

*Sutura:*  
Gendered Honor, Social Death, and the Politics of Exposure  
in Senegalese Literature and Popular Culture

by

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*Sutura*: Gendered Honor, Social Death, and the Politics of Exposure  
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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the ways in which *sutura*—a Wolofized Arabic concept that can mean discretion, modesty, privacy, or protection—mediates the production of the boundary between gendered life and ungendered death in Senegalese literature and popular culture. In the ethics of the Wolof caste system, the order of slavery, and local Sufism, the unequal distribution of *sutura* produces a communal “inside” of those who possess a refined, ideal form of life and humanness, and an abject “outside” comprised of subjects who possess a bare form of life that is exposed to social and moral death. While *sutura* is one of several concepts that constitute the Wolof code of honor, it serves as the very membrane between the state of honor and the state of shame. The inherent lack of *sutura* attributed to subjects like the slave and the griot reproduces their permanently shamed state, and *sutura*’s transgression exposes the previously honorable, high-status subject to a publicly visible dishonor, a death-like state worse than physical death.

The gender hierarchy is one of the many overlapping hierarchies that comprise Wolof society, thus entangling the possession of a legible gender with the possession of *sutura* in the production of normative humanness and virtuous life. This study tracks this entanglement in its investigation of the production of ungendered, socially dead subjects in contemporary Senegalese culture, revealing that inclusion in the honorable community of the nation is predicated on the possession of a gendered legibility mediated by *sutura*. The chapters are organized around media scandals that exemplify this dynamic and suggest that contemporary figures of bare life—rogue wives of Sufi sheikhs, maids, prostitutes, gay/transgendered men—are abjected through a mechanics inherited from older Wolof ethical orders. However, as the novels and video melodramas that I foreground as a counterpoint reveal, the ethics generating those mechanics are contested. Indeed, the conservative ethics of *sutura* are challenged by various liberal-secular, feminist, and Muslim ethical orders currently vying for dominance in the Senegalese public sphere. The new regime of exposure that has taken hold of the media in the wake of the mass democratic movements of the 1990s provides a stage not only for

unprecedented scales of abjection via the generation of moral panics, but also for popular contestation of that abjection and the production of new inclusive humanisms. In the midst of the raging pro-*sutura* versus anti-*sutura* debate, I propose that a recasting of *sutura* within a progressive Muslim ethos would disarticulate *sutura* from social hierarchies, thus enabling the formation of an ethics of communal care and protection that could still be coded as both Senegalese and Muslim.

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## Introduction

### The Politics of *Teraanga* and the Politics of *Sutura*

In countless Senegalese popular songs and common-sense declarations, Senegal is praised for being the country of *teraanga*. Arame Fal's Wolof-French dictionary defines *teraanga* as civility or honor,<sup>1</sup> but it is generally understood to refer to the specific component of the Wolof code of honor that indexes hospitality or generosity. According to this idealized code, it is incumbent upon honorable subjects to welcome guests into their house, feed them copiously, and attend to them with care and respect.<sup>2</sup> *Teraanga* makes the inclusion of the stranger into the family and the community possible, whether that incorporation lasts only for the duration of a guest's visit or results in the stranger's permanent integration into the family as fictive kin. Popular iterations of Senegal's *teraanga* thus figure the nation as an honorable subject that is committed to civility and open to outsiders.

Having been at the receiving and giving ends of the *teraanga* relation during the four years I resided in Dakar and the many other years I have been embedded in Senegalese communities in France, the United States, and Senegal, I am repeatedly moved by the beauty and overwhelming sincerity of the ethical practices that instantiate this ideal. Indeed, for the many non-Senegalese who have a love affair with Senegal that can only be described in mystical terms, *teraanga* is one of Senegalese culture's romanticized—and even divinely granted—attributes.

While I was in Dakar, my exposure to the complex terrain of contemporary cultural politics also taught me that communal and familial *teraanga* has its limits. Popular debates around the exploitation of maids, the degradation of virtue embodied by prostitutes, the banishment of rogue Sufi wives from pious legibility, and the threat to communal life that *góor-jigéen* (gay/transgendered subjects) are purported to pose in the wake of a media-generated same-sex marriage scandal led me to a meditation on the terms of full inclusion into the normative honorable community, as well as of the care and protection that that inclusion guarantees. This inquiry steered me to an examination of figures like the slave and the *g'wél* (low-caste griot) who served as the constitutive outside of the idealized honorable community in the timocratic systems of the past and who are invoked in iterations of the outsideness of various abjected subjects today. The verb *ber* (isolation, separation or exclusion) links these cases of abjection, serving as the counter-force of *teraanga*. For example, this segregating term appears in the internal isolation of the HIV-positive maid from the household life of her employer's family in a contemporary Wolof video melodrama,<sup>3</sup> as well as in accounts of the archaic segregation

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<sup>1</sup>Arame Fal, *Dictionnaire wolof-français suivi de, Index français-wolof* (Paris: Karthala, 1990), 221.

<sup>2</sup>Assane Sylla, *La philosophie morale des Wolof* (Dakar: Sankoré, 1978), 86.

<sup>3</sup>Cheikh Diop, *Muchiba la racine du mal* (Paris: Africa productions, 2006).



of the *ñoole* and *gévél* castes into a morally degraded, biologically impure race with whom certain kinds of interaction could result in a dangerous contamination.<sup>4</sup>

I came to understand that the distribution of *teraanga*, and honor more generally, is articulated not only to the hierarchies of caste, the order of slavery, and (more recently) of class, but to the gender hierarchy as well. Indeed, *teraanga* appears in a feminized modality; since women are in charge of food preparation and presentation,<sup>5</sup> a wife's lack of *teraanga* dishonors both herself (she ceases to be a good woman, or “jigéen ju baax”) and her husband, whose honor she is supposed to instantiate and enhance through her virtuous behavior. This violation of *teraanga* is simultaneously a break with gendered honor and a break with noble honor, for through it she exposes herself and her husband to a state of shame that is figured as the death of their noble subjectivity. In the dominant ideology of the timocratic caste system, status is tethered to honor, and only upper-caste members were seen to have the capacity to possess a refined form of honor.<sup>6</sup> The state of dishonor, then, is a disempowering one that brings the noble to the level of low-caste subjects who are always-already dishonored. Since the descent of the previously honorable noble into a lapsarian state of dishonor disrupts the hierarchical ordering of the caste system, the noble is expected to kill himself rather than live in a state of moral, and therefore social, death.<sup>7</sup> Through death, he cleanses himself of his shame, thus reproducing the hierarchical ordering of the community and protecting and restoring its harmonious life. While the caste system no longer structures society to the same degree, honor continues to index an elite and refined state of life that is opposed to a degraded, dishonorable state. This state of dishonor is equated with death, and is embodied by various abject figures, some of which are newcomers to the Senegalese imaginary.

The exposure of the *teraanga*-violating wife and her husband to shame points to another core concept in the Wolof code of honor: *sutura*. The virtuous practices and states that *sutura* indexes include discretion, modesty, privacy, protection, and the

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<sup>4</sup>Lilyan Kesteloot, *Du Tieddo au Talibé: contes et mythes wolof*. (Paris: Présence africaine; Agence de coopération culturelle et technique; Institut fondamental d' Afrique Noire, 1989). At one level, the *gévél* were recipients of the *gээр*'s *teraanga*; the *gээр* was obliged to provide gifts, upkeep and patronage to *gévél* in conformity with the noble code of generosity. Failure to satisfy the *gévél*'s wishes could cause the *gévél* to ruin the *gээр*'s reputation, thus exposing him to shame. Here, nobility and *teraanga* are entangled, for the *gévél* was not expected to engage in this modality of *teraanga*, and his identity was not predicated on honorable generosity. The fact that the *gévél* was the recipient, not the giver, of gifts, establishes him as outside the ideal honorable human as performatively reiterated through *teraanga*, yet it also presents him as deserving of *gээр* protection. However, in some regions, *gévél* were not allowed to spend the night in *gээр* towns because of their impurity; indeed, there are stories of *gévél* being beaten by *gээр* townsfolk and punished by *tuur* (guardian spirits of towns) for not leaving at nightfall, thus indicating that the *gévél* could not always be classified as a guest like any other. Abdoulaye Diop, *La société wolof: tradition et changement: les systèmes d'inégalité et de domination* (Paris: Karthala, 1981).

