the 'why'. In Senegal, the Muslim conception of submission and surrender to God anchors the belief in *ndogalu yàlla*, fate and predestination. While one's life events – such as marriage(s), the birth of children, illnesses, accidents, and so on – are not fixed, they are nonetheless inscribed in a belief in what Sow calls *destin-fatalité*, destiny-fatality (2009: 390-391). Resorting to *maraboutage*, divination, and general occult practices is, in other words, a way to figure out and accomplish one's path in life, one's destiny.

Although most Senegalese take for granted that everyone, male or female, more or less believes in the beneficial, protective, therapeutic and sometimes destructive properties of *gris-gris* (Cissokho 2005: 5), and that they will resort to *maraboutage* at some point in time, it was difficult to get people talking about their experiences and the reasons that took them to the *seriñ*. This secrecy was

especially prevalent when it concerned very personal matters, such as relationships. On the one hand, women would not hesitate to tell me that they had paid a visit to the marabout at the end of the school year to make sure their children pass their exams – it is, after all, the job of a mother to help her children succeed in any way she can. On the other hand, neither men nor women ever openly confessed that they had also asked for help in finding a partner, or in getting rid of a co-wife, a trouble-making mother-in-law, or an embarrassing mistress. I often sensed that no matter how I framed my questions, my informants would talk about *maraboutage* in general terms, telling stories of what happened to a distant acquaintance when so-and-so had allegedly cast a spell on them. Individuals portrayed themselves as victims of *maraboutage*, never as its perpetrators – a situation also encountered by West in Mueda (2007: 68).

I believe the sense of secrecy that surrounds *maraboutage* is in fact an integral part of the emotional work at play in its usage: to take recourse to invisible forces implies finding a fine balance between influencing others – in a positive or a negative way – while protecting oneself. To openly disclose what kind of *liggéey* you are interested in would be to expose yourself even more than you already have: if everyone does it, everyone is also at risk of being the victim of it. The question is, then, if one is content to simply use protection against intangible powers, or if one should also actively participate in – or at least influence – the magico-religious rearrangement of life.

That people were reluctant to talk openly about their own experiences with marabouts and their use of mystical forces was methodologically challenging; but this lack of first-hand accounts, the gossipy aspect of the few conversations I did have, and even the related newspaper and magazine articles I collected actually drew out a significant conclusion: *maraboutage* is real, it does things – as the Manchester School's anthropologists pointed out regarding witchcraft in

the 1950s and 1960s (Moore and Sanders 2004: 7) – and one shouldn't underestimate its power. I was reminded of this social productivity in a deeply emotionally unsettling way one day when Kira the seduction coach took me to meet Famara, her marabout.

Instead of interviewing clients of marabouts, I decided to question marabouts themselves. In addition to meeting with Awa Konté, I was introduced to Cheikh by my housekeeper Rokhaya, and to Famara by Kira. Because of several stories I had heard and read about charlatans who drugged and abused their female clients, I did not conduct either of these interviews alone. But in spite of the precautions I took, my encounter with Famara – in the depths of Sine Saloum, a three-hour drive from Dakar – left me utterly distraught. With him, the interviewer-interviewee roles were subtly reversed, as he eluded my questions by discussing complicated metaphysical notions, and then proceeded to question me in a very inquisitive, personal manner. I felt completely overtaken and powerless, emotionally naked. Famara looked perfectly in control of himself, of his thoughts and of the surrounding environment – even the birds stopped singing when he ordered them to. His piercing eyes seemed to read into my heart and soul, and his powerful physical and spiritual presence destabilised me to the point that I spent the entire drive home curled up on the back seat of the car, sobbing silently. Once back in Dakar, it took me two days to recover from this unpleasant experience, and I spent the whole time alternately crying or sleeping. To this day, I still haven't been able to listen to or to transcribe the recording of our two-hour 'session'. I had not asked Famara for a consultation, but through the disconcerting experience of meeting and talking with him, I was able to understand why people spoke so highly of him: his self-confidence and charisma, toned down by a simulated nonchalance, made him both powerful and trustworthy, someone you can confide in and rely on. And beyond the religious and the magical knowledge every marabout must deploy, his clients' faith in him

and his ability to help them protect themselves, achieve their goals and find happiness is ultimately what *maraboutage* is all about.

Shortage of husbands

'Shortage of husbands in Senegal: Women in despair' (Dieye 2015). The headline of this online news article read like that of a tabloid. Using words like 'desperation', 'depressive state', 'catastrophe', and 'nightmare', it described Senegalese women 'whose sleep is haunted by the lack of suitable marital partners'. Muslim or Christian, housekeepers, lawyers, students, bankers, journalists, fish vendors or restaurant owners: according to the author, herself a woman, all unmarried Senegalese women suffered from this 'husband deficiency', which worried them profoundly and deeply concerned their families. And her views were widely held. The availability of husbands is such a common source of anxiety that during the 2012 election campaign – which he won – Macky Sall promised that if elected, he would find unmarried women husbands: 'After I access the highest office, men will have work and as a result, young people will be able to get married', he pledged (Rewmi 2012). Of course, what he actually promised was to reduce official unemployment rates – which, as discussed in Chapter 3, have soared since the 1980s, and brought about an economic crisis and delays in marriage (Dial 2008) – but he situated the promise in direct reference to the Senegalese sexual imaginary in which marriage is so central. The presidential candidate's reasoning was that if more young eligible bachelors entered the workforce – especially the formal, salaried sector – they would be able to make and save enough money to get married. His electoral strategy, then, was to appeal to the preoccupations of young men and to simultaneously engage young women's hopes and ideals.

Although the 'husband shortage' article makes use of a dramatic and sensationalistic tone, and although it is virtually impossible to evaluate whether Macky Sall has delivered on his pledge, both the article and the electoral promise

nonetheless depict a reality most Senegalese women must face: social pressure to get married and its increasing impossibility. Indeed, marriage in Senegal is so important that most people believe that the only way for a woman to achieve self-fulfilment and self-realisation is through marriage and procreation. No matter how she makes it happen, the important thing is for her to unite with a man in the sanctified bonds of marriage (Antoine 2006: 23 n17). Nuptial social pressures are not as marked for men, who generally enjoy much more freedom and independence than women. Moreover, although a prolonged bachelorhood may raise questions about a man's virility (Gueye 2010: 73), men are rarely expected to get married before their thirties, while women should tie the knot in their early twenties.

Marriage is the only recognised form of union in which to build a family. Cohabitation out of wedlock is extremely rare in Senegal, even in Dakar, because of the bad connotations of promiscuity and loose morals it conveys and the social stigma it brings on people – and especially on women. More than just a social imperative, marriage is also a religious one. When asked why people get married, my informants, male and female, all replied that it is a divine recommendation, a way to accomplish God's will and to be good Muslims. Moreover, some people added that women especially need to get married because it is through their husband that they will have access to the gates of heaven (more on this point in Chapter 7).

As a result, for women, the fear and anxiety of not finding a suitable husband by the time they have reached a socially acceptable age (usually around 25 years old) works as a strong incentive for them – or their mothers – to consult marabouts. Women themselves were worried when they or their close friends weren't married by their mid-twenties. When I celebrated my thirtieth birthday in Dakar, my Senegalese male and female friends were surprised to learn my age; because I was not married yet, they assumed I was younger. They whole-heartedly and

compassionately wished me to find a good husband to whom I could give children quickly. Some of my older female informants joked that my husband should be Senegalese, as they are believed to be better lovers than *tubaab* (foreign) men: ‘*Gooru tubaab danuy nooy*’ (Foreign men are flabby, soft).⁴⁵ But at that time, as more generally – including when I met with Awa Konté’s husband – many people were shocked to find out I was single. When I answered the polite but inquisitive query, ‘*C’est madame ou mademoiselle?*’ (Mrs or Miss?) with ‘*mademoiselle*’, the response was often followed by, ‘But why?’. That *why* was charged with concern and worry that I would not be a real, complete woman until I had tied the knot... and it was a *why* that implied something was wrong with me.

Being a foreigner, I benefited from a certain degree of latitude, but I could easily imagine the anxiety and fear of ostracism a similar situation would bring on my local female friends. Even in the urban context of Dakar, the social recognition conveyed on a woman’s marital status – and then on motherhood – meant that long-lasting singlehood was almost non-existent. ‘Unmarried women are perceived as social anomalies and as constant threats to married women’ (Rosenlew 2012: 76). In a polygamous environment, the fear that one’s husband may take on another wife pushes women themselves to judge unmarried women severely, and to exert social pressure on them. Fatou Binetou Dial even speaks of an ‘urgency of marriage’ for young women: ‘Marriage is a woman’s security. No matter what her social rank [class and caste] is, or how rich she is, if she doesn’t have a husband, she doesn’t have security’ (2008: 42-43, my translation). In patriarchal Muslim Senegalese society, matrimony is for women a social coming of age and a way to acquire respect and status – which also translates into more freedom. Indeed, marriage allows a woman to move from the liminal and uncomfortable space of being a biological adult and a social minor to that of

⁴⁵ The older women would often repeat this, sometimes holding their forearm straight up, meaning that Senegalese men are ‘hard’ and sexually vigorous.

being a fully incorporated and, once a child is born, reproductive member of society:

Both a religious and cultural duty, marriage has long served as a means for women to gain adult social status, partial autonomy, and social and economic security; it is the way that they may "achieve desired social status, reach a state of respectability, liberate themselves from parental authority, and obtain emotional and material security" (Bop et al. 2008: 51). (Hannaford and Foley 2015: 208)

It makes sense, considering the significant social pressure that is put on women to get (and remain) married and to become mothers, that they look for reasons to explain any failures to achieve these goals, and for ways to alleviate the burden such expectations represent. My having a *jinne* lover was a perfectly logical explanation for the fact that I was still single. Talking about my experience with Rokhaya, I understood that having a jealous *jinne* was a very common diagnosis for single women; and Gemmeke's research suggests that it is also an explanation regularly provided when a couple has difficulty conceiving a child. In fact, from early on in her fieldwork, Gemmeke noticed that although men also visit marabouts, their waiting rooms were mostly filled with female clients (2008: 71-72). In Dakar, this gendered difference was commonly reflected in magazines, newspapers and mundane conversations, and confirmed by marabouts themselves. Cheikh told me that women came to see him to deal with *affaires de femme*, or women's issues – a broad appellation encompassing problems with husbands and children, with co-wives, with mothers-in-law, with fertility, and with celibacy, which is consistent with Gemmeke's findings (2008, 2012). Marabouts like Cheikh and Awa Konté not only diagnose problems, but also offer appropriate ways to remedy them (to which I return below); and according to Rokhaya, most women were willing to save up for months in order to follow their marabout's recommended course of treatment, if they believed it could help them win the war against singlehood, infertility, polygamy and household conflicts.

The very personal grievances and reasons for which Senegalese women consult marabouts point to intimacy, intimate spaces and close relationships as areas fraught with tension and potential danger, as described by Peter Geschiere in *Witchcraft, Intimacy and Trust* (2013). For Geschiere, the tendency in the social sciences to take intimacy as an unquestionably positive and stable force obscures the fact that ‘witchcraft as an event is shaped by its ambiguous and volatile relation with intimacy – also seen as constantly shifting – resulting in a continuous and uncertain struggle for establishing and maintaining trust’ (2013: 23). In Anthony Giddens work, for example, intimacy is a ‘transactional negotiation of personal ties by equals’ that implies a ‘*democratising* of the interpersonal domain’ (1992: 3, my emphasis) by equating intimacy to autonomy and trust. What Geschiere’s, Gemmeke’s and my own material suggest, however, is that in Senegal and elsewhere, intimacy is profoundly ambiguous, and that the ‘main danger [of witchcraft / *maraboutage*] lurks in the very core of sociality; it is the attacks "from within" that are the most frightening’ (Geschiere 2013: xxi). In fact, rather than being a relation of equals, as Giddens contended, for my informants intimacy had more to do with relations of inequality and rivalry. This understanding was clearly exemplified by one of Gemmeke’s female informants:

Here in Senegal, we live with masks on our faces. We are so used to pretending for the outside world that our family is perfect while we live with our biggest rivals. We live with our co-wives, with our half-brothers. Even of our husbands, who sleep in our beds, we know nothing. We do not know what they earn, and they do not know how much we earn. That’s why marabouts are indispensable for us. They comfort us. They take away our fears so that we can become our normal, calm selves again. For example, I know a woman who doesn’t care who her husband sleeps with or marries. A marabout once told her she would die as his only wife. (Gemmeke 2008: 104)

Obviously, intimate relationships – the sharing of a bed with a spouse, the living with co-wives and in-laws – or the lack thereof are not the sole reasons for *maraboutage* in Senegal (see Sow 2008, 2009, 2013; Chev   et al. 2014). But when considering the gendered aspects of *maraboutage*, we notice that for women, it is inscribed in and reinforced by the patriarchal social structures it tries to

mediate: compulsory marriage, polygamy, and virilocality. Such a gendered differentiation in the recourse to occult forces has been largely neglected by the recent Africanist literature on witchcraft which – since its revival through Geschiere’s *The Modernity of Witchcraft* (1997) and several pieces by Jean and John Comaroff (1993, 1999, 2000), among others – has tended to focus on witchcraft as a modern response to and a critique of economic, political and global forces that Africans grapple with in a context of deep financial and social insecurity (see Moore and Sanders 2004: 10-19). By the very emphasis it places on finance, markets, money, business, structural adjustment programs, politics, and power, this literature implicitly concentrates on predominantly male spheres of influence.⁴⁶ This gender blindness notwithstanding, the common thread that runs through the various ways of analysing the occult in Africa – and to which this chapter contributes, albeit in a different way – seems to be that they ultimately offer ‘a set of discourses on morality, sociality and humanity: on human frailty’ (Moore and Sanders 2004: 20).

A seed of doubt

Over the course of my stay in Senegal, talk of *maraboutage* became an intrinsic part of my life – much as it was for my informants. Although I initially referred to it as a sort of ethnographic bait to get people talking, it slowly became a way to defuse tension and anxiety regarding day-to-day events that affected me; and even if I never resorted to any form of *maraboutage* myself, I sometimes wondered if I was the object of it. Even if I wasn’t sure I believed in her gift and correlated powers of intervention in my life or the lives of other people, Awa Konté had planted a seed of doubt in my mind – a doubt far more acute and real than the jokes my friends and I had been making regarding my bad luck with everything water-related.⁴⁷ Although I had never doubted the importance of

⁴⁶ I am grateful to Rebecca Marsland for pointing out this implicit bias.

⁴⁷ For more than six months, I lived without regular running water – in part due to a general water pipe breakdown that affected most of Dakar for a few weeks in the autumn of 2013, and then a few more times later in 2014. The lack of water was also due to my landlord’s refusal to

maraboutage in my informants' lives, I had been skeptical about its effectiveness. But then – much like Harry West, who told his students that he believed in sorcery more at night than in the light of day – I started to 'believe a little bit' (Rogers, n.d.) in *maraboutage* and the power of the occult when it affected me more directly (West 2007: 19). What if I really had a *jinne*? What would I be willing to do to get rid of it? How would believing in *maraboutage* impact my actions? How far would I be willing to go, how much would I be willing to pay, to get something – or someone – I really desired?

These doubts and questionings came back to me sporadically, usually in unexpected times and places. About a month and a half after meeting with the female *marabout*, I was away with a group of friends on a remote island in the Sine Saloum – the same area where I had met Famara – a three-hour drive and forty minute boat-trip by *pirogue* (large fishing canoe) from Dakar. I suddenly woke up in the middle of the night, startled, my heart pounding and my mind and body paralysed by the unpleasant and very real sensation that *someone*, or *something*, was staring at me, standing by the bedside table. I grabbed the flashlight and proceeded to inspect every corner of the small cabin from what I convinced myself was the safe space provided by the anti-malaria bednet, not forgetting to look under the bed. Slightly relieved by not seeing anything or anyone, I tried to go back to sleep, feeling distressed by this intense mental and physical experience.

acknowledge the poor plumbing work that had been done in the building. My flatmates and I used to say that one of us had been *maraboutée*, since we never knew when we would actually have running water. When I later moved to another apartment (where I tested the water pressure before signing a lease) I had water for about a week, and then ran out again. Then, after the landlord had a water tank and pump installed, I ended up being flooded, though I lived on the 4th floor: during a particularly strong thunderstorm, my entire apartment was covered with one to two inches of water, due to an uncovered little TV cable hole on the terrasse. Although these misadventures all have a physical, logical explanation, their accumulation took a toll on me, and I started to refer to my bad luck as *maraboutage* – eventually wondering if there wasn't some truth in my trying to defuse the situation by referring to the supernatural world.

A few days later, back in Dakar, I told my friend Valérie about my fright, explaining how real that presence felt. Married to a Senegalese man, she easily conjugates both her Quebecois and Senegalese lifestyles and beliefs, mixing the two in what seems like an effortless interpretation of life in Senegal.

‘You were sharing the cabin with Damien, right?’ she asked.

‘Yes, the two single beds were next to each other under the large mosquito net,’ I responded.

‘You know... maybe it was just a nightmare. But it could also be your *jinne*,’ she suggested.

‘What do you mean?’ I was unsure of what she was implying, or if she was joking.

‘Well, remember what the clairvoyant said. You usually sleep by yourself, so your *jinne* lover doesn’t usually have any reason to be jealous. But if Damien, a man, was sleeping next to you, maybe your *jinne* felt threatened and wanted to remind you that you are his.’

At the end of our interview, when I asked Awa Konté what to do about my *jinne*, she replied that she could help me get rid of it. Her exorcism sessions were held every Thursday, so I only had to call her back to make an appointment. When I asked her how much it cost, she responded that 65,000 CFA (£73) plus the shared cost of a lamb, to be slaughtered as part of the ritual, is the usual price – an astronomical sum equivalent to and even more than a maid’s or construction worker’s monthly salary. I wasn’t sure if the usual *waxaale* [bargaining] rules applied to the spiritual and magical worlds, but nonetheless replied that it was a bit too much for me. ‘If you don’t want to find a husband...’ her manager-husband started saying semi-jokingly, but subtly implying that I should not spare any time

or expense if it helped me get out of my husbandless, childless life. Magico-religious powers or not, it was business. It was a business that relied on people's fear and anxiety, but in exchange promised to bring love, happiness and peace of mind.

To my surprise, the clairvoyant responded that she would accept whatever amount I was ready to give her: she said that she had foreseen that my book (the thesis)⁴⁸ would expand her fame in new places, adding that since she already does cowry shell readings and other types of divination over the phone, she was ready and equipped to handle it. I repeated that I would think about it and give her a call back when I had made up my mind. I never did.

El Hadj was convinced that Awa was probably running a scam, or that it would be too dangerous to undergo the exorcism to get rid of my alleged spirit lover. My assistant's reaction was interesting in that it showed disbelief and dismissal while also acknowledging the danger and thus power marabouts like Awa Konté potentially have. I was unsure of what I believed at the time – and to a certain extent, I still am. Reflecting back on the meeting, I came to realise that Awa Konté's diagnosis did not come out of the blue completely, since her husband had asked me before the interview began whether I was married, or at least in a relationship. His reaction, 'But it's not good to be alone! You have to look for someone!', marked both his concern about my relationship status – or the lack thereof – and his surprise that El Hadj and I were not an item, which was made even more obvious by the perplexed look he gave my assistant. The female clairvoyant had heard the end of that conversation, and she could easily have invented the story that I have a *jinne* to show me her 'powers'. I briefly regretted not having lied and pretended to be married to my research assistant in order to put said powers to the test.

⁴⁸ Cheikh the marabout told me, after counting my numbers on his prayer beads, that 'the paper you are looking for, you'll get it, they will give it to you. If it's a diploma, if it has to do with paper, you will get it.'

This story about my potential *jinne* highlights how stressful but mundane events and situations – having nightmares, repeatedly running out of water, or being single in a society that abhors it – can be articulated as experiences of the supernatural to help explain them. In particular, it draws attention to a fundamental element of *maraboutage*: the need to understand, to make sense of one's life tribulations. This quest for causality and meaning in external forces, rather than in oneself, reassures and soothes the client by transferring all sense of individual responsibility and guilt onto someone else (Sow 2009: 172-173), be it a *jinne* or a rival co-wife.

However, Sow (2009: 370) points out that a *séance* with a marabout or diviner most often leaves the client in a dubious state of ambiguity, his or her emotions alternating between hope and fear, happiness and sadness, composure and anxiety. The feeling of hope for a brighter future is dampened by remnant dissatisfactions with the past. Not all needs are met, and a feeling of absence, of lack, remains. In fact, as Gemmeke remarks, '(...) marabouts play an ambiguous role. On the one hand, they offer tools for containing and expressing feelings of fear, anxiety, frustration, and jealousy. They also, on the other hand, produce these feelings' (2012: 74). Surely, if marabouts and clairvoyants can help identify the source of the obstacle to their client's happiness, they can also guide them in getting rid of the problem. In that sense, going to the marabout, being 'diagnosed' and finding answers is only the initial step in a cycle of action-reaction, of attacks and counterattacks, of self-defense. All of these actions represent a physical and emotional way to deal with the fear and anxiety brought by solitude,⁴⁹ rejection and social stigma, in the hope of finding enduring happiness. It follows that *maraboutage* is empowering because it allows its users to create order and meaning, but then also to take action with regards to this newly acquired knowledge of themselves and the people who surround them.

⁴⁹ Solitude and the 'need to be alone' from time to time is considered bizarre, the sign that something is wrong.

Therefore, *maraboutage* also offers individuals the opportunity to engage actively, emotionally and physically with anxiety-causing sentiments, and to transform them into concrete, empowering actions. The *maraboutage* industry is thus a manifestation of Senegalese women's considerable interpretive labour.

Attaching one's love

Identifying the root of a problem – for example, being single because you are possessed by a jealous *jinne* – is certainly a relief for most marabout clients; but it is often not enough. Having recourse to diverse divination techniques such as cowry shells, sand reading, mirrors and so on, a visit to the marabout traditionally follows the same classic pattern: 'the client's desires could be satisfied, *but* since something (a spell or a spirit) or someone prevents it from happening, the client *could* perform specific actions *if* he or she wants to thwart those antagonistic plans' (Sow 2009: 161, my translation, emphasis as in original). Acting as a translator between divine forces and the human world, the marabout justifies his intervention by interpreting what needs to be accomplished *by the client* in order to restore equilibrium and happiness in his or her life. Therefore, although the marabout creates a cycle of action-reaction in his predictions, the relationship between the client and the diviner is not simply one of blind submission to the holder of mystical powers, but one of action and empowerment – materialised through the use of charms and *gris-gris*. In Dakar, securing one's love through occult practices works mostly on two non-mutually-exclusive levels: one can use *liggéey* on the self, or on someone else, as the following examples illustrate.

'This is called a *cherche-mari* (find-a-husband) or *garde-mari* (keep-a-husband). If you are single it will help you find a husband within a few weeks. If you are already married, it will help you keep your husband, he won't want to take a second, third or fourth wife', said Khadjara, the saleswoman. Despite the loud crowd that surrounded us, she talked quietly, so as to make sure no one else could

hear us. We were at Dakar's International Fair, held every December, and I had been going from stand to stand in search of the *cherche-mari*. A newspaper article entitled '*Ces produits maliens et nigériens*⁵⁰ pour bien ferrer son homme' (Those Malian and Nigerien products to nail a husband) in which it was described had caught my attention that morning, and considering the traffic jams I had to go through to get to the event, I certainly wasn't the only curious one.

Khadjara was holding a small, transparent bottle in her palm. It contained dried, pounded herbs and a short branch. She refused to tell me what was inside: 'It's the marabout's secret. If we tell everyone, it will not work anymore'. She handed me a leaflet listing everything the Nigerien man could cure, from hair loss, diabetes and asthma to impotence, celibacy and sexually transmitted diseases. In the right-hand corner was a picture of the marabout himself, posing seriously, almost frowning. From the newspaper articles I had read over the previous days and the set up of their stand, it was clear that their best sellers were the sexual wellbeing products rather than the general health ones. Khadjara confirmed that most of their female clients had asked about the *cherche-mari/garde-mari*.

In order to know more about this life-changing product and how it worked, I knew I had to buy it: knowledge and information weren't free. It wasn't that expensive, about 3500 CFA (£4), so I handed the money to Khadjara. I was taken aback by the question that followed: 'Are you Muslim or Christian?', the saleswoman asked.

After I replied that I had been brought up in a Catholic family, Khadjara gave me some precise instructions on how to use the *cherche-mari*: 'Ok. So after you shower, you say the *Notre Père* (Holy Father). Then you fill the bottle up with your own perfume, and you keep it in your purse for a week. After that time,

⁵⁰ Typo in the article. Should read *nigériens*, from Niger.

everyday after you shower, you recite the prayer and then you apply some of the mixture to your armpits and pubis. Not long after, you will find a husband.'

'But what if I had been a Muslim? What difference would it make?' I asked.

'After her ablutions, a Muslim would recite some special verses of the Quran, but the rest is the same,' she informed me.

'Does it really work?' I inquired sceptically.

'Of course it works! We have many clients who are married now, or whose husband hasn't taken another wife.' Khadjara then turned to another client, a beautiful, tall young woman impeccably dressed in the latest fashion. Probably hoping to enhance her own desirability and sex-appeal she, too, subtly pointed at the *cherche-mari*.

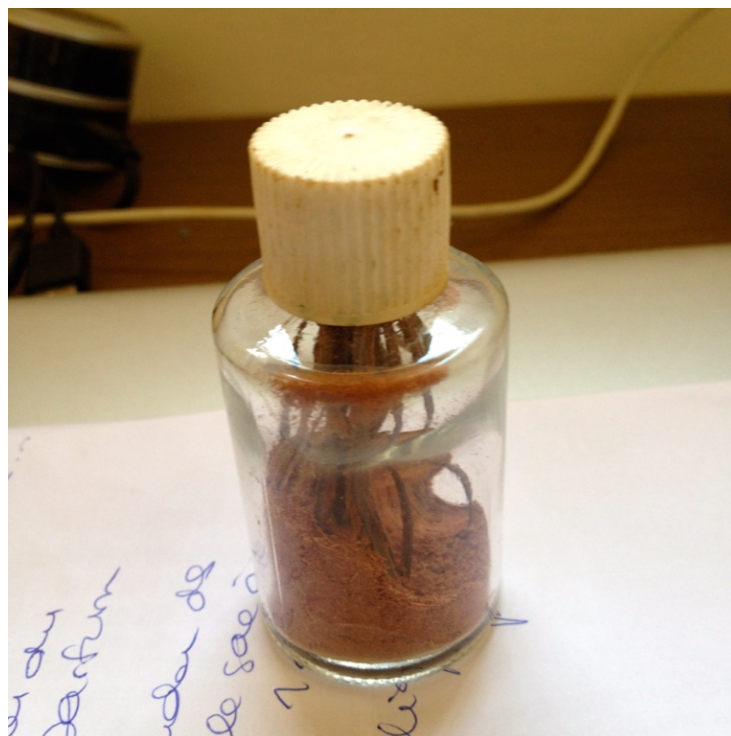


Figure 5. *Cherche-mari/garde-mari*

Several months later, Adama also assured me that her products worked. She mostly sold *secrets de femme* [‘women’s secrets’, that is, aphrodisiacs and cosmetics] in a building next to the former Dakar train station, in front of the harbour. I was first introduced to her by Khady, a young woman who was developing her online sex-store and, like Kira, her seduction coaching business, in her native Côte d’Ivoire. I visited Adama several times during fieldwork, sometimes to simply say hello, sometimes to talk more extensively. Among all the items she had for sale – lingerie, waist beads, perfumes and aphrodisiacs – Adama once presented me with a small piece of rope that had been tied onto itself, creating a series of knots. Going back and forth between her approximate French and my basic Wolof, she ended up miming the role of the knotted piece of rope: making hooks with both her index fingers, she intertwined them to show they were tied together. ‘*Pour mariage. Takk.* [For marriage].’ It all made sense: in Wolof, the verb *takk* means to attach, but is also used in the sense of marriage, when people become attached to one another. The little rope had been prepared by a trustworthy marabout, Adama assured me, and was meant to bring love and marriage to its user. All I had to do, Adama said, was to repeat the name of the man I desired seven times, spit on the rope and put it in my body lotion, so everyday when I put it on, I would also cover myself with the spiritual benefits of the knotted rope. As De Martino has remarked regarding love magic in southern Italy, the knots act as a symbol of binding – a term he defines as ‘a psychic condition of impediment or inhibition, and at the same time a sense of domination, a being acted upon by a force that is as strong as mysterious, one that totally removes a person’s autonomy as well as his capacity for decision-making and choice’ (2015: 3). Adama’s knotting is an example of combined *maraboutage* action, as it ‘attaches’ one’s affection by acting both on the beloved, whose specific name is repeated seven times, and on the client, who applies body lotion daily.

The best place to buy traditional and magico-religious stuff is on the outside of the Iba Mar Diop Stadium,⁵¹ in one of Dakar's oldest neighbourhoods, Médina. Dozens of stalls backed against the walls of the stadium sell ready-made potions, powders, *gris-gris* and other objects used to bewitch others. This is also where several marabouts come to buy the elements they need to put together a *médicament* (medicine), as they refer to their spells and potions: gorilla hands and fur; snake skin and teeth; bird claws, beaks, and feathers; shark teeth; ground herbs, plants and dehydrated animal body parts... everything and anything can be imbued with certain medicinal, spiritual and magical properties, if adequately prepared by a *borom xam-xam*. As we were walking from one stand to another, El Hadj and I asked about the different products we saw, touching and smelling them when we could. In general, the salesmen weren't very talkative, unless we expressed a keen interest in buying something.

At one of the stands, I finally found one of the objects I had heard a lot about: a padlock to 'secure' one's love. There were three of them sitting on top of a pyramid of boxes that stood precariously on a table full of knick-knacks. I picked one up and carefully examined it; it looked like a normal key lock padlock bought at any hardware store, except that the main body of the lock golden was wrapped in snake skin, giving it an old, dirty look. The marabout-salesman asked 3000 CFA for it, but El Hadj bargained it down to half the price. The man wrapped it in a torn, wrinkled piece of brown paper and said, handing it back to me: 'You open the padlock, then you say the name of the man seven times. Then you repeat what your wish is, for example if you want to get married to him, or make him fall in love with you, or if you want to prevent him from marrying anyone else. You say this for seven times as well. Then you spit on it, in the shackle top hole, and you lock it up. Keep it in your purse with you, and what you wished for will happen very soon.' He specified, however, that one needs to be patient.

⁵¹ Probably because of the significant relationship between *maraboutage* and wrestling (Chevé et al. 2014), Senegal's national sport.

According to a newspaper article published in the daily *Walf Grand-Place* (Mansaray 2006), a stronger, apparently more effective but also more extreme version of the love padlock calls for a piece of shroud from a cadaver buried on that day. Once the fabric is obtained, it is combined with a brand new padlock, a piece of red fabric, a white cotton thread, and two red kola nuts, and transformed into a charm through incantations and spittings of the chewed kola nuts, all in the middle of the night. This process apparently creates a dreadful *gris-gris* nobody can resist. It can be activated by pronouncing the name of the beloved three times before locking it. This padlock is said to be so powerful that the bound individual will come to or at least call the client within a couple of hours. However, the user must not forget to reopen the padlock within 8 hours in order to free the soul/spirit of the bewitched; otherwise the charm's powerful magic could make him or her crazy. It is also important not to lose the padlock, as it can be used on up to twenty individuals. And when its owner doesn't want to use it anymore, he or she has to open it and bury it, or throw it in the sea.

The three examples above show how *maraboutage* is more than the intangible intercession of powerful, mystical forces called on by a marabout: for it to achieve its purpose, *maraboutage* requires the active involvement of the client. The padlock, the knots, and the perfume all act as material reminders of the spiritual work that is being performed, as much as they are means through which that work is achieved. Moreover, the actions they entail – that is, bottling up, tying down and locking in – are highly symbolic. These actions help transform anxiety and fear into confidence and reassurance by requiring physical, embodied, repetitive actions. The saying of Muslim or Christian prayers gives validity and value to the endeavour, as if it was blessed; repeating the loved one's name and the intrinsic desire it makes it more concrete, almost a reality; the action of bottling the knotted rope or the perfume, or of locking the padlock, confirms the process and brings a sense of accomplishment, of empowerment. Even without

the daily reminder of an action to perform, the idea of attaching one's love can be powerful, as the example of this woman's one-off *maraboutage* highlights:

We had been going out for more than six years, we lived like husband and wife, we have two kids. To keep him to myself and make him forget his wife, I went to a marabout who gave me a talisman to place in the mouth of a cadaver that has spent three days in the grave, in order for me to do everything I want with my lover, for him to be submissive. I did it with the help of a boy and the guard of the cemetery, who told me which graves were 3-days-old. I swear, since I've done it, I can do anything I want with him. I decide everything, even his salary goes through my hands. If you want a man, you have to be ready to do anything. (Cissokho 2005)

In this case – as in so many others discussed in the media – regardless of the end result of her *maraboutage* actions, the client isn't simply subject to external forces, and isn't helpless anymore: not only has she rid herself of what was holding her back, she is now taking charge of her destiny. Although the object of her affection is mentioned and thought about during the daily re-enactment of putting the cream or the perfume on, or locking and holding the padlock, the emotions at work here involve the client much more than her loved one.

Attacking rivals

Actions intended to attack rivals also produce a sentiment of empowerment, sometimes assimilated to a need for reparation, or for justice. One morning, as I was preparing coffee in my small kitchen, our housekeeper Rokhaya walked in and asked me bluntly what I thought about revenge. Surprised by her apparently philosophical question, I replied that I didn't think it was worth putting any effort into planning revenge against someone who did you wrong, but that it is sometimes satisfying to get an unexpected little revenge – like meeting an ex-partner when you look fabulous or when you are with someone new. As she didn't seem to like my response, I asked her what was on her mind. She started talking about her former employer: Bamba was a single man, relatively well-off, and he had confessed his love for his housekeeper before having a sudden change of

heart, marrying a another woman and firing Rokhaya. 'You see, today is Bamba's two-year wedding anniversary. You remember I told you he was in love with me, and that I loved him too? I know his wife split us up through mystical means, so we never got married. She has had two years of happiness with him, so now it is time for me to get my revenge,' she stated. Shocked by the bitterness and resentment in her voice, I paused briefly before asking: 'But why? Weren't you proposed to recently? Do you want to get back with Bamba?' When I asked what she planned to do to get her revenge, she looked at me, surprised that I had to ask: 'I'm going to the *marabout*, obviously. What else can I do?'

Rokhaya had no interest in being with Bamba again, which left me quite perplexed: why plan an expensive and dangerous revenge when she did not care about the initial subject of her affection anymore? Her plan involved attacking her rival, Bamba's wife, a strategy that was closer to black magic than to Islamic *maraboutage*. Since not all marabouts performed such spells – Cheikh, to whom Rokhaya had introduced me, swore he did not engage in that type of work – it would be a very costly revenge, which explained in part why she had had to wait and save some money before putting her plan into execution. One thing was sure, however: whatever she was planning to do, it was going to be more elaborate – and most likely more dramatic and dangerous – than the egg *dëddle* (separation) spell I heard about around that time.

At the end of our *gris-gris* shopping spree at the stadium, El Hadj and I were ready to go when a salesman caught my attention. He was lying sideways on his table in a leisurely fashion, supporting his upper body up with his left elbow, his bare feet slightly touching some of his merchandise: a mix of *maraboutage* stuff, chewing gum, cookies and phone top-up cards. When we approached his stand, he put down his *sothiou* – a wooden stick used as a toothbrush because of its cleansing and whitening properties, sometimes infused in hot water to make a tea. His casual demeanour extended to his salutations, a disinterested '*Asalam*

aleikum'. When we told him what type of things we were looking for, he suddenly sat down, whispering: 'You know, there are a lot of ways in which you can split people up, tear them apart and break them up. You see the crossroad here?' he asked, his chin pointing towards the busy intersection. El Hadj and I both nodded.

'Crossroads are good for that,' he continued. 'Have you ever wondered why there are often eggs on the street in the morning? It's because of *maraboutage*. If you are in love with someone who is not available, you can make him divorce his wife or at least break their happiness by writing their names on eggs, and writing some specific verses of the Quran. Then, very early in the day, before the morning prayer, you bring the eggs to a crossroads, you place them in the middle of the street, you say a few prayers, and then you leave. When the cars begin to drive by, they will run over the eggs and break them, and the relationship will be broken too,' he concluded simply.

When it comes to attacking rivals, the most common stories are of competition between co-wives trying to undermine each other mystically. 'My husband's first wife poured magic potions in the food I cooked. I often hear her discussing with her friends about the best ways to make me ask him for a divorce,' said Fatou, 49 years old, to the newspaper *L'Observateur* (Tall 2010). As I mentioned earlier, the social pressure and stigma surrounding unmarried women favours the endurance of polygyny, even if women almost uniformly profess a desire to be their husband's only wife. The competition to gain or retain a man's favours consequently involves seductive techniques directed at the man himself (as I will discuss more extensively in Chapter 7), and recourse to occult practices to 'attach' his affection, while also involving mystical attacks against real, past or potential rivals. Maternal, financial and sexual jealousy are all triggers for women to try sabotaging their husbands' relationships with their co-wives (Gemmeke 2008: 77). Similarly, dire financial situations and virilocal practices mean not only that

co-wives often have to live together, but they also have to share a confined, already limited space with their mother-in-law. Conflicts between them are commonplace, and frequently cited as causes for consulting a marabout. In the media and in casual, gossipy conversation I overheard, women frequently argued that their mothers-in-law plotted to get rid of them by hiding separation *gris-gris* in their marital bedroom or under their doorstep, or by pouring potions to make them crazy in a beverage they then offered their daughters-in-law.

In public, these in-laws were expected to behave as if they lived in perfect harmony. As Werner (1991: 70) explains, behind a mask of close-knit conviviality, conflicts do exist, but they are rarely openly expressed in Senegal; instead, they are mediated through *maraboutage* (Gemmeke 2008: 36), a fact reminiscent of Geschiere's reference to witchcraft as 'the dark side of kinship' (2003). Although open confrontations do happen, they are not deemed appropriate, and the often-problematic quadratic relationship between a husband, his mother, his wives and their children is best dealt with via occult forces. Resorting to *maraboutage* thus allows an individual to respect tradition and social norms by avoiding open conflicts and disagreements. However, this emotional work of avoidance is compensated in the direct, concrete, spiritual? action of *maraboutage*.

Protecting oneself

As I have described with examples of attaching love and attacking rivals, *maraboutage* is generally seen as a way to control someone's actions or emotions against his or her will or knowledge, in the interests of the client. Its omnipresence in all spheres of life, and especially in the most intimate circles (Geschiere 2013), creates the need to protect oneself in different ways – often by resorting to a different set of magico-religious procedures. Therefore, in a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, *maraboutage* actually stimulates the very practices it also tries to protect people from. As Sow remarks, 'the magical world is constituted

in anxieties based on real or imagined attacks to which one responds with protection or retaliation' (2009: 89, my translation).

As Foley points out, taking protective measures against malevolent forces invoked by jealous family members, friends and neighbours is 'part of what "everybody knows and does"', and is discussed with a 'nonchalance that demonstrates their banality' (2010: 110). Yet, in spite of their ordinariness, actions of protection and self-defence against the occult are taken very seriously – especially considering the dangers of being *marabouté*. For example, a spell should not be kept for longer than prescribed by the marabout, otherwise it could have tragic consequences, including physical pain (overall body pain, back and kidney ache, etc.) and sometimes death. The user should defuse the charm or use it in time, as in the case of the *noob* [love potion] – which needs to be drunk within 24 hours of its preparation, as otherwise it could cause severe, fatal bloating of the stomach (Lo 2006).

It is essential, then, to protect oneself from spells *per se*, but also from their potential side-effects. For many, protection will amount to a little *gris-gris* worn around the waist or the arm, or bathing with *saafara*, the water in which written verses of the Quran have been soaked. For others, it involves following certain prescribed behaviours. For example, a diviner who had visions in his dreams told my friend Nafissatou – who at the time had just been married as a second wife – to avoid eating any white-colored food, such as rice, yogurt, or bread, offered to her by people she was not sure she could trust entirely. Such a refusal could prove challenging, as it is generally considered very rude to refuse food or beverages. Adamant to avoid being bewitched, Nafi complied with the recommendations. Another example is that of a female marabout who advised one of her clients, a young single female, not to walk outside between 2pm and 7pm, as it is the favourite time for evil spirits to wander around and possess their next 'prey' (Diouf 2006).

Other preventive measures are sometimes especially surprising to foreigners, as my friend Sarah, a French female in her early thirties once recalled. 'We had been dating for a few weeks when I realised what he was doing,' she explained, speaking of her Senegalese boyfriend, Ahmed. 'He comes over to my place, we watch a movie or we listen to music and chat, and we have sex. He can't spend the night, it wouldn't be appropriate, his family could get suspicious if he didn't go home at all. So he usually leaves around midnight or shortly after. It took me a while to notice that he didn't throw away the soiled condoms in my garbage bin. He doesn't do it anymore, but he did for quite a while. I think he wrapped them in toilet paper and took them with him. I don't know where and how he disposed of them, but he didn't leave them here, that's for sure. He was with his (Senegalese) ex-girlfriend for a few years. She was pressuring him to get married, but he wasn't ready. One day Ahmed walked in on her putting some powder in his water bottle. He broke up with her, he couldn't trust someone who was trying to bewitch him in order to get married. That is probably why he was taking the condoms with him: he didn't trust me, he was scared that I would try to use his sperm to cast a spell on him or something,' Sarah told me all in one breath, clearly embarrassed to share such private details of her relationship.

It is no wonder that Ahmed was afraid. Newspapers and magazines are filled with stories of men who completely surrender to their girlfriends or wives after they've absorbed a love potion: 'Did you see how her husband is crazy about her now? Everything she asks, from dusk to dawn, he gives her. [The marabout] gave her a powder to cook with some meat. Then he asked her to send him a cotton pad containing their mixed sexual fluids, from after intercourse.' Another common recipe was to 'wash your genitals and make him drink the water, he will follow you like a little dog and you can do whatever you want with him' (Cissokho 2005). Following the principle of symbolic participation – which means that the object or substance that represents or has been in contact with an individual keeps part

of its essence, or its nature (Sow 2009: 91) – bodily fluids such as sperm, menstrual blood, hair and nail scrapings, or personal items like dirty underwear are particularly valued in *maraboutage*. Being so intimate, they are believed to provide very high potency to a spell: ‘the more intimately connected an object is to a person, the stronger the magical connection,’ Laurie Wilkie (2000:132) writes regarding African-American love potions. Both my host mother and, later on, my housekeeper repeatedly told me not to throw away my dead hair in the garbage; I should dispose of it more securely, for example in the toilet or, if I could, by burning. Apparently, *tubaab*’s hair was in high demand for money spells. I, personally, was not too worried about my hair (although I have to confess that after my encounter with Famara, and later on with Awa Konté, I began to throw my hair and nail clippings down the toilet); but I could understand easily why Ahmed was doing everything he could to protect himself and avoid being bewitched. He recognised and had first-hand experience that ‘those people in your life with whom you are most intimate are the individuals who have the potential to do you the greatest harm. Family members and sexual partners have greatest access to exuvia [urine, semen, menstrual blood, pubic hair, etc.]’ (Wilkie 2000: 132).

It is worth noting an interesting gender difference in preventive or protective *maraboutage*. In general, as I mentioned previously, Senegalese agree that when it comes to matters of the heart, women tend to consult marabouts in a larger proportion than men. Men are said to be more prone to asking for a job, money, or fame and power than to find or retain love. However, men also appeal to marabouts for help in managing their marital relationships. Whereas women engage with spiritual forces in the hope of finding or retaining a single partner, men employ them to ease and facilitate their polygamous unions. In doing so, they are protecting themselves as much from the anger of their spouse(s) as from potential bewitchment.

Married men who are planning to take a *ñaareel*, a *ñetteel* or a *ñenteel* [second, third or fourth wife] call upon marabouts to prevent the *awo* [first spouse] from ‘making trouble’ – that is, from opposing the marriage or throwing a tantrum; the men want to keep their first wives quiet, ‘*leur clouer le bec*’ (Dia and Beye 2013). Men are, of course, well aware that embracing polygyny will hurt their spouse’s feelings. Despite what they describe as their God-given right to polygamy, it turns out that in the earthly reality of day-to-day relationships, where emotions and sensibilities are involved, taking on another spouse is not easy to justify and undertake, and can be a great source of anxiety. Men apprehend their wife’s reaction, and want to mitigate its impact by keeping silent about the existence of a future wife, and by mediating conflict via magico-religious practices. They hope to avoid a divorce (for example, if they had initially signed for monogamy), but also fits of anger that could result in the *awo* casting spells to destroy the relationship with the wife-to-be – in the worst case, by paying the marabout for a *xala* (see Chapter 5), an impotency spell which would make it impossible for the husband to consummate his new marriage (though he could still have successful intercourse with his first wife).

When it comes to conjugal relationships, it appears that *maraboutage* practices reflect conflicting, even opposed, needs and desires between men and women. While women use magico-religious procedures in an effort to find a relationship or protect the one they are in by attacking rivals or attaching their desired partner’s exclusive affection, men use similar *maraboutage* practices to contract new unions in a way that actually contradicts and undermines their wife’s efforts. It also highlights how the patriarchal, normative Senegalese sexual imaginary serves men much more than women. If the desired aim is the same for men and women – to be in a relationship – resorting to the use of mystical forces empowers them differently. While *maraboutage* gives men the courage to transition to polygamy, it enables women to actively fight it.

'What is not true does not last'

For its believers and users, the magico-spiritual world of *maraboutage* is fraught with empowering potential, but also with danger. However, even if the majority of Senegalese make use of *maraboutage* at one time or another, for a diversity of reasons, not everyone agrees that it is a legitimate way of finding or retaining a partner.

For Moussa, a monogamous 27 year-old peddler El Hadj interviewed, it simply doesn't make sense to *marabout* a woman. As for many Senegalese who justify polygyny by saying that there are significantly more women than men in the country, Moussa believes that if so many women are available for marriage, a man should not concentrate his efforts on a specific one to the point of forcing her to fall for him through *maraboutage*. He assimilates such practices to lying, adding that – in a mix of Wolof and French – '*Ludul dëgg du yagg, même si c'est cent ans et quatre dimanches*': what is not true does not last, and the truth will eventually come out, even if it takes a hundred years and four Sundays.

'Deep down, you'll know that there has never been real love between you two,' he told El Hadj, referring to changing marital patterns described in the previous Chapter. Similarly, Monsieur Samb – the 50-year-old former *chauffeur* who says that 'women don't love men anymore' in Chapter 3 – argued that several people have recourse to *gris-gris* and potions for immoral reasons: 'Some men do it to play with girls (i.e. have sex), not to marry you. (...) And some girls, they do it to eat your money. They do not love you. But when you cut the roots, the tree will fall. No wonder divorce is so frequent.' Both men's comments allude to the ephemerality and unnaturalness of relationships based on *maraboutage*: although it is difficult to evaluate the actual veracity of such suppositions, many Senegalese assumed that when the bewitchment stops, the relationship tends to end too.

From the untidy bedroom he rents on the premises of his workplace, where he is employed as a watchman, Monsieur Gueye – a divorced and remarried man in his sixties – told El Hadj about what he sees as the more lasting consequences of *maraboutage*. ‘When you use *maraboutage* to get a woman, you turn her spirit, so she can’t distinguish... You get married with a woman you have bewitched, you played with her spirit. When you have problems, you won’t be able to discuss them with her, because you’ve turned her spirit. When you have children, these are the consequences: they are not smart, they are not intelligent, because you have ruined their mom’s spirit. Their mom hasn’t come to you from love but because of a charm. When you marry her, she won’t be able to help you, to support you, to advise you on your problems, because you destroyed her spirit. But the one you marry by love, that one can help you face any problem. These are the consequences. It is wrong; people need to avoid it,’ he concluded strongly. According to him, *maraboutage* not only impacts the relationship between two people, but more importantly alters the true nature, *l’esprit*, of the bewitched – rendering the woman incapable of accomplishing her quintessential role in supporting her husband. What is more, Monsieur Gueye’s comments suggest that *maraboutage* directly affects the couple’s offspring. Considering that children are perceived as a gift from God, a link between the visible and invisible worlds, and the parents’ pride, help and social safety net for the future (Kuyu 2005: 219), having dumb, helpless children can have serious – perhaps disastrous – long-term consequences for the users of *maraboutage*.

Fatima, aged 25, prefers to believe in her own capacities and sex-appeal rather than trusting a third party marabout: ‘One needs other tricks than *maraboutage*. A woman can be beside her man, that is, take care of him, cuddle him and make sure he doesn’t get bored. More than anything, you need to take the initiative to give meaning, to spice up your relationship. I prefer to buy him gift or go out than giving my money to a *marabout*’ (Diouf 2006). Similarly, Vieux, a single civil servant who will feature more prominently in the following chapter, prefers to

think that he can date and marry a girl 'naturally': his hope is that he'll meet a girl he loves, who loves him in return, without any additional, unnatural mystical tricks. For him, to employ magico-religious practices in order to find love corresponds to a lack of self-esteem, of self-confidence: 'I don't see why I'd try to *marabout* a girl to marry her. To put a spell on a girl? It would be to not believe in myself'.

Conclusion

In Senegal, *maraboutage* and occult forces are part and parcel of the natural flow of life – a life where, for example, having a *jinne* lover explains singlehood and infertility. The power of *maraboutage* lies in the fact that it does things, that it gives people meaning and a sense of control over their own destiny. However, by its very existence and the climate of suspicion and distrust it generates, *maraboutage* also disrupts this flow and undermines that meaning and empowerment, in very gendered ways. Within and without the bonds of a conjugal relationship, the existence of and possibility of recourse to *maraboutage* in order to destroy a rival's happiness or improve one's own conditions creates an environment in which no one is ever completely safe, and where trust is a rare commodity – even, and perhaps especially, in the intimate spheres of the home.

Maraboutage both results from and feeds into anxiety through a vicious cycle of action-reaction, attacks, counterattacks and protective measures. The feeling of uncertainty and anxiety relates to a question of temporality: as was suggested dramatically in the online article on the lack of potential husbands cited above, Senegalese men and especially women feel that they are running out of time, and running out of opportunities to conform to what is expected of them socially – to be good, reproductive citizens. This sentiment of incompleteness, of latency, is triggered by the social pressure and weight of conforming to traditional roles and standards, but also by the fact that happiness seems to come from what one

represents in the eyes of others (Sow 2009: 381). Through the empowering emotional work *maraboutage* facilitates, it is, for many, the key to a temporary wellbeing that needs to be reassessed and reaffirmed. For women more specifically, *maraboutage* is part of the interpretive labour they perform continually to gain status and recognition in a society where they hold a subaltern position. *Maraboutage* provides them with a socially-accepted, religiously-influenced healing system of thought that they can engage with actively, and that helps them to explain and cope with their difficulties. Senegalese women's interpretive labour, then, is not only about imagining, anticipating and responding to the needs of their male partners: it is also about their own self-care and wellbeing.

Chapter 5.

'Virginity. You can get it at the pharmacy' :

aphrodisiacs, ideals and feminine capital

'What is the value of virginity?' El Hadj asked Vieux, a 29 year-old civil servant, when they met in an old building in Plateau, the business centre of the capital. Vieux was waiting for a friend to join him for lunch when my assistant struck up a conversation with him. Still single, he was certainly one of the bluntest and cockiest informants we met, showing off by repeatedly mentioning his potency and sexual abilities, and by alluding to his allegedly big phallus several times. Throughout the interview, he tried to present himself as a confident, modern and progressive man, but his answers, full of contradictions, portrayed him as more conservative and traditional than he might have anticipated.

'You will never be disrespected, your husband will always respect you,' he began. 'When he sleeps with you for the first time and he understands that your virginity is neither invented nor fabricated, that it's not from tablets or other products, that it is a natural virginity... He'll be delighted,' Vieux continued. The restaurant had already become busier: the clicking sound of cutlery hitting the plates, of glasses being moved around, and of friends and colleagues chatting and teasing one another made Vieux's voice harder to hear. Noticing El Hadj's puzzlement, the good-looking young middle-class man thought my assistant had not heard him and repeated what he had just said. El Hadj had heard properly the first time around, but he did want to know more about the tablets Vieux was talking about. 'You know, sometimes women have tricks, they use tablets to shrink their vagina and bleed to make believe they are virgins. Yesterday I heard a girl on the radio, she was explaining how to shrink your vagina. She said to put in some *karité* [shea butter] at night and in the morning you rinse it with fresh water. That is a method to shrink your vagina. Because when you bring virginity in your

marriage, even if you're a mean woman, nobody will disrespect you. Because virginity, that's what counts in a marriage. Whatever you do, if you are a virgin, you don't owe anything to your husband. When you marry a woman and you find her a virgin, and you're the one to *dévierger* [de-virginise, i.e. deflower] her, you know she has never made love with any other man, and that she will be faithful. That's it. Truth be told, virginity makes the woman,' Vieux concluded, digging into his plate.

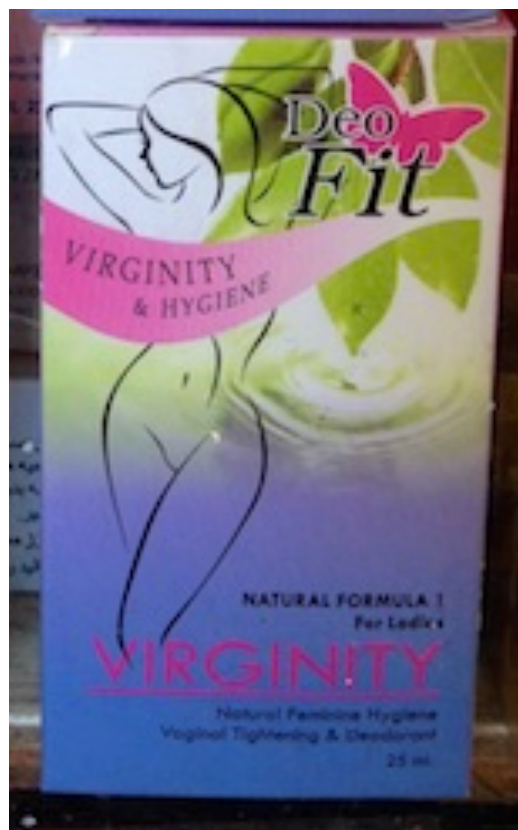


Figure 6. Virginity Soap

Vieux's reflections perfectly encapsulate a generally-held opinion on virginity in Dakar. In public narratives, virginity is posited as the essential element from which a woman's worth is measured: even if she is a mean person, a bride's virginity compensates for her unkindness. Being a virgin upon marriage is not only a source of honour, but also of power, as Vieux's assertion that 'you don't owe anything to your husband' suggests. Likewise, a woman's sexual

inexperience is praised and associated with her faithfulness, while a husband's virility is increased and strengthened when he is 'the first' a woman knows carnally. However, no matter how desirable female virginity is in theory, the existence of tablets that 'shrink the vagina' suggests that in practice, virginity can be faked. Virginity-faking products sit among an array of aphrodisiacs found in Dakar's market stalls. While the use of vagina-tightening items is frowned upon for unmarried women, it is considered a pleasurable, powerful aphrodisiac when utilised within the bonds of marriage. On the men's side of things, penis-enlargement creams, generic Viagra pills and even *maraboutage* practices can positively contribute to masculine sexual performance.

In this chapter, I take aphrodisiacs as a starting point to analyse the role played by discourses about the necessity of women's virginity in the Senegalese sexual imaginary. Although there exists a vast array of products aimed at increasing sexual pleasure, I pay particular attention to virginity-faking soaps, creams, pills and so on, because they occupied a remarkable space in my informants' discourse, in media outlets and in market stalls. The prominence of this specific category of aphrodisiacs in the public sphere was simultaneously counterbalanced by a masculine discourse promoting virginity and condemning virginity-faking items – whereas other aphrodisiacs, for example those aimed at enhancing male potency, were condoned and considered part and parcel of a woman's *mokk pooj*, of her art/work of seduction.

While it may seem counterintuitive to combine topics like virginity and aphrodisiacs, I contend that they are both crucial in enhancing what Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez has termed *capital femenino* (2005, 2011), or feminine capital. Indeed, aphrodisiacs that give a man a prolonged erection or that allow a woman to pretend she is a virgin again fulfill the same function: they fortify Senegalese husbands' egos, which in turn strengthens Senegalese women's feminine capital and power in the relationship. Women's compliance with and perpetuation of

the discourse on virginity, and their enactment (real or fake) of it, reveals the significant interpretive labour that goes into managing and upholding ideals of femininity and masculinity.

A woman's second soul?

'Virginity is because it ends', summarises author Hanne Blank in *Virgin: The Untouched Story* (2007: 268). Virginity can be broadly described as 'a human sexual status that is characterized by a lack of any current or prior sexual interaction with others' (Blank 2007: 27). Through an initial sexual encounter, virginity ends.

As hinted at by Vieux in the vignette opening this chapter, a woman's virginity is highly valued in the Senegalese sexual imaginary; and although 'nobody has many illusions about whether most brides really are virgins, virginity is always being claimed and nobody openly dissociates her/himself from its importance' (van Eedewijck 2007: 89). It thus follows that the narratives surrounding virginity in Senegal are not about a woman's virginity *per se*; they highlight those characteristics that are constituted as an ideal, hegemonic femininity, and an ideal, hegemonic masculinity. 'Idealisation', Sara Ahmed argues, 'is contingent because it is dependent on the values that are "given to" subjects through their encounters with others. It is the gift of the ideal rather than the content of the ideal that matters' (2004: 106). In other words, it is what virginity represents – honour, virtue, purity – that carries weight, much more than the actual lack of sexual interaction. Virginity testing does not actually measure virginity, but looks for signs of virginity (Blank 2008: 215) which are culturally, religiously and socially defined and constituted as feminine attributes and ideals. Blank contends that 'virginity tests cannot tell us whether an individual woman is a virgin; they can only tell us whether or not she conforms to what people of her time and place believe to be true of virgins' (Blank 2008: 217-218).

In Dakar, virginity is assessed after a couple's *jëbële*, or wedding night. The following morning, the bride's paternal aunt, the *bàjjen*, pays a visit to the newlyweds to verify – and let everyone know – that the marriage was unequivocally consummated overnight. 'We do that to make sure there's no doubt, that honour is safe', my informants repeated. The honour in question here is the new bride's reputation, because is it her *ndaw* (virginity) – never her groom's – that is initially doubted, then tested and ultimately displayed. A successful *jëbële* involves a visibly blood-stained cloth as the essential sign of a woman's lack of prior sexual experience, but

a woman's virginity is also marked by the degree of difficulty for the man to penetrate the vagina and the weak condition of the newly wedded woman the morning after the wedding night. [...] A consummated marriage in combination with the tiredness and pain of the woman are taken as indicators of the man's virility and potency. (van Eerdewijck 2009: 12)

Virginity, then, is as much a performance as it is posited as a biological fact. A woman's bleeding and fatigue are seen as the irrefutable and necessary proof of her virginity, but also of her husband's potency. While the wife's exhaustion contrasts with and proves her husband's vigour, so does the blood on the cloth: the blood of virginity acts as a confirmation of the bride's purity as much as it certifies that the husband sustained an erection. However, much as infertility problems are imputed to women (Gemmeke 2008: 92), a man's virility is rarely called into question; providing the blood of virginity is, in the Senegalese sexual imaginary, entirely a woman's responsibility.

Once his bride's virginity has been assessed, the pleased husband gives a certain sum of money and gifts to his bride, but also to her mother, *bàjjen* and kinswomen who have helped preserve his bride's purity throughout her upbringing. Although today this particular component of the brideprice – in the past known as the *mbërënti* (price of virginity), and now referred to as the

njaganal (pillow gift) to reflect the fact that fewer women are actually virgins upon marriage (Diop 1985: 121) – is meant to ‘enable the bride to purchase necessities such as clothes, ornaments, utensils, working tools and other articles necessary for the functioning of the new household’ (Gaspard and Platteau 2010: 153 n3), it is still symbolically tied to a woman’s virginal status. As discussed in Chapter 3, pecuniary aspects have always played an important role in the events that precede and lead to marriage (LeCour Grandmaison 1972; Diop 1985). Although Wolof marriage traditions and brideprice payments have changed considerably over the last centuries, in part due to the influence of Islam, their financial components have endured nevertheless, and can add up to very large sums. Indeed, in contemporary Dakar, dating, getting engaged and then married involve substantial sums of money and gifts, both to the bride-to-be and to her family. Significantly, while a man’s father used to gift him a parcel of land and help him cover the brideprice, nowadays (and especially in urban areas) it is the groom who covers most if not all of the *alali farata* – the sum of money that seals a Muslim marriage, and the costs associated with the wedding ceremony and the ensuing celebrations (Diop 1985; Gaspard and Platteau 2010). As Anouka van Eerdewijk notes, the bride’s mother and *bàjjen* benefit from these substantial prestations, especially those linked to the wedding night and consummation of marriage (2009: 12), because they are the women who have properly educated and thus contributed to the bride’s purity and good morals. Consequently, Senegalese women’s sexuality is monetised in every ethnic group through bride wealth payments (Diop 1985; Wade 2008) – showing that a range of material, economic and value-laden interests impacting a wide range of kin are vested in a woman’s virginity (Wade 2008: 40).

Most anthropological writings have discussed virginity in relation to honour, prestige, and purity, and their opposite, shame – often tying these concepts to the economic aspects of marriage transactions (see Bardet et al. 1981). While honour encompasses ‘both an individual’s sense of self-worth and this person’s

reputation in the surrounding community', shame, by contrast, 'ar[i]se[s] from the failure to act according to social values', often resulting in public disgrace (Stewart 2015). A woman's virginal status is therefore associated with an idealised sexual purity which is posited as the requirement for being a 'good' woman, requiring 'the disciplining of [her] desires, bod[y] and behaviour' (Bennett 2005: 19). Henrietta L. Moore explains that honour is a cardinal value in Muslim society, and that

family honour depends most critically on the modest, chaste and discreet sexual conduct of daughters, sisters and wives. Honour is a basic social principle, and a family's reputation and status in the community depend upon its vigilant maintenance. The principle of honour structures gender and kinship relationships [...]. The economic and the moral, the material and the cultural, are here combined. (Moore 1988: 106-107)

While this assessment holds true in the Muslim Senegalese context, her assertion that '[c]ontrol of women in the kin group is vested exclusively in the hands of male members of the group' (Moore 1988: 107) does not. Women themselves monitor their daughters very closely, for their own reputations – and as previously mentioned, financial interests – are at stake. As will be discussed more extensively in Chapter 7, *liggéeyu ndeye*, or the 'work of the mother' a woman accomplishes in raising her children properly, is critical in establishing her as a good wife and thereby solidifying her marriage. Consequently, although it is not framed as such, individual and familial honour is a very feminine concern.

In *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (1996), feminist anthropologist Sherry Ortner suggests that the association between purity and virginity is mostly functionalist in orientation, and almost tautological, as it takes 'as explanations the very things that need explaining' (1996: 46). Indeed, women's virginity and purity are seen as markers of the 'social coherence', 'economic viability' and 'cultural reputation' of their group – as pointed out above by Moore – on the basis of women's 'natural childbearing abilities',

‘physical structure (internal pollution)’, ‘function as token of alliance’, or ‘symbolic roles in the family’ (Ortner 1996: 46), which are themselves imputed to their pure, virginal status.