<sup>5</sup>Marame Gueye, “Ode to Patriarchy: The Fine Line between Praise and Criticism in a Popular Senegalese Poem” in Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *Gender epistemologies in Africa: gendering traditions, spaces, social institutions, and identities* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>6</sup>Judith Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village*. Diss. (Philadelphia: U Penn, 1973), 63.

<sup>7</sup>Boubakar Ly, *L'honneur et les valeurs morales dans les sociétés Ouolof et Toucouleur du Sénégal étude de sociologie* Diss. (Paris: Sorbonne, 1966).

happiness that the previous terms are said to ensure.<sup>8</sup> Since *sutura* refers to the boundary between the state of protection (life) and the state of exposure (death), I would like to suggest that it is the Ur-concept of Wolof honor. According 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. Indeed, by not performing *teraanga* for her husband's guests, the wife has exposed him, and therefore this violation of *teraanga* is simultaneously a tearing of his *sutura*.

In discourses on ideal feminine behavior, it is *sutura* that is most often held up as the cornerstone of feminine honor. Like *teraanga*, in certain iterations *sutura* is an ideal for men and women, but in contemporary popular representations, there is more at stake when it is violated by the female subject. *Sutura* extends to feminine modesty in general—properly covering the body with voluminous clothing, avoiding unnecessary circulation in public space, and guarding one's chastity. These ethical practices were formerly an indication of nobleness in both men and women, but they are now tethered to feminine honor in unprecedented ways.

Indeed, *sutura* has come to produce gender difference itself, making a break with feminized *sutura* a break with legible womanhood. It is articulated to the norm of feminine submission to masculine authority, and wifely submission to the husband in particular. This modality of *sutura* is most powerfully exemplified by the injunction to guard the husband's *sutura* by eschewing the disclosure of his flaws, misdeeds, or anything else that would diminish his honor in the eyes of society.<sup>9</sup> The wife's knowledge of these flaws is deemed protected, domestic, private information, and to narrate them publicly or expose them to the public eye by other means would be to tear the veil that protects that private sphere. Even if her husband engages in activities generally deemed to be improper or sinful—and even if he commits acts of violence against her—the wife should not expose him, and should instead appeal to her kin for help solving the problem discreetly. Even if he has wronged her, the wife's act of exposure is classified as a more egregious violation than his wrongdoing, for, in exposing him to the death of dishonor, she effectively murders him. Within the timocratic logic inherited from the caste system, *sutura* as articulated to wifely submission thereby staves off the death of honorable men by producing a wife subject who will not expose her husband for fear of exposing herself to death, thus ensuring the reproduction of the harmonious, honorable life of the hierarchically-structured family and the community.

In my exploration of the mechanics by which certain subjects come to be classified as outside the honorable community, and therefore subject to banishment, exploitation, death, or entrapment in a permanently degraded state, I found that *sutura* plays a key role in the dynamics of abjection. The excluded subject is figured as having no *sutura*, either because she was a previously honorable subject who has violated its dictates, or because she is classified as an always-already degraded subject who is inherently (or by her function) incapable of possessing *sutura*. Because she lacks *sutura*,

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<sup>8</sup>Sylla, *La philosophie morale des Wolof*.

<sup>9</sup>Eva Rosander, *Transforming female identities : women's organizational forms in West Africa* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1997), 165. Also, Gueye, "Ode to Patriarchy," 69.

she cannot make the same claim to the right to communal protection, a protection also called *sutura*. She is not a signatory, as it were, of the *sutura* contract that stipulates that if individual subjects cover themselves with discretion and protect other people's privacy, then they will have a right to communal protection and care. Since *sutura* is so strongly articulated to gender, the female subject who violates the *sutura* contract willfully un genders herself, thereby becoming locked in a permanent state of dishonor. *Sutura*-mediated ungendering is not limited to women, however, but can extend to the previously honorable male subject's loss of honor which he experiences as loss of masculinity. As demonstrated in the case of the *góor-jigéen*—the figure who has come to occupy the furthest limit of legibly gendered, honorable Senegalese humanness—the male subject's allegedly willful break with the normative performance of gender and gendered honor renders him always-already without *sutura*, regardless of his commitment to the ethical practices of discretion.

The reading of *sutura* I propose in this dissertation is the fruit of several years of research that spanned three continents and required fluency in three languages. Before I moved to Senegal, I had completed four years of Wolof language classes, and have sustained that study since. Ever unwilling to be straightjacketed within the confines of disciplinary inquiry, I opened my field of investigation to include Francophone literary texts, Wolof orature, anthropological studies, ethnophilosophy, history, popular cultural production and media studies. The expansiveness of this field of inquiry made the project's fruition laborious, but it has nevertheless given it a depth that I would not have traded for expedience.

My understanding of the link between *sutura*, nobleness, and gendered human legibility is also very much an embodied one. This embodied understanding is a product of my integration into an elite Dakar milieu via social connections first established in the U.S., my employment as a lecturer at Suffolk University's Dakar campus, my eventual marriage into a prominent Wolof family, and my conversion to Islam. I learned that one of the preconditions of my continued protection in that milieu and my continued legibility as wife, sister, daughter, and daughter-in-law, was my cleaving to the moral discourse of feminized *sutura* through the performance of virtuous discretion and modesty. This made my experience vastly dissimilar to that of other *tubaab* (white or foreign) women who, because of their exposure of their bodies through their unkempt dress and their purported sexual looseness, could be harassed in the streets and denigrated in popular discourse. I, on the other hand—with my tailored-to-order *yére olof* (“traditional” clothes) made out of rich (but not flashy) fabrics, my fluent Wolof, and the transformation of what was initially my studied mimicry of idealized feminine comportment into embodied habit—was interpellated in the street and in people's homes as *soxna* (lady), *adja* (a respectful term for a woman who has been to Mecca, but that can be used as a term of respect for all pious women), “Madame Dakar” (in downtown Dakar, primarily by street vendors), and as a *jigéen ju baax* (a good, virtuous woman). On occasion, I was called “Mame Diarra” (after the mother of the founder of the Murid Sufi order who is the embodiment of the ideal of feminine virtue for Murids) by taxi drivers and other strangers, thus inserting me into the community as a legibly virtuous and pious female subject.

\* \* \*

In Aminata Sow Fall's novel *Le Jujubier du patriarche*,<sup>10</sup> Naarou, the female character of slave descent whose previously seamless integration into the noble family her ancestors served is placed in question by other women characters, asserts her right to full inclusion in that family as kin—not as natively alienated slave—through her public modification of the epic story that serves as the basis for the family's claim to an illustrious noble lineage. In so doing, she commits a dual transgression: she arrogates a function that should only be performed by *gèwél*, and she inserts her slave foremothers into the noble genealogy. The blood of slave women and noble men had been mixed for centuries, but, because the ban on reciting slave genealogies is central to their reproduction as symbolically natively alienated subjects, only the slave women directly involved in the drama of the celebrated ancestor are mentioned, not their descendants. Indeed, even though she had mastered the entire family epic in all of its complex iterations, she had not been aware of the degree to which her lineage and that of the noble family was entangled until her relationship with that family was in crisis.

Since the epic is incredibly long and encompasses multiple generations, characters, and heroic deeds, Naarou and the family's *gèwél* historian do not transmit the story in one sitting, but rather begin any given recitation *in media res*. They are able to navigate through the complex narrative via its “doors,” or points of entry, and the door that the *gèwél* chooses for the portion of the epic privileged in the novel opens out onto a fable of gendered honor. In this story, Dioumana, the wife of the Almamy (Muslim ruler), throws herself into the mouth of a whale rather than live in a state of feminized dishonor brought on by her perceived inability to please her husband. Her act is an instantiation of the Wolof proverb “*bañ gâce, nangu dee*,” which posits that physical death is preferable to a life of shame.