Following Jack Goody’s argument that the expectation of virginity is related to the giving of dowry and inheritance practices among women (1973), Alice Schlegel argues that the value placed on a girl’s virginity depends on the type of marriage transaction practiced in her society: virginity is meaningful when marital alliances serve to preserve, strengthen or improve a family’s social status (1991: 719-720). It is to prevent an unwanted or non-optimal alliance that a girl’s sexuality should be surveilled, and even more so in dowry-giving societies. Schlegel suggests ‘that the ideology of virginity has its source in pragmatic concerns about status maintenance and improvement’ (1991: 731). Similarly, a common reason used to justify the value of female premarital abstinence is in terms of descent, lineage and inheritance: a woman’s virginity would ensure that the offspring born from the union are the husband’s rightful heirs, as ‘the only guarantee of his paternity is that his wife does not have sexual contact with any other man’ (Espin 1992: 154). What virginity symbolises, then, is not so much a woman’s self-control and moral purity, but the control that is exercised over her reproductive capacities and the social and economic benefits that come from them (Ortner 1996).

My own data hints at these structural and functionalist views of virginity, but none of my informants ever mentioned paternity and inheritance as reasons for demanding their bride’s virginity. In fact, through men’s discourses, a more significant pattern emerged. Although female virginity is said to be a guarantee of a woman’s good morals, which are presented as the reason it is expressly sought, popular discourse about the importance of virginity has more to do with alleviating men’s feelings of vulnerability and anxiety than with assessing or protecting feminine virtue.

Our other female informants mostly described virginity and its significance in relation to men. Ndeye Fatou, a young married woman with two children, when asked why it matters to be a virgin at your wedding, replied that we should 'ask men! My husband usually says that when a man marries a virgin, it is an indescribable feeling, and that a woman's virginity is a proof for the man that he can trust her. A woman's virginity upon marriage is a testament of her eternal faithfulness to the man'. Max, a single woman in her early twenties, concurred: 'The importance of virginity? It shows the man that his wife is faithful. That she has never had affairs, and will never have. A woman's virginity allows the man to respect his wife, because he knows... It allows the woman to be respected by her husband. (...) Virginity is important in the life of a woman'. Bineta, twenty-one years-old three years into her marriage, also mentioned how others' perceptions influenced her decision to remain a virgin until she got married: 'I wanted to be a virgin until my wedding because my dad is so strict! But regardless of my dad, I didn't think it was right to get married without being a virgin. In fact, it's tradition that dictates that, and religion too, so we are afraid you know.'

In this context, virginity can be analysed as a form of feminine capital. Gloria Gonzalez-Perez coined the Spanish term *capital femenino* to explain how, for the migrant Mexican women she worked with, 'sexual purity is socially assembled as a life-enhancing resource' – meaning that 'virginity takes on a social exchange value that women, a subordinate social group in a patriarchal society, use to improve and maximize their life conditions and opportunities' (2005: 38). She contends that when a woman's socioeconomic status is closely tied to her marital status – as it is in Senegal – people construct ideologies that come to dictate what is desirable or undesirable in a woman, associating, for example, moral integrity with sexual inactivity. Noncompliance to these beliefs not only brings stigma and rejection, but social and financial insecurity. Importantly, this

process of (dis)identification is relational: it is in relation to others that virginity matters (Gonzalez-Lopez 2011: 543), that it becomes a source of pride for the virgin, and a locus of shame for the non-virgin.

Of all the recorded interviews El Hadj and I conducted, and throughout the informal discussions I had with several Senegalese women of all ages, only Ndeye Fatou talked about virginity as something intrinsically important to the woman herself. She explained that '[o]f course virginity is important for me! I consider virginity as the *seconde âme* (second soul) of a woman. Because virginity, once you have lost it, you can't get it back'. While she did not elaborate on what her notion of 'second soul' entailed, her comments appear to refer to the values of purity, morality, piety and honour that are associated with an unmarried woman's sexual restraint in the Senegalese sexual imaginary.

Although Gonzalez-Lopez's concept of feminine capital takes virginity as its point of departure and source of power, it is strikingly similar to Catherine Hakim's notion of erotic capital, which proposes to use sensuality and sex-appeal to maximise gains. Erotic capital, Hakim suggests, empowers those who have it – mostly women – through the careful management of a 'combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social, and sexual attractiveness to other members of [one's] society, and especially to members of the opposite sex, in all social contexts' (2010: 501, 2011). Both *capital feminino* and erotic capital are inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's types of capital – namely social (network of social relations), economic (monetary capacities) and cultural (intellectual and educational qualifications, among other things) capital. Since, for Bourdieu, '[s]ocial action depends on social determinants, deriving from an individual's position within the cultural field, the amount of social, economic and cultural capital that she or he possesses and the personal trajectory experienced' (Silva 2007: 144), in an '*economy of symbolic exchanges* [...] a woman learns to perceive

her premarital virginity as a form of social capital that she may use strategically' (Gonzalez-Lopez 2005: 43, emphasis in original).

While it presents some interesting insight, the idea of erotic capital – or, more precisely, the specific way Hakim frames it in her work – has been heavily criticised for not considering the multiple factors and contexts such capital is contingent upon (Harris 2013; Greene 2013, 2014). Moreover, Hakim disregards the stigma and taboos associated with sexuality (Harris 2013: 239) and writes as if women's erotic capital could simply be deployed in all times and places without consequences other than those intended – neglecting to acknowledge that women's erotic capabilities are, in Senegal as elsewhere, carefully regulated. Gonzalez-Lopez's *capital feminino* therefore appears more grounded in and encompassing of the multiple dynamics that actually inform sexual practices.

Vaginas, small and big

'It's forbidden for a woman to go out and look for another man, she must stay with her husband. *Les sexes ne sont pas pareils* [Genitalia aren't all the same],' Djibril said. I was not sure what he meant by that, so I asked him to give an explanation. He began by showing me his pinky finger, saying that 'Some men have a sex like this. And some have a big penis like that!' he added, using his forearm as a measure of comparison. Bringing his thumb and index close to one another, leaving a small gap between them, he continued: 'For a woman, it's the same. Some have a sex this small, and others have one like that,' he burst out laughing as he held his hands shoulder-width apart.

'Well, that is a bit large don't you think?' I teased him. Djibril was very expressive, and I could not help but laugh with him. 'So you're saying some women have a small vagina and others a larger vagina... I heard that some products exist to shrink or tighten the vagina, do you know anything about that?'

‘Yes. They’re not good for your health. These products exist for men and women, they’re good!’ Djibril exclaimed. I was confused by his mentioning that the aphrodisiacs were simultaneously unhealthy and good, and asked if he believed people should use them or not.

‘Of course you should use it! Men love tight vaginas, not the ones you can put your head in,’ the taximan replied without hesitation. ‘Ouch! That would hurt! I’d be in pain, that’s for sure,’ I laughingly responded.

‘You know, there are some medicines you can take. Nowadays, even when you have had a child... you take the medicine, and you’ll be a virgin again.’ I must have had a skeptical look, because Djibril assured me that such products actually worked. ‘But it is imperative,’ he added, ‘that when you take it, you have sex. If you don’t fuck, it won’t go away. The man must come and fuck you, and blood will flow.’

I was still very suspicious of the virginity-giving property of the nostrum preparations: ‘So it gives a woman her virginity back?’ I queried again. Djibril’s response was unequivocal: ‘Yes, virginity. You can get it at the pharmacy.’

In reality, Senegalese would rarely go to the doctor or the pharmacy to access aphrodisiacal products such as the ones Djibril talked about so passionately. The erotic pharmacopoeia is a flourishing element of Dakar’s informal economy, and although I have seen some ‘sexual pleasure enhancers’ displayed at my local pharmacy, when I asked my friends and informants about where I could get such products, I was mostly directed to the *Marché malien* (Malian Market) – close to the former train station and to the ferry to Gorée Island – or to the *Marché HLM*, famous for its wide collection of colourful fabrics, its numerous local and imported incense stands, and its large sensual clothing section.

On my first visit to Marché malien, I was accompanying a friend who wanted to buy stocks of erotic products she could resell in her native Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Kadhy introduced me to Adama, a lively saleswoman in her mid-fifties to whom she had been referred previously. That afternoon, I sat down and silently observed how Kadhy was trading with Adama, trying to figure out what the myriad of goods on display were meant for. Every inch of the small space she was renting for a monthly 40 000 FCFA (approx. £45) was covered with merchandise. The space she occupied was expensive, but it was probably one of the best in the building: right by the main doors, it was conveniently located, and unlike the other stands it was bright and airy. Adama made clever use of the few steps leading from the street up to the floor to display her stock which, thanks to the colourful look of waist beads and other packagings, easily grabbed the attention of passersby. And there were containers everywhere in Adama's booth. Jars filled with dried or marinated roots, powders, beans and similar plant-based substances were perfectly aligned in rows stacked on top of one another, giving a sculptural impression. Baskets packed with tiny imported pots of breast- and buttocks-enlarging gels, tubes of *crème d'amour* (love cream) to massage and grow the penis, small bottles of lubricating oil and ginger-based candies were laid out in front of the metal and glass display cabinets – also crammed with jewellery, cosmetics and titillating merchandise – that edged Adama's U-shaped stall. A long, slightly unstable wooden bench allowed customers to sit down and take their time to look at the products, discuss their intended effects and efficacy, ask advice on a specific issue, *waxaale* (bargain the price)⁵² and, as Adama always hoped, make a purchase. I was grateful to Kadhy for taking me there; there were several stands like Adama's at the market and throughout the city, but as with

⁵² A myriad of products are easily and relatively cheaply available to help a woman achieve her goal. If the cigar-shaped *craie chinoise* retailed for around 8000 FCFA (£9), I managed to buy the *billes de karité* and other similar *secrets de femme* for 1000 to 1500 FCFA (£1.70). In comparison, a meal in a street restaurant was usually priced around 500 FCFA (£0.60).

most things in Dakar, I preferred to rely on word of mouth and references from people I knew to buy something or find informants.

I did not buy anything that day, feeling overwhelmed by the impressive quantity of *affaires de femmes* (women's things) Adama had to sell, by the high number of people walking in and out of the building and passing us by, and by the thick, humid air that made me so hot I could see pearls of sweat dripping from the front of my knees. I promised Adama I would come back soon after, and I returned a couple of weeks later. That morning, I spent more than two hours on the wooden bench, Adama captivating and wowing me with everything she had to show and sell. Our conversation, a mix of Wolof and French that included some acting or mimicking when neither of us was able to find the words we were looking for, revolved around the products and what they achieved – or at least promised to achieve. I was once again surprised by and curious about the diversity of potions, lotions, creams and pills Adama stocked, and I could not help but think of how fun and exciting it would be to actually give some of them a try: I had been seduced into the creative, sensual and tempting universe of *secret de femmes*.

However, the overall feeling of playfulness I enjoyed in the moment and the potential pleasures I imagined from Adama's *médicaments* [medicine], as she called her products indiscriminately, did not last. This was due, in part, to the lack of labelling on most of them: it is virtually impossible to know what ingredients they are made of. Imported from China, the Emirates, Mali, Niger, and elsewhere, or locally made, the pots and bottles could contain anything. I was especially worried by the products meant to be inserted in the vagina in order to – as Adama put it – *augmenter son goût*, increase its taste.

Making sex better was the main objective of the erotic paraphernalia she was selling. But from the best-seller items she showed me with such pride, a clear pattern emerged: all were intended to enhance individual male and female sexual

performance in order to maximise masculine pleasure. On the men's side of things, products designed to enlarge the penis or make an erection last longer were *en vogue*. The love cream, *crème d'amour*, was to be used as massage oil for the penis, whereas the generic Viagra she sold for less than £3 a pack was to give confidence to a man. Likewise, the Men's coffee, a Chinese-imported aphrodisiac, was said to give up to a hundred hours of erection (the box contained eight small packages) and cure impotence. Because it looked, smelled and apparently tasted like coffee, women could furtively prepare a cup for their partner. In doing so, they could ensure their partner's sexual performance and satisfaction, thereby enhancing the man's masculine pride and their own feminine capital.

Apart from cosmetics and jewellery, a wide selection of the female products Adama offered were *serre-vagin*, vagina tighteners. In other shops and stalls I visited, and for most people I talked to, these goods were also known as *produits qui redonnent la virginité* (products that give virginity back). Despite numerous visits and discussions with aphrodisiac vendors like Adama, or with users and beneficiaries like Djibril, I was still having a hard time understanding how a soap bar, a cream or a gel could restore virginity; but I kept hearing and reading about such products in newspapers or magazines. Concoctions like small pellets of shea butter mixed with one or several plants and 'secret' ingredients were marketed as products that can give a woman her virginity back, or make her feel like a virgin again. I was aware that hymenoplasty – the surgical reconstruction of the hymen – existed in Senegal, as an article published in the local newspaper *Walf Grand-Place* reported (Cissokho 2006). But how could any product – be it swallowed, inserted in the vagina, or used to bathe with – restore a woman's virginity, as Djibril and Vieux, in the introductory vignette, contended? That was still a mystery to me.

Faking it

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I was lucky enough to be invited to a women-only gathering, a private sex-toy event organised between good friends where a saleswoman, usually a Laobe, would sell waistbeads and wrapper loincloths, incense and perfumes, cosmetics and aphrodisiacs. Oumy, our hostess, was a friend of a French colleague who had told her about my research, and she was adamant that I had to attend a traditional Senegalese "sex-toy" party – so she quickly organised one. That evening, several elements of my research seemed to come together in a sort of anthropological epiphany and, amongst other things, I finally made sense of the virginity products.

Our group of about ten women had been talking, laughing and, as in every Senegalese *ndaje* (social gathering), eating finger food and drinking non-alcoholic beverages for about an hour when Ndeye Marie, the Laobe saleswoman, took out some more items from the tote bag at her feet. Maguette, one of the guests, quickly grabbed what she called the *craie chinoise* (Chinese chalk) – a short, white, cigar-shaped stick about six inches long and three-quarters of an inch in diameter, beautifully wrapped in a red and gold cardboard box that looked like a little Asian treasure chest. She said she had heard good things about the *craie* and really wanted to try it, because she had had such a painful experience with the little *billes de karité* (shea butter pebbles). Slightly confused about what she was referring to, I asked Maguette to tell me more about what had happened to her.

‘I wanted to surprise my husband and try something new, to spice things up,’ she began. ‘So I bought the little *billes de karité* at the market, you know what they are? You insert them in your vagina, and it feels like you are sixteen years old again, like you're a virgin again. It makes sex very pleasant for your husband. The lady I bought them from said to put one or two in my vagina a couple of hours before making love. But I have had 3 children you know, my vagina is not the

same [as it used to be]. So I put four pebbles in. When my husband and I wanted to have sex, it was *trop serré, trop serré!* [too tight, too tight!]. I could not even put my finger in my vagina, it was so tight! We waited a bit and tried again, but again it was so tight that I bled. It was very painful. It took a few days before it came back to normal.'

As she recalled the story in a semi-funny, semi-serious manner, Maguette's facial expression showed that the memory of the strong discomfort she felt at the time was still vivid. As I empathised with her and tried to imagine the unpleasant sensations, it suddenly made sense.

She bled.

She had made herself a virgin again.

Although bleeding was the extreme, unintended result of her use of a vagina-tightening, plant-based local remedy, Maguette did want her vagina to feel 'young' again for her husband. This procedure, based on the use of 'plants and other intravaginal desiccants [...] to minimise vaginal secretions' presents striking similarities with the practice of dry sex, which 'creates a vagina that is dry, tight, and heated, which is supposed to generate an increased sensation for the man during intercourse' (van Andel et al. 2008: 84). A significant difference, however, is that although my Dakarais informants wanted a tight vagina, they never mentioned it having to be excessively dry. In fact, Adama and other saleswomen I met made a point of selling lubricating lotions and oils along with the *serre-vagin*, *savons de virginité* [virginity soaps] and the like. Unlike several countries where dry sex is commonplace – according to Karen E. Kun, 'the use of vaginal drying agents has been reported in South Africa, Senegal, Zaire, Cameroon, Malawi, Zambia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia, Haiti and Costa Rica' (1998: 93) – it appears that the aroused, wet vagina is not a problem in Senegal; whereas in some places, a woman with too much vaginal fluids is

believed to be promiscuous or unfaithful (Gonzalez-Lopez 2005: 47; van Andel et al. 2008; cf. Taylor 1990, 1992). The astringent properties of the plants and sometimes chemical products inserted in the vagina dry out the vaginal walls and alter its pH (van Andel et al. 2008: 86), making the vagina swell and tighten, resulting in the man's penis feeling bigger.

In Senegal, the use of vaginal cosmetics, as Cheikh Ibrahima Niang calls them, highlights the idea that

the vagina is not considered a simple, natural part of the body; it is viewed as an erotic "work of art" that can be enhanced by the use of perfumes and the introduction of other substances (some women place incense between their legs in order to perfume the vagina). This practice is called *Safal* in the Wolof language, which means "heightening the quality of the taste". (1996: 218)

As a result of these expectations, a woman's body becomes a site of anxiety for both herself and her partner, which explains the ongoing physical, emotional and interpretive labour she must put into creating a desirable body: a body that is or must seem to be untouched, ignorant of carnal pleasures; a body that is physically and symbolically transformed by the husband upon the wedding night; a body that becomes a 'work of art' for masculine pleasure. Virginity, then, becomes a form of feminine capital that women use to position themselves within their relationship. In order to do so, they have to interpret their husband's needs, wants and preferences. If a woman wasn't a virgin upon marriage, she has to imagine her husband's potential reaction if he came to discover the truth. She might tell him, but she has to weigh the costs of such a decision (as I will discuss further below). She might also decide to fake her virginity, which requires careful planning and preparation, again involving physical and emotional labour.

Bloody egos

Interestingly, Niang's vision of the vagina as a body part of which the taste can be enhanced contrasts significantly with the prevalent idea that virginity is natural

and measurable. Indeed, virginity is equated with the hymen, a fact disseminated and taken for granted by men and women alike, and even by the president of Senegal's Midwives Association: 'It happens that some girls come to see me saying they are virgins, but the midwife has touched them with two fingers. Let this be clear: even if the hymen is elastic, it is impossible to perform a vaginal exam on a virgin, especially using two fingers' (Cissokho 2006). According to this excerpt from a longer interview published in the newspaper *Walf Grand Place*, there are no biological differences between women, and there exists a typical, natural, virgin vagina. However, later in that same article, the midwife offered a contradictory message:

Will a virgin necessarily bleed? Yes, absolutely. I work with a couple, the woman is very depressed, because she says she had never been with a man before getting married, but she did not bleed on her wedding night. Cases like this are very rare. During intercourse, if the hymen is very thin, sex will go without problem and the woman won't bleed. And men should also stop feeling ashamed. A well-lubricated woman with a thin and elastic hymen can't bleed. (Cissokho 2006)

In this incongruent statement, the particular and the norm are blurred, creating a confusing message that every virgin will bleed, although there are some rare exceptions. What's more, the midwife is preoccupied with a man's feeling of shame, suggesting that when a woman does not bleed on her wedding night, it is his virility and potency that is directly undermined. This preoccupation with a man's shame becomes particularly interesting when it is put side by side with the idea that respect for a wife emanates from her virginity, as Vieux claimed at the beginning of the chapter, when he asserted that 'virginity makes the woman' and that a husband will always respect his virgin wife. Respect for a woman and wife, it seems, comes not simply from her virginity, but from her ability to uphold and fortify her partner's masculinity. Discussing fake orgasm in a way that applies strikingly to virginity and fake virginity, Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott contend that it represents an example of

the embeddedness of sexual activity in everyday sociality: women's reassurance of their partners is part of the "emotion work" of

maintaining a heterosexual relationship (see Duncombe and Marsden 1993) and conforms to the more general expectation that women will "feed egos and tend wounds" (Bartky 1990). (Jackson and Scott 2007: 106)

Indeed, this same emotion work is at play when a woman purchases vaginal cosmetics that desiccate her vagina to make it swell and tighten. She puts herself at increased risk of contracting HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases (Niang 1996; Kun 1998; van Andel et al. 2008) by making her vagina feel smaller in order for her man's penis to feel bigger. She also posits herself as the 'deficient' partner, so her husband does not feel his real or imagined shortcomings, while simultaneously marking her body as worthy of admiration, demonstrating that she can modify it, paint it, and colour it much like a work of art. In doing so, she tries to prevent her partner from looking for another woman who would have greater success in making him feel 'big', potent, manly. At play here is a significant interpretive labour, for the wife has to act 'in such a way that the man always feels he is rediscovering sexual pleasure every time he has sexual relations with her, and she should show him that sex with her is the best, so that he will not be tempted by other women' (Niang 1996: 219). In this context, the use of virginity soaps, pebbles and the like strengthens a woman's feminine capital because it comforts her husband in his own sexual, masculine capital.

From a feminine point of view, then, aphrodisiacs and other vaginal cosmetics that recreate a woman's virginity aim to prevent men going astray – an aim exemplified by one Senegalese saleswoman's business card, which read *Secrets de Femme: Comment retenir son homme à la maison?* [Woman's Secrets: How to keep your husband at home?]. The masculine demand for virginity is also linked to ideas of keeping one's wife at home, as virginity is correlated to female faithfulness. However, the emphasis placed on female virginity points to men's fear of not living up to women's expectations, of being unable to sexually satisfy them. When El Hadj asked Monsieur Samb to explain why he thought virginity was important, the former private chauffeur, now in his fifties, replied that 'it

gives confidence to the husband, he can have complete trust in his wife. He will know that she is chaste and faithful, that she hasn't known any man other than him. And when you see that, you're obligated to respect your wife. But when you find she is not a virgin on her wedding night, you won't trust her. You'll think she has slept with several men you do not know. It is rarer and rarer to find a virgin. Back in the days, when you married a woman, you were the one who had to teach her social norms, and how to make love. And then you knew she only knew you. And then she could not make any judgment,' he stated, as if it was obvious.

Moussa's answer to the same question was even more explicit in describing the masculine anxiety around performance: 'With a virgin, some men take one minute, two minutes, 3 minutes or more to ejaculate. So when the woman had had experience making love before her marriage, when the man she had been making love with took several minutes to come, and when she was taking more time to have an orgasm, five minutes or more... Were she to end up with a husband who only lasts two seconds before he ejaculates, that will hurt the man, it's the man who has pleasure and not the woman, so it's a cause for divorce. That is why our elders say you must watch over your virginity until your marriage.'

These statements highlight how female virginity is seen as essential not for the woman herself, as a marker of her femininity, but rather as a way for men to protect their egos and their sexual abilities from their wife's judgement. Virginity means that a woman doesn't have any point of comparison, and therefore cannot have expectations. By demanding that women be virgins, men ask women to fulfill the ideal they envision and imagine about themselves much more than about the women *per se*. In this context, virginity stands not for a woman's purity, morality and faithfulness: it is a way for men to alleviate their anxiety. For if '[v]irginity is a symbol of exclusiveness and inaccessibility, nonavailability to the general masses, something, in short, that is elite' (Ortner 1996: 56), marrying a virgin bride is a proof that a man has achieved some success, that he is a real

man. Indeed, 'the ideal joins rather than separates the ego and the object; what one "has" elevates what one "is"' (Ahmed 2004: 128). By 'having' a virgin, then, a man 'is' more masculine. As such, the message hidden behind that of female virginity says much more about men than it does about women.

A man's concern that his wife should not be able to compare his sexual performance with someone else does not mean, however, that he does not want to pleasure his wife – on the contrary. In fact, some men will go to great lengths to enhance their sexual capacities, as exemplified by the popularity of sex enhancement *maraboutage* around 2006. Dakar newspaper *Walf Grand Place* ran several articles on a woman named Marie Guignage Faye and her two sons, Gormack and Raymond, who claimed the power to magically enlarge a man's penis. The procedure starts with four days at the village where the Faye family lives. Each day, the patient is taken away to a baobab (a very large tree considered to have mystical properties) where he picks a dildo-like piece of wood from a selection of branches that represent potential penis sizes – as the treatment is irreversible, one must choose carefully. The patient then has to undergo a series of ritual bathings. After four days, he can go home, but has to continue his treatment by taking a special concoction (Lo et al. 2006; Thioye and Diakhaté 2006). Importantly, the client is forbidden to have sex during the course of treatment, highlighting that he is making himself new again – in a process somewhat akin to a woman recreating her virginity.

'Hop on, hop off, and next stop'

On the 13th of August 2015, a short clip taken from the television program *Yendou Leen* and posted on Youtube (SenTV 2015) showed up in my Facebook newsfeed. Since fieldwork, I had been following several Senegalese news and lifestyle pages on the social networking platform. Entitled '*Une fille vierge et une fille qui a perdu la virginité n'ont pas...*' [A virgin and a girl who has lost her virginity don't

have...], the video is an excerpt from an interview showcasing prominent Senegalese political, religious and business figure Ahmed Khalifa Niasse. In his early seventies, the *marabout*-politician, one of the richest men in Senegal, explains that virgin and a non-virgin women do not have the same value – adding that it doesn't matter how the woman has lost her virginity, be it by playing sports or having been raped. He illustrates his point by explaining that when an individual goes to the market to buy a mobile phone, a brand new one in an unopened box is worth more than one with open packaging.

My friend Soumaya, a young single woman in her mid-twenties, was beside herself when we discussed the video over Facebook chat. I had asked her to watch the one-minute excerpt and translate it from Wolof to French for me, to make sure I had understood Niasse's comments correctly. 'We're compared to merchandise and we're given prices... It's like we're not human beings! We're just like mobile phones!' she quickly typed, her frustration emphasised by the fast pace of her messages.

'What about men? Does Niasse say anything about men having premarital sex?' I asked. Again, she replied quickly: '*Non*. Nothing. A man can do whatever he wants with every woman on earth and demand, and I really mean *demand*, that his wife be a virgin. That's our society.'

Soumaya's comments call attention to the double standards – not exclusive to Senegalese society – set for men and women in terms of premarital sexual behaviours. According to scholar and spiritual leader Iman Ravane Mbaye, the theological canons of Islam require that both men and women be chaste until marriage. However, perhaps because there is no visible anatomical marker of male virginity – and most likely because men enjoy, in Senegal as elsewhere, much more sexual and overall freedom than women – it is generally assumed that a man will have had multiple sexual partners before he finally settles down.

'Maybe here in the religious context both should be virgins, but in the cultural context, it's the woman who's more... For men, it's no big deal, it doesn't matter. You have no way to know if a man is a virgin or not, because when he goes through puberty, there are a lot of temptations. A man might have been de-virginised at 13 or 14 years old!' said Doudou, a salesman I met on the busy streets of Marché Sandaga on Valentine's Day 2014. A married man in his late thirties, Doudou wore jeans and a well-ironed shirt. Throughout the interview, we walked around the market and he introduced me to his friends and colleagues who all tried to sell me something, convinced I was there to find a Valentine's Day present for my *chéri* [French term of endearment for a romantic partner].

Our conversation was animated. Doudou thought it was both funny and weird that I pointed out the intrinsic inequality of the differentiated gendered expectations regarding virginity, even when he had noted them himself. Earlier in our discussion, he had told me that in his youth, his relationships were multiple and temporary, much like Dakar's colourful minibuses, known as *cars rapides* (fast buses): 'I just hopped on, hopped off, and next stop,' he laughed, confirming that he had a variety of premarital sexual experiences.



Figure 7. Car rapide

Doudou's comparison of women to *cars rapides* is interesting on several levels. For one thing, although it is easy to hop on one of these minibuses, there is always an *apprenti* (apprentice) guarding the back door and collecting the fare – much like women's virginity is safeguarded and traded in brideprice and the often-symbolic *prix de la virginité* (virginity price). And Doudou's analogy, like Niasse's association of women with mobile phones, is reminiscent of Francis Nyamnjoh's informants – who described some women as 'spare tyres' (*routes de secours*) or wheels of trucks (*pneus de camions*) (2005: 304). As Soumaya pointed out, in all three cases, women are commodified and given a rather poor value – first as a used telephone with an open packaging, second as a cheap mode of transportation (a ride on a *car rapide* is much less expensive than on a regular, official TATA bus line), and third as replacement parts. What is particularly striking, however, is how female mobility is associated with poor morality and assumed promiscuity. Adeline Masquelier has shown how Hausa women in Niger used to be likened to race-horses – and now to cars – because of the prestige (and related high expenses) associated with getting and supporting a well-dressed wife (2005: 73-76). For the Haya of Tanzania, Brad Weiss suggests, 'the mobility and speed of cars and buses embody forms of both power and inaccessibility' (1996: 192) because of their high monetary value. Just as Weiss points out that the Haya associate female mobility with promiscuity, Doudou and Niasse's commentaries suggest that it is this very potential for mobility that devalues women – because it increases the risk that they lose their virginity and become 'easy to hop on'. Indeed, in the Senegalese sexual imaginary, a good woman should stay at home to be a housewife, and it is the man who should be mobile. However, Donna Perry (2005) illustrates how in rural areas this ideal of feminine confinement to the home has always been disputed through women's agricultural work and, more recently, through their involvement in petty trade and commerce, a point also made by Buggenhagen (2012) regarding women's work in urban areas.

So despite his own proud admission of having had a multiplicity of premarital sexual affairs, Doudou was adamant that his wife had never had sexual intercourse before their *jebēle*, a point I called him out for: 'You said you would not have married your wife if she hadn't been a virgin, is that true?' Doudou nodded in approbation. 'So you had sex with women you did not love and knew you did not want to marry, but you did not touch the woman you actually married?' I asked. 'Don't you think it ruined *their* chances to get married?' I added, slightly insulted on these women's behalf.

My interlocutor took on an offended look before answering that some of his former girlfriends were virgins, while others weren't: 'I tell you, I have never *devirginised* a woman, so the girls I dated, those who were virgins I kept their virginity, I did not even try to penetrate them,' he added, proud of his honourable self-control. 'But those who weren't... well... There wasn't much to be afraid of!' he concluded, a mischievous smile on his face. He was clearly oblivious to the fact that the burden of premarital pregnancy falls on women's shoulders (Wade 2008: 127-134), a point I come back to in the following section.

Doudou's comments parallel those of van Eerdewijck's young male participants, for whom sexuality is carefully regulated, albeit in contradicting ways. For those unmarried men – as was the case for a younger Doudou – 'virginity and abstinence remain important reference points' (2009: 18). They refrained from having penetrative intercourse with their 'real', serious girlfriends, thus preserving their virginity, while they enjoyed a much more active, frequent and carefree sexuality with the 'easy' girls. Differentiating between 'good' and 'easy' women allows young and sexually active men to 'fragment their sexual desires' and negotiate the tensions and incoherencies inherent to their own sexual activity by deflecting them onto women (van Eerdewijck 2009: 18). In consequence, it is women's sexuality that is scrutinised and controlled through

the social and religious valuation of their virginity and the surveillance of their daily activities. This surveillance does not prevent couples from engaging in sexual play (with or without vaginal penetration), however. Kodou Wade (2008) provides several examples of how premarital relationships are managed and the abstinence rules bypassed, for example by going home right after school when the teenagers' parents are less likely to be home. In my own study, a few university student informants explained how they circumvent social taboos on sex by meeting with their partner at the beach late at night or, more often, use their own or their friend's dorm rooms on campus to steal a couple of hours of 'good alone time' with their girlfriend. One friend in particular was really curious about morning sex, after having spent the night sleeping with a partner. He had never had the opportunity to spend that much time with his girlfriend, as they both felt compelled to go home for the night in order to avoid raising their parents' suspicion. However, the importance of keeping up with appearances of abstinence is much more important for women than for men, and the following example illustrates the significant double standards applied to both.