In the spirit of Naarou's transgressive retelling of the noble family's genealogy, this dissertation engages in a modification of the official genealogy of the honorable Senegalese community, writing the abjected subject back into the story in order to make sense of the politics of the present. Much as Naarou's adjustment of the epic is triggered by the irruption of invocations of her slave status into an environment in which slavery is no longer practiced and into a family which appears to have become fully inclusive, the trajectory of this dissertation is similarly informed by irruptions of slaveness (and, in a slightly different vein, *gèwélness*) in the Senegalese public sphere today. In order to provide a genealogical introduction to the contemporary political questions that the tracking of *sutura*—as modality of gendered honor that acts as the fragile membrane between life and death, and therefore between communal inclusion and exclusion—leads us to pose, I would like to examine two traditional Wolof tales that serve as “doors” analogous to the points of entry into the epic. I turn to tales and proverbs in this exercise, as they are habitually mined for an understanding of the moral philosophy that defined the ethical orders of the past; indeed, their reiteration modeled and stabilized ideals of humanness and honorable behavior, a representational tradition alternately sustained and subverted in the Francophone literary and Wolof filmic texts I examine below.

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<sup>10</sup>Aminata Sow Fall, *Le jujubier du patriarche*. (Paris: Le serpent à plumes, 1998).

In the first tale, “Fari, jeegu mbaam,”<sup>11</sup> a wealthy, noble man (Ibra) of marrying age obstinately refuses to consider any potential spouses who are not perfect. His future wife, he declares, will not have a single scar; all scarred women can therefore abstain from presenting their candidacy. One day, a lone woman enters the village. No one knows where she comes from, no one knows who her relatives are, but she is of exceptional beauty, and when Ibra catches glimpse of her perfection, he marries her. According to all the visible indicators, Fari is a perfect wife—she is demure, performs her domestic tasks without complaint, brings lunch out to her husband who is laboring in the fields, attends to him as he eats, maintains her beauty and subtly seductive mannerisms—and Ibra is happy with his choice. One day, the village *naar*<sup>12</sup>, known for his inappropriate coveting of the village women, covertly trails Fari as she makes her way to her husband’s fields to bring him lunch. When she passes by a group of donkeys at the river, they start to sing to her: “Faree mbaam la. Du nitoo, mbaam la” (“Fari is a donkey. She is not human-oo, she is a donkey”). She attempts to ignore their summons, declaring she has left the donkey life behind her, but is ultimately powerless to resist the interpellation of her hidden animal self. She disrobes, enters the water, and is transformed into a donkey, joining her donkey friends splashing, swatting flies, and singing Fari’s refrain. The *naar*, in shock, runs off to report what he has seen to the community. When the gossip finally reaches the ears of Fari’s incredulous husband, he goes to see for himself, and witnesses the same transformation. In the story’s climax, as Fari is cooking the evening meal, her husband sings the same refrain he heard the donkeys sing at the river, and Fari’s body is progressively changed from its human, womanly form into its donkey form. Ibra chases the hee-hawing donkey away with a stick, and Fari the donkey wife is never to be seen again.

The obvious moral of the story is a caution against the fetishization of physical perfection in women, and more specifically a critique of the tendency to conflate beauty with feminine honor. According to one strand of Wolof moral philosophy, a woman’s virtue derives from her beauty.<sup>13</sup> The conflation of physical beauty with honor is, however, dangerous, as it risks supplanting other markers of feminine honor that are central to the reproduction of the social order. In “Fari, jeegu mbaam,” the gossips at the village well claim they could see Ibra’s misfortune coming; after all, that is what you get when you marry a woman whose origins are unknown. They underscore the importance of the primary source of honor—noble birth—in a system structured by a caste hierarchy and an order of slavery that crystallized over centuries of centralized Wolof monarchical rule, and which I am placing under the sign “Wolof society.” In this system, birth

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<sup>11</sup> I refer here to Wade’s filmic adaptation of the tale: Mansour Sora Wade, *Fary L’anesse* (Senegal: California Newsreel, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> *Naar* is the generic term for “Arab,” but in this case “Mauritanian” is the most accurate translation. The *naar* is a stock character in Wolof tales who embodies the negative qualities of dishonesty and lasciviousness.

<sup>13</sup> A *gével* in Aminata Sow Fall’s novel *Le Revenant* renders this equation explicit in her praise of Yama, at the time an unknown young beauty at a neighborhood dance party, “Yow danga taaru, te woyu jigéen, taar” (“you are beautiful, and a woman’s honor is her beauty”) Aminata Sow Fall, *Le revenant*, 3rd ed. (Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1982). See also Gueye, “Ode to Patriarchy” 74.

determines one's place in the hierarchy, and norms of strict endogamy prevent the mixing of blood that would destabilize and confuse the assignation of status.<sup>14</sup> Free, non-casted nobles are at the apogee of the hierarchy, and it is their honorable status, derived from birth and continually reinforced through an adherence to a strict code of honorable comportment, which confirms their right to political rule.

While Fari possesses beauty and correctly performs noble feminine submission and restraint, she cannot access other forms of honor because she has no kin and cannot prove she is of non-casted and free birth. Indeed, if she has no *bàjjan* (paternal aunt) who can attest to her virginity after her wedding night, how can we be sure she is chaste? How can we be sure that she is not a *ñeeño* (a member of the inferior artisanal and performance castes) who is a carrier of impure, tainted blood? How can we be sure that she is not a *jaam* (slave) who, unless she is formally manumitted, passes on her dishonored, subjugated, socially dead status onto her children? How do we know she is not a *dëmm*, a witch who feeds off of people's souls and organs but appears to be a regular person like you and me<sup>15</sup>? Indeed, how do we know she is human?

Here is the second, less obvious but most profound lesson of the tale: a bare, animal, inhuman, dishonorable form of life can lurk underneath the beautiful veneer of respectable human life. Fari's hidden nature, her donkeyness, is a cipher for the degraded, socially dead forms of life embodied by the *jaam*, the *dëmm*, and, to a lesser degree, by the *ñeeño*. Indeed, her appearance from out of nowhere, walking around by herself in the unregulated, outside space of the *all* (bush), establishes her as already ungendered and socially dead: the only women who would be wandering about alone would be those who were banished from their communities for having committed a crime or witchcraft, or runaway slaves. These outcasts would be incorporated into new communities as slaves,<sup>16</sup> condemned to dishonor and social death, natively alienated from both ascending generations left behind in their home towns and from descending generations—their children and grandchildren—who will now belong to the master. It is not by chance that the tale selects the donkey to be the foil for the honorable human; in the Wolof imaginary, the figure of the *mbaam* is degraded and subjugated, a beast of burden invariably linked to the figure of the slave.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Diop, *La société wolof*.

<sup>15</sup>David Ames, *Belief in "witches" among the rural wolof of the Gambia*. (Oxford, 1959).

<sup>16</sup>Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village.*, 300; Martin Klein, "Servitude Among the Wolof and Sereer" in Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa : historical and anthropological perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 343.

<sup>17</sup> In a bid to assert the honor—and therefore the humanity—of the *gévél*, one Gambian informant cited in Emil Magel's important study of the figures of the hare and the hyena in Wolof traditional tales posits the equivalence of the slave and the donkey: "From the time of our father and our grandfather, we have never been slaves. A man who is a slave is like a donkey. When he was captured in war he lost his honor. For him there is only farting and kicking his heels and rolling around in the dust. You know, before the English, there were many wars. Our father and his father's father fought in them They led the warriors to battle. They sang songs of war and praised them. They wanted them to fight bravely. Our relatives were also brave, for many of them died there. Our father has taught us that it is fear that kills a man. It kills him even before the battle begins. We would rather die in battle than be captured and sold as slaves." Emil Magel, *Hare and hyena : symbols of honor and shame in the oral narratives of the Wolof of the Senegambia*. Diss (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin, 1977).