Double standards

One evening as I was heading to my boyfriend Modou's apartment, I called him and offered to pick up beers for us – an offer he accepted, unsurprisingly. However, in the span of our brief conversation, he asked me to be very careful in concealing the cans of beer I was to bring, emphasising at least three times that the neighbours should not see them. When I arrived, his eyes swiftly surveyed my hands and purse, and his shoulders relaxed when he noticed the beers were not visible, as I had hidden them in my large tote bag. He was not at all worried about the fact that the neighbours had seen *me* arrive at such a late hour, making it obvious that we were more than friends and thus flouting the religious taboo on premarital sexuality. When I left later that evening –

spending the night would have made things even more, maybe too obvious, although the same constraints did not apply when he stayed at my place overnight – he even kissed me when he knew full well that the shop-keeper, house guards and men discussing on the nearby bench could (and definitely did) see us.

Modou's behaviour suggests a hierarchy in taboo-breaking, with some transgressions having more consequences than others, at least socially. Both alcohol consumption and sexual relations outside of marriage are prohibited in Islam, but Modou and other Muslim friends did not mention a fear of Allah when discussing the potential repercussions of drinking and having sex. However, they did show concern about how both would make them appear in the eyes of others. Modou did not want to risk being labeled a drinker, a negative attribute that would impinge on his status in the community by framing him as impious and, by consequence, a man of lesser quality, if not a lesser man. In contrast, by openly kissing me in public and having me over at his apartment late one evening, he was infringing on another religious taboo, but one that is socially accepted and even promoted for men: our libidinal transgression actually augmented his status by situating him as a sexually active, potent, virile man. Had I been a Senegalese woman, of course, it could have curtailed if not destroyed my reputation. I was thus surprised by Modou's recollection of these events, which he cast as a way of protecting me. As I was writing this Chapter, I asked him what he thought of the fact that he could sleep over at my apartment while I couldn't spend the night at his: 'It's true that I was thinking about my neighbours', he replied, 'because some things are not acceptable here, and a gentleman will do everything to care for and protect the woman he loves. You could not sleep here because it would have got them talking, and I respect you too much to let something like this tarnish your reputation. I wanted to protect you, protect your image. If you had been a slut, I would not have respected you, and I would not have cared,' he concluded.

The idea that respect comes with virginity is used as leverage by both men and women in similar, yet opposite ways: men use it to control women's behaviour towards them, and to maintain women in a subordinate position; and women use it to gain more respect and power, as a sign that they are people of high moral value. Much as Modou did, men often framed the double standards they hold for themselves and for women in terms of respect: 'Why would I marry a girl who does not respect herself enough to preserve her virginity?' was a recurring question in the interviews and informal conversations I had with Senegalese men. Indeed, the following anecdote, recalled by a senior widowed woman, highlights how the concepts of virginity, respect and power intersect:

I remember a story my mom used to tell me about this couple. The husband would sit at one end of the table, and his wife at the other end. Every time they ate beef, he would take a bone from the thigh, look at her intensely and put his finger through the empty bone. She inevitably began to cry, and other people around the table wouldn't understand what was going on. He was silently shaming her by reminding her that he had found her 'without marrow', that she was not a virgin. That woman, she was miserable her entire life.

Conversely, when I discussed the issue with Rokhaya our housekeeper, she said that if a woman is a virgin, the respect she gets from her husband is transformed into power within their relationship: 'When you are fighting with him, if he starts to be mean, you can just tell him, "You know how you have found me, you know I am pure, so you have nothing against me," and it's true, virginity gives you the last word,' she emphasised. Rokhaya's statement is congruent with the fact that some of Gonzalez-Lopez's informants 'remained sexually abstemious to prevent future husbands from throwing their transgressions in their faces' (2005: 45). As Rokhaya concluded, 'telling your boyfriend that you want to remain a virgin could be used as a way to measure the seriousness and extent of his love and respect for you'. Such a strategy was also noted by van Eerdewijck (2006; 2007; 2009) and corroborated by a few men, like Doudou the salesman, who

highlighted that it was out of respect and love for their partner that they did not try to have sex with her.

Although I believe Modou was genuinely concerned about my reputation, his behaviour that evening suggests that a fear of judgment similar to that faced by sexually active unmarried women is experienced by Muslim men only when it comes to alcohol consumption – and not because of the religious taboo itself, so much as what others might think and how that might impinge on one's masculine capital. In contrast, men are proud of their sexual experience because it constructs them as a real man, *goór* – an inaccessible status for a virgin man. As such, '[b]eing a man is not so much a matter of biology; it is not the fact of having a penis that makes a man a man, but what he does with that penis. Men become men by using their penis for heterosexual sex' (van Eerdewijck 2009: 11). It follows that by sending me home that night, but also by openly kissing me goodbye, Modou simultaneously displayed his virility, his affection and his respect for me not only to his neighbours, but also to me – although I did not pick up on it right away. In doing so, he expressed a certain form of discretion, *sutura*, which is a central element of the Senegalese sexual imaginary.

Sutura

A core concept of the Wolof code of honour, '(t)he virtuous practices and states that *sutura* indexes include discretion, modesty, privacy, protection, and the happiness that the previous terms are said to ensure' (Mills 2011: 2-3). In Senegal, *sutura* has also come to be recognised as a Muslim value, and as such it is widely shared among other Senegalese ethnic groups.

For most of my informants, *sutura* is both something you have and something you do: you can give someone *sutura* by hiding their flaws or misbehaviour, but you can also show *sutura* yourself by avoiding certain practices, such as openly

discussing sexuality. Indeed, from basic sex education to pregnancy, from contraception to pleasure, in Senegal sexuality⁵³ is contained by *sutura*. However, talks of sex can happen in certain circles, especially between women and close friends from the same generation, as I witnessed at Oumy's sex-toy party. The participants exchanged tricks and strategies to please their husbands, and they did not try to conceal the pleasure that they get from sex. The evening was filled with laughter and kinky talk. Djibril, however, would certainly have disapproved of such fun women-only reunions and the discussions we had: 'You know, between a man and a woman... to kiss and tell is forbidden. It's confidential. You know there are women's groups and associations, when they meet on a Sunday and they talk about it. They say "Haaa, last night my man, oh la la, he's so good, he made me come twice." That's forbidden.'

⁵³ Its pre-eminence partly explains why formal sexual education is virtually non-existent: most of my informants reported learning about sexuality from friends, the internet and pornography, as corroborated by van Eerdewijck (2007, 2009). The belief that any form of sex education, in school or at home, would encourage young unmarried individuals to explore their sexuality is prevalent – as illustrated in an issue of *Magazine Confidences* which debated the pros and cons of sexual education (Dia 2013). Uneducated women know very little about their own reproductive capacities, and even less about contraception and the prevention of unwanted pregnancies. A woman asking her partner to put on a *capote* (French slang for condom) or a *kawas* (Wolof for sock, a slang for condom) is considered either a prostitute or an intellectual (Wade 2008: 191-192), meaning that she thinks too highly of herself. Wade clearly describes how the use of condoms is a choice and a responsibility left to the man who, in most cases, will prefer having unprotected intercourse because it 'feels better' (2008: 190) – a sentiment common well beyond Senegal. In Kenya, Sanyu Mojola (2014) explains how this lack of information – in combination with the male partner's usually larger economic power – puts women at risk of contracting HIV and unwanted pregnancies. In my own interviews, only Djibril showed some concern about HIV and STDs, whereas one woman, owner of a *secrets de femmes* shop nearby Marché HLM, believed that 'by remaining virgins until marriage, at least young women can prevent getting a disease'. Although (or maybe because) the prevalence rate for HIV/AIDS is currently estimated at around half a percent in Senegal (UNAIDS 2015), testing is readily available and often free. However, an important stigma surrounds the very idea of getting tested. I was told by a very close friend, also a young *tubaab* woman, that a suggestion to her Senegalese boyfriend that they both get tested quickly turned into a dramatic argument. He categorically refused, which initially did not surprise her. But as she tried to convince him, he got more and more defensive, even responding that he would 'rather never get a blow-job ever again than get tested'. As we later discovered, naming a disease or a mortal danger is associated with wishing it upon the person – a fact Wade also briefly mentions (2008: 193) – and my friend's insistence on doing the 'responsible thing' was read by her partner as a death threat. In this climate where biological facts are left unexplained and sexual health talks avoided, *sutura* could potentially prove dangerous.

'Is it *sutura*?' I asked.

'Yes. Our Muslim religion forbids it. What's between a man and a woman is confidential. Your best friend, you have no right telling him how you have sex with your wife. And as a wife, even your sister, you can't tell her how you sleep with your husband. It's not something one can talk about. Why would you?

'So you need to protect your intimacy, that's right?'

'You can't tell about it, never ever. A woman who talks about it, she's crazy, we should cut her throat. It's ignorance, it's ignorance. A lack of education. A woman who has been properly raised, who is well educated, she will never ever say how she sleeps with her husband, never, ever!' The aging taxi driver was so passionate about this topic that, as he finished that last sentence, he knocked his fist on the table, trying to make his point about discretion even clearer. His comment could also be read as a sign of insecurity: for women to talk about sex with their friends increases the chances that they compare their husbands' potency and sexual abilities. *Sutura* thus not only protects a couple's intimacy, but it also serves to protect the masculine ego, much like virginity does.

Ivy Mills explains that '[a]ccording to Wolof ethics, shame is predicated on public exposure; a bad deed that is not visible to others does not incur dishonor until it is exposed' (2011: 3). For example, despite the strong emphasis placed on prenuptial female abstinence, Wade's study of non-marital pregnancies in Ouakam (2008) shows that a young woman's loss of virginity is more accepted than it used to be – as long as it does not result in a pregnancy. A child would be physical proof of the girl's 'debauchery' and a significant stigma to bear for the family, and unlike losing one's virginity, having a child can't so easily be undone. However, it would not have the same meaning for the man, as Djibril explained when I asked him about how Islam perceived sexual relations: 'When she is not

married, the woman is not allowed to have sexual intercourse, it's *haram* [illicit], it's the most dangerous sin,' he began.

'And you, you never cheated on Awa?' I dared asking.

'When I was young, back in the days... Before I got married, yes. But I didn't touch Awa,' he replied with pride. I could not refrain from asking him what his wife thought of that: 'So it was not a problem that *you* had had sex with someone else before your marriage?'

'No, no, she understands. You know, some men have children with their wife, and then they go on and have a kid with another woman with whom he's not married, and the wife learns about it, but she can't say much. But I have never done it, I don't have other children, I only have children with my wife.'

Shortly after, Djibril reiterated the connection between virginity and respect made earlier by Doudou and Modou, but his point about men having children out of wedlock reveals how gendered *sutura* is. In theory, *sutura* applies indifferently to both men and women; but as Mills explains, 'in contemporary popular representations, there is more at stake when it is violated by the female subject' (2011: 3). As Djibril said, a man can showcase his potency and virility to the extent of having children out of wedlock, a physical proof of his behaviour that everyone can witness; but when this happens, it is his wife who must show *sutura* in order to protect her husband and conceal his flaws, for her 'act of exposure is classified as a more egregious violation than his wrongdoing' (Mills 2011: 3). What is more, in this scenario it is the unmarried pregnant woman who is shamed – not so much for losing her virginity, but for openly dishonouring her family.

Therefore, behind the concept of *sutura* lies the idea that ‘shame feels like an exposure’, as Sara Ahmed writes in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004: 103). In her book, Ahmed analyses how emotions such as pain, hate, fear, disgust, shame and love circulate, accumulate and shape individual and collective bodies on large-scale, national levels. Her chapter on shame is particularly relevant when tied to the concept of *sutura* in relation to the gendered expectations of virginity. She contends that because shame needs a witness (real or imagined, 2004: 105), it is a particularly potent emotion that has the power to regulate behaviours: ‘in order to avoid shame, subjects must enter the ‘contract’ of the social bond, by seeking to approximate a social ideal. Shame can also be experienced as the affective cost of not following the scripts of normative existence’ (2004: 107). As such, the potential for shame informs one’s comportment and reactions to exposure. In her analysis of *sutura* in Senegalese literature, Ivy Mills cites examples of women who commit suicide when their virginity is questioned, illustrating how social death by shame can lead to physical death – a literal application of the Wolof proverb “*Ban gcce, nangu dee*” (“eschew shame, accept death”)’ (2011: 41).

Fortunately, death is not the only way to avoid shame in the context of *sutura*, and contemporary, less dramatic modern adaptations have surfaced. The prevalent non-observance of the rules regarding premarital sexual relations, despite the expectations associated with virginity, have brought about alternative ways to maintain *sutura*, keep up with appearances, and avoid shame.

‘Saccalma sama jabar’

The first of these strategies is for a woman to fake her virginity with appropriate products such as the *serre-vagin* Maguette inadvertently overused, or by gently cutting her thigh to get a few drops of blood on the bedsheet. However, these tactics mean that the husband would know his wife was not a virgin – a fact he

could either reveal or conceal and which is in and of itself problematic, as illustrated by the earlier example of the husband comparing his wife to a bone without marrow. Reconstructive surgery of the hymen and the overuse of *serre-vagin*, on the other hand, offer a more secretive way to hide a woman's sexual history. However, hymenoplasty, formerly only available in the Gambia, remains an expensive option for Dakarois women (Cissokho 2006).⁵⁴

It is difficult to estimate to what extent aphrodisiacs are used in a subversive way that would allow women a freer premarital sexual life while still conforming to the socio-sexual expectations of the husband and the family, even if by 'faking it' – especially since *sutura* calls for keeping up appearances. Sex outside the bonds of marriage may be morally, religiously and socially prohibited, but effectively practiced – and a politics of ignorance means this contradiction goes unspoken and is thus surrounded by an aura of secrecy. Transgression of the rules might be tolerated if there is no tangible proof of it, i.e. a child; and the cult of virginity is relentlessly magnified, even if it means, as Djibril put it, one gets it at the pharmacy.

Faking one's virginity is not a new phenomenon that has developed suddenly with the advent of imported aphrodisiacs and other sexual goods. It was already showcased in Senegalese author and director Ousmane Sembène's movie *Xala* (1975). The morning after an elaborate wedding reception, the film depicts the bride's *bàjjen* (paternal aunt) walking into the newlyweds' bedroom with a chicken. Noticing there is no blood on the bedsheets, she proceeds to slice its throat before she is stopped by Ngoné – the bride and much younger third wife of a successful businessman called El Hadji. Ngoné tells her *bàjjen* that nothing happened, that she is still a virgin: '*Janq laa ba leegi. Yéggul ci man*'. The marriage had not been consummated because he could not get it up: he was the victim of *xala*, an impotence curse. The *bàjjen* severely scolds El Hadji, the incapacitated

⁵⁴ See Ahmadi 2016 about hymenoplasty as a form of resistance in Iran.

husband, reminding him that Ngoné is a 'pure girl' and that he just 'crumpled like wet paper'. The scene concludes with El Hadji walking slowly towards the modern bathroom, his head bent in shame and sorrow, while we hear the chicken clucking, saved by his impotence. The virgin bride eventually leaves him.

Curiously, although the *bàjjen* presents her niece as a 'pure girl', she had come prepared to slice a chicken's throat in order to fake her niece's broken hymen – which either challenges the biological (mis)conception that all virgins bleed on their wedding night, or highlights the fact that even a good girl may have premarital sex. Either way, the *bàjjen* is ready to cover her niece's 'shortcomings' and to protect her reputation and that of the women of the family since, as noted earlier, the absence of virginal blood is usually imputed to the impure wife and the bad *liggéeyu ndeye* of her mother in raising her – rather than to the impotent husband.

What is also remarkable in *Xala* is that Ngoné's *bàjjen* does not appear even to consider hiding El Hadji's impotence with chicken blood – which at first glance seems to contradict the argument that a woman's feminine capital is enhanced when she fortifies her husband's ego and masculinity. However, *Xala* suggests that a husband's impotence on the wedding night shows that he is not worthy of his wife's feminine capital, and of the significant interpretive labour she would put into their marriage. This posits virginity-faking as a gendered, levelling and empowering strategy for women to save face *if need be*, showing that when men are obviously at fault, women do not have to fake anything while maintaining, even enhancing, their feminine capital.

The second strategy to maintain *sutura* and avoid shame on the wedding night is presented as 'the modern way of doing things'. I have been told on a few occasions that it is now trendy for some young, middle and upper class couples to go on honeymoon and avoid the blood-stained cloth ceremony altogether.

Whereas the most well-off may go to Europe, others may simply rent a room in a local hotel or travel out of the city in order to spend their wedding night privately, far from the acute scrutiny of the *bàjjen* and other family members. Indeed, the necessity of proving a wife's virginity is qualified as being archaic, backward and unfair, and is highly criticised by young women and men who consider themselves modern. Pragmatically, many realise that virginity is a flawed concept: 'Virginity doesn't prove anything nowadays, it has become artificial' said Pape to newspaper *Walf Grand-Place* (Cissokho 2006). However, the clash between the younger and older generations, who are more attached to traditions, calls for the need to disappear for a few nights. The groom, with the complicity of his friends, will ask them to '*Sàccalma sama jabar*' [Steal me my wife].

The 'abduction' of the bride – with her acquiescing connivance – is a tactic to protect the couple's privacy, but also, sometimes, to save face. Marie-Madeleine, a well-known actress and journalist in her sixties, told me that now that more couples get married for love or by their own choice, rather than abiding by their parents' decisions, men tend to be more willing to marry a woman they care for regardless of her virginal status, or to be more inclined to protect her honour. She gave me the example of a young woman she knows who had been raped as a teenager but had never told anyone. On her wedding night, anticipating her husband's reaction, she confided in Marie-Madeleine, asking for her advice. 'Talk to your husband, he's an intellectual, he'll understand,' Marie-Madeline said. 'He'll be upset especially since he's from a conservative family. They will be waiting by the door tomorrow morning to see and show the stained cloth to your *bàjjen* and to all of us. Just tell him and apologize, you know how to talk to a man, you know how to seduce him, tell him you love him and that you're sorry'. Telling me this story, Marie-Madeline recalled that the husband was indeed raging and told his fiancée that if he had known she was not a virgin he would not have married her. He eventually calmed down and after the wedding ceremony, before the moment when they take the bride to her new home to get ready for the night,

he sent his friends to take her: '*Sàccalma sama jabar*,' he said. So they left and they did not have to show anything in the morning.

Recent practices such as honeymooning and stealing the bride are associated with African modernity for some, and with the globalisation of foreign customs for others (Spronk 2012). In the local newspaper *L'Observateur*, sociologist Aly Khoudia Diaw laments the cultural importation of the *lune de miel* in Senegal because it prevents families from knowing whether the bride was a virgin, and thus from 'assessing her value on the marriage market' (Diedhou 2008). Such comments highlight the conservatism and sexism shown even by the more educated spheres of society. They also hint at the ways that couples who spend their wedding night in private disrupt the traditional institution of marriage. As we saw in Chapter 3, marriage in Senegal has traditionally been a family affair, uniting kin of similar social status and honoured positions, creating a larger shared workforce and wealth. By suppressing one of the elements on which the bride's and her family's honour are appraised, the couple appears to question the role of family, and challenge the importance of community in Senegalese society.

Conclusion

The presence of virginity-faking aphrodisiacs in Dakar is illustrative of a Senegalese sexual imaginary where masculine ideals of sexual pleasure act as the key to accessing feminine capital. By demanding a virgin bride, a man stimulates and enhances his own capital – deflowering a chaste woman is the privilege of potent, economically and socially successful men. Therefore, a man who marries a virgin, even if he has doubts about the authenticity of said virginity, boosts his status in his own eyes and those of his peers, but also reduces the risk of being ridiculed and judged by his wife on his sexual abilities. As Ndeye Fatou's husband told her, deflowering a woman is 'an indescribable feeling': virginity in and of itself is considered aphrodisiacal.

Even if premarital sex is common, double standards regarding female virginity are upheld by men and women alike, and promoted by misogynistic, disembodied and depersonalised depictions of sexually active women as valueless items of consumption. At the same time, the rise of honeymooning and the local practice of bride-stealing shows that, despite heavy critiques, more young couples choose to forego the traditional wedding night and its emphasis on virginity – reworking the meaning of *sutura* to their advantage.

By not remaining chaste until marriage, women challenge an idealised, masculinist order of things that exacerbates men’s feelings of vulnerability. However, through their use of products that make them ‘a virgin again’, women uphold and promote a discourse and set of expectations that glorifies virginity. They do so not out of false consciousness and submission, but because virginity, real or fake, ultimately benefits them socially and economically – first as brides, then as wives and ultimately as mothers and *bàjjen*. Writing about fake orgasm in a way that applies equally to the Senegalese discourse about (fake) virginity, Annamarie Jagose suggests that it

is part of a network of effects and behaviours that naturalises dominant cultural norms such as the masculinisation of sexual desire, the promotion of intercourse as the signature act of heterosexuality and the representation of orgasm [or virginity] as the true expression of an interiorised sexual self. This indisputable fact, however, has tended to obscure the possibility that fake orgasm [or fake virginity] might also be, and for that very reason, an innovative sexual practice that makes available a mode of feminine self-production in a constrained field of possibility. (2010: 529-530)

As Jagose points out, by preserving their virginity with a variety of aphrodisiacal substances and products – or the illusion of it – women maintain the status quo of Senegalese gender hierarchy, but can also subtly undermine established roles and expectations. Their virginity, real or fake, enhances their own and their kinswomen’s feminine capital, while it simultaneously contributes to their

partner's masculine capital. By allowing the enactment and reproduction of traditional, conservative social ideals, women's performance of virginity has a stabilising effect in a time when men feel especially fragile as they face profound social and economic vulnerability. Through their use of aphrodisiacs, women feel compelled to manage their husbands' anxiety, but can also choose (not) to – as the example of the movie *Xala* has shown. This interpretive labour allows them to use virginity as a form of feminine capital they can bank on rather than simply being subjugated by it. Their active, public compliance, but subtle and private transgression, shows that contrary to Vieux's assertion that 'Virginity makes the woman', a woman can (re)make her virginity.

Chapter 6.

'The pepper will talk back':

the gift economy of food and sex

The small shop was located on a quiet street close to where I lived, in Sacré-Coeur 3, a middle-class neighbourhood of Dakar. As I walked in, all my senses were suddenly solicited: loud music videos of *mballax*, Senegal's favourite drum-based music, played on a small TV set placed in the corner of the room; the strong, sweet wooden smell of burning *thiouraye* [incense] tickled my nose and made me sneeze a few times; because of the light smoke that filled the room, I even tasted the incense in my mouth, a mix of vanilla, cheap perfume and herbs. As I walked slowly around the store, my eyes were at once charmed and assaulted by an orgy of colourful, shiny fabrics and a series of products perfectly laid out on the single table and a few shelves. Picking up rows of handmade *bin-bin* [waist beads], I noticed how delicate some of them were, and the extent of the creative work that had been put into them. I had entered what is referred to as a *secrets de femme* [woman's secrets] shop, where women, and occasionally men, purchase lingerie, sex toys, aphrodisiacs and the like to spice up their sexual life.

Adja, the female employee I had talked to on the phone to get directions – '*Derrière la Boulangerie Jaune*' [Behind the yellow bakery] was all she had said – received me with an inquisitive *asalam aleikum*, the Arabic greetings Senegalese use to salute people on the streets or to initiate a conversation. I knew she was wondering what I was doing there... Maybe I had a Senegalese husband and wanted to surprise him? After responding to her salutation, I explained, in Wolof, that I was writing a book about *mokk pooj*. Visibly surprised but pleased by my interest in the Senegalese art of seduction, Adja was happy to answer my questions while I wandered around the small store – a family business she

managed and ran with her mother Mama Ndiaty, though it was owned by her sister.

I picked up a piece of black, satin fabric, and it unfurled itself, revealing a series of handwritten golden inscriptions. It turned out to be a *bethio*, or *petit pagne*, a mid-thigh length piece of textile that women wrap around their hips as a sexy and arousing item of lingerie. I recognised some of the Wolof words, but was utterly confused. The golden letters in front of me read like a recipe; I knew them because I had learned some cooking vocabulary. But given the type of shop I found myself in, I knew the meaning of these writings had to be at least suggestive, if not blatantly sexual. I asked Adja to help me to translate the words, but also to explain their underlying meaning. And they were indeed salacious: more than a sexy piece of clothing, this *bethio*, read vertically, actually presented a step-by-step recipe for good sex, an invitation to a spicy feast to be devoured in bed... or at least, in the privacy of a couple's bedroom.



Figure 8. The recipe-for-good-sex *bethio*

The top line, *Chéri sakoy nekhna* [Honey/darling, your penis is delicious] stands as the name of the ‘dish’ to be prepared, while complimenting the undoubtedly male cook (the French word *Chéri* is written in the masculine form, and he has a *koy* – the Wolof term for penis – after all) for his past and upcoming ‘meals’. The title also implies that his *koy* is the cook’s main utensil, as well as the meal he prepares. The three columns underneath list instructions on how to concoct the dish. It begins, on the left hand side, with *Katma* [fuck me] – an imperative repeated with *Dakharma*, associated here with tamarind [*dakhar*], which needs not only to be pressed, pushed or squeezed, *Beusseul*, but has to go deep inside, *Nasseus*. In the middle column, the cook, or sous-chef, who is directly and lasciviously addressed as BB – from the French *bébé*, babe, a term of endearment– is instructed by the female recipe-writer (she refers to her vagina [*leuf*] later on) to take his partner vigorously, making her bounce [*Teulma BB*], as if tossing her. He should then knead or stir until it gets painfully delicious, *Diambal mou saf*, before *Rofal sibir*, stuffing (penetrating) her deep. Lastly, the right-hand column details the final, crucial steps: the female master chef demands to be turned around and taken from behind⁵⁵ [*Dioutalma*], then pounded, ‘stung’ or ‘injected’ (from the French *piquer*) in the vagina [*Pikirma si leuf*], making the meal *Thioukhouna lol*, very delicious, scrumptious, and orgasmic – leaving the last ingredients lusciously mashed up in a bit of (seminal) liquid, *Nokosal mou saf*, and both the master chef and her sous-chef satisfied and satiated.

I was awe-struck.

It should not have surprised me that the worlds of food and sex would conflate on an item of lingerie, since food and sexuality are deeply intertwined in Senegal

⁵⁵ Anal sex being explicitly forbidden by Islam, I suppose this instruction means ‘doggy-style’; sodomy (consensual or otherwise) would not be condoned or promoted so openly, even on a kinky piece of lingerie. However, it is also safe to assume that taboos are sometimes surreptitiously transgressed by men and women alike.

– and not just metaphorically. Elspeth Probyn suggests that ‘[l]ike a rhizomatic line that always turns into something else, the vector of food leads into other areas, and following its line we soon arrive at the blurred boundaries between food and sex’ (2000: 64); but the recipe-inspired *bethio* took me along an inverse path, from the world of sex to that of food, further highlighting just how intimately connected they are in the Senegalese sexual imaginary. The *bethio* is one of an array of items that constitute a woman’s *salagne salagne*, which are the tools and erotic paraphernalia that are part and parcel of Senegalese *mokk pooj*. As I have explained in the introduction, *pooj* means ‘thigh’, and *mokk* seems to derive from the verb *mokkal*, which refers to ground spices – often hand-crushed with a mortar and pestle. The art/work of seduction for which Senegalese women are admired throughout West Africa is designed to simultaneously trigger and fulfil the most carnal of appetites: that is, hunger for food and sex. As such, it is believed that a woman’s culinary talents represent her sexual aptitudes (Sow Fall 2002). The multiple, flavourful ingredients she uses to create a tasty dish for her husband are a preview, almost a promise, of things to come later in the bedroom. Though I knew about these symbolic associations between food and sexuality, I did not expect them to materialise so explicitly.

The black and gold *bethio* is unlike any other I have ever seen. Handmade, it is certainly one of a kind – as is most of the locally fashioned lingerie. Besides its obvious appeal to the senses and ensuing erotic quality, this article of clothing is remarkable for another, less apparent reason: conflating the realms of food and sex, the recipe showcased on the *bethio* perfectly encapsulates the dynamic relationship that underlies gender roles in Senegal. While it may seem surprising that it is the man who does the cooking in the recipe, when cooking is usually a female role, I suggest that this apparent reversal is indicative not of a contradiction, but of the (re)productive complementarity on which the Senegalese gender division of labour rests.

The analysis of Senegalese women's food labour in relation to sexual practices and symbolism challenges traditional Western second-wave feminist views of foodwork as a site of women's subjugation. In this chapter, I juxtapose the (female) *bethio* described above with a suggestive excerpt from a discussion I had with El Hadj, my (male) assistant, in order to contrast feminine and masculine perspectives on gender roles within the conjugal context – a vision heavily influenced by Islam, which promotes gender complementarity rather than equality. It emerges that food labour, which in the day-to-day practicalities of life is eminently gendered and incumbent upon women, is paralleled and matched by men's sexual work. Both men and women are expected to engage in a tangible and symbolic process of transforming food and bodily substances, which become part and parcel of a Senegalese domestic 'gift economy' of 'consumptive production' (Gregory 2015).

Gift economy

In a manner analogous to what Christopher C. Taylor (1992) described in the Rwandan context, the food and sexual labour of Senegalese men and women contributes to the activation and protraction of a flow of alimentary and bodily substances which form the fulcrum of productive and reproductive life in the Senegalese gift economy. Simply put, and as will become clearer throughout the chapter: women's cooking of men's labour is the first of a series of transformations in which money (from the husband's work in the public sphere) becomes food, food becomes strength, strength becomes (sexual) pleasure, pleasure becomes sperm, and sperm becomes children who eventually insure their parents' physical and spiritual nourishment⁵⁶ while themselves engaging in this 'circle of life'. However, because it operates on the metaphysical, symbolic level, the interconnectedness of men and women's transformative labour is far from evident to the onlooker. A strict division of labour places the burden of

⁵⁶ Children ultimately provide for their aging parents. Having children is also an important Muslim life goal, as it was in all traditional pre-Islamic Senegalese societies.

foodwork and other domestic tasks on women, while men appear to sit back, eat, be pampered, and reap all the benefits. In my analysis of the mutual constitution of masculine and feminine work with regards to food and sex, I do not mean to dismiss women's much more substantial involvement in food preparation. Rather, I seek to understand why foodwork remains such an important female prerogative and source of pride in a time where more and more women also work in the public sphere, therefore having to juggle increased responsibilities.

Taylor draws on Christopher Gregory's⁵⁷ seminal work in *Gifts and Commodities* (2015 [1982]) to stress the interdependence of men and women in managing flows and blockages in an evolving Rwandan gift economy. Explaining that 'in a gift economy persons and things are perceived as relatively inseparable', in opposition to a commodity economy in which they are divisible (Gregory 1982: 120, in Taylor 1992: 4; see also Parry 1989:64), Taylor suggests that a fundamental element of a gift economy is its emphasis on consumption, which is the root of the reproduction of social relations: 'people produce each other through the gifts of things they consume. [...] In a gift economy, food is both substance and symbol, nourishment as well as meaningful gift. It is thus not surprising to find food employed as a central symbol in issues related to social and biological reproduction' (Taylor 1992: 6). This process of 'consumptive production' (Gregory 2015: 27) underscores how consumption is necessary in the production of the self, for instance when the consumption of food produces the physical body. As a matter of fact, Gregory contends that 'consumption is a personification process that permits the survival of people, first, by providing their nourishment and, secondly, through their sexual relationships' (Gregory 2015: 30). Contrary to Georg Simmel's assumption that once eaten by an individual, food is necessarily lost and unavailable to anyone else (Fischler 2011: 531), the concept of consumptive production foregrounds the exact opposite: in matters of alimentary and sexual appetites, Senegalese men and women

⁵⁷ Who himself draws on Marx and Lévi-Strauss (Gregory 2015: 26-30).

coextensively produce and consume each other's valuable work, which enhances its value and underscores the complementarity and co-constitution of their roles in production and reproduction. It follows that rather than being lost in a Simmelian sense, we might conceive of food as ephemeral, as Tom Boylston suggests: food 'will always either spoil, or be eaten, digested, and excreted; by definition, it will always be transformed by living beings that draw their sustenance from it' (2013: 257).