I have chosen this tale as my first door because it shows that the distribution of gendered honor is also, fundamentally, a distribution of different forms of life. This differentiation is partly apparent in the dual meaning of the Wolof word *nit*, which can mean human in the sense of a species designation, or in the sense of a refined, honorable, personhood whose exemplar is the noble. A person who acts dishonorably can be referred to as *nitóodi*, or someone who ceases to be a *nit*.<sup>18</sup> The tale's implicit equation of animal-like life with social and moral death suggests that there are people who are not properly human, and therefore do not have the same rights, privileges, and capacity to be integrated as do the normative subjects of the honorable community. If in contemporary society, honor has almost been fully disarticulated from birth in the wake of the breakdown of the caste system, the differentiation between bare life and honorable life continues to generate other vectors of exclusion. Indeed, the distinction is especially acute in the homophobic discourses that claim *góor-jigéen* possess an animal-like form of life that can be killed with impunity—without that killing counting as murder.

The deployment of this distinction in Senegal suggests implications for how the field of the political is defined in African Diaspora Studies. The centrality of dishonor in the production of the inhuman, socially dead state of the black slave in racial slavery has been a central preoccupation in black cultural studies since the publication of Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death*.<sup>19</sup> Because blackness became synonymous with slaveness in the U.S., the dishonored state of the slave can be extended indefinitely, that is for as long as the black subject continues to exist. Black feminist social death scholarship has shown how that dishonored state was a necessarily ungendered one; the black woman, for example, was denied human legibility because she, as the constitutive outside of white womanhood, could not possess feminine virtue or occupy feminized kinship locations.<sup>20</sup> The extension of slave dishonor past emancipation has exposed the black subject to police repression, incarceration, white vigilante torture and execution, pathologization, forced sterilization and a host of other acts of violence that would be deemed a violation of the white subject's rights.

While my analysis of social death in Senegal is enabled by this scholarship, it poses a set of problems back to the field. There is a tendency in black social death studies to see slavery as the only possible form of social death, although Patterson does not necessarily make that argument. This limiting of social death to the slave state disappears abjected Wolof subjects like the low-caste *gével*, who is free to choose his patrons and is not natively alienated, but who is nevertheless trapped in a state of eternal, racialized

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<sup>18</sup>Sylla, *La philosophie morale des Wolof*, 196.

<sup>19</sup>Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and social death : a comparative study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>20</sup>Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing womanhood : the emergence of the Afro-American woman novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17:2 (1987): 65-81; Sara Clarke Kaplan, "Love and Violence/Maternity and Death.," *Black Women, Gender + Families* 1:1 (2007): 94-124; Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" in Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Words of fire: an anthology of African-American feminist thought* (New York, NY: The New Press, 1995).

moral death. Since honorable life *is* life in the Wolof context, according to *gээр* supremacist discourse the *gээр* is a dead subject.

There is also a tendency to see the black subject as the paradigmatic socially dead subject of modernity, and to argue that social death is non-transferable to other kinds of subjects.<sup>21</sup> This equation of social death with blackness further obscures the local politics of exclusion in Senegal, where, in the postcolonial period, blackness is not the basis for exclusion, although the colonial legacy of the abjection of black Africans informs contemporary Senegalese politics to a certain degree. This particular strand of myopia is ironic given the genealogy of some of the key analytics in the field. Indeed, Hortense Spillers' seminal work "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," a text that proposes a feminist analytics with which to understand the unique natal alienation of the black female slave, builds on Claude Meillassoux's study of internal female slavery in West Africa.<sup>22</sup> My work is a conscious contribution to this transnational cross-pollination, whereby analytics developed for an African context can impact those generated for a U.S. context, and then those modified analytics can be brought back to Africa. This movement of analytics produces a diasporic formation that nevertheless does not assume blackness, or the more problematic "black culture," as its unifying principle.

The transnational peregrinations of the analytics of biopolitics and necropolitics in social death studies also inform the present work. Giorgio Agamben's<sup>23</sup> post-Foucauldian study of biopolitics, which sees the distribution of life and death—as well as of different forms of life—as the defining function of sovereign power,<sup>24</sup> has informed recent U.S.-based thought, as well as meditations on contemporary necropolitical formations on the African continent.<sup>25</sup> When viewed within Agamben's schema, social death can be understood as bare life—life that can be killed but not murdered or sacrificed. Since bare life is life defined by sovereign power as having the capacity to be killed with impunity, the figure of bare life, of which the slave could be considered the exemplar, is suspended in a state threatened by death. Since this figure is by definition exposed to death, biopolitics and necropolitics overlap, producing sovereign power formations that constrain the agency of the socially dead subject to the necropolitical. In a necropolitical order, the barely living subject's only form of meaningful political agency is to wield death against death, as in the slave's suicide or murder of her children.<sup>26</sup> My study contributes to this scholarship by showing that the analytics of biopolitics and necropolitics need not be limited to Western or "modern" political formations, but can be adapted to elucidate pre-colonial African political formations as well.

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Jared Sexton and Elizabeth Lee, "Figuring the Prison: Prerequisites of Torture at Abu Ghraib1," *Antipode* 38:5 (2006): 1005-1022.

<sup>22</sup> Claude Meillassoux, "Female Slavery" in Claire Robertson and Martin Klein, *Women and slavery in Africa* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

<sup>23</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer*. (Stanford : Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society must be defended : lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, 1st ed. (New York: Picador, 2003); Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume 1 : An Introduction* ([S.I.]: Allen Lane, 1979).

<sup>25</sup> Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15:1 (2003): 11-40.

<sup>26</sup> Abdul JanMohamed, *The death-bound-subject : Richard Wright's archaeology of death* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2005); Kaplan, "Love and Violence/Maternity and Death."



Another insight from black feminism to which the Fari tale points is the simultaneous constitution of the category of “woman” and the production of an abject, racialized other that serves as her outside. If Wolof society contains female subjects who are not proper women, then the feminist analytics commonly employed to study gender in Senegal need to be drastically revised. Senegalese feminism and gender scholarship on Senegal tend to assume that the Senegalese woman is an undifferentiated, monolithic category that is opposed to the Senegalese man, thus generating an overly-simplified account of Senegalese patriarchy. Given the multiple, overlapping hierarchies of age, kinship, gender, caste, piety and class that continue to give Senegalese society a highly complex and unstable structure, the isolation of one axis without taking into consideration the others produces distortions that impede our ability to understand the political terrain. Following the lead of African scholars of gender like Oyeronke Oyewumi, I propose that we avoid assuming in advance that the gender hierarchy will take a particular shape, instead widening the lens to examine its mutual constitution with other hierarchies.<sup>27</sup> In this study, rather than focus first on gender and then on *sutura*, I tried to track *sutura* first and then see what it revealed about gender. This approach has particular implications for feminist criticism of Senegalese literature, which tends to mistake *sutura* for “women’s silence.”<sup>28</sup>

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The Wolof tale that serves as my second “door” is “The Indiscrete Friend,” included in the written French archive by Bérenger-Féraud in the nineteenth century and reproduced by Assane Sylla in his 1978 study of Wolof moral philosophy.<sup>29</sup> In it, Demba comes to stay with his good friend, Ousmane, who lives happily with his wife and male servant. Over the course of his visit, Demba comes to realize Ousmane’s wife is sleeping with the servant, and he hastens to inform his friend. When Ousmane refuses to take Demba’s claim seriously, Demba insists, showing him the secret passageway Ousmane’s wife uses to visit her lover at night. Ousmane is broken-hearted, but calmly hatches a plan. He has his wife prepare a meal of *cere* (millet couscous), Demba’s favorite dish, and then sends her out to work in the fields while they sit down to lunch. When Demba, who has eaten his fill of the delicious *cere*, asks Ousmane why he hasn’t touched the food, Ousmane informs him he had sullied the cooking utensils used to prepare the *cere* with fecal matter, and brings him to the kitchen to show him the evidence. When Demba smells the nauseating odor emanating from the pots and pans, he starts vomiting and reprimands his friend for giving him proof of that which he did not want to believe, thereby turning him off *cere* for good. Ousmane response is they are now even, since

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<sup>27</sup>Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The invention of women : making an African sense of Western gender discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). See also Eileen Boris, “Gender After Africa!” in Catherine Cole, *Africa after gender?* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).