Discussing Azawagh Arab women's fattening practices in Niger, Rebecca Popenoe summarises the significance of their consumptive production:

As nature (milk and grain as of the physical world) is turned into culture (the achieved aesthetic of fleshy immobility), so is culture (milk and grain as products of men's labor) turned into nature (the given forms of women's bodies). [...] [T]he material and the aesthetic are merged into one in the profoundly natural but simultaneously profoundly cultural forms of women's bodies (Popenoe 2004: 131).

In this excerpt, and throughout her ethnography, Popenoe shows how the embodied and spatially dichotomous worlds of men and women are not only interwoven, but actually feed one another. However, her analysis seems to locate consumptive and transformative powers mainly in women's bodies, relegating men to the role of producing inputs, 'recycl[ing]' and 'invest[ing]' (Popenoe 2004: 129) the tangible fruit of their labour as well as their reproductive seed, leaving it to be transformed by women. Although similar on several levels, my analysis of the Senegalese alimentary and sexual gift economy differs in this respect; for in Dakar, both men's and women's bodies physically and symbolically participate in the transformative, consumptive production process.

The kitchen, a feminine space

In the Senegalese domestic sphere, men rarely, if ever, cook⁵⁸ (Thiam 2008: 14). Despite the fluid and quickly-evolving nature of gender roles in the Dakarois political and economic sectors, in the privacy of their home and family, Senegalese men and women are still socially and individually valued according to their respective roles with regards to providing food and taking care of the household. While men are supposed to work outside the home, earn an income and pay for the food, women are expected to prepare and cook it, even if they too have a job outside of the home.

Quite simply put, a man's responsibility regarding food is almost exclusively financial: he has to pay for it, to be a good provider. In monogamous and polygamous families alike, the husband is typically in charge of feeding his wife and children by providing a daily sum, *la dépense quotidienne*, which will be used to buy food for that day. In some families, the man buys a bag of rice and onions at the beginning of the month and gives his wife between 1000 and 5000 FCFA everyday, depending on his income, to buy fresh items such as fish, meat or chicken, and vegetables. I've also heard of cases where the husband pays a certain sum in advance at the local *boutique* so his wife doesn't handle the money, but can still procure what is needed. Others will simply hand out money to their wife and she'll manage it as she wishes.

Both as a physical and social space, the kitchen and its pans, pots and utensils, are considered such a female domain that their use by a man would depreciate

⁵⁸ That being said, on special occasions, a man may consider cooking for his wife, as exemplified by an article published in the newspaper *L'Observateur* on Valentine's Day 2014 (Diedhiou 2014: 10). When asked if and how he and his wife Fatou Thiam, a member of the Senegalese National Assembly, would celebrate the day of love, singer Mame Goor Djazaka said he wanted to celebrate even if Valentine's Day is a Western ritual: 'I'll get her a nice gift. Then, I will organise a sumptuous dinner. *Even if I have to enter the kitchen* to concoct her a meal fit for a queen, I will do it without any hangup. In the name of love, anything goes' (my emphasis). However, his wife replied she would not let him cook, as it was *her* job to prepare something memorable for their first Valentine's Day as a married couple.

and feminise him (Sow 2008: 120). In fact, a corpus of superstitions and presages prevents men from getting near domestic objects used in cooking, for fear that they would themselves absorb the feminine proprieties of the objects. For example, a man should never sit on a mortar, or a woman carrying a pot or a mortar should never pass by a man without stopping and putting her container down: failure to do so could make the man impotent (Sow 2008: 202). Because it would blur the clearly opposed but complementary boundaries of gender roles, coming in contact with these objects could negatively impact not only a man's sexual potency, but also his overall capacity for action, existential purpose, and productive power – a broad impairment communicated clearly in the Wolof description of impotence, '*Dafa tële*', [He can't] (Sow 2008: 159). It follows that an impotent man's identity and social role – much like that of a barren woman – is questioned, because it is so intricately linked to his (in)capacity to participate in the gift economy of consumptive production. Impotent, he is not much of a man, so how could he summon enough strength to work in order to provide for a family? Conversely, how could he have intercourse, give pleasure and engender a child if he is incapable of an erection? How could he consume his wife's labour and thus participate in the reciprocal transformation of food and sex, the very process from which life comes from? Interestingly, in the recipe for good sex presented in the opening of the chapter, the male 'cook' is not feminised at all – even though his penis is likened to a kitchen utensil: on the contrary, he successfully brings the meal to life. I suggest that in that specific case, because the woman takes the position of a master chef who gives orders – typically a masculine task – there is a complete reversal of roles that maintains the logic of consumptive production intact.

Yount observes, however, that cooking to make a living, for a remunerated job, is acceptable for a man, because it is perceived as a way to fulfil his duty to provide for himself and his family (2010: 41). When going to high-end restaurants or fast food places in Dakar, it is easy to notice, at one glance, that it is mostly men who

work behind the oven. They prepare fine French or international dishes in fancier establishments; hamburgers, pizzas, kebabs and French fries in fast food places; and a variety dishes, from grilled meat, chicken or fish to spaghetti, in mid-range restaurants. These public spaces and paid employment opportunities add a premium that renders it socially acceptable for a man to cook. Rather than diminishing his personal status, or being a threat to his masculinity, the fact that a man cooks in return for a wage actually transforms the feminine, domestic and naturalised act of cooking into a public, valid masculine work.

Women also cook in the public domain, but their money-making endeavours are mostly perceived as an extension of their domestic tasks. When I met with women restaurant owners at the Ouakam city hall during a training session on safety and sanitary measures, most of them explained that they had a small business close to their home. One of them actually lived above her restaurant, a ground floor fast food place which opened directly on to the sidewalk of a busy street in front of the Ouakam market. Others prepared meals in *gargottes*, little pop-up shacks found everywhere and anywhere in the city: in between cars at a garage in Colobane, behind the Brioche dorée in Ouakam, on the sidewalk in Plateau. For 100 to 200 francs CFA (£0.11 to £0.25) depending on the selected topping, they usually served sandwiches and coffee in the morning, a piece of white freshly baked baguette with a few choices of fillings such as *petits pois* (cooked green peas with onions and peppers), spaghetti, tuna or boiled eggs, on top of which mayonnaise and hot pepper can be added for an additional kick. At lunch time, many also serve a rice dish, a *thiep*, with either *jën* [fish], *yapp* [meat], or *guinaar* [chicken]. This food is similar to what would be served at home for lunchtime, and is sold for around 500 CFA (£0.60) a portion, a relatively small price considering similar traditional meals would go for twice, triple or even four times the price in restaurants mostly attended by low to middle-class working people – and up to ten times in big, renowned hotels and fancier restaurants. Having tried the national dish of *thiep bu jën* in a variety of places across the

entire price range, I always felt that the cheapest, most understated establishments offered the tastiest meals – usually because the dish was made as it would have been at home. And that is probably the point: it is a flavourful, inexpensive option, but also one that would often go unnoticed because it is naturalised: ‘Women have [historically] been the caretakers of our stomachs. Men have cooked for aristocrats and kings, but it was women who devoted extraordinary energy to finding, growing, preparing and serving food to the better part of the human race’ (Schenone 2003: xii quoted in Cairns and Johnston 2015: 6). In consequence, because small fast food and *gargottes* restaurants are more or less perceived as an extension of a woman’s home kitchen, and therefore as part of her natural, traditional gender role, women’s domestic and professional foodwork doesn’t have the value associated with a man’s work in a restaurant. Unlike a man who needs professional training to work in a kitchen, it is assumed that a woman does not.⁵⁹ It is believed she just knows how to cook, because it is her quintessential role at the micro-level of the family, as women around the world tend to be in charge of feeding work (Guptill, Copelton, and Lucal 2013: 31).

Learning to cook, learning to be

My host mother Eva made a living by hosting students of the culture and language school where I was learning Wolof. This work provided her with a substantial revenue of 150,000 CFA (approx. £170) per guest per month – three times what the *bonne* (maid) was paid for working from dawn to dusk six days a week. These earnings allowed her to live a comfortable life. Her income also figuratively bought her the flexibility to be more independent than most women I knew, a fact that she was proud of and reminded me about on numerous occasions – usually by suggesting I should look for a rich husband who’d let me

⁵⁹ There are, however, professional cooking and baking schools in Dakar where male and female students are enrolled; but they generally offer specific training, for example in French cuisine.

keep my freedom so I could continue my life without masculine, inquisitive control.

Even though she enjoyed her independence and freedom, Eva knew she had to fulfil her motherly and wifely duties around the house. She actually took great pride in her hostessing skills and, like most Senegalese women, in her cooking abilities. She would never let the housekeeper prepare an entire meal by herself, always keeping a close eye on the way onions were peeled and chopped, or garlic and hot peppers mashed up in the mortar, ensuring the rice was thoroughly rinsed and cleaned. She did not hesitate to reprimand the maid – and occasionally me, when I took part in the preparation – vehemently if things were not done the way she wanted. And because they are the main and most expensive components of any dish, Eva would always clean, trim and prepare the fish, meat or chicken herself. At the various stages of the long preparation process – cooking lunch, the main meal of the day, would usually take between two and three hours – Eva would dip the long *kuddu luus*, a large iron serving spoon in the pot, stir its contents, bring it to her nose to smell it, then gently tap the side of the spoon on her palm in order to cool the broth and not burn her tongue when she licked it to taste the flavours. She would then adjust the quantity of salt, *poobar* [black pepper] and *kaani* [hot pepper] accordingly.

Like most women I've seen in action in the kitchen, Eva never actually measured any ingredients, adding a pinch of salt here, a cube of Maggi stock there, and sometimes a spoonful of oil or spices on top of it all. Just like she had learned from watching her own mother and housekeeper cook, taste and adjust recipes, I was to learn by observation and imitation, not from following a cookbook. Her instructions were more instinctual than precise, and her idea of measurements rendered me a bit perplexed and unwilling to really try to cook a traditional meal from scratch. My fears were not unfounded: when I travelled home to Quebec for my cousin's wedding, I brought with me all the local ingredients I would need to

cook *mafé*, a peanut-and-tomato-based meat stew served on a bed of broken rice. I managed to prepare a decent stew, but the rice, the staple element of a Senegalese meal, turned out horribly. When I had asked Eva how many parts of water I should add for each part of rice, she simply laughed and said I should first rinse the rice thoroughly, and then add ‘not too much water so the spoon still stands up, but just enough so it is not too stiff, and not too much because it will be too soggy’. Needless to say, despite my best efforts I ended up burning the rice, and then overcooking the second batch, being left with a shapeless, viscous white paste, far from the evenly-cooked, separate-grained preparation I aimed for. Back in Dakar, I told Eva and her neighbour Yaye Sow about my rice misfortune, at which they laughed hysterically, commenting that my inability to cook something as basic as rice would not look good to a prospective Senegalese husband.

I was willing to learn, but Eva seemed to forget that I had years of apprenticeship to catch up on. From a very young age, Senegalese girls start helping in the kitchen by doing small tasks like getting utensils out of the cupboards, peeling onions and garlic cloves, running to the boutique to buy a missing item, or setting up the *basan* [mat] or the table. As they grow up, they are progressively involved in more complex and demanding tasks, such as cleaning and cutting a fish or a chicken, and are given more responsibility, like seasoning the meal and dressing the plate. Not only does this slow and steady learning process take girls and young women through the various and tedious stages of preparing a traditional meal from scratch, and consequently allows them to acquire important culinary skills, but it also – and perhaps even more importantly – contributes to their overall education in inculcating core feminine Senegalese values.

Indeed, as I alluded to above, cooking is a physically demanding and time-consuming activity. Even in more well-off families who own an electric or gas

range, like Eva's, most of the cooking and simmering of the stews is actually done on a single gas tank topped with a metallic ring on which the pot is installed, and the grilling takes place on a small *fourneau* heated by charcoal briquettes. In the hot summer months, and especially during *hivernage*, the rainy season, the combined humidity of the air and the heat of the burning fire render the task of cooking tangibly more difficult to accomplish. Consequently, by their daily, repetitive labour in the kitchen, women demonstrate *muñ*, which translates as patience, endurance and tolerance. Having *muñ* is deemed essential to a marriageable woman because it is commonly understood that she will have to accept and endure her husband's flaws and misbehaviours without complaint – thus showing *sutura*, discretion, while preserving appearances. By manifesting these values in the kitchen, a woman exhibits her own qualities while simultaneously honouring her mother and showcasing how well she has been brought up – for example, by holding the communal plate with her fingers to prevent it from moving while the group is eating – demonstrating that she, too, now embodies Senegalese femininity.

Small dish, small heart

If the act of cooking is in itself revealing of the inner qualities of a woman, the savour of the dish is also important, yet very subjective. What is considered a good *yassa poulet* [chicken in an onion and lemon sauce] or a good *thiep bu jën* varies from family to family, and from person to person. Some like it hot and spicy, others will prefer the added taste of tamarind sauce, or the salty and bitter flavour of the *Arôme Maggi* [liquid seasoning]. But that a dish deserves a '*Dafa saf sap*' [It is delicious] or a '*Nekhna*' [It is good] often has more to do with the quantity of food served than its actual taste.

Indeed, a good woman should always cook copious portions of rice and stew, and there should ideally be leftovers, or those partaking in the meal should struggle to finish the plate. Everywhere I ate (except in some of the more 'refined' and

expensive restaurants, where individual portions are served), I was always surprised by the enormous quantity of food presented to us in the bowl,⁶⁰ and I often wondered how our group – no matter how many people we were – would manage to eat it all. Unsurprisingly, I was often the first one to put my spoon down on the table, meaning I had finished eating. Even if I quickly said *Suur naa* [I am full], my hosts and other guests would invariably pressure me to continue eating, sometimes adding ‘*Tu dois te renforcer!*’, that I needed to get plumper to better comply with local beauty standards (Holdsworth et al. 2004; Ndiaye 2006; Cohen et al. 2010). And while I sometimes obliged with a few more bites, I usually complimented the cook and explained that although the meal was delicious, the insufferable heat affected my appetite; or I joked that my *tuubab* [Western, foreign] stomach was too small for such a large quantity of rice. Even during Ramadan, when Eva cooked a non-traditional lunch (pastas, sandwiches, potato salad and bread, etc.) for the non-Muslims of the house, the plate she dressed for me was enormous and when I asked her to give me smaller portions, she replied that ‘In Senegal, you either eat or don’t eat. There’s no half-measure.’ And so the gargantuan lunches continued.

I initially believed that not eating as much as my hosts would be an insult to the cook, but I now realise that it did not matter at all. As a matter of fact, the preparation and offering of large quantities of food is directly linked to *teraanga*, the art of hospitality and cultivation of social relations so fundamental to Senegalese society (Yount 2010: 53). As a matter of fact, Fatou Sow extends the meaning of *teraanga* beyond that of hospitality by claiming it is in fact the

⁶⁰ Being the most important meal of the day, lunch is rarely eaten alone in Senegal, and is a key moment for the production of commensality, of bringing people together (Fischler 2011; Debevec and Tivadar 2006; Lupton 1996; Counihan 1999; Guptill, Copelton, and Lucal 2013). When it is ready, food is laid on a large circular plate that is then placed at the centre of a mat around which people gather, sitting on small stools or the mat itself. The meal, usually consisting of rice, meat or fish, vegetables and a thick sauce, is eaten directly from this big sharing plate with the right hand, each guest forming a small ball of food in the palm of his hand, sliding it to the tips of his fingers and bringing it to the mouth. Usually, one only drinks at the end of the meal (Boilat 1853: 299).

'fundamental point of reference of the Wolof-Senegalese code of ethics, an instrument *par excellence* of social cohesion that consolidates and embellishes social relations' (Sow 1976: 10, my translation). Indeed, *teraanga* 'connotes civility, honour and consideration for others, whoever they may be. Practicing *teraanga* in daily life requires an attitude of respect, openness, and tolerance. It also means that people take the time to deal with others as humans' (Ross 2008: 95). An enduring feature of Senegalese culture, *teraanga* transcends ethnic and religious differences, and people take great, patriotic pride in it. As Sow and Ross suggest, *teraanga* permeates all aspects of Senegalese social life, but I believe – and my informants would mostly certainly concur – it is best materialised through food. As a consequence, *teraanga* becomes a woman's responsibility, and the expression of hospitality a marker of femininity. For the Tukulor, Fainzang and Journet (1988: 94) claim, this connection between congeniality and femininity extends to fertility, as showing hospitality is equated to having a pure belly, devoid of malice and pettiness, which in turn contributes to having a healthy, pure baby.

It thus follows that the act of cooking is perceived as a measure of a woman's character: a small dish equals a small heart, I was told on various occasions. The quantity of food she prepares and serves is said to represent a woman's generosity, an essential quality of the ideal Senegalese woman and wife. Asked by El Hadj what traits a man should look for in a woman, Monsieur Samb's answer is in keeping with this association between food and a woman's morality: 'A *jigéen bu baax*, a woman with a good heart, who can cook, who can give food, who gives enough food', he replied, as if it were obvious. What is interesting here is the choice of words, *jigéen bu baax*, literally, 'a woman who is good'. In Wolof, *baax* means good or kind. *Baax na*, it's good, is an expression used in everyday situations: at the end of a bargaining deliberation, for example, at the market or with a taximan, when a price has been agreed upon. But *baax* is also the translation for the adjective 'generous', and through Monsieur Samb's response,

we understand that it has a more profound moral signification: being a good and generous cook is not only closely tied to the social expectation that a woman should be good and generous, but is in fact a materialisation of those qualities, a tangible proof of her ability to *topoto*, to take care of others:

That's what we prefer. When we say that the wife of so and so is very generous, it is because she cooks well and serves enough, that is to say, when she cooks the meal, everyone will have enough to eat. If you cook little, people will hate it, they will speak ill of you. They will say, "This woman is bad, people cannot eat their fill". But if you manage to cook enough, they will sing your praises. Otherwise they will say, 'She's a bad person.' In our society, people do not like it when you only take care of your husband. You need to take care of the whole family. That's how you are a good woman.

Cooking femininity

The idea that a *jigéen bu baax* is a generous cook is a stark reminder that 'by feeding the family, a woman conducts herself as recognizably womanly' (DeVault 1991: 118 in Cairns and Johnston 2015: 5). In Senegal, the significance of food and cooking as a necessary marker of femininity is ongoing throughout a woman's life course, and intricately linked to the social organisation of sexuality:

Unmarried girls please their suitors with their culinary talents. Women who can cook and are ready to offer food are held in high esteem by their husbands' relatives and friends. In the past, brides who lacked culinary talents were sent back home at the discretion of their parents to learn to cook. Food is also linked to sexual intimacy and overall gender politics. In most polygamous households, the wife whose turn it is to cook sleeps with the husband. Co-wives fight by spoiling each other's food. Women stand up against their husbands by refusing to cook. Likewise, husbands punish their wives by not eating their food. Often, a woman knows that her husband is courting another woman when he does not eat at home. Thus, for women, knowing how to cook is essential to marriage. (Gueye 2010: 70)

As Gueye suggests above, food is for women as much a source of anxiety as it is a medium of distinction: it is a site of gastro-politics⁶¹ (Appadurai 1981; Holtzman 2002), especially between co-wives who rival one another to cook to their husband's taste, creating a culinary bidding war in which the husband's food needs and preferences are not only fulfilled, but elevated. Indeed, in Senegal, polygyny is intricately connected to the realm of food, which itself conflates with the realm of sex. For example, men often justify having more than one wife by resorting to food metaphors: 'Women are like mangoes, they do not all taste the same, and some are tastier than others'; 'Everyone knows you can't eat peanuts with only one tooth. One can't do, but two or three, that works better. That's the same with women, you can't just have one', I was told. Likewise, Fainzang and Journet's informants referred to a Tukolor proverb stating that '*Il faut changer de menu de temps en temps*' [One must diversify his diet]' (1988: 72), or said that 'If you eat *thiep bu jën* [fish rice] every day, you'll get tired. You need *thiep bu jën* one day, couscous the next, and *maafe* [peanut stew] the following day' (1988: 80).

Polygynous men's appetites, however, are carefully regulated; they cannot 'eat' whatever they want whenever they please. Based on a guiding principle of equality among co-wives, a husband has to ensure the equal division of his time between each wife, even if he prefers the 'flavour' of one of them – as suggested

⁶¹ Several authors have demonstrated how food serves as a medium for creating intimacy and relatedness (Douglas 1972; Lupton 1996; Counihan 1999; Carsten 1995, 2004; Debevec and Tivadar 2006; Sahlins 2013, among others), sometimes articulating the relationship between food and sexuality in a more direct way (Probyn 1999, 2000; Fox 2003; Feldman-Savelsberg 1995; Osseo-Asare 2005; Yount 2012). In Mozambique, for example, Signe Arnfred illustrates how women derive a great source of pride and power from their cooking and sexual abilities. She presents the Makhuwa women she worked with as well versed in the culinary and sexual arts: 'Cooking is a necessity – vegetables, cereals, meat have to be cooked in order to be turned into food. But cooking is also an art; you can perform it well, or less well. Performing it exquisitely is a source of pride for a woman. Sex (with a man) is also a necessary function as well as an art. Doing it well is likewise a source of pride for a woman' (Arnfred 2011:261). Similarly, in an article on 'cuisine and the gendering of African nations', Igor Cusack cites Congolese writer Claude Eliane Kesney Mikolo (2000) who pens that 'love enters by the kitchen', while Cameroonian author Calixthe Beyala's novel *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africaine* (How to cook one's husband the African way) (2000) shows how food is used by the heroine to seduce and retain her philandering husband (Cusack 2003:289-290), much as *mokk pooj* does.

by my informant who stressed the difference in taste between mangoes. Consequently, the husband usually rotates between his wives' homes – or, when they live in the same house or apartment, he moves between their bedrooms – customarily on a two-night basis. When it is her *tour* (turn), a wife is expected to cook delicious meals for her husband, but also to have sexual relationships with him, an association that undergirds a tight connection between food preparation and procreation (Meillassoux 1972: 121, cited in Fainzang and Journet 1988: 109) – much like the one to which the recipe-for-good-sex *bethio* alludes.

As I have pointed out, however, the sexy undergarment presents a much more assertive and empowering vision of the relationship between food and sexuality than that of women submissively cooking and feeding their husbands and families to out-compete co-wives or for fear of being labelled ungenerous. The almost exclusively domestic foodwork of Senegalese women could definitely be analysed as a primary site of subjugation. Of particular concern to Western feminist scholars is the naturalised way in which food is associated with femininity and the ensuing gendered division of domestic labour, for which Senegal could serve as a prime example. The second-wave feminist movement vehemently critiqued the notion that a woman could only attain self-realisation by responding to men's needs, and linked all forms of domestic work, including foodwork, to patriarchal oppression (Hollows 2007: 34; Cairns and Johnston 2015). Senegalese feminists, for their part, have concentrated their efforts on obtaining greater political rights. In the 1980s, the core of their campaign – led by the *Réseau Siggil Jigéen*⁶² – focused on 'the notion of family authority, advocating a change from 'paternal' authority to 'parental' authority, acknowledging both father and mother as responsible for the children' (Sieveking 2007: 38; see also Savane 1987; Latha 2010). In keeping with the Islamised Senegalese gender epistemology, Senegalese feminists' claims were not

⁶² *Siggil* means 'raise your head', 'keep your head up', while *jigéen* means 'woman' (Savage 1987; Sieveking 2007; Latha 2010).

framed in terms of achieving gender equality on all levels (Sieving 2007: 41), but centred on the Muslim ethics of the different yet complementary roles men and women play in raising a child and, by extension, in producing society. It is this mutual responsibility that, in theory, posits men as providers and women as nurturers. Even so, as the upcoming discussion with my assistant El Hadj will illustrate, when we combine the realms of food and sex, this division of labour is not as clear cut: both men and women simultaneously consume and produce one another.

'Poobar déey feyyu'

El Hadj and I had worked on translating an interview from Wolof to French all morning, and as we usually did on those intensive working days, we had lunch at the restaurant a block away from my apartment. The first few times my assistant had come over, I had offered to cook lunch for both of us, suggesting I could make something 'from home', such as pasta or a refreshing bean salad; but he had politely declined and opted for a traditional Senegalese lunch from the nearby restaurant. This arrangement worked really well for both of us, as I didn't have to lose precious working hours slaving away in my hot, tiny kitchen, and he would get what he considered 'a real meal', that is, rice, meat or fish, and sauce. That day, the plate of hearty *yassa* chicken I was served was particularly large, and my appetite was lowered by the almost unbearable humidity announcing *hivernage*, the rain season. As a result, I left a large portion of the meal on the plate, quickly feeling full. Joking on my wasting food, El Hadj remarked that I hadn't eaten much, commenting that it was normal anyways for men to eat more than women, since 'they have to'. Intrigued, I waited for us to be back at the flat before interrogating him about what he meant. Surprised by my question, he suddenly started moving uneasily on his chair, speaking in an even lower voice than usual, clearly uncomfortable:

'Men have to eat more than women because we are the ones providing energy during intercourse. You [women], you do nothing, you only lie there on the bed. We [men] use our strength, we are the ones moving. That energy, it is the man who provides it, it is not the woman, it is the man. That is why we are told "You have to eat, you have to eat a lot to be vigorous".'

'But what do you mean? You said the woman doesn't do anything?' I managed to ask, lost for words at my friend's insinuation. 'No, she doesn't. That's it,' he repeated, unaware of the feminist turmoil he had stirred up in me. I wanted him to go on, but I found myself hastily interrupting him, stung by his words: 'So you're saying that the woman is basically a spectator, is that it? Don't you think she's active?' As the words left my mouth, I sat straighter on my chair, ready for a verbal fight.

Oblivious to my angry disbelief, El Hadj continued, slowly getting more at ease and animated: 'A spectator, yes. Of course she is active, but it is to excite you, to allow you to do what you have to do. But strength wise, it is not the woman. Well, there are some positions, you lie in bed, the woman is on top, you do not need to move, the woman does it, but that's the only case... Otherwise it is men who make the back-and-forth. You lie down, and it is the man who makes his penis enter [the vagina]. He is the one creating and using strength [...], he's the one fucking you, *c'est lui qui te baise*, it's not the woman... so that is why we are asked to eat a lot, to make sure we are not weak when we make love. That is why we must eat a lot, why a man must eat more than a woman.'

El Hadj paused briefly, gathering his thoughts. 'Because in bed, it is you who should dominate the woman. You know, in life it does not matter if the woman dominates you. What is worse, in bed, is if she dominates you, that is the worst. In bed, it is you who should dominate the woman. The woman must know that you are a man. *Tu dois bien la baiser*, you have to fuck her well. Do not pity her.'

You really must fuck her well. Do anything and everything to make her have an orgasm. It is a pleasure that can't be found anywhere else.'

'I know that, but...,' I intervened, 'I do not agree that the woman is only a spectator. I mean, we're involved, we do things, we take part in that relationship, don't we? When a woman sucks you off, she is not doing nothing, is she? YOU are the spectator, aren't you? When she is on top of you, when she kisses you and caresses you, it's not only the man giving and the woman receiving, don't you think?'

I was trying to confront him, but he remained calm and composed, his logic infallible, everything making sense to him: 'Everything you said now, it's all... it's all sensations. Everything you have just told me to me, they are sensations that a woman creates for a man. The woman is in bed, she screams, cries, moans with pleasure, that's what the woman does, really. It is not energy that the woman provides or uses towards us. Us men, we create sensations for women, but then we also bring our energy because... to have an erection a man must have energy. And that too is difficult to do. Bringing energy. And also when the orgasm comes, with the ejaculation, it is strength that gets out. And that strength, you need to... you have to replace it with food. By eating well, and even by eating a lot.'

'So what should you eat? Are there things that are preferable to eat rather than others?' I queried.

'Meat... you must eat meat, millet, corn... especially corn. It gives energy. Ginger... You know, Senegalese women have the habit of preparing ginger juice once a week and then leaving it in the fridge for their husbands. You know, sometimes women incite their husbands to make love to them, because when women cook they say you have to put a lot of black pepper. They put a lot of pepper.' He paused briefly, thinking. 'And they use *kaani* [hot chili pepper], too. If you are in a family

and the *kaani* is too much... that you have put too much hot pepper, someone will say, "Oh, be careful!" They'll tease you. They will say, "Oh Astou, be careful! That is a lot of *kaani*, eh! And *kaani* will respond". That's what we say in Wolof, "*Poobar déey feyyu*" [The pepper will talk back]. That is to say, if someone slaps you, you will respond. It means that when you give a lot of *kaani* to your husband, that night you'll cry [with pleasure], because it helps him to have a good erection, when he eats very spicy food. There are people who think that if they eat spicier food, it will help them when they have sex. Because you know that when intercourse lasts, it hurts. That pain, it's not really pain, it is great pleasure, it's an intense pleasure you feel strongly. A pleasurable pain. That's why men are advised to eat hot peppers, ginger, all that... All this is to be hard, to last longer. And when you have a husband who has a big penis, that hurts too, in a good way. Because only a man with a long penis will be able to touch you where you've never been touched, a man with a small penis will only touch your labia. There's pleasure there too, you can have an orgasm, and it depends on how he moves, how he makes love. But a man with a big penis, he will multiply tenfold the pleasure you feel. And he'll be the man you prefer, you'll say that this man fucks you well, because every time you have sex with him, he'll touch you where others can't, he'll bring you more pleasure. That's why we say *il faut bien être dedans*, we have to penetrate her deep. Because the woman likes it.'

'Are there things that women must or should eat then?' I asked.

'In our societies, that is why I said that it's the man who gives, he who provides, because I have not heard "A woman should eat this", except for *fondé* [porridge]. That is to enlarge the buttocks. It's the *fondé*. Other than that, I do not think I've heard of any other food recommended for women. So that's why I tell you that it is the men who provide, who give. The woman... it's as if she's a receiver [*réceptrice*] and the man a transmitter [*émetteur*]. The man gives, the woman receives. The receiver and the giver. It's just that. That is why we say that we

should not follow women's desires, they will hurt you. Because women, they never tire.'

'You must not follow a woman's pleasure?'

'The man should not follow the pleasure of the woman because she never gets tired. It's like a hole that cannot be filled. You have to go slowly, because for a woman, you can do it ten times, you can make love all week, it does nothing to her.'

'You know, it is tiring for us too...'

'Yes, it gets tiring but only at some stage... But for a man after the second round, he feels tired. But the woman, after the third round, no... A man after the second, after the third round, he feels very tired. Because he is the one who dominated. Your buttocks, your movements, your penis and all... it's in movement, it's your movement. You even feel that you're sweating. So it's good for a man to make love, because it frees you, it releases you [from excess energy].'

'I'll go get the fan, it's getting hot in here,' I suggested, not realising the double entendre of my affirmation in the context of the sexually laden conversation we were having. But before I could get up from my desk to go get the fan, which would hopefully make the thick and humid air circulate more freely in the living room, my assistant suddenly remembered another element he wanted to add to our discussion: 'Actually, that's another thing! Women, they need to make love when it's cold, they need the energy. When it's cold, when you have sex, you'll feel warm, hot. The human body, when it's hot, needs to refresh. So when it is cold, it wants to warm up. Having sex warms you up, it gives energy.'

The consumptive production of food and sex

Our intense, rich and at times deeply personal conversation went on for another half hour or so, during which it was El Hadj's turn to question me. We were used to discussing our interviewees' opinions on sex and gender roles, and to talk about our own experiences was intimidating, but liberating. His questions and generous answers provided me with a better understanding of the complexities young unmarried men have to navigate in terms of gender roles and expectations. Significantly, our exchange made me reconsider my assumptions regarding women's foodwork, which I used to believe was only a symbol of their oppression within a patriarchal, normative society. As our conversation was unfolding, and the first few times I listened to the recording afterwards, all I could take from it was his underestimation and belittling of women's labour in the kitchen and in the bedroom. Truth be told, my upset reaction to his statements about women's passivity and men's activity in bed says more about my own beliefs, stereotypes and presuppositions than about the worldview he was so patiently trying to explain to me.