<sup>28</sup>Irène Almeida, *Francophone African women writers : destroying the emptiness of silence* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994); Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans : Francophone literature and anthropology in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Renée Larrier, *Francophone women writers of Africa and the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).

<sup>29</sup>Sylla, *La philosophie morale des Wolof*, 114–15.

Demba insisted on turning him off his wife for good even after Ousmane had made it clear there are things he would rather not know.

What is striking about this tale is that Ousmane takes revenge, not on his cheating wife, but on the friend who exposes her infidelity to Ousmane, marking the transgression of someone else's *sutura* as a worse crime than the deviation from feminine honor that the wife's affair entails. The story provides a striking counterpoint to the standard scenario in contemporary discourse that isolates and vilifies the *sutura*-transgressing woman. It suggests that the current tethering of *sutura* to a fixed understanding of the gender hierarchy may not have been as acute in the past, and therefore that we may have to revisit our understanding of *sutura* as "traditional" modality of feminized submission.

"The Indiscrete Friend" presents an idealized scenario in which the two subjects in the *sutura* relation are social equals (*nawle*). They are both non-casted, free men, and, while surely one is older than the other and therefore can claim seniority, no hierarchy is indicated by the narrative. As such, they can be "even" at the end of the story, each turned off something he had previously loved. In the complicated structure produced by the many overlapping hierarchies in Wolof society, however, the deployment of *sutura* often designates an unequal power relationship. Indeed, *sutura* is the subject of formulaic discourses that dictate how one should reinforce the honor of one's superiors. The servant or slave is obliged to protect the *sutura* of her master or mistress, and the wife must cover her husband with *sutura*. The *g w l*'s role is to glorify through speech and song her noble patron's honor, keep her secrets, and provide a foil against which the nobility of *sutura* can be constituted. The *g w l* is, by her very function, without her own *sutura*—she can expose her body publicly in suggestive dances, tell lewd stories and jokes, and publicly insult people if they do not comply with her requests for patronage. This public denigration can kill the noble in question—hence the power often ascribed to the *g w l* to force the noble's hand—but the *g w l* does not die, for she is always-already dishonored and outside the *g er* community, and therefore has no honor to lose. Given these various hierarchizing vectors of *sutura*-in-submission, any analysis of gendered *sutura* must extend its field of inquiry beyond a pre-defined gender dyad.

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As the novels and video melodramas that I analyze below show, the hierarchizing ethics of *sutura* are both reproduced and contested in the contemporary period. Indeed, the conservative ethics of *sutura* are challenged by various liberal-secular, feminist, and Muslim ethical orders currently vying for dominance in the Senegalese public sphere. The new regime of exposure that has taken hold of the media in the wake of the mass democratic movements of the late 1980s and 1990s provides a stage not only for unprecedented scales of abjection via the generation of moral panics, but also for popular contestation of that abjection and the production of new inclusive humanisms. Prior to this movement, in compliance with the ethical norms regulating concealment and disclosure, the Senegalese community had been covering the elite with *sutura*, refraining from exposing and dishonoring them. Politicians and Sufi leaders were figured as fathers, senior authority figures to whom everyone should perform submission and whose honor

everyone should be committed to enhance. To expose them would be to kill them, further destabilizing the fragile peace of a young nation.

Rampant corruption and abuse of power forced a reconsideration of the appropriateness of applying *sutura* to democratically elected representatives who are supposed to act in the people's interest, and popular discourse voted in favor of breaking the *sutura* contract.<sup>30</sup> This ushered in a new regime of morality in which disclosure became more ethical than concealment, and the peace of the community became less important than obtaining justice for those who have been wronged. Indeed, if you see someone stealing someone else's hard-earned possessions, should you cover him with *sutura*? What if he is your relative? Your father? Your gardener? If someone rapes you, should you remain quiet? What if you are a maid, and he is your employer? If your husband beats you, and the relatives who are supposed to quietly solve domestic disputes without the community catching wind are ineffective, should you go to the police, exposing him to *gacce*? The media took on the responsibility to expose—in great detail—cases of rape, incest, pedophilia, domestic violence, adultery, embezzlement, corruption, conflicts between co-wives, and infanticide.<sup>31</sup> They ceased to respect the boundary *sutura* draws between public and private spheres, to the point that there are public figures journalists track so closely and so invasively, one almost expects to read about their bowel movements in the paper. At the same time, the media also claims to be the defender of traditional Senegalese and Muslim values like *sutura* and contributes to the reinforcement of the dead status of abject outside-insiders.

In the hope of making an intervention into the raging pro-*sutura* versus anti-*sutura* debate, I argue that Senegalese popular culture and literature can gesture toward an alternative future for a *sutura*-based ethics. Following the pious yet progressive trajectories indicated by these texts, I show that a recasting of *sutura* within a feminist Muslim ethos could disarticulate *sutura* from social hierarchies, thus enabling the formation of an ethics of communal care and protection that could still be coded as both Senegalese and Muslim.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibrahima Thioub, "L'enfermement carcéral: Un instrument de gestions des marges urbaines au Sénégal XIXe-XXe siècles," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 37:3 (2003): 278–79.

<sup>31</sup>Frank Wittmann and Martin Taureg, *Entre tradition orale et nouvelles technologies : où vont les mass média au Sénégal?* (Dakar: Enda, 2005).

## Chapter 1

### A Literary Representation of the Murid Subaltern<sup>32</sup>: *Sutura* and the Gendering of Pious Submission in Ken Bugul's Riwan, ou le chemin de sable

Murid: “the person who exercises his or her will.”<sup>33</sup>

The disciple should be like a corpse in the hands  
of a mortician.<sup>34</sup>

Et si Riwan avait été une femme?  
Ou plutôt: une femme pouvait-elle être Riwan?<sup>35</sup>

In 2008, veteran PDS politician Sophie Ndiaye Cissokho granted an interview to Weekend magazine, a sensationalist weekly publication that has become a major player in the exposure-obsessed media. Of particular interest to the magazine was not her long, potentially fascinating career as a female member of the opposition party that became the ruling party in the biggest upset of post-independence politics, but rather her marriage to the head caliph of the Muridiyya, Serigne Bara. One of an undisclosed number of wives of the powerful Sufi order's leader, she shared her hopes for her marriage, including her dream of having a child with him. While this revelation would hardly count as a scandalous disclosure of marital intimacy had it been uttered by a popular songstress, or another kind of public figure—indeed, it is part of the acceptable script for wives to say they want to have children with their husbands—Cissokho is not a wife like any other. Her interview was deemed such an egregious violation of the Serigne's *sutura* that it sparked a series of dramatic events: his grandsons vociferously expressed their outrage, commanding the press to cease any and all coverage of the caliph's private life; copies of the issue were quickly removed from newsstands; death threats were leveled at Madiambal Diagne, the head of the media group that owns Weekend; and Serigne Bara himself allegedly physically attacked Babou Birame Faye, the journalist who conducted

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<sup>32</sup> The title of this chapter is an obvious nod to Gayatri Spivak's well-known essay, “A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman's Text from the Third World.” My analysis is greatly indebted to Spivak's methods and insights in that essay, as well as in “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography.” Gayatri Spivak, *In other worlds : essays in cultural politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>33</sup> Seyyed Nasr, *The garden of truth : the vision and promise of Sufism, Islam's mystical tradition*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 112.

<sup>34</sup> Sahl al-Tustari quoted in Cheikh Babou, *Fighting the greater jihad : Amadu Bamba and the founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853-1913* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 86.