Indeed, El Hadj's quasi-monologue has to be read in a much less literal sense, beyond what it might suggest at face-value, and beyond what I understood from it myself when that exchange took place. Reflecting on it jointly with the *bethio*, I suggest that together they reveal a Senegalese conception of gender and personhood in which men's and women's roles are complementary, albeit asymmetrical. It suggests that the relationship between food, sex and gender roles is not reducible to a man/woman, power/oppression binary, for it alludes to a much more encompassing register than the receiver/transmitter, passive/active metaphors to which El Hadj resorted.

Counihan posits that '(o)ne of the most significant domains of meaning embodied in food centres on the relation between the sexes, their gender definitions, and their sexuality. In many cultures, eating is a sexual and gendered

experience throughout life. Food and sex are metaphorically overlapping' (1999: 9). Although I agree that an intricate link ties food, sex and gender together, both the *bethio* and the discussion above indicate that in Senegal, food and sex are not merely *metaphorically* overlapping: they are part and parcel of a mutually constitutive process that informs the meanings imputed to alimentary and sexual needs. Besides, they participate in the elaboration and definition of what it means to be a Senegalese man or a woman. As such, they are not simply allegories for each other, but are charged with a literal, creative potency that is the essence of consumptive production. As Taylor puts it: 'Persons united by gift relations embody aspects of each other: Mauss observes that "to give something is to give part of oneself" (10); to receive something is to incorporate aspects of the other within the self' (Taylor 1992: 5). This assessment is reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin, who posits that 'by taking food into the body, we take in the world' (1984: 281 in Lupton 1996: 16), conferring on the act of eating an undeniable transformative power. As such, food is a potent liminal substance that

stands as a bridging substance between nature and culture, the human and the natural, the outside and the inside (Atkinson 1983: 11). Fischler, therefore, writes not of eating or consumption but of 'incorporation', or 'the action in which we send a food across the frontier between the world and the self, between 'outside' and 'inside' our body' (1988: 279). (in Lupton 1996: 16-17)

Prescription, proscription, incorporation

Thinking of food prescriptions and proscriptions in terms of incorporation makes sense in the Dakarais context. Apart from the Islamic ban on alcohol and pork and the restrictions observed during the fasting month of Ramadan,⁶³ most

⁶³ One of the five pillars of Islam, Ramadan is a month of fasting during which food and drinks, including water, can only be consumed between sunset and sunrise. Muslims are also supposed to abstain from engaging in sexual relations with their spouse during this time (sexual relations being prohibited, in theory, for unmarried individuals) – marking the importance of controlling carnal desires, be they alimentary or sexual, through self-discipline and prayer. Young children,

food taboos in Dakar work on the principle of symbolic assimilation of the properties associated with the food ingested – to put it simply, on a ‘you are what you eat’ basis. For example, it used to be that children were forbidden to eat the head of a fish, as it was believed that fish must be somewhat stupid since they were so easily caught. In Wolof, one species of fish is even named *ngaka* [credulous], because it is particularly easy to catch. Thus, a child eating a fish’s head risked incorporating its naivety and unintelligence, both unwanted characteristics. Likewise, boiled eggs were believed to stall a baby’s development, especially in terms of language: hermetic and opaque, the egg is closed off and its content mysterious and impenetrable until it is cracked open.⁶⁴ For an infant to eat boiled eggs would jeopardise his or her ability to open up to the world by rendering him or her mute (Fall 2012), reminiscent of Pasi Falk’s description of the mouth as a site of intake of food and outflux of speech, constituting it as a liminal zone (1994: 14 in Lupton 1996: 18). Considering that *fayda* [personality] is for the most part displayed through eloquent speech – which becomes especially important for men as a marker of their masculinity and a tool of seduction – proper language acquisition is not to be messed with.

Although these traditional proscriptions are barely observed anymore in the Senegalese capital, they nonetheless occupy an important place in people’s imaginary, as do similar associations between food and sexuality. Fall’s research in Dakar presents a series of alimentary considerations women must deal with. For instance, while it is recommended for boys to improve their virility, girls should not eat sheep testicles; nor should they be fed with cow’s or goat’s milk in infancy, for it would awaken their libido and make them promiscuous, just as these animals are perceived to be. Likewise, young women are informed that eating raw, white rice risks whitening their blood, making it unnoticeable. This

sick or elderly people, travellers, and menstruating, breastfeeding or pregnant women are exempt from fasting.

⁶⁴ It is no surprise then that eggs are regularly used in *maraboutage* (Quran-based withcraft) practices aimed at unpacking difficult situations, as discussed in Chapter 4.

invisibility would have the consequence of ‘taking a woman’s virginity away’ because her virginal status could not be assessed, as there would be no visible blood mark on the white bedsheets after her wedding night, thus bringing dishonour upon her family. In the same vein, an unmarried young woman should not eat a meal directly from the pot, as this would delay or even prevent her marriage: a *marmite* (large pot) spends a considerable time on the fire on a daily basis, and a woman who can’t contain her impatience and hunger is not showing *muñ*, patience and endurance. Likewise, eating from a cooking pot suggests eating alone, which is contrary to *teraanga*. What’s more, it shows a laziness incompatible with married life which, as we’ve seen, entails intensive food labour, and the faulty woman might well remain a spinster (Fall 2012). In the case of a pregnant woman – a *jigéenu weroul* (literally, a woman who is unwell) in Wolof – what she eats is physically and symbolically passed on to her foetus, which contradicts El Hadj’s claim that there are no associations between women’s food and sexual consumption and (re)production. Of a baby who cries a lot, it is said that the mother must have eaten too much hot pepper and spices, making her child irritable or bitter, *wekh*, an adjective also given to hot pepper. Likewise, a fish called *yet*, which is particularly gelatinous, would make her baby drool if eaten by a pregnant woman (Fall 2012).

Whereas women are forbidden to consume certain foods, men benefit from more food recommendation than restrictions. Such prescriptions are for the most part geared at insuring or enhancing a man’s virility and potency. Again, the similitude between what is eaten and what it is expected to provoke is remarkable. For example, manioc and peanut take a white, milky texture after being masticated and are associated with a higher production of sperm and increased fertility (Fall 2012). Ginger is also a well-known stimulant and aphrodisiac, so much so that ginger juice, mentioned by El Hadj as a staple of the Senegalese fridge, is offered with kola nuts to male guests attending wedding ceremonies. Quite similarly to the sheep testicles aforementioned, sea turtles’

genitalia – which I suspect are not very common – are said to sustain libido and stimulate the masculine sexual appetite (Fall 2012).

Consumptive production of energy

The masculine avoidance of *fondé* and El Hadj's assertion that men must eat meat, among other things, in order to have enough energy for sexual intercourse, are both based on the symbolic qualities imputed to the comestibles. *Fondé*, which is a creamy, sweet, white millet porridge, is closely connected to feminine aesthetics, as it is recommended for women desiring a more prominent and consequently more desirable *derriere*. Men who eat it risk being labeled soft, sweet, flabby and effeminate (Fall 2012), whereas potency is associated with strength, spices, stiffness and masculine demeanour. In the case of meat, which 'has connotations of lust, animal and masculine passion, strength, heartiness and energy' (Lupton 1996: 28), it is those qualities of the animal that are to be absorbed, *incorporated*, and then embodied by its consumer, who would exude potency and manliness – not only channeling these properties, but *being* them. Far from being limited to contemporary Senegal, red meat, 'with its high protein content and bloody constitution has been found to represent for men a totem of virility and strength' (Newcombe et al. 2012: 392; see Adams 1990; Fiddes 1991; Rozin et al. 2012) in a variety of contexts. Indeed, a long-standing relationship correlates meat with masculinity in other African settings (for example, Holtzman 2006), but also in Asian and European cultures, where 'meat has been closely associated with power and privilege' from the Middle Ages to more recent times (Ruby and Heine 2011: 448). Adams even constructs meat as a symbol of patriarchy (1990, 1991), highlighting not only the symbolic but also the effective social and political power derived from access, control and consumption of meat (Ruby and Heine: 448). Significantly, Senegalese men usually get the best pieces of meat, fish or chicken of any meal. When eating together from a large, common plate, a woman usually uses her right hand to split the bigger pieces of meat, fish or chicken into smaller bites

that she distributes around, placing them in front of each person. Men usually receive the best and biggest parts. This form of commensality could easily be analysed as a patriarchal co-optation of resources. Fajans, for instance, suggests that the giver of food must control 'his or her appetite in order to satisfy another's (1988: 149). The recipient indulges his or her appetite at another's expense', highlighting an asymmetrical relationship in which one consumes what the other has produced without reciprocating.

In the case of Senegal, however, I believe that the fact it is the woman who divides and distributes the food that way is telling. While a woman may control and restrain her own appetite by giving her husband the best part of the protein, in doing so she acknowledges the significance of her contribution in the construction of strong male body, a body that will eventually feed her in return: the food she serves will be transformed into sexual energy, strength and orgasms, a connection stated by El Hadj multiple times. Both my assistant's monologue and the *bethio* illustrate this significant element which ties food, sex and femininity together in Senegal. Not only do women have to feed tangible, edible meals, but they also have to feed their partner's desires.

The recipe-for-good-sex written on the *bethio* shows that it is the woman, the chef wearing the lingerie and stimulating her partner with titillating talk, who instructs her sous-chef on how to please her. It corresponds to El Hadj repeating, in different ways, that women are less active than men in bed, because their role is 'to excite you, to allow you to do what you have to do'. He specifies that these actions are not generative of energy, which is the man's role in bed: to create and transfer energy to his partner – the giver and the receiver – through mutual pleasure and ejaculation: 'And when the orgasm comes, with the ejaculation, it is strength that gets out. That strength, you have to (...) replace it with food. By eating well, and even by eating a lot'.

Although El Hadj contends that a woman holds a more passive, receptive female role during intercourse, what he fails to acknowledge is that a woman asserts much more power than he recognises. Without the energising food she feeds him, and without the erotic work of seduction she performs (here exemplified by the *bethio*), a man is left without the vital nutritional and sexual energy he requires to be a real man – that is, in an extremely simplified way, a provider of food and orgasms: ‘The woman must know that you are a man. *Tu dois bien la baiser*, you have to fuck her well. (...) Do anything to make her have an orgasm’. So women are not creating energy, because they are the initial *source* of energy, and the source of the desire the energy feeds from.

Indeed, the woman’s feeding is necessary to the man’s providing, both in the literal and metaphorical sense. In the same way that he needs his wife’s meal to sustain him so he can go to work, earn money and provide for his family, he also needs it to generate enough energy to have an erection, which can be enhanced by the *kaani* and other aphrodisiacs his wife puts in the food, making the pepper talk back, ‘*Poobar déey feyyu*’. And just as food is simultaneously necessary for the body to function, but also necessitates being digested and expelled, so is it with intercourse: ‘So it’s good for a man to make love, because it frees you’, meaning that the excess energy created by the ingestion of food and its transformation into sexual drive also needs to be channeled and discharged, a masculine responsibility. It also refers to the regulation of bodily temperature. For men, the ingestion of hot substances such as *kaani* and ginger, creates a surplus of heat that needs to be cooled down or expelled. In contrast, El Hadj points out that for women, having sex ‘warms you up’, that they ‘need to make love when it’s cold, they need the energy’. This depiction not only suggest a liberating transfer of the masculine excessive energy onto (sweat) and into (semen) the woman, but also links back to early Islamic conceptualisations of the body, which were directly inspired by the Greek humoral medicinal framework: ‘[t]his system assigned females the qualities and temperaments

associated with the cold and more humid humors' (Dallal 2003: 401). It is rather telling that sterile women are either compared to men in Wolof (Lecarme 1999: 266 n30), or to dried fields, an association further compounded by the Quranic comparison of women to fields to be ploughed (Ben Fradj 1999: 58) – bringing to the fore the relationship between food production, consumption and reproduction.

Of big penises and orgasms

Presenting women as fields insinuates that men are labourers, and the penis their tool of production. El Hadj's accentuation of the importance of having a big penis is paralleled by and correlated to his insistence on providing and feeding women's orgasms. On the *bethio*, the man's penis is understood to be his utensil, most likely a pestle, whereas the woman's womb would be akin to a mortar. Indeed, the mortar and pestle are symbols of fertility in Senegal (Ly 1999a, 1999b) and throughout Africa, and this is where the connection between a big penis and a woman's orgasm becomes more obvious: traditionally, 'reproductive organs are [perceived as] sacred and powerful. Not only do they serve in giving life, they constitute the site of reception of the cooking (*cuisson*) where the different vital elements of human and divine origin unite to give birth to the community' (Biaya 1999: 50, my translation). A husband's big penis facilitates sexual pleasure and is the source of his wife's orgasm, which in early Islamic conceptions of sexuality,⁶⁵ is perceived as essential to the production of a female semen, itself necessary to procreation: 'pleasure is a precondition for the fertility of a woman' (Dallal 2003: 403). Indeed, both male and female semen are needed to procreate, which underscores the emphasis in Muslim sexual ethics on the complementarity of gender roles, within and outside the bedroom. As such, it is not only the man's appetites that need to be fulfilled, but also those of the woman who 'never tires,

⁶⁵ I discuss the Muslim sexual ethics of pleasure in more detail in Chapter 7.

whose desires are insatiable: in Islam, women are actually ‘thought to have nine times the potential for sexual desire and pleasure’ (Imam 2001: 18).

It follows that by feeding a man the most potent pieces of the meal she prepared – facilitating his consumption of meat and other traditional ‘male’ foods, such as ginger and *kaani* – a woman is not only designing and upholding his manhood, power and virility; she is simultaneously reinforcing her own femininity, by preparing her body for her own pleasure, her own orgasm, her own semen, and ultimately, a pregnancy. She is not only contributing to the construction of a strong male body which, as Fabio Parasecoli (2013: 285) notes, is often associated with sexual potency, power, and productivity; she is creating the conditions of her own power. As Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch contends, ‘[p]rocreation not only gives women prestige but through rituals fosters their identification with vital forces. Because *power was defined in Africa by authority* not over inert, limited factor of production such as land but *over one’s own life and that of others*, women’s power depended greatly on their children. A woman without descendants was by definition powerless’ (1997: 34, my emphasis). Indeed, by exerting power over food, Senegalese women can enhance their and their partners’ reproductive, fertile potential. In doing so, they transform a situation of apparent submissiveness to masculine desires and appetites into one of affirmation: in Senegal, in the responsibility of feeding others lies the power of creating and sustaining life, tangibly and metaphorically.

Reproductive powers are also reflected in the belief that a newly married couple should gain weight after their nuptials. For women, weight gain signals fertility, and ideally pregnancy. In men, physical corpulence, or at least signs of a pot belly, signals wealth and power, a relationship Bayart’s ‘politics of the belly’ (1993: xviii) acknowledges as part of several African cultures (Cusack 2003: 291). A larger body both exposes the husband’s masculine attributes and simultaneously participates in the constitution of the wife’s feminine powers: the husband being

wealthy enough to provide sufficient quantities of food, it is his wife's role to transform this raw, economic wealth into the symbolic wealth of cooked meals. A perfect example of consumptive production, a husband's wealth, when eaten, is thus neither lost nor wasted: by its transformation from the raw to the cooked, it is reinscribed on his and his wife's bodies in the form of plumpness, and it is reinvested by her through *teraanga*, which signals and reinforces her generosity, her femininity. Meanwhile, the husband's transformation of food into sexual energy eventually results in a child. Husband and wife thus mutually produce and consume each other's labour, converting it into something more, in terms of social values that go beyond the net worth of the man's income and the female's meal. Thus, money becomes food, food becomes energy, energy becomes pleasure, pleasure becomes orgasm, orgasm becomes sperm, and sperm, both male and female, becomes children. Significantly, this mutually constitutive process continues in the breastfeeding of the infant, as the 'notion of the mother's milk arising in part from the male's semen' is found in Islamic writings (Fortier 2007: 21). Intercourse during pregnancy is therefore recommended, as the male's sperm is believed to nourish, fortify and strengthen the child's body by constituting its flesh and bones while it is sheltered in the woman's womb (Fortier 2007: 21-24). In traditional Wolof kinship, however, a child is made of both maternal and paternal substances: the mother's side, *meen* (breastmilk), transmits blood, flesh, character and intellect, while the father's side, *genô* (belt), gives bones and courage, among other things (Diop 1985: 15-20).

Although the intersection of ancestral beliefs with Islamic thought makes it difficult to distinguish what is believed to actually be passed down from each parent, I believe that what is important to note here is that food is undeniably a foundational element of Senegalese kinship, as it concretely participates in the creation of both the physical and the social person. As the substance around which both men and women's labour is articulated, its procurement and subsequent transformations into meals, energy, and children represent the

mutually constitutive and transformative process of men's and women's respective consumptive production. As such, it is reminiscent of Janet Carsten's work in Pulau Langkawi. In the Malay context described by Carsten,⁶⁶ money earned by fishermen holds a 'negative, anti-social' and 'anti-kinship' (1989: 132) power associated with individual commercial endeavour, a power that can only be neutralised by women's involvement in kin and community networks in which they reinvest that money, transforming it into a positive, shared valuable. Malay women's cooking of their husband's fish catch is thus a process that transforms 'money from a means of exchange to a consumption good so that it ceases to threaten and actually sustains the household' (Carsten 1989: 118). Although in Senegal money doesn't have the same inherently negative connotation as it does in Malaysia – Moya even contends that in Dakar, 'money is the most valuable form of relationship' (2015: 157; see Chapter 3) – Senegalese women similarly transform it into a productive object of consumption, food, which has the power to create relatedness (Carsten 1995).

It appears that in Senegal, the female processes of transformation discussed by Carsten unfold via and within both the male and the female bodies, rather than through the female one alone. This simultaneous transformation also diverges from what Rebecca Popenoe has discussed in relation to the Azawagh of Niger, for whom 'not only do female bodies turn the stuff of men's labor into something enduring, fertile, and infinitely appealing, but in doing so they enhance that value immeasurably' (Popenoe 2004: 130).

In Dakar, although a strict, gendered division of labour places women in the domestic sphere and makes them solely responsible for foodwork, when we look at the relationship between food and sex, and between men and women's respective roles, we can see how what first appears to be a patriarchal sphere of

⁶⁶ Interestingly, Carsten does not seem to consider the influence of Islam in the lives of her Muslim informants.

domination is challenged. Comparing Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to Candace West and Don Zimmerman's concept of doing gender, Molly Moloney and Sarah Fenstermaker summarise that '(i)n both conceptualizations, gender is not an attribute but an activity' (2002: 194). By conceptualising food and sexual labour as complementary and necessary to one another, Senegalese husband and wife help one another in creating, establishing, doing or performing their femininity and masculinity in a socially acceptable way that – to paraphrase Popenoe – enhances each other's gender value.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how closely examining Senegalese gender roles in food and sexuality allows for an alternative analysis that recognises the cooperative and complementary labour of Senegalese men and women in a consumptive production that encapsulates 'the requirements of material production and reproduction – eating, working, and sexuality' (Boylston 2013: 267). In this domestic gift economy, satiation – gastronomic and sexual – is at once a maker and a marker of masculinity and femininity.

Although complementary, the gendered division of labour in Senegal remains hierarchical, and is an example of asymmetrical reciprocity that favours men (Komter 2005: 86-87). In practice, it is women who still bear the weight of domestic duties – even if, in the Senegalese sexual imaginary, foodwork is part of a shared understanding of men's and women's respective contributions to the intimate making and sustenance of a productive household, and to the collaborative work of doing gender. However, rather than being a simple symbol of a woman's subordination and confinement to the kitchen and the domestic, subservient role that space marks out, food can also be a source of female power. Indeed, as exemplified by the *bethio*, through their food labour, Senegalese women create the conditions for their own appetites – sexual, reproductive and social – to be fulfilled.

For men, the food they eat is important because of its energising properties. Food is the element through which they perform their masculine role as provider, but it is also the fuel that allows them to perform sexually: ‘That is why we are asked to eat a lot, to make sure we are not weak when we make love’. I was told a few times that a man should never go to bed on an empty stomach, implying that he needed the energy to ‘cook’ his wife, as the recipe-for-good-sex *bethio* suggests. But since it is women who prepare and distribute the food, men are not solely responsible of their sexual vitality. By preparing a hearty, spicy meal, and then by arousing (with or without external medicinal help) their partner’s desires, women not only feed food, but also desires. Although El Hadj contends that a woman’s screaming and moaning in bed is not energy, unlike the man’s more physical sexual intensity, these sensations are what actually channel energy, and help to build it up. They are the *kaani* of sex, the spices that add to the flavour of the dish. As such, I believe this consumptive production of desires perfectly parallels the imaginative labour women enact on a day-to-day basis by being *mokk pooj*. When they imagine what would please their husband, and how they could satisfy his appetites, they are not receptors, but are actively engaging in a creative, productive process. Moaning, screaming and crying with pleasure is not passive: it is another form of interpretive labour, and women’s way of making the pepper talk back.

Chapter 7.

'A slut, a saint, and everything in between':

mokk pooj, submission and agency

'What's written on that one?' I asked the young woman sitting on the sofa in front of me. Between us the coffee table was covered with little bags, shiny containers, and colourful boxes, and I could detect strong fragrances emanating from the various products. Fanta, a married woman in her early thirties, held the flamboyant string of red glass beads in front of her and, with a playful smile, read the words written with silver letter-shaped beads: *Ya saf kooy*. Her friend, sitting next to her, giggled, mildly uncomfortable at Fanta's bluntness. Ndeye Marie, the Laobe saleswoman, glanced at me as she continued to lay out her merchandise on the table, and I could see that the three women were surveying my reaction attentively to see if I had understood what it meant.

'Do you know what *kooy* is?' Fanta asked. '*Kooy*, it's this dangling thing men have' she continued, placing her hand between her thighs and letting it fall limply. Before I could place a word, she carried on: 'It means "Your penis is tasty!"' 'More laughter erupted from the ladies around the table.

When she had caught her breath, Fanta resumed her questioning: 'Sooooo... you're doing research on *salagne salagne* [tools], *feem* [strategies] and *mokk pooj* [seduction], but do you have a boyfriend who kisses you? Who touches you here? And there?' As she talked, she made suggestive movements that left little to the imagination, her hands quickly caressing her breasts, thighs and groin, resulting in her friends giggling again.

'Maybe men are afraid of you because you're *jongué* [unmarried women knowledgeable in seduction]' she offered after I responded I was single. Holding

a *bethio*, a sexy loincloth or underwrap, she remarked pensively: ‘Or because you do not use the right things. Ndeye Marie will sew you one that says *Baise-moi* [Fuck me] at the back, won’t she?’ Fanta asked the saleswoman, who silently agreed.



Figure 9. Waistbeads

‘Ah yes! *Katema*,’ I translated innocently from French to Wolof, provoking more laughter and exclamations of both surprise and delight at my knowledge and use of the Wolof slang. The group was slowly getting bigger as more women arrived for the sex-toy party. For the next five minutes or so, Fanta would recall this short translation to every single one of the female-only guests showing up, by the same token introducing me to the group. One of the women, pleased to hear I understood some Wolof, turned to me and said ‘Yow, Aïcha.⁶⁷ *Caga nga!* You know how to please a man!’ Though, in the strictest sense of the word, my interlocutor had just called me a prostitute [*caga*], I smiled, aware of the double entendre in her remark. A *caga* may be lady of the night, but the term is also used as banter and friendly teasing to refer to a confident individual, comfortable in

⁶⁷ Aïcha is the name that was given to me by my Senegalese family, and I used it interchangeably with my official name throughout fieldwork. It gave me a certain legitimacy by situating me within the respectable realm of a family and, by extension, within larger social circles.

her own skin, who owns her body and sexuality, and is always thinking of how to please her man.

In our short conversation, Fanta had set the tone for the rest of the evening. Engulfed in the realm of *mokk pooj*, during the following hours I was to be simultaneously overwhelmed by loud and cheerful exclamations, bedazzled by the bawdiness of the women with whom I was spending the evening, and captivated by the delicacy and sensuality of the feminine lingerie, waistbeads and aphrodisiacs with which I was presented. For these married, Muslim women, sex and eroticism were definitely associated with pleasure.

The following morning, I woke up with the impression that something was missing from the previous night's gathering. Or, to be more precise, that something had been overly present: men. Although absent and indeed forbidden to enter the room we occupied, men were the intended recipients of the creativity embodied in the material objects up for sale; they were the targets of the various tactics and strategies imagined to please them and, most importantly, keep them from going astray. Men, in their omnipresent potential absence, created and structured acceptable forms of desire(s), eroticism and sexuality.

Therefore, when Senegalese social scientist Cheikh Ibrahima Niang argues that Senegalese women play a decisive role in sexuality, when he insists that they are the creators of sexuality and of erotic capital, and then further contends that "Sex is an art [...] dominated, invented and continuously reinvented by women' – or that '[t]he discourse about sex is essentially constructed by women' (in Sy 2013; Ekine 2014) – I cannot help but feel a strong ambivalence. While I agree that Senegalese modes of seduction and sexual practice are mostly a female affair, and considered as such, I suggest that the Senegalese art/work of seduction and sexuality, *mokk pooj*, is actually highly dominated and cultivated by men. It involves the reproduction of a subtle but deeply ingrained, patriarchal social

structure from which men clearly benefit: polygyny, *ligéeyu ndeye* [work of the mother] and its correlated value *muñ* [endurance] play central roles in the lopsided Senegalese sexual imaginary.

However, reducing Senegalese gender interactions to relations of male dominance versus female subservience would be dishonest, and would obscure the intricacies of power in conjugal, heterosexual relationships in Dakar. In fact, both Senegalese men and women participate in the reproduction of patriarchal control over women's bodies, behaviours and sexualities through an emphasis and glorification of the 'good woman', *jigéen bu baax* – a woman whose essence, quality and femininity are defined and prescribed as much by men as by other women, especially in the competitive context of polygyny.

That being said, I argue that *mokk pooj* can and should also be analysed as a pleasurable way for women to gain power in their asymmetrical relationships. Indeed, the concept of *mokk pooj* highlights the underlying tension between duty and pleasure that frames most marital relationships. In fact, in spite of the wifely duties they are expected patiently to fulfill, women are encouraged to use their erotic abilities to get what they want from their partners – in other words, to use sex and submission as a tool of negotiation, manipulation and control over men. Following Saba Mahmood, who defines 'agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create' (2001), I suggest that *mokk pooj* is 'a medium for the cultivation of women's consciousness' (Boddy 1989: 345), and Senegalese women's agentic response – made possible by their interpretive labour – to a deeply sexist sexual imaginary.

***Mokk pooj*, the art of negotiation**

Mokk pooj translates roughly as the art of attracting and pleasing others, or the art/work of seduction, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Although

the expression is seldom used to refer to men, it is sometimes acknowledged that a man can be *mokk pooj*. For a man to be considered *mokk pooj*, he needs to go beyond his breadwinner role and show an extra effort – for example by taking care of the children, by surprising his wife with an unexpected present, by using endearing terms when talking to her, by preparing her breakfast, or by doing his share of the household chores, as Khady, a 27 year-old married woman explained to me. The masculine definition of *mokk pooj* therefore rests on gallantry and romance, on care that exceeds what is traditionally expected of him within marriage. Significantly, all of these masculine expressions of affection are presented in the active verb tense.

But differentiating between feminine and masculine forms of *mokk pooj* is largely superfluous, and talking about feminine *mokk pooj* is tautological: whereas masculine *mokk pooj* is exceptional, its feminine version is a compulsory component of Senegalese femininity, and strongly related to traditional gender roles. When conducting interviews or having an informal conversation, the mention of *mokk pooj* was immediately understood as feminine trait, unless my assistant El Hadj or I specifically inquired about its masculine version. In the Senegalese sexual imaginary, *mokk pooj* is indubitably a feminine attribute, deeply connected to the basic expectations of what defines a good wife, the behaviour she should present to the outside world, and the skills she should show within the confines of the bedroom. Behind it lies the idea that Senegalese wives should not only honour and submit to men in public, but do everything in their power to pamper their husbands at home. As such, *mokk pooj* is a typically Senegalese form of interpretive labour, as it involves the feminine work of imagining, anticipating, enabling and enacting the desires and needs of one's husband. In opposition to its masculine counterpart, feminine *mokk pooj* is defined grammatically in the passive tense: the verb *mokk* refers to a task or skill that is understood or mastered; to spices that have been finely ground; and to the appropriate display of submissive and docile behaviour (Diouf 2003: 226).

However, for a woman to be and to do *mokk pooj* is far from being passive: all of my informants, men and women, closely related *mokk pooj* to a woman's cooking abilities which, as discussed in Chapter 6, involve a large investment in terms of time and energy. In addition, as *mokk pooj* goes hand in hand with the use of lingerie, waistbeads, aphrodisiacs and incense to generate, intensify and rejuvenate sexual desire, most Senegalese women spend a lot of time and money making themselves beautiful and desirable for their husbands.

More than being the passive object and active enabler of male desires, for a woman to be *mokk pooj* entails that she knows what is expected of her in a specific situation, and how to harness the power that comes from her compliance most effectively. Accordingly, *mokk pooj* relies on the skillful articulation of tools and tactics with a certain *savoir-faire* to navigate the Senegalese social dance (Buggenhagen 2012: 114), in public but mostly in the privacy of the home. In Wolof, the word *feem* refers to feminine finesse, to the artful tricks and strategies used to deceive or convince a man – for example by talking to him softly and calling him by his favourite pet name – whereas *salagne salagne* are understood as the material tools deployed to do so, such as the fragrant incense, the titillating lingerie and the playful sex toys that are part and parcel of *mokk pooj*. It follows that while *mokk pooj* entails women's submission to and reproduction of patriarchal gender norms, it also reshapes the status quo: seduction blurs the boundaries between the subject and the subjugated, as Akiko Takeyama (2008: 18) has suggested regarding the commodification of seduction and affect in Japanese host clubs. 'Mokk pooj? It means that I can catch a man without using my fingers,' a young Gambian⁶⁸ waitress I met in Edinburgh commented amusingly. For her, as for the women I interviewed in Dakar, the art/work of seduction is as empowering as it is subjugating – maybe even more so.

⁶⁸ The Gambia, a small country entirely surrounded by Senegal, shares several cultural elements with its neighbour.

It took me a long time to figure out that connection, however. I met Madame Thiam at the phone company to which my flatmate and I had signed up. She walked slowly, her body entangled in the multiple layers of her deep orange *boubou*. The upper front part of her loose dress, from collar to mid-torso, was overlaid with intricate golden embroidery, as was the hem of its sleeves. Perched perfectly on her head, a headscarf made of the same fabric as her *boubou* had been folded and tied in the latest fashion. As she was taking me through the building to her office, her high heels clacking on the ceramic tiles emphasised her rolling hips and confident yet reserved bearing. When she opened the door to her office, I smelled the sweet and smoky aroma of burning *thiouraye* [incense] instantly. I commented on the wonderful fragrance, which surprised Madame Thiam: 'How do you know about *thiouraye*? Do you like it?' In my best Wolof, I answered that not only did I know about the incense, but that I was doing research about the Senegalese art of seduction: 'Wow, *xam nga thiouraye, damay binde sama thèse ci birum makk pooj*'. In a response to which I had become accustomed when I told strangers about my thesis, she looked confounded and burst out laughing: 'Ah! So you're studying our art of negotiation!' she giggled.

After months of research, observation, and incessant questioning, my meeting with Madame Thiam was a turning point. In one simple sentence, she gave me one of the keys to understanding the Senegalese art/work of seduction: irrespective of the duties women must fulfill in conjugal life, *makk pooj* is also, and perhaps most significantly, an art of negotiation in which sexual pleasure is a powerful bargaining tool.