<sup>35</sup> Ken Bugul, *Riwan ou Le chemin de sable : roman* (Paris; Dakar: Présence africaine, 1999), 31.

the interview.<sup>36</sup> After Diagne filed a complaint and petitioned for state protection, Serigne Bara defused the tense situation by publicly pardoning Diagne, declaring “he is a disciple who has made a mistake and should be forgiven.” Cissokho, however, was not so fortunate: Serigne Bara divorced her post haste, placing the blame entirely on her shoulders at the same moment he absolved Diagne.<sup>37</sup>

If both Cissokho and Diagne are disciples, and both are implicated in the exposure of the caliph’s intimacy, why would one be pardoned and the other punished? This chapter explores how *sutura* mediates the unique gendering of the Murid subject, suggesting not only that the agency of the Murid subject is differentiated along gendered lines—that Muridism invests the female subject with a different capacity for pious action than the male subject—but also that the normative female Murid subject is invested with a different agency and form of honorable personhood than the normative female subjects of the Wolof social order, the Islamic reformist movement, and the diasporic intelligentsia, thus revealing a set of fractures within the category of “the Senegalese woman.” I supplement Cissokho’s story with a reading of Ken Bugul’s *Riwan, ou le chemin de sable*, an autobiographical novel that brings into view the paradoxical location of the wife of a *seriñ*<sup>38</sup>: while elite and exceptional, she is, at the same time, the paradigmatic figure of a form of bare life that emerges in the zone of indistinction between a feminized, agentive pious submission and a slave-like subjugation which enables only a highly constrained form of necropolitical agency. By emphasizing *sutura*’s centrality in the production of this indistinction, Bugul’s novel forces us to confront the impossibility of fully accessing the subaltern Murid wife’s consciousness, an access that the feminist scholar-subject wishes would resolve the problem of her agency once and for all. My reading of the novel suggests that we cannot seek to correct the gender imbalance in both Muridism and Muridism Studies simply by inciting the Murid woman to discourse or by collating her traces in the archive into a cohesive narrative, since *sutura* structures both the archive and contemporary speech in advance. Instead, I propose to read the Murid tradition against itself in order to generate a crisis in the hierarchizing logic that makes the gendering of pious submission possible. My aim in generating this crisis is not to discredit Muridism as mode of African Muslim religiosity, but rather to open up new possibilities for Murid piety.

While my analysis intervenes directly in the field of Muridism Studies, it also speaks back to wider debates about agency in both African Diaspora Studies and Gender

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<sup>36</sup>“Seneweb News : Affaire Babou Birame Faye / Serigne Bara Mbacké : Le Synpics, toutes griffes dehors”, n.d., [http://www.seneweb.com/news/Societe/affaire-babou-birame-faye-serigne-bara-mback-le-synpics-toutes-griffes-dehors\\_n\\_16953.html](http://www.seneweb.com/news/Societe/affaire-babou-birame-faye-serigne-bara-mback-le-synpics-toutes-griffes-dehors_n_16953.html).

<sup>37</sup>“Serigne Bara se sépare de Sophie Ndiaye Cissokho et blanchit Madiambal (Entretien Avec M. Diagne)”, n.d., [http://www.xibar.net/AUDIO-Serigne-Bara-se-separe-de-Sophie-Ndiaye-Cissokho-et-blanchit-Madiambal-Entretien-Avec-M-Diagne\\_a9192.html](http://www.xibar.net/AUDIO-Serigne-Bara-se-separe-de-Sophie-Ndiaye-Cissokho-et-blanchit-Madiambal-Entretien-Avec-M-Diagne_a9192.html).; “INTERVIEW DE LA FEMME DU KHALIFE SUR WEEKEND MAGAZINE: Madiambal Diagne s’excuse, Serigne Bara Mbacké pardonne et « classe le dossier... »”, n.d., [http://www.xibar.net/INTERVIEW-DE-LA-FEMME-DU-KHALIFE-SUR-WEEKEND-MAGAZINE-Madiambal-Diagne-s-excuse-Serigne-Bara-Mbacke-pardonne-et-classe\\_a9162.html](http://www.xibar.net/INTERVIEW-DE-LA-FEMME-DU-KHALIFE-SUR-WEEKEND-MAGAZINE-Madiambal-Diagne-s-excuse-Serigne-Bara-Mbacke-pardonne-et-classe_a9162.html).

<sup>38</sup> Murid spiritual leaders can be referred to as marabouts, sheikhs (or cheikhs), or *seriñ* (“serigne” in the Gallicized spelling of the Wolof word). In this chapter, I use the latter two interchangeably, although I use the capitalized Serigne to refer primarily to the character in Bugul’s novel.

Studies. The narrator of Bugul's novel is a Western-educated diasporic subject who attempts to make sense of Murid agency within black liberationist and Western feminist paradigms, and comes across a series of impasses in the process. Those impasses invite the following questions: Does the agency that matters—the agency to which we ascribe political value—become visible only in the subject's resistance to racial, colonial, and gendered norms? Or, as both David Scott and Saba Mahmood have argued,<sup>39</sup> is there another important agentic mode in which the subject submits to an alternative discipline, thus engaging in the production of a self that cannot be fully captured within racist/colonial/patriarchal regimes of subjectivation? Both of these positions assume that one of the key properties of an agent is a discernible willfulness or intentionality, although Mahmood's pithy working definition of agency, "a capacity to act enabled by historical relations of subordination," suggests that intention itself is discursively produced, not a property of a self that exists prior to discursive practice. All the same, must the intention of a subject be discerned in order for an act to be classified as properly

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<sup>39</sup> David Scott, *Refashioning futures : criticism after postcoloniality* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); Saba Mahmood, *Politics of piety : the Islamic revival and the feminist subject* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005). Scott and Mahmood are concerned with two very different kinds of subjects, yet both are indebted to Talal Asad's critique of liberal secularism and to Michel Foucault's later work on self-fashioning. In *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality*, Scott proposes that the unruly figure of the Jamaican *ruud bwai* can be rendered intelligible as political subject by folding the Fanonian paradigm of defiant resistance into a late Foucauldian analytic which distances itself from the resistance paradigm but sees the work that the subject performs on itself as an ethical practice of freedom: "[Foucault] wants nevertheless to create a conceptual space among relations of power in which the self acts not in relation to others but in relation to the self, in which it is possible to see, not the self overcoming power, but realigning it, turning it elsewhere, turning it toward itself. He wants to understand, that is to say, the ways in which the self produces effects of power upon the self—by the application of exercise, for example, by a dietary regimen, an imposition of interdictions, or a regular and progressive shaping of movements. These are practices of freedom, then, not because they are beyond power (for Foucault there are no such practices), but because they are practices by means of which the subject deliberately acts upon the self in an effort to alter the dimensions already imposed upon it, to reconstitute the energies already shaped by existing relations of power. It is in this sense, too that they are ethical practices. They are, Foucault suggests, what one might call 'ascetical' practices, 'giving the word ascetical a very general meaning, that is to say, not in the sense of abnegation but that of an exercise of self upon self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being'" (213-14). The *ruud bwai*'s self-fashioning constitutes a danger to the norms of bourgeois civility; it is "a concrete practice of the self that produces a transgressive interruption of the circulation of normalized consensual identities in urban postcolonial Jamaica—those identities that are taken to define *who* belongs (as well as *how* one belongs) to the body-politic" (214). While Scott's *ruud bwai* "refuses to be a 'docile body' available to be worked over by capital, to be worked over by the police, or to be counted by the statistical ideologues of representative democracy," but rather takes hold of the body's energies himself and redirects them, Mahmood's reformist subject channels her energies into producing a docile body that can then be molded so as to conform to a reformist ideal of piety. (I will reference in greater detail the political implications of these latter practices throughout this chapter.) While on the surface these two subjects are at opposite extremes of any recognizable spectrum, neither the *ruud bwai* nor the reformist Muslim women is intelligible as properly political subject in dominant paradigms of agency in black radical and feminist traditions. Indeed, I have chosen to use Scott and Mahmood as twin points of reference in this chapter because Bugul's novel inhabits the intersection of the problem-spaces invoked by the two scholars.

agentive, or can a body whose actions are propelled by a force outside its conscious control also be considered an agent?

Muridism is an intriguing case study through which to explore these questions, as it operates according to what appear to be agential paradoxes. The submission of disciple to sheikh, arguably the defining Murid practice, requires both the disciple's willfulness and the complete relinquishing of his will in order for the Sufi ideal of pious self-annihilation to be realized. The process of submission can be divided into two stages: the first, a willful relinquishing of control to the sheikh at the moment of the *njébbal*, or pledge of submission; and the second, a state of extreme docility in which the disciple's will is already suspended, where he is a dead subject who can then be molded into a different kind of living subject through the sheikh's discipline.<sup>40</sup> While the first stage would appear to be agentive and the second non-agentive (or "passive"), Saba Mahmood has convincingly argued that the state of docility is a precondition for the acquisition of skill and knowledge. In the Egyptian women's Islamic reformist movement she studies, the subject seeking to attain an advanced stage of piety actively and continually cultivates a docile disposition, thus leading Mahmood to recast docility as agency. However, that reformist movement is distinct from Muridism in that the reformist subject's submission to God is mediated through sacred texts and interpretive traditions, not through a sheikh, and therefore she has to constantly engage in a self-propelled curriculum of Quranic study and pious corporeal discipline (even though some habitual bodily practices of piety become automatic after time). While the Murid disciple also follows a curriculum, he does not need to grapple with the daily decisions and interpretations through which the pious reformist self is fashioned; he has merely to follow the sheikh's command. Furthermore, in its emphasis on the complete overcoming of the *nafs*, or lower self, Sufism's immediate aim is the destruction of the self rather than the incremental production of the pious self.

Viewed within Mahmood's framework, then, the agentive nature of Murid docility is ambiguous. Early Western observers of the Murid sheikh-disciple dynamic saw a relation of exploitation, where Murid ideology produced a servile peasant class enthralled to an elite clerical class through a particularly effective form of false consciousness.<sup>41,42</sup> This exploitative relationship, while not slavery per se, appeared to be close to it; the only difference was that Murid ideology incited the disciple to consent to relinquish sovereignty over his person to the sheikh. While these observers were unable to ascertain the complex pious logic of Muridism, which I explore in greater detail below, they raised the important question of how to distinguish the agency of the disciple from that of the slave. For Bugul's narrator, the investigation of this distinction takes on a political urgency when subjects who are excluded from participation in the first stage of submission—but must nevertheless engage in the second stage—come into view. What

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<sup>40</sup>Donal Cruise O'Brien, *The Mourides of Senegal: the political and economic organization of an Islamic brotherhood*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

<sup>41</sup>Paul Marty, *Études sur l'Islam et les tribus du Soudan* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1920).

<sup>42</sup>Portere quoted in Vincent Monteil, *Esquisses sénégalaises. Wâlo. Kayor. Dyolof. Mourides. Un Visionnaire. [With illustrations and maps.]* (Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire Dakar; Mâcon [printed] 1967), 199.

role does consent or intention play in the constitution of the agency of women who cannot perform the *njébbal* (the pledge of devotion to a particular sheikh), but rather must submit to the sheikh of their father or husband, and who can be given to a sheikh as another's pious gift? If the normative female subject's submission to a particular sheikh is compulsory, not voluntary, then her capacity to act is constrained by this compulsion: she can either cleave to the ideal of docility, thereby embracing a pious form of death, or expose herself and her kin to social death by refusing to submit. This subject's worldly agency, much like the slave's, would seem to be solely necropolitical: she has the capacity to choose, but that choice is nevertheless between death and death. However, although pious submission may mean death in this life, it holds out the promise of a blissful afterlife, the stage of the soul's existence that matters the most. Life in this world, including the suffering inalienable to worldly existence, is fleeting, but the afterlife is eternal.

Bugul's narrator remains attached to the Murid ideal of pious submission even as she raises the thorny problem of the gendering of Murid agency. For her, submitting to a sheikh and becoming one of his wives is a salutary path that heals the wounds of colonial alienation and reintegrates her into her home culture. She celebrates the Murid path as a means to black African liberation from Western neocolonialism and Arab control over Islamic tradition, bringing to the fore yet another one of Muridism's agential paradoxes: how is it that submission can simultaneously be a practice of freedom? And how is it that a regime of piety that was originally proposed as a means to self-annihilation can now be figured as the means to recuperate an alienated African self?

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For some time, the Muridiyya has been attributed properties that would be considered germane to African Diaspora Studies: as the first Sufi order founded by a black African,<sup>43</sup> it is hailed by many as an authentically black form of Islam,<sup>44</sup> and its diaspora is recognized as a dynamic, visible presence in cities around the world.<sup>45</sup> Founded by charismatic Wolof scholar Cheikh Amadou Bamba in the late nineteenth century, the new order enabled black West African Muslims to seek religious guidance from a local order, rather than turn to sheikhs who followed Middle Eastern and North African traditions. Bamba's formative experience as a Qadiriyya disciple in Mauritania exposed him to anti-black racism among Arab clerics, a prejudice that violated Quranic ideals of racial harmony and brotherhood within the *umma*. The Moorish clerics saw their homologues to the south of the Senegal River as ignorant of the real Islam, and therefore in need of corrective Arab proselytization. Bamba responded directly to this racist paternalism in the preamble to his seminal work on Sufi mysticism, *Massalik Al-Jinan* (1886): "Do not let my condition of a black man mislead you about the virtue of this work" because "the best of man before God, without discrimination, is the one who fears him the most" and "skin color cannot be the cause of stupidity or ignorance."<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup>Babou, *Fighting the greater jihad*, 97.

<sup>44</sup>Éric Guglielmi, *Touba : voyage au coeur d'un islam nègre* (Paris: Alternatives, 2007).

<sup>45</sup>Mamadou Diouf, "The Senegalese Murid Trade Diaspora and the Making of a Vernacular Cosmopolitanism," *Public Culture* 12:3 (2000): 679-702.

<sup>46</sup>Quoted in Babou, *Fighting the greater jihad*, 62.



One account privileges this self-conscious rejection of Arab clerical racism, rendering the formation of the Muridiyya intelligible within the familiar diasporic narrative of the assertion of a positive black identity as a reaction to white or Arab racism. (Senegalese philosopher and politician Léopold Sédar Senghor famously called Bamba “an apostle of negritude.”)<sup>47</sup> Compounding this view is the emphasis on Bamba’s persecution at the hands of the French once his influence on the local population was perceived by the authorities to constitute a threat, thus turning Bamba into an anticolonial hero who refused to comply with colonial command.<sup>48</sup> This narrative imparts a resistant agency to the Murid founder, a capacity to act enabled by a racial order of subjectivation that pits a black subject against a white/Arab supremacist system. The Sufi path advocated by Bamba, however, complicates this easy insertion of Muridism into a globally legible blackness. Bamba credited the formation of the order not to his own resistant agency, but rather to the creative agency of God via the Prophet Muhammed, who appeared in a series of dreams to authorize Bamba’s use and transmission of a new *wird*.<sup>49</sup> In this latter account, the founding of the Muridiyya is an act of submission to an alternative order, not simply an act of resistance by a subject that seeks to break free from colonial/racial oppression in order to become fully autonomous and self-determining.

Historian Cheikh Babou convincingly argues that beyond Bamba’s call for the recognition of the erudition of black scholars, there was nothing distinctively “black,” “African” or “Wolof” about Bamba’s initial teachings. Instead, his proposal for the introduction of Sufi *tarbiyya* practice into Senegal did not significantly diverge from how that tradition had been practiced elsewhere in the world for centuries. His innovation was to integrate *tarbiyya* into a holistic system of education which could be implemented at a grand scale in the region. There is evidence that Bamba alternately ignored, staved off, and accommodated the many forces that interfered with the realization of his vision—at times sending gifts to French authorities in order to reassure them that he was interested in peaceful Islamic education, not politics; and at others publicly defying Wolof aristocratic authority and the very foundations of the timocratic ordering of power. That these pragmatic moves were made in the interest of the formation of a new pious order, not in the service of a consistent proto-nationalist, anticolonial ideology, does not make their effects any less revolutionary. Indeed, his commitment to this new system of education, combined with his charisma, enabled him to mobilize large numbers of people and form pious communities that operated according to a new set of rules—a state of affairs that could only be a threat to a colonial power seeking to reorder the colony in such a way as to maximize its own sovereignty.