The Muslim sexual ethics of *makk pooj*

Makk pooj is part of a particular sexual ethics that incorporates elements of local eroticism with Islamic perceptions of sexuality. In the Senegalese sexual imaginary, as in Islam more generally, 'sexuality is seen as an integral part of the

human constitution and denying sexual pleasure is not encouraged and perceived to be against human nature' (Odoms-Young and Abdulrahim 2003: 206). At the same time, and as we have seen regarding the importance given to female virginity (Chapter 5), this sex-positive attitude is limited to the married couple. I have been told on countless occasions, when I asked about the reasons that people get married, that marriage is a religious prescription that legitimates sexual intercourse. As explained by Monsieur Gueye, an active, twice-married, once-divorced man in his mid-sixties: 'For us Muslims, Allah has recommended that we get married, because when you refuse to wed, you will be unfaithful [*moy*] and that's forbidden by God.' The verb *moy*, to cheat, means both cheating on a partner and cheating, or falling short of, God's law: '*Moy nga sa jabar, moy Yälla*' (You cheat on your wife, you fail God; Diouf 2003: 228). In addition, the emphasis on marital sexuality is linked to procreation as a goal of marriage, given that children both grow the community of Muslim followers and ensure their parents' wellbeing in their old age – a significant consideration in a developing country with no formal social welfare program. Ndeye Fatou, an educated, soft-spoken but articulate married mother of two young children, concurred: 'Marriage is a social contract that binds a man and a woman. It is a divine recommendation, because in the Quran one of the *sura* says that Allah created us, men and women, for us to multiply. So, since men and women complement each other, it is imperative that they multiply in order for society to evolve, for a perpetuation of human beings.' However, coupled with Islam, *mokk pooj*, *salagne salagne* and the like are all constitutive of a Senegalese sexual imaginary that does not limit sexuality solely to the sexual procreative act, although the distinction between procreative and plastic sexuality – 'sexuality freed from the needs of reproduction' (Giddens 1992: 2) – is not always easy to make. In this chapter, I will follow Signe Arnfred's suggestion to disentangle 'sex for pleasure' from 'sex for procreation' analytically – concentrating on the former – in order to engage with the realm of sexuality beyond that of the regulation of fertility and kinship practices (2003: 389).

Mokk pooj calls for a satisfying sexual life for both men and women. In the Muslim ethos, sexual pleasure and orgasm are said to make the married couple feel closer to Allah, in an experience of physical and spiritual bliss that would be a glimpse of the ecstasy ultimately to be experienced in heaven. This Islamic sexual ethics does not relegate sexuality to 'the sphere of sinful carnality; rather sexuality is celebrated and inextricably linked to spiritual practice and worship of the divine' (Hoel 2015: 84). In consequence, any tools, strategies and tactics to reach this incomparable elation are seen as useful and welcomed because they foster intimacy through pleasure: the key to a successful marriage is sexual satisfaction, *Séy ca lal ba la* [marriage is the/in bed] (Dial 2008: 37).

Even if, in theory, sexual pleasure is supposed to be enjoyed equally by men and women, throughout fieldwork I found that there was a definite emphasis on satisfying masculine desires. At the sex-toy party, as in the stores I visited, I was surprised to find erotic objects that enhanced only men's sensations, or modified and beautified a woman's body in order to arouse her partner. The absence of dildos and vibrators marked the fact that for women, pleasure should come from her male partner – to whom she should be married – or not at all.

Once I visited a women's shop in my neighbourhood and noticed among the strings of multicoloured waistbeads a beautifully simple one. It was basic in design but very elegant, a string of shiny, translucent golden pearls alternating with mirror-like silver ones, with a few bigger and more intricate yellow and silver beads interposed at regular intervals. Suspended from the dazzling row of beads by a short chain was a little heart-shaped white and silver bead. When the saleswoman saw me look at it, she started explaining that it should be worn under a long and airy *boubou*, without any underwear. I must have looked intrigued because she smiled with pride, happy with the impact her creative idea seemed to have provoked. 'You wear it and when you walk around the heart bead

will touch your clitoris...,' she began. 'But... but I thought masturbation was forbidden in Islam?' I interrupted, stupefied. 'Oh yes it is. It's not to masturbate, it is for your body to get ready. So if you visit your husband at his office on lunch time, or if he comes home early, well... if he wants to have sex, you'll be excited, wet and ready.'

In this scenario, the woman is simultaneously presented as a temptress and as subjected to her husband's desires. By wearing the heart-shaped, clitoris-tickling waistbead, she feeds her insatiable sexual desire and prepares herself for sex, while at the same time that desire is tamed through marriage and submission to her husband's desires: if *he* wants sex, she must be ready *for him*. Indeed, within Islam, female sexuality is perceived as a source of danger that must be controlled: 'We get married to avoid adultery. Because Satan is very powerful. And the woman is part of Satan's family. You see her, she is so beautiful, you think you'll just go talk to her but end up going where God doesn't want you to go, that is, sleep with her,' Monsieur Ba told El Hadj during his interview. Because women are seen as inherently more emotional and naturally irrational – partly because they are believed to be unable to control their sexual urges – female sexuality is thought to be pervasive, powerful and potentially disruptive (Popenoe 2004: 53) of life forces:

The necessity of taming and controlling women's sexuality (through marriage) is concomitant with the sustenance of Islamic society. In the juridical imagination a woman's obedience to her husband is not only emblematic of the expected power relations in the domestic sphere, but is an important signifier of the natural order of things, effecting harmonized balance in the sacred universe. In effect, if women's sexuality is left uncontrolled, social and cosmic disorder will triumph. (Hoel 2015: 85)

Men and women, Rebecca Popenoe suggests, consequently are posited as 'radically different – and often opposed – kinds of beings. These views correlate with particular perceptions of the body – women's bodies inherently attract, and men's bodies are inherently attracted' (2004: 53-54). And these distinctions have

served to justify particular hierarchical discourses about men, women and their respective roles in society. In such narratives, '[t]he roles of husbands and wives are viewed as complementary rather than unequal, and although men and women are equal before God, men stand a step above women in society (Quran 2: 229). Thus, the family is hierarchical and patriarchal in structure' (Callaway and Creevey 1994: 30). Besides, while '[t]he values of marriage, motherhood and female virginity are particularly salient in hegemonic ideals of femininity and female sexuality' (Bennett 2005: 17), men are perceived as heads of households and decision-makers, by virtue of their role as breadwinners who must provide housing, food and clothing for their wives and children. What is more, several men we interviewed believed that their role as Muslim husbands was to complete their wife's religious education and show her the path to God. Indeed, I was often told that it is through her husband that a woman will go to heaven after her death: 'My husband will open the doors of heaven for me,' was an oft-repeated mantra, and stood at the core of an Islamised Senegalese gender epistemology linked closely to the importance of feminine work within marriage.

Liggéeyu ndeye

Interwoven with the assumption that a woman accesses heaven via her husband is the concept of *liggéeyu ndeye* – from the Wolof words *liggéey*, work, and *ndeye*, mother. *Liggéeyu ndeye* is the belief that a mother's work – that is, the way she behaves as a wife, mother and daughter-in-law – has a direct impact on her children's lives. When I asked friends and informants to explain what *liggéeyu ndeye* is, I was often given the mothers of President Macky Sall or famous singer Youssou Ndour as examples: their sons could not have reached such prominent positions and status if their mothers had not worked well. One of Mireille Lecarme's informants had a more dramatic explanation, suggesting that the sole survivor of a car accident should thank his mother for having worked well – implying that the death of the other passengers could be imputed to their mothers' lack of proper behaviour (1999: 262). Such beliefs are manifested in the

regular use of the proverb *Liggéeyu ndeye añu doom*, which translates as ‘the work of the mother is her children's food’ – meaning that the way children turn out in life is a direct consequence of what their mother feeds them, metaphorically and literally. As such, a person’s physical and mental health, happiness, social accomplishments and overall success are said to depend on how his or her mother has ‘worked’. In practice this signifies that she has to be an irreproachable, exemplary wife (Diop 1985: 23; Gueye 2010; Dial 2008: 81). Ideally, the perfect wife is a submissive, quiet, docile and stay-at-home woman.

These expectations are the result and culmination of the differentiated socialisation of boys and girls from a very early age. Abdoulaye Bara Diop (1985: 58; 64–65) suggests that masculine superiority, derived from both an abusive interpretation of Islam by men – sole possessors of Muslim knowledge – and long traditions of virilocality and patrilinearity, is indisputable. So, for example, girls learn to respect and obey their male siblings, who are in charge of the household in the absence of the father. They are also taught that to go to heaven, a woman has to be a good mother who cares for her children's future; that to ensure their success, she has to be considered an exemplary wife; and that to be a perceived as such, she has to glorify and submit to her husband. This seems like a striking example of what Lecarme termed the ‘domestic social relationship’ (1999: 259; 2000: 205): the fact that girls and women’s bodies – as well as their souls, I would add – learn submissiveness, and their personhood and identity is educated, fashioned, and shaped according to a principle of hierarchical subordination that is initially exercised by the girls' parents or tutors, and later in life by their husbands.

Liggéeyu ndeye, then, emphasises and prescribes normative gender codes where a woman's value and worth is measured in relation to her husband and the work she has performed for him, including in raising his children. As Maramé Gueye notes in her analysis of a popular Senegalese poem, in which the late Fatou is

praised by her husband for having worked hard – meaning that she was a devoted, docile wife :

Wolof women serve as the primary caregivers to their children. Because of the latter's future, they are willing to suffer the most abusive situations with matrimony. [...] In practice, this proverb makes motherhood the primary reason for women's submissiveness within marriage. The 'worshipping' of husbands is only for the sake of one's children. (Gueye 2011: 72)

In reality, *liggéeyu ndeye* has not much to do with the children themselves, but everything to do with the husband: the *liggéeye* performed benefits men much more than it actually ensures children's futures. Several of my female informants explained that, 'Marriage is hard work. You work all day, all night. You work all the time'. By making reference to the work (*liggéeye*) of being married, Senegalese women hint at the hierarchical dynamic that permeates marital relationships, and at the difficulties that come with them. Indeed, the need for women to show *muñ* – which translates as patience and endurance, with an undertone of resignation – is 'inevitable in marriage, as vested in [Fatou's] understanding of Islam and traditional gender codes' (Gueye 2011: 78). In that respect, it is not only the poem's main protagonist who believes in the importance of *muñ*: it is a commonly shared value, presented as a female virtue and marker of femininity, a fact that Soumaya explained – and vehemently criticised – when I asked about what it means for women to have *muñ*.

'When you get married, the only thing you hear as a woman is "*Muñal, muñal, muñal!*" It means you have to endure, to tolerate, to put up with everything your husband does. It won't be easy, but you have to bear, you have to endure". That's how it is. Here, we may have parity⁶⁹ at the government level, but men are above us, that's a reality. They can do anything they want, they won't be bothered. They can flirt, they can have children with other women, nobody cares. But a woman's

⁶⁹ In May 2010, the Senegalese government voted in a law to promote the equal representation of men and women in all elected or partially elected institutions. (République du Sénégal 2010)

shortcomings... ay ay ay, she'll have the whole world on her back. She won't get away with it. A man will. But a woman, you can't even begin to imagine the repercussions. It even affects her grandchildren,' she exclaimed.

'Oh! That's like the *liggéeyu ndeye*, isn't it?' I tried to confirm.

'Yes, exactly! As a woman, you have no room for error because whatever you do can impact your children and grandchildren, for example they'll be told "Shut up, your grandmother did this and that, so you have no say on the matter". So you endure and you shut up. What else are you gonna do? Otherwise it will cast a shadow on your family, you will dishonour them,' she sighed. Understanding Soumaya's frustration, I tried to find out if there was any equivalent belief about men's work regarding children.

'No! If his child is good, a man will say "This is my child, I gave him life," but if the child misbehaves, it's the mother's fault. It's very unequal. Men have power and women are below. When you succeed in life, your father will say, "Yes this is my son, look how well he's doing!" On the contrary, he'd say that you're struggling because your mother has not done this or that. Sometimes you hear fathers say that to their kids for very simple things. For example, if your husband asks you to pass him the TV remote or the phone, and you're busy and you tell him to just take it himself, he can threaten you that your children won't succeed if you do not obey him. That's how it is. [...] Here in Senegal, men have priority over us on everything. Even my father sometimes says it is unfair. But what can you do?'

As Soumaya's comments underscore, the silent submission and wifely devotion that underlie *liggéeyu ndeye* and *muñ* are reminiscent of the three 'S's' historian Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch suggests define African women: silence, sacrifice and service (1997: 18). A woman must have *muñ* to endure the hardships of marriage in silence, so that her sacrifice is beneficial to her children and might

earn her a place in heaven – if her husband believes that she works well. Importantly, in relation to *mokk pooj* and the Senegalese sexual imaginary, a woman's service is also sexual, as Lecarme notes: a wife cannot refuse to have intercourse with her husband, as a child conceived in conflict would be a 'bad child' (1999: 263).

The spectre of polygamy

Catering to men's desires, be they sexual or others, is a pivotal element of *liggéeyu ndeye*, as much as it has also become part of *mokk pooj*. Significantly, both are further influenced by and contingent on polygyny. As discussed in Chapter 4, the primacy of marriage within Senegalese society means that for most women, a good life is a life lived within the bonds of a fruitful marriage, fitting in socially and religiously as a wife and a mother. However, where pre-marital seduction and flirting is a man's domain, a woman's role is to continuously and relentlessly please and seduce him after the wedding, in order to grow and solidify their union. This interpretive work of seduction becomes especially important when considering the fact that Muslim Senegalese men are allowed to have up to four wives simultaneously. Indeed, polygyny – which in day-to-day Dakarois life is referred to as polygamy – is certainly one of Senegal's most distinctive marriage practices, and is sanctioned by tradition, religion and law (Fainzang and Journet 1988: 62).

Polygyny was a pre-Islamic practice in several of Senegal's ethnic groups (Wolof, Serer, and Tukulor), but the spread of Islam over the centuries and its intermingling with local conventions makes it difficult to assess which elements of the current Senegalese sexual imaginary are derived from Islamic precepts or antecedent to them. However, Diop suggests that polygyny is considered part of a 'truly (pre-colonial) African tradition,' which could explain in part why it is still so prevalent nowadays (Diop 1985: 188). According to the latest available

demographic data, 14.5% of men between 15 and 49 years old⁷⁰ have two or more wives. 25.6% of women in the same age range (15-49) have one co-wife, while 6.7% of married women have two or more co-wives. Unsurprisingly, polygyny is more prevalent in rural areas than in urban centres (ANSD 2015: 31-33).

Most studies on polygynous unions have adopted structural and functionalist points of view, emphasising the conditions and rationales that favoured the development and sustenance of the institution. According to Fainzang and Journet (1988: 9-10), polygyny is typically justified by three principal explanations: political, economic, and reproductive/sexual. The political argument stresses how, in societies where power rests in the hands of the older generation, polygyny is used by elders as a form of social control over the younger age group. Access to marriageable women is mediated by male elders, and men of an age to marry have to respect and obey their seniors in all spheres of life. The economic justification prevails mostly in rural areas where agriculture, as a primary means of subsistence, necessitates the labour of a significant workforce, constituted largely by women and children. The reproductive and sexual explanation derives, in part, from these economic imperatives: because women are forbidden to have sexual intercourse during breastfeeding, polygyny is a means to resolve the problem of the temporary sterility of a wife – keeping in mind the need for maximal reproduction – while palliating the husband's sexual frustration. The notions of prestige and honour associated with a large number of descendants also participates in all three types of justification; monogamous men face a lot of pressure to take on multiple wives (Fainzang and Journet 1988: 73) as a way to prove their virility, power and social standing through their capacity to provide for them and their numerous children.

For women, polygamy means that they are in constant competition with one another and with themselves: not only do they have to get married to attain the

⁷⁰ The percentage goes up to 19.2% when men aged between 49 and 59 are included.

social recognition and status granted to married women, but they also have to secure that relationship. In that sense, marriage is seen as the goal and reward of becoming a full, complete woman, but it is also perceived as a challenge: once married, a woman has to do everything she can to prevent her husband from taking on another wife, or, in the case she enters a polygamous union, to become his favourite spouse.

My female informants experience polygamy as a sword of Damocles hanging above their heads. The spectre of another woman, co-wife or mistress, crystallises gender roles and identities; women have to correspond closely to male expectations and ideals (in addition to resorting to *maraboutage*, as discussed in Chapter 4) in order to find and subsequently keep a husband, ideally to themselves. Over the course of fieldwork, I heard several stories of men who had secretly wedded a second or third spouse without telling their *awo* [first wife] – a practice that was considered hurtful and disrespectful by both men and women I interviewed, but that happened regularly nonetheless (Diop 1985; Fainting and Journet 1988; Antoine 2006; Dial 2008). Men are well aware that embracing polygamy will hurt their spouse's feelings, even if as good Muslim women, the majority of my female informants said there is not much they can do about it: 'Personally, I'm not against polygamy, because I am Muslim. But it's true that every woman wants to keep her husband to herself. But it is better for a man to have two wives, or three, instead of just one and several mistresses. But no one wants to share her man', said Ndeye Fatou.

Djibril, a taxi driver in his late fifties who had recently met a thirty-something woman he planned to marry after 33 years of monogamous marriage with Awa, his first wife, explained to me that even though he had already started dating Ngoné a few months previous, he wasn't too keen on telling Awa. He was planning to wait for another six months, closer to the wedding, to let her know she was going to have a co-wife and – as Djibril put it – someone to help her

around the house. Although he said that Awa – who he noted was ill and had difficulty keeping up with household chores – had been telling him to take a new, younger wife, Djibril also knew that she would be deeply hurt and angry at him for actually going through with it.

I asked Djibril why he was not simply hiring a maid to help Awa, if his reason to take on another wife was to alleviate her workload. He kept beating around the bush for a while before finally saying that she could not keep up with his sexual drive, that he needed ‘more’ but did not want to cheat on her. Djibril’s case was far from unusual: men often justified polygamy in terms of providing their first, older wife with help around the house, since the younger bride has to take on the household chores. They tend to deny any conflict between their co-wives, arguing that their wives become good friends.

Although friendships and cordial relationships may be possible, as Madhavan (2002) has shown in her study of co-wife relationships in Mali, it seems unlikely in Senegal. Fainzang and Journet (1988) demonstrate clearly that friendship is rare among women who share a husband, and my own experience concurs with theirs. During my third stay in Senegal in 2011, I lived temporarily with a polygamous household in the Dakar suburb of Thiaroye. The husband, Saliou, had four wives: I stayed in the apartment that Bintou, the *awo*, shared with Alimata the *ñaareel* [second wife], while the third wife lived in another town and the fourth with her parents. With the children, Saliou’s brother and family friends often staying overnight, the apartment often felt crowded. One day, we were all seated on the mat, ready to dig into the two large plates in front of us. The men had just come back from the Friday prayer at the mosque, and everyone was hungry. At that point I had been living with the family for about three weeks and had regularly shared meals with them, but that day, something felt strange. It took me a while to figure out what was different from the other times we had eaten together. Then, it hit me: not only were Bintou and Alimata in the same

room at the same time, they were even eating from the same bowl. I was often out of the house most of the day, but I had noticed that the co-wives seemed to live completely separate lives, avoiding one another, although they shared the same house, most likely because they shared a husband. The fact that they were eating together that day was certainly compelled by Saliou's presence; they were pretending that they were all one big family, while it was obvious that there was tension and rivalry between the cohabiting co-wives. Competition, more than cooperation, seemed to prevail.

Perhaps ironically, while they implicitly acknowledge their spouses' rivalry, husbands often talk of the relationship between their wives as sisterhood, especially when the co-wives share the same residence. Fainzang and Journet (1988: 157) suggest that this creation of sorority through a shared husband epitomises his role as an authority figure – a role previously held by the women's fathers – thus maintaining women under the tutelage of a male domination and contributing to the 'naturalization of hierarchy' (Carsten 2004: 50) and the reproduction of domestic social relationships from the natal household (Lecarme 1999; 2000). They further contend that the organisation of polygyny in Senegal could actually be analysed as multiple monogamies: sequential monogamy for women, who can only have one husband at a time, and juxtaposed monogamies for men, who may accumulate up to four simultaneous conjugal relationships (Fainzang and Journet 1988: 156). Seen as distinct but parallel relationships, each marriage does not necessarily have to implicate the other co-wives as possible 'sisters'. Husbands seem to be working really hard to create a harmonious home by applying, almost imposing, the term 'sisters' on their wives, but it is clear that while they accept polygyny as part of their religion, most women reject this appellation.

What is particularly interesting, in this regard, is the tendency for men to deny the inherent tensions their multiple or upcoming marriages create, although

those marriages reinforce their power and domination over women. Fainzang and Journet even argue that co-wives' rivalry is the structural element that allows the institution of polygamy to endure. In fact, men admit that they are the main beneficiaries of the permanent competition between women: 'When you go to your first wife, she cooks well, she puts on perfume, she is nice to you. You go to the second, and it's the same thing, she takes very good care of you. And when they start getting tired of it, or when you become bored, you take another wife' (Fainzang and Journet 1988: 80, my translation). Coupled with *muñ*, which compels women to remain silent, patient and enduring in the face of adversity, polygamy becomes a means of controlling women, sometimes unconsciously. For example, when my friend Ousmane got married, I asked him what he had signed for at the registrar: 'I am monogamous in my heart, but I signed for polygamy,' he replied. His reaction is common: several men use the threat of polygamy as a way of maintaining their wife in a constant state of submission and seduction. Perhaps surprisingly, some women say that is because of polygyny that they have time to be seductive. Because the rotation system stipulates that a husband shares his time, money and affection equally between each one of his wives – which opponents to polygamy say is impossible – women get days off from wifely duties, a time they can use as they wish. For some, this time is synonymous with independence and time for themselves, a break from always working for someone else. For one Senegalo-Guinean woman I met in Ouakam, when her Senegalese husband signed for polygamy – the French-inspired Senegalese *Code de la famille* (Family Law), promulgated in 1972, requires the couple to select between monogamy, polygamy (maximum of four wives) or restricted polygamy (predetermined number of wives) when a couple marries at the registry office (Brossier 2004: 79) – she saw it as a liberation: 'You freed me, I told him,' she exclaimed in laughter. 'You signed for polygamy, so now I know that no matter what I do, no matter how I behave, no matter what I say, you will threaten to take another wife if you don't like it. "Go on, go ahead," I said to him.

I am free,' she added. They had been married for more almost two decades, and to that day, she was her husband's only wife.

According to the Islamic scholar and iman of the Grande Mosquée de Dakar, Ravane Mbaye, a husband is under no obligation to tell his wife about his upcoming or already consummated second, third or fourth marriage: 'He doesn't have to ask for her authorisation or else, he doesn't have to inform her. Islam says that as long as he fulfils all his duties and obligations towards his spouse(s), that is, that he treats her decently, dresses her properly, feeds and houses her well, he has all latitude to take on another wife.'

When I questioned him about *mariage civil* (marriage at the registry office), the iman reiterated the man's right to marry without his current spouses' permission. 'But what about men who break the contract they signed? What about a man who signed for monogamy and ends up taking two more wives?' I questioned.

'He has the right to get married, even when he had signed for monogamy, it's only before the registrar, it only concerns terrestrial powers. God Almighty expressly gives him the authorisation, the possibility to marry up to four women, so this little worldly constraint isn't a sacrosanct one, we can't say "He has no right to do so". Islam says he has the inalienable right to do so, granted by Allah himself in the Quran,' the iman replied.

What's more, since Senegalese law allows monogamous marriage contracts to be amended after seven or eight years (Fainzang and Journet 1988: 121), men who break their initial marriage contract (if they have one) do not face any consequences apart from their spouses' ire – which, because of the weight that *liggéeyu ndeye* and *muñ* bear, won't be exteriorised too dramatically. I was also told on a few occasions that it is easy for men to bribe someone to falsify a marriage contract, a fact impossible to verify but that does not sound completely

impossible when considering the extent of petty corruption that pervades Dakarois social relations.

It is in this context of deep uncertainty and intense rivalry between women that *mokk pooj* comes into play. The saying goes that '*Jabar dafa wara mokk pooj*,' a wife has to have the art to please her husband. Here, the Wolof verb *war* takes the meaning 'to behoove, to be incumbent upon,' as a form of duty but also of necessity. While *liggéeyu ndeye* means that a woman's behaviour towards the husband has an impact on her children, *mokk pooj* is directly related to the woman's status as a wife. She needs to please him to be said to work well.

Imam Mbaye conceded that Islam, at least in Senegal, accepts and even encourages rivalry between co-wives. When I questioned him about *mokk pooj*, he stated that Islam encourages competitiveness because it benefits the husband: 'The husband is the pole around which the wives gravitate, he is the centre of interest, he is the driving force of the union. If each one of his spouses takes great care of him, it can only create harmony and a cordial ambiance in the house. What Islam disapproves is an open hostility between the co-wives. [...] To take good care of the husband through competition is valued in Islam because the husband is the balancing element, if he is balanced it will reflect on his wives.' So when women are complimented on their *mokk pooj* skills, it is not only their talent as a cook, housekeeper and lover that is praised; what is actually evaluated is their ability to conform to heteronormative social norms and religious expectations that reinforce and promote patriarchal superiority.



Figure 10. Lingerie

Ammunition for marriage

By now, it should be clear that *mokk pooj* is a site of masculine domination where sexualised gender norms and constraints are embodied and reinforced. However, as I have mentioned in the introduction – and as the playfulness women exhibited at the sex-toy party has shown – the essence of *mokk pooj* cannot be reduced to female passivity and abnegation. In fact, I argue that it is within the constraining limits of *mokk pooj*, *liggéeyu ndeye* and *muñ* that Senegalese women find agency. After all, isn't what Madame Thiam implied when she summarised *mokk pooj* as 'the art of negotiation'?

Judith Farquhar notes that in anthropology, agency has become more of a value to be defended than an analytical tool, resulting in opposing agency – defined here as resistance – to dominating social structures (2006: 154). A consequence of this binary, Lila Abu-Lughod argues, is that social scientists tend to be ‘more concerned with finding resisters and explaining resistance than with examining power’ (1990: 41). Following Michel Foucault’s claim that ‘where there is power, there is resistance’ (1990[1978]: 95), she suggests to ‘use resistance as a *diagnostic of power*’ (1990: 41) in order to invert the analytical lens and uncover, in her case, what Bedouin women’s acts of resistance say about the power structure(s) within which they take place.

In Senegal, the female power intrinsic to *mokk pooj* is no secret: the saying goes that a man is a lion who becomes a lamb when his trousers drop off⁷¹ (Diop 1985: 66). Women’s well-acknowledged art of seduction therefore cannot be analysed as a form of resistance, because such power resides not in women’s opposition to *mokk pooj*, but in their compliance to it. As such, in line with Saba Mahmood’s study of Egyptian women’s veiling and participation in the Islamic revival movement, we have to think of *mokk pooj* as a type of agency: ‘one that can be understood only from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment. In this sense, agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms’ (Mahmood 2005: 15). Mahmood draws upon Judith Butler’s paradox of subjectivation, itself influenced by Foucault’s work, to suggest that one’s subordination and capacity to respond to this domination – one’s agency – stem from the same power dynamics: they ‘are not the residue of an undominated self that existed prior to the operations of power but are themselves the product of those operations,’ meaning that ‘the conditions that secure a subjects’ subordination are also the means by which she becomes a self-conscious identity and agent’ (Mahmood 2001: 2010).

⁷¹ ‘Goor bu takkee tubeyam gaynde la, bu ka tekke xarum tubaaber la’ (Diop 1985: 66).

The similarity between Mahmoud's study of Egyptian women's piety and my work on Senegalese women's art of seduction is best understood through the virtue of *sabr* described by Mahmood (2001, 2005). *Sabr*, she explains, means roughly 'to persevere in the face of difficulty without complaint' (2001: 220); and it is strikingly reminiscent of the Senegalese *muñ*, the ability to endure that is a constitutive part of the feminine ethos encapsulated in *liggéeyu ndeye*. Both *muñ* and *sabr* exude, at first sight, a sense of resignation and passivity. What Mahmood suggests, however, is that *sabr* offers a way to bear hardship in a proper, Islamic way: the essential element of *sabr* is not that it allows or helps one not to complain, but that it 'infuses one's life and mode of being' (2001: 221). In this sense, *sabr* does not represent passivity, but 'rather it is integral to a constructive project, a site of considerable investment, struggle, and achievement' (2001: 222). Transposed to the Senegalese context, women's *mokk pooj* appears as both a consequence of and a response to the imperative to display *muñ*.

In her PhD thesis on Senegalese women's livelihoods and everyday lives, Agnes Hann (2013: 132) uses the verb *nax* to refer to the feminine *savoir-faire* of seduction. She discusses how women 'humour' their husbands – her translation of the Wolof *nax* – by being sensual, using soothing words and making themselves physically attractive. *Nax* also means to cheat, trick or deceive, or to soothe and calm down an upset child (Diouf 2003: 238). In fact, my female friends often talked about how taking care of a husband is similar to taking care of a child, an act of comforting Erin Augis' informants referred to as *chomolong* (2009: 224) – though both *chomolong* and *nax* are terms I haven't personally heard. Hann recalls that *nax*, *mokk pooj*, *feem* and *salagne salagne* were all used interchangeably to refer to wifely behaviour (Hann 2015, personal communication). However, she makes an interesting point regarding the positive, purposeful agency that *nax* entails:

Respectful, subservient behaviour was generally depicted in terms of refraining from certain actions – from disagreeing with one’s husband in public, for example, or making a fool of him in front of other people. In contrast, humouring your husband involved *actively taking charge* of a situation in order to achieve a very specific goal: I often heard people joke that if you humoured your husband skilfully enough, you could ask him for the title deeds to the house [*këyitu kër gi*], and he would hand them to you. (Hann 2013: 133, my emphasis)

Though the majority of my informants seemed to amalgamate *salagne salagne*, *feem* and *mokk pooj* as being one and the same – ‘Tout ça, c’est la même chose [it’s all the same]’ – I believe Hann’s differentiation between *humouring* and *refraining* makes it possible to disentangle two sets of opposing yet complementary dynamics that underlie the overarching concept of *mokk pooj*, which I see as encompassing *nax*, *feem* and *salagne salagne*. At play are distinct but complementary notions of work and pleasure, subjugation and agency. As much as *mokk pooj* exists in a patriarchal structure, it is through it rather than against it that Senegalese women are able to negotiate: seen via the lense of *nax*, as Hann proposed, *mokk pooj* becomes an active, engaged and pleasurable form of *muñ* that involves a significant interpretive, embodied labour. It thus follows that when Kira the seduction coach teaches a woman to orchestrate moments of seduction and pleasure, when she helps a client to ‘become a seductress’, she does so not for the husband himself, but for the benefits his wife will reap from his satisfaction.

At the sex-toy party, when I asked who uses the *salagne salagne*, I was told that ‘*Y’a une base* [there’s a minimum]. It’s for all women, for those in monogamous and polygamous marriages alike,’ suggesting that they are tools for action against and prevention of polygamy and infidelity. As many of them started talking all at once, Oumy sat next to me, speaking softly: ‘It’s about maintenance, upkeep, for your husband not to get bored. And it also gives you bonus points against your co-wife.’

The waist beads, *bethio*, and other erotic paraphernalia thus become part of a married woman's seductive toolkit; or, as Adama – the aphrodisiacs saleswoman introduced in Chapter 5 – put it, they become 'ammunition for marriage'. Indeed, one of the erection-inducing, Viagra-like products she sold was fittingly labelled *Bed War*, a name that underscores the importance of the bedroom politics *mokk pooj* entails.

During one of Kira's workshops, a young, newly-married woman observed: 'In the bedroom, you have to be every woman your husband might dream of, a slut, a saint, and everything in between.' This comment reaffirms the importance of conforming to a Senegalese sexual imaginary that underscores the preeminence of men over women, and the multiple roles wives have to play to secure their relationship. Not only do they have to incessantly pamper and please their husbands sexually – like a 'slut' – but they have to do it in a manner that embodies appropriate behaviour and values, namely *liggéeyu ndeye* and *muñ*, those of the 'saint'. Underlying that comment is the understanding of the threat posed by polygyny and the need to fulfill your partner's fantasies in order to gain some bargaining leverage, something Oumy clearly stated during the sex-toy party: 'It's not about not wanting a co-wife; it's about knowing what to do not to get one.'

What these comments underlie is that far from being a mindless submission to masculine desires, *mokk pooj* is a form of interpretive work that involves significant preparation. To paraphrase the young woman's comment on polygyny, it is not about simply using the *salagne salagne* – it's about knowing how to use them. Kira, the seduction coach, often repeated to her clients that 'spontaneity is not compatible with the couple: marriage is a marathon, you need planning'.

In this optic, Kira taught her clients to break the day down into moments of seduction, each one calling for a different type of action. In the morning, she suggested short actions like wearing a light interior dress to prepare and serve breakfast to one's husband, adding a 'little plus' – such as the newspaper, a lovely note, or a flower – beside his plate; or waking him up by initiating intercourse. During the day, the seduction coach also recommended short actions from afar, while the husband is at work: sending him a sultry text message, giving him a phone call to tell him you miss him, paying him a short visit while being elegantly dressed, and so on. The end of the work day marks the beginning of longer actions, those that are traditionally associated with *mokk pooj* – such as kneeling down when offering him a glass of fresh water upon his return home, washing and massaging his feet, cooking a delicious meal, and not tiring him with your problems and/or demands. It is also the time to start wearing waistbeads under your skirt, Kira offered, so that when you are walking by your husband, you can roll your hips so he can hear the little sound of glass pearls clicking together, a sound that will without a doubt excite him. Or, pretending to drop something on the floor, you can slowly and suggestively bend over to pick it up, making sure that the hem of your shirt rises in your back so your husband catches a glimpse of the rows of beads you are wearing. Later, once in the privacy of your bedroom, the longer sex-oriented foreplay can begin.



Figure 11. Aphrodisiacs

Covert Sexuality

Low down
The beads I wear under my clothes are beautiful
So beautiful
I change them according to my mood
They slide in different shapes and colours
Some glow in the dark
They are my hidden beauty

For me to feel sensual
I keep them on even when I am lying naked
Next to you
When I touch, when you touch
I burn with desire

When I walk down the streets of Dakar, Bamako and Ouagadougou
You can't see them but I can feel them
They remind me that I am beautiful
So beautiful inside
The promise of pleasures and tenderness

You cannot hear their noise from afar
But when they provide the rhythm of my gait
When I pass by
If you pay attention
Or if I decide to get your attention
You will hear the subtle sound of my waist beads

I keep so much underground
So much creativity
Woman to woman
Secrets exchanged between the initiated
The crochet underwear, knit like a net
That no fish can slip through

The bethio – small pieces of underwear cloth
With thousands of holes
The incense, to intoxicate you, leaves you gasping
Laughter, rolling eyes, intricate henna
A bare shoulder to caress
The hanging head wrap catches your eye

Sexy, sensual, invisible
Yet there, terribly present
You between my legs, if I so wish

But even I didn't know about the bed sheets
With different provocative positions of intercourse...
Low down

(Touré 2011: 303-304)

Beads, lingerie and incense – to which I would add aphrodisiacs – are the essential material components of *mokk pooj*, known as *salagne salagne*. The poem above perfectly encapsulates the joyful, agentive nature of the Senegalese art/work of seduction in which the woman is a sensual, desiring, autonomous and empowered sexual subject who uses sexual artefacts for not only for her partner's pleasure, but to satisfy her own sexual desires, subjectivity and agency.

Senegalese women's sexy undergarments mix crochet lingerie, which can easily be found in most public markets, and imported 'Westernised' nightgowns similar to what is found in most lingerie shops in Europe or the Americas. It also includes the more graphic *bethio*, which are locally handpainted, mostly by men, and call for more discretion from the buyer and seller. Also referred to as '*pagnes kamasutra*', these suggest sexual positions and sex talk phrases that stimulate the imagination and arouse the body. Women wrap the long piece of fabric around their hips and usually hold it with several rows of waist beads. They would only wear it in the privacy of the bedroom, but could also cover it with a long skirt and give a glimpse to their husband as they serve dinner, in a game of enticement and excitement. Most of my informants talked about how the lingerie is as much for themselves as it is for their husbands. Indeed, 'Senegalese seduction operates in the double dynamic of conquering a man and in the self-satisfaction – and not self-eroticism – of being attractive regardless of the man to win over' (Fall and Andriamirado 2005: 114, my translation). My informants said that the garments makes them feel like a woman, that they feel beautiful and sexy, desirable and, importantly, confident. The use of erotic lingerie helps women own their sexuality, express feelings, desires and fantasies. It embellishes and empowers their body, which then becomes a powerful tool of negotiation and active participant in the conjugal relationship.

The waist beads, called *fer* and *jal-jali* in Wolof, are beautiful pieces of jewellery worn on the hips on a naked body, or in combination with a bra, or with a

wrapper skirt. Women talk about '*ferrer son homme*' in French, that is, to bait the hook or to cast one's net – basically to attract one's partner's affection and sexual desire. *Jal-jali*, the name given to big beads, means to 'jump for joy'. It refers to the very exciting sound the beads, hidden under clothes, make when they tap together as women roll their hips suggestively, or during intercourse. Some waist beads can be custom-made and personalized to the woman's taste, or to the message she wants to send her husband. The message can be very direct and crude, giving specific instructions, in Wolof or French, on what the woman expects – such as 'Fuck me', 'Eat me' or 'Lick me'. The use of the beads, especially the ones with messages, highlights how women can be assertive and express their sexual preferences.

Thiouraye (incense) and perfumes also play an important role in *mokk pooj*. Islam even contributed to the elaboration and development of the art of smells through the importation of new perfumes and incense which, used conjointly with verses of the Quran, are part of Islamic healing and exorcism practices – but which also 'stimulated creativity in the erotic imagination' and 'presented new olfactory facets to the erotic sensorium' (Biaya 2000: 714).

Erotic objects, toys and aphrodisiacs are probably the areas where women's bargaining and negotiation power is most evident. Mostly called '*secrets de femme*', or women's secrets, these products are used with or without a partner's knowledge or consent to enhance and maximise sexual satisfaction. As a matter of fact, this emphasis on pleasure is the central element of a woman's power of negotiation: when her husband orgasms, and when it is obvious that she, too, has been sexually satisfied by her potent, strong, manly partner, she not only obtains bodily pleasure and religious blessings from it, but she can use this satisfaction to her advantage. Several of my informants, male and female, mentioned that during foreplay and after intercourse, men are more 'vulnerable' and susceptible to agree to a woman's demands. Vaginal creams and lubricants

like 'House Keys / Car keys', vagina tightening products like 'Crazy Glue', or natural and chemical arousing pills like Viagra, are said to *safal*, augment the 'taste of sex' – and to make it so good, that a man will have no choice but to give you everything you ask for, like the house property titles or a car. The bargaining is usually more low-scale, however, and involves negotiating more time spent together, going out for dinner, better or more help in the house, jewellery, and so on. Importantly, what a man accepts and commits to do in the bedroom is considered a form of valid contract, and his wife will make sure he respects his part of the bargain.



Figure 12. Pagne 'Kamasutra'

Being and becoming *mokk pooj*

As the erotic paraphernalia described above suggests, to 'know what you need to do' to avoid getting a co-wife or to 'look after yourself so your husband doesn't get bored' demands an active engagement of the mind and the body. 'A seductress *must* be prepared,' said Kira in the opening lines of the thesis, 'because it is when you are prepared that it becomes natural'.

Once again, Mahmood's study of pious Egyptian women offers an interesting element of comparison to the Senegalese art/work of seduction, and Kira's point in particular. Discussing veiling and the cultivation of shyness and modesty, Mahmood shows how piety requires a physical training – veiling – through which

the physical and emotional body become a site 'of discipline until the religious virtues acquired the status of embodied habits' (2001: 212). For her informants, veiling is a way to simultaneously create an inside feeling of modesty – when one starts to wear the *hidjab* – and to exteriorise this emotion until it becomes natural and necessary to veil for one to feel comfortable. Veiling is thus the 'means of *being* and *becoming* a certain kind of person' (2001: 215, emphasis in original).

Similarly, the lingerie, beads, incense and aphrodisiacs are ways of *being* and *becoming mokk pooj*. As discussed in previous chapters, the Senegalese sexual imaginary calls for a woman to be a virginal, sexually ignorant bride who transforms into an erotic goddess upon marriage – a contradiction that can be the cause of much anxiety. Bineta, a petite, soft-spoken woman who had been married for three years, confessed being very afraid of having sex with her husband and delaying the consummation of her marriage as much as she could. Over the years, she had come to enjoy her sexuality more, especially because of the erotic paraphernalia she had learned to use and from which she had grown more confident. Her husband – a European man in his early sixties – did not care much for the beads and lingerie she wore, or the incense she burned in their bedroom. She, however, felt that these *salagne salagne* helped her put into action the seductive strategies – *feem* – her friends and she discussed, or the ones she read about on the Facebook group on which we had met. For Bineta, doing *mokk pooj* was obviously a way of becoming and being *mokk pooj*, of feeling like a proper Senegalese wife. As such, her use of lingerie was intrinsically linked with her own project of self-construction, and not only geared towards pleasing her husband. We can locate Bineta's agentic capacity in the interpretive labour she performed to align her behaviour with her feeling, and vice versa, and in the ways she has been capitalising on the very system that subjugates her to become the person she wants to be. Indeed, Bineta exemplifies the conclusion that 'action does not issue forth from natural feelings but creates them' and that 'it is through

repeated *bodily acts* that one trains one's memory, desire and intellect to behave according to established standards of conduct' (Mahmood 2001: 214).

Much as Mahmood presents the body as a site of cultivating piety, the body plays an integral role in the Senegalese art/work of seduction. According to Biaya,

the body is erotically valued in African societies on the condition that it is not naked but accessorized, properly prepared. The body's beauty and erotic value are achieved not when it is stripped bare but when it is *worked* or denatured – for example, by excision, scarification, elongation of the clitoris, and so on. Such a body modified in accord with African canons invites the tactile and olfactory sensuality of an eroticism of the skin, of the senses of touch and smell (Biaya 1999: 19).

What Biaya does not mention, however, is that it is especially the female body that needs to be modified⁷² and eroticised, which is how it is feminised – a fact exemplified by Cheikh Ibrahima Niang's description of the Senegalese woman's vagina as a 'work of art' (1996: 218) discussed in Chapter 5. Indeed, it is through the work of adorning the body that men's and women's bodies are differentiated: 'A woman without *bethio* [underskirt] or *bine bine* [beads] is like a man, I can't imagine having sex without them,' a polygamous man told a *Slate Afrique* reporter. It was a statement corroborated by a lingerie saleswoman who stressed the importance of marking oneself feminine: 'A woman must own these articles because without waistbeads and *bethio*, she looks like a man' (Lo 2011).

The female body is thus adorned as a means of differentiation, or of distinction, but also as a 'persuasive display'. In an article on beads, money and power in Madagascar, David Graeber posits that a king covered himself with gold not to display the wealth he already had, but to convince others to transfer their wealth to him and thus increase his power – trading on what people believed him to be, rather than what he was expected to do (1996: 9). Likewise, when a Senegalese woman wears her *bethio* and prepares an evening of pleasures for her husband,

⁷² Although it must be noted that male bodies are made masculine and manly through circumcision.

she positions herself as a good *mokk pooj* wife in her own eyes, but she also makes him surrender to the seductive power she is trying to embody. She forces him to see her adorned body and to respond to it: she transforms the lion into a lamb.

Even if *mokk pooj* is generally framed as the ability of women to please their husbands, through the artful combination of *feem* and *salagne salagne*, women take a joyful pleasure in imagining, creating and living sensuous moments with their husbands that goes beyond duty and the need to 'lock him up'. As I witnessed during the sex-toy party, where a dozen women openly discussed products, tricks and positions, the Senegalese couple's bedroom is definitely the realm of fun, creativity and pleasure. The bedroom is also an arena of negotiation for women, who subtly or openly send messages about their own material, psychological and sexual needs and desires to their husband. The use of sexually explicit waistbeads (such as the ones using letter beads to spell words like *Katema*), lingerie and other erotic items creates a space for man/woman, husband/wife interaction and dialogue in what is otherwise a very strictly gendered environment. In a society where eroticism was traditionally based on smell and touch (Biaya 2000: 713), they allow a woman to be seen and, most significantly, heard. The titillating sound of clacking *bin-bin* hidden under a sexy *bethio* is a call for attention. Beads (Graeber 1996) and cloth (Buggenhagen 2012), which have functioned as currencies and wealth in West Africa for centuries, maintain their roles as mediators of social relations, this time giving leverage to women. This erotic paraphernalia and what it materialises – pleasure – temporarily frees women from social and public expectations so they can let go of the usual restraint required by *liggéeyu ndeye* and *muñ*, in a process where rules and scripts regulating gender relations can be contested, redefined, bargained (Kandiyoti 1988). As such, women position themselves as sexual subjects rather than sexual objects: instead of 'solely being the target of someone else's desire, a sexual subject has agency, that is, she has her own desire as a compass in actively negotiating her sexuality' (Tolman 2011: 155).

Conclusion

For Dakarois women I met, the interpretive labour and gendered responsibilities involved in conjugal sexual obligations – of reproduction and male satisfaction – were fused with and hidden by their conflation with the essentialised and romanticised eroticism of *mokk pooj*, a *savoir-faire* elevated to a status of ‘national heritage’ (Fall and Andriamirado 2005: 114). It is women’s responsibility to be sexually desirable, to please their husbands so as to avoid polygamy and infidelity, but also to ensure their and their children’s futures, on earth and beyond. The *bethio*, *ferr*, *thiouraye* and sex toys become tools that women can use to develop, harness and strengthen their agency, while they simultaneously create and promote a wifely ideal that maintains and even exacerbates their subordination to men’s desires. As Lecarme (1999: 260) points out, a Senegalese woman’s virtue resides in her conformity – or in her staging of a credible illusion of conformity – to the prescribed social gender epistemology. As such, *mokk pooj* encapsulates views of gender roles and relationships in which the feminine art of pleasing the husband is at once a social expectation and a religious obligation.

However, a specific form of agency also resides within *mokk pooj*, allowing women to negotiate the power dynamics that underlie *liggéeyu ndeye* and *muñ*. Mahmood conceives of agency as a ‘modality of action’ (2005: 157), as a capacity to enact change but also to maintain a sense of ‘continuity, stasis and stability’ (2001: 212). As such, *mokk pooj* is a perfect example of Farquhar’s assertion that ‘[t]he conservative reproduction of culture is also a form of action’ (Farquhar 2006: 154): it is by complying with a normative sexual imaginary that Senegalese women can best respond to it.

Chapter 8.

Mokk pooj: a conclusion

'Sex and marriage, it's like cooking. They're the same thing,' Kira remarked. We had been talking for at least an hour, and since I was due to leave Dakar and return to Scotland a few days later, we both knew this meeting was our last. As usual, Kira was dressed elegantly in a beautiful, colourful *boubou*. She continued to speak calmly and moved with poise when she stood up from behind her desk. Noting that my plastic water bottle was empty, she poured me a glass of water, which she then placed on a small tray decorated with a fresh hibiscus flower before offering it to me. For the seduction coach, *mokk pooj* consisted of paying attention to detail, and she certainly practiced what she preached. Her art/work of seduction was not reserved for her husband. She excelled in navigating what might appear to be trivial aspects of the Senegalese social dance (Buggenhagen 2012: 114), and that is where the power of her *mokk pooj* came from: it seemed effortless, natural.

Going back to her desk, Kira continued: 'When you eat a good dish, you smile. As you are digesting, you appreciate having eaten such a great meal, but at some point, you forget what it tasted like, you even forget that you've eaten. You're hungry again.' I began to see where she was going with her analogy.

'Sex and food, they are the same thing,' she repeated. 'Cooking is an art, it's an alchemy. It's knowing how to put ingredients together, how to combine them. It's also about dressing the table nicely, about how to serve your meal, about how to make sure your guests appreciate and savour every bite.' She paused for a brief moment, marking her words.

'It is the same with sex: it appeals to the appetite; it makes you hungry. Marriage is the art of making a composition, of putting things together, of making yourself

look and smell nice to get your man close to you, so that when he's done "eating", he stays with you and "digests" for a while. But you know he will eventually be hungry again. The need for food and sex never ends. Every day, we need to eat. Making love, it's the same. It's a need. You're never completely satiated.'

That day, as I left *Kira Créations* for the last time, the seduction coach offered me a beautiful red and silver *bin-bin* as a reminder of 'all the rules, tricks and tips on how to attract, tantalise and win over a man' she had taught me. 'I hope you put it to good use,' she said seriously before winking and smiling goodbye.

Kira's interweaving of the culinary and sexual realms was no surprise. Over the year and a half I spent in Dakar, most if not all the discussions I had about *mokk pooj* invariably made a similar association, highlighting how being a generous, skillful cook and a gifted, imaginative lover were necessary to being portrayed – and to portraying oneself – as a good wife and a *jigéen bu baax*, a good woman. That afternoon, Kira reminded me that being a 'good cook' was to be taken in the literal as much as in the metaphorical sense, and that Senegalese femininity was in large part – if not quite exclusively – contingent on a woman's ability to uphold and nourish Senegalese masculinity. Drawing attention to the repetitive aspects of eating and having sex – the need for both being compounded by the impossibility of ever feeling 'completely satiated' – the seduction coach underscored the extent to which 'marriage is hard work', especially for women. Indeed, while her words acknowledged food and sex as basic human needs for both the husband and the wife, her emphasis on masculine hunger pointed to the importance of a woman's readiness to feed that desire continually, for fear of being replaced by a better 'cook' – thus blurring the lines between duty and pleasure, between subjugation and choice. In the hard physical, emotional, sexual and interpretive labour that marriage is, money, *gris gris* and potions, aphrodisiacs, food, and erotic attire are the ingredients at a woman's disposal in putting together the artful and complex recipe that is *mokk pooj*.

The agency of interpretive labour

In this thesis, I have analysed *mokk pooj* – the art/work of seduction for which Senegalese women are known and admired – as a form of interpretive labour, the emotion work women perform by anticipating, managing, providing and caring for men. While David Graeber’s formulation of interpretive labour highlights the ways in which it creates ‘lopsided structures of the imagination’ (2012: 117) that reinforce and preserve gendered structural violence, I have taken his concept further by illustrating how, in the Dakarois enactment of *mokk pooj*, women’s interpretive labour and the deep knowledge they derive from it is also the means by which the structural violence of patriarchy is subtly mediated.

The colourful, sensual and vibrant material culture of *mokk pooj* – its ‘ingredients’ – has provided a starting point from which to explore the art/work of seduction as something constituted by and constitutive of a Senegalese sexual imaginary that informs the definition and performance of gender roles in Dakar. I have argued that while it stems from and upholds an Islamised, patriarchal, heteronormative, and hegemonic vision of gender, *mokk pooj* and the feminine interpretive labour it entails represent a sphere where this conservative Senegalese sexual imaginary is negotiated, and where women’s agency takes root.

Inspired in large part by Saba Mahmood’s work on Cairene women’s involvement in the Islamic Revival movement (2001, 2005), I have demonstrated that it is through Dakarois women’s participation in the art/work of seduction and their compliance with the Senegalese sexual imaginary – rather than their opposition to it – that they can best harness their powers of negotiation and agentic capacities. As a result, *mokk pooj* can be seen as an example of Judith Butler’s interpretation of the Foucauldian paradox of subjectivation (*assujétissement*), which ‘is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is it itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms’ (Butler 2011: xxiii) – meaning that ‘the

very processes and conditions that secure a subject's subordination are also the means by which she becomes a self-conscious identity and agent' (Mahmood 2005: 17). Butler goes on to explain that rather than dismissing the possibility of agency, the co-constitution of social norms and of the possibility to contest them 'does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, *immanent to power*, and not a relation of external opposition to power' (2011: xxiii, my emphasis). If the 'undoing' of social norms is contingent on their 'doing' (Mahmood 2005: 20), we can better understand that it is by deftly navigating the Senegalese social dance, by adroitly deploying their seduction skills and the values of docility, endurance, honour and hospitality they entail, and by knowing when and how to do so that Dakarois women enable their capacity for action. It is through the interpretive labour they actively perform in mundane, everyday situations, and in the privacy of their conjugal bedroom, that their agency takes shape. It is women's conformity – or at least their appearance of conformity (Lecarme 1999: 260) – to the Senegalese sexual imaginary that holds the potential to undermine the unequal power relations that constitute its very core.

This tension between doing and undoing, between agency and submissiveness, between pleasure and duty, is best evidenced by women's wearing of lingerie and utilisation of erotic objets which are often considered – along with food – to be the cornerstones of *mokk pooj*. The playful paraphernalia of *bethio* underskirts, *ferr* and *bin-bin* waistbeads, fragrant *thiouraye* incense, and other *secrets de femme* aphrodisiacs all participate in intensifying and magnifying the husband's sexual pleasure. As they also contribute to a woman's own sexual subjectivity and pleasure, these objects and women's *savoir-faire* become powerful tools of negotiation within the conjugal relationship, allowing a woman to be heard and seen, and to gain leverage against actual and potential co-wives. At the same time, the spectre of polygamy and the belief that it is through her *liggéeyu ndeye* [work of the mother] and her showing of *muñ* [endurance] that a woman will go

to heaven posits *mokk pooj* as a social and religious obligation, demanding women's interpretation of and compliance with masculine desires.

Senegalese women's food labour also showcases the agentive, interpretive skills they deploy to fulfill their own sexual and reproductive needs as much as those of their husband. It would be easy to restrict the long, fastidious, and almost-exclusively female responsibility of foodwork to a site of women's oppression. However, a comparison between the recipe-for-good sex *bethio* and an enlightening conversation about sexual energy with my assistant El Hadj demonstrates the complementary nature of men's and women's gender roles in the Senegalese gift economy of food and sex. Indeed, both men and women engage in a transformative processes with their mutual labour: the 'masculine' money of the *dépense quotidienne* becomes food – prepared by the woman – which provides strength and energy for the man to please his partner sexually so they can maximise their chances of conceiving children. Through her foodwork, a woman feeds her own femininity by embodying the Senegalese values of *teraanga* [hospitality] and *muñ* [endurance], while she feeds her husband's potency and masculinity. As a consequence, while a woman's interpretive food labour caters to her husband's tastes and culinary preferences, it does so in a creative, productive way from which she benefits sexually and socially, showcasing the agency she derives from the demanding, physical work of food preparation.

Within the Senegalese sexual imaginary, married women have to be imaginative, sensual lovers, but they should remain chaste until marriage. Indeed, a woman's feminine capital, her 'value', is linked intrinsically to her ability to conform to men's ideals of what makes a respectable wife – a wife whose inexperience means she can't compare her husband's sexual performance to anyone else's, giving him a confidence that boosts his own masculine capital. As a result, female virginity itself acts as a powerful aphrodisiac for vulnerable men, a fact that contributes to

the perpetuation of sexual double standards: while premarital sexual activity is encouraged for men as a display of their masculine potency, a young woman's virginity upon marriage is considered essential to showcasing her proper femininity, her honour and that of her kinswomen. In practice, young women are sexually active, and the recent trends of honeymooning and of 'stealing the bride' to give her *sutura* [privacy] show points of tension and rupture in the normative Senegalese sexual imaginary. At the same time, the growing presence and allegedly extensive usage of aphrodisiacal products that are said to restore a woman's virginity, or to give her back her youthful, pure and tight vagina – her work of art (Niang 1996: 218) – illustrate that while female virginity can be counterfeited, it remains a firmly ingrained element of the Senegalese sexual imaginary. Used to hide past sexual experiences or to enhance a husband's sexual pleasure, these products are examples of the ways that women simultaneously conform to and work around men's ideals in an agentive way.

Much as masculine demands for female virginity signal men's sexual vulnerability, their vilifying discourse about women's monetary interests in marriage underlines the fragility of their status as breadwinners and heads of household, and is part of a larger crisis of masculinity affecting other regions of the African continent. Whereas marriage practices in Senegal have always been based on a series of preferences and constraints – including one's caste, character, and bridewealth payments – that foreground filial love, men's condemnation of women's financial concerns and *mbaraan* [transactional sex] stems from and aims to conceal the men's inability to fulfill their part of the patriarchal conjugal bargain by appealing to emerging ideals of pure, romantic love. Women, for their part, consider that a man who really loves them will prove his sentiments by showering them with gifts; and *mbaraan* becomes a dating strategy to evaluate a man's feelings as much as his financial ability to support a wife and children. So while men criticise women's materialistic demands for the 4 Vs (*villa, voiture, virement, voyage*; Nyamnjoh 2005), they (and the recent

literature on transactional sex) seem to neglect the 4Cs they get in return: that is, a wife's provision of cooking, copulation, children and care. Seen in this light, women's *mbaraan* can be analysed as an agentive, interpretive labour they perform, not in order to submit to men's desires, but to ensure their own wellbeing in a context of deep economic uncertainty.

In a context where the pressure to conform to social expectations runs high, and where a woman's standing rests on her marital status, the *gris gris* and potions of *maraboutage* make tangible the anxiety brought about by the normative Senegalese sexual imaginary. Women's use of padlocks, knotted ropes and the *cherche-mari* mixtures shows a longing to connect, to bond, to be intimate, and to 'attach' one's love. Meanwhile, the fact that occult forces can be summoned to attack rivals exemplifies the 'dark side of kinship' (Geschiere 2003), bringing to the fore the danger inherent in intimate relationships and the difficulties in establishing and maintaining trust even with those with whom one should, in theory, be safest. A husband might take a co-wife at any moment; a mother-in-law might conspire to get rid of her son's wife; a former rival might want revenge. *Maraboutage* becomes a tool to manage anxiety and expectations, but also to prevent or deal with conflict. At the same time, *maraboutage* calls for more *maraboutage*, as its very existence triggers the need to protect oneself from – or respond to – undesired occult attacks. It follows that by resorting to *maraboutage*, women take matters into their own hands and become active agents of their own wellbeing, of their own search for happiness – even if that happiness is found within the limits of a patriarchal Senegalese sexual imaginary, and ultimately reinforces it.

While women's agency within *mokk pooj* does not erase the asymmetrical gender relationships to which they are subject and the difficulties those asymmetries entail, it does contribute to alleviating them. Conversely, the fact that men reap the rewards from women's ubiquitous pampering does not erase their own

anxieties. Masculine fragility was made most obvious in Chapters 3 and 5, where men appeared overwhelmed by the economic and social changes that shake the foundations of their patriarchal hold. Their discourse on 'bad women' who marry for money rather than for love and the importance they bestowed on female virginity both promote a static vision of ideal femininity and masculinity that cannot stand the messiness of reality. What these masculinist discourses denounce is not so much women's agency as the fact that a social system men created, hold dear, and usually benefit from appears to be slowly turning against them, making it more and more difficult for men to live up to the responsibilities placed on them. There are cracks in the foundations of the patriarchal household.

***Mokk pooj* as self-production**

Although the focus of this thesis has been on women's art/work of seduction and the power and work it represents, a great deal of my data also derives from men's points of view and experiences. I have sought to portray a balanced sense of the opportunities and challenges posed by *mokk pooj* within a normative, patriarchal Senegalese sexual imaginary, which both weighs upon and is upheld by men as well as women. As such, my work is not an attempt at doing an 'anthropology of women'; rather, it positions itself within and seeks to contribute to a feminist anthropology, to the 'the study of gender as a principle of human social life' (Moore 1988: 188), 'of the interrelations between women and men, and of the role of gender in structuring human societies, their histories, ideologies, economic systems and political structures' (Moore 1988: 6). Studying women's interpretive labour and work of seduction without accounting for its intended beneficiaries and co-participants would have presented only one side of a complex situation where Senegalese men and women are in constant interaction, co-fashioning one another.

In the same way that '[g]ender is always relational' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 848), so are anthropology and feminism. Taken independently, both bodies of scholarship have a particular and opposite way of relating to 'the Other' – which means that taken together, they entertain an 'awkward relationship' (Strathern 1987). While the anthropologist tries to make sense of differences and experiences by collaborating with and dialoguing with the Other, the feminist scholar works to 'expose and thereby destroy the authority' of any Other who tries to determine women's experiences and speak for them (Strathern 1987: 288-289). This tension is particularly vivid for practitioners of feminist anthropology, Marilyn Strathern suggests, as we are faced with opposing ways of relating to our subject matter. These contradictions also emerged time and time again during my writing process. For example, Chapter 5 on virginity and feminine capital was rewritten countless times – to the extent that it became known, among my friends, as the "'F-word" virginity chapter' – as I struggled not to let my own exasperation about what I consider unfair and unrealistic double standards dominate the analysis. I did not, I confess, think of such disciplinary considerations while I was in the field; and I did find myself calling out sexist and homophobic remarks, rather than trying to understand where they came from and what they meant. In this sense, I was unconsciously 'choosing' feminism over anthropology – although unlike Strathern, I do not see them as opposing one another, but more as complementing each other.

Perhaps one of the reasons that the awkward relationship between feminism and anthropology did not trouble me as much during fieldwork as during writing pertains to the nature of my research topic: the study of sexuality is itself fraught with tensions, oppositions and its own awkward relationships, so I expected to have to navigate them when I took on the study of *mokk pooj*. Carole Vance wrote that sexuality is 'simultaneously a domain of restriction, repression, and danger as well as a domain of exploration, pleasure and agency' (1992: 1). As an assemblage of erotic practices and a gendered, prescriptive way of being a *jigéen*

bu baax, a good woman, *mokk pooj* presents similar incongruencies which, at first sight, appear irreconcilable – much like the practice of a feminist anthropology.

Mokk pooj is about opportunities and constraints, about desires and limitations, about the doing and undoing of social norms. It is, as Audre Lorde declared in (and about) *The Erotic as Power*, ‘an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives’ (1984: 55).

What strikes me in Lorde’s description of the erotic as a form of power, as an influential life force, are the words ‘creative’, ‘knowledge’, and ‘work’. Together, they summarise the core of what interpretive labour is all about. The erotic drive, the life force of the Dakarais women I met, derives from the knowledge they gain in the interpretive work they perform by feeding men’s desires, and from the creative ways in which they do so. The ways they navigate artfully and negotiate skillfully, often within contradictory imperatives and limitations, becomes a process of meaningful *self-production*. Indeed, *mokk pooj* is not simply about fulfilling a man’s needs; it is also – and maybe above all – about constructing oneself as a woman. Like Lorde’s erotic, *mokk pooj* is a being-in-the-world, a *bodying forth* that expresses ‘life through the body’, an ‘unfolding of the inherent potentiality of human existence’ (Zhang 2015: 202).

At the same time, in a religiously informed Senegalese sexual imaginary that promotes gender complementarity rather than equality, constructing oneself as a proper Senegalese woman can hardly be disentangled from taking care of masculine needs – much like constructing oneself as a proper Senegalese man rests on women’s efforts. Kira points out:

We are a society where everything rests on the woman. We are the mother. We are the wife. We are the mistress. We are the daughter.

Without us, men could not go on. For them to reach their goals, we have to keep in mind everything that is expected from us, from our spirit, our body, our language. We like to put men at the forefront of everything. But behind each man, there is a woman. Everything depends on her. It is the woman we have to support. Not for her to be equal, no! But we have to help her so she can fulfill her mission, which is to support her husband at home by advising him, by educating the children, and by pleasing him in the bedroom. This is what is expected from a woman. When a woman accomplishes all of that, we say she is an exemplary wife. Every woman, no matter where she comes from, aspires to that. We strive for that. Because we know that when we act like that, our husband values us, considers us, loves us more. We have to fight to maintain that. *That is our mission on earth.* (Leral 2010, my emphasis)

I believe Kira's description of a woman's religiously and socially ascribed gender role as her life mission helps us better understand 'how essential becoming a [woman] is to one's very sense of personhood, one's sense of well-being, one's possibility to flourish as a bodily being' (Butler 2004: 100). And it reiterates that *mokk pooj*, as an interpretive labour that sublimates an erotic lifeforce and a bodying forth, is less about pleasing a man than it is about making oneself as a woman.

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