The implementation of Murid *tarbiyya* served as the motor for the establishment of new forms of Senegalese life.<sup>50</sup> Cheikh Babou defines *tarbiyya* as  
a holistic approach to education invented by the Sufis that goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and seeks to transform the whole being

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<sup>47</sup>Allen Roberts and Mary Nooter Roberts, *A saint in the city : Sufi arts of urban Senegal* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2003), 36.

<sup>48</sup>Monteil, *Esquisses sénégalaises. Wâlo. Kayor. Dyolof. Mourides*, 201.

<sup>49</sup>Babou, *Fighting the greater jihad*, 96.

<sup>50</sup>Diouf, “The Senegalese Murid Trade Diaspora and the Making of a Vernacular Cosmopolitanism,” 682.

by touching the body, the mind, and the soul. It establishes a special relationship between the sheikh and his disciple, who is no longer a *taaleb* (student) but a *murid* (aspirant) on the path to God who surrenders his will to his master and gives him command of every aspect of his life. Tarbiyya requires from the aspirant a clear commitment to follow the sheikh's recommendation on all matters, temporal and spiritual.<sup>51</sup>

In the Murid educational ideal, the disciple submits completely to a sheikh as the means to transcending his *nafs*, the lower self or desiring soul. When the disciple pledges allegiance to a sheikh (an act called *njébbal* [noun] or *jebbelu* [verb]), he commits to following the sheikh's *ndigal* (order or command); he then contributes his labor and/or wealth to the Murid community, and he continually instantiates his selflessness and love for the sheikh through a practice of ritualized gift-giving. In return, the disciple acquires the necessary discipline to ascend to the next stage of learning, receives religious knowledge from the sheikh, and is blessed by his close proximity to the sheikh, who is the bearer and conduit of *baraka*, or divine grace.

This educational model was a radical departure from pre-existing Islamic clerical norms in Wolof country, which privileged mastery of scripture and the reproduction of high status for the erudite within the Wolof social hierarchy. By devoting himself entirely to the sheikh, the Murid disciple ceased to occupy a legible position within a Wolof system hierarchized by caste and the order of slavery, and his submission was redirected from his superiors in the social hierarchy to his sheikh. These former superiors could also include his parents; by replacing parental sovereignty with clerical sovereignty, Murid ideology thereby posed a challenge to the kinship order.<sup>52</sup> Since agricultural production was organized through kinship, this threat had potentially serious material effects: children's labor was essential to the production of familial wealth and thus was seen to belong to parents, so to lose that labor to the sheikh was possibly to face economic ruin. Viewed from within the ideological matrix of the hierarchical Wolof system, then, the normative Murid disciple is a socially dead subject who has turned his back on traditional modes of conferring personhood and who exposes his kin to physical death.

Bamba explicitly called for the dismantling of the timocratic distribution of honor, in which only the possession of noble honor conferred full personhood. In keeping with an international tradition of scholarly dissidence, Bamba refused to pander to rulers and court clerics. At Bamba's father's funeral, a friend and peer of his father tried to bring Bamba to court to present him as his father's heir, but Bamba publicly declined: "I do not have the habit of mingling with rulers, and I do not expect any help from them. I seek honor from the Supreme Lord (God)."<sup>53</sup> As Babou recounts,

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<sup>51</sup>Babou, *Fighting the greater jihad*, 63.

<sup>52</sup> "The student had to lean to tolerate hunger and to be patient and resolute. He had to be passionate in his quest, soft in his manners, chaste and humble. But above all, the student had to respect the master's rights. Bamba even suggested putting the teacher's rights over the rights of parents because if the former educated the substance of humanity, the spirit, the latter only took care of the body, a perishable envelope. To completely respect the teacher's right was to honor him, to follow his recommendations without hesitation, and to give him material support" (Ibid., 85.)

[His] response upset the crowd. His reluctance to interact with the royal court was known, but the circumstances made his attitude particularly striking. First, it was a violation of the Wolof code of conduct to express one's mind so crudely in public. Second, the incident took place in front of the entire village, between a man and someone old enough to be his father. Third, a funeral was expected to be an occasion of communion and not of dispute and disagreement.<sup>54</sup>

Bamba recognized the honor conferred by God, not the honor signalled by high birth and socially-prescribed *gээр* (noble) behavior. He therefore had no qualms publicly flouting the norms of *kersa* (noble restraint) and *sutura* (discretion), which, as an elite man, he should have been concerned to enhance. As a social junior relative to the elder man, he should have engaged in *maslaa*, the public performance of deference and respect, thus performatively reconstituting the age hierarchy and maintaining communal harmony. His violation of appropriate conduct at one of the many ceremonies that are the primary stage for Wolof public life, a stage on which the disciplined Wolof subject acts according to his station, makes him *nitóodi*, or “unpersonly.” This term, along with the expression “kii du nit” (“s/he is not a person”), are commonly employed when someone commits a particularly egregious violation of social rules. Bamba's shocking acts could therefore be read as a willful break with legible Wolof personhood.

Bamba's disregard for communally conferred personhood and honor seems dangerous at first glance, as it risks inviting his social death. However, this position is a necessary one for his Sufi project, which requires the death of the social self in order to make way for the birth of the pious self. Bamba espoused the Sufi ideal of the disciple's corpse-like pliability, preaching “the disciple should be like a corpse in the hands of a mortician.” The disciple should relinquish control over his mind and body—a death of the legibly agentic self—and place them in the capable hands of the sheikh. The sheikh, like the mortician who purifies the dead body and prepares it for proper burial, then cleanses the disciple's soul in preparation for its encounter with God on Judgement Day. The disciple must be a proper *tabula rasa* so that a new person can be fashioned through the disciplinary practices of *askesis* and Quranic education, so that the sheikh *tarbiyya* can fulfill his vocation to “*defar nit*,” literally “to make or repair people.”<sup>55</sup> Here, personhood is conferred by God—via his educating vessel, the sheikh—not by the social system.

The divine conferral of honorable personhood is no less earned; indeed, it could even be considered meritocratic. At its inception, the ideology of the Muridiyya was a leveling one: the only characteristic that could place one person above another was one's degree of piety and possession of sacred knowledge. One's position within the hierarchy of piety is neither innate nor immutable, as one can always strive to become more pious and acquire more knowledge. In theory, all Murids came to the order as disciples like all

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<sup>53</sup> He reiterated this position in a letter to the court advisers to Lat Dior, in which he also included the following quote originally attributed to Muhammad Ibn Maslama: “A cleric who seeks the favors of a king is like a fly feeding on excrement” (Ibid., 60).

<sup>54</sup>Babou, *Fighting the greater jihad*, 59–60.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 83.

others; only after attaining a high degree of knowledge and piety could they become sheikhs. All sheikhs are also disciples of Bamba and of God, so even the most venerated sheikh is simultaneously a submissive subject who cannot make a claim to total sovereignty. It is not surprising that many of Bamba's early disciples were of low social status, including former slaves and members of the lower castes, for the Muridiyya made a different kind of honorable life possible for subjects irrevocably dishonored in Wolof society, and it blurred the boundary between masterhood and discipleship.

For those who have had any degree of exposure to Muridism today, this early meritocratic orientation of the order might seem ironic. Even though Bamba's initial plans for the new order were not particularly Wolof—indeed, it is more accurate to classify them as anti-Wolof—the colonial and Wolof cultural context in which the tariqa developed resulted in a series of significant shifts in Murid practice. Bamba's long absences from the hands-on management of the tariqa during his lifetime—years of exile, imprisonment, and house arrest—meant he could not always keep the first group of sheikhs oriented on the path he had set out. Both sheikhs and disciples interpreted his teachings in their own ways, sometimes yielding sheikh-disciple relationships that resembled the patron-client arrangements of the Wolof social order. The trials to which he was subjected by the French also had the effect of transforming him into a sainted martyr, which attracted followers who may not have joined the order otherwise. These trials, along with the miracles Bamba allegedly performed during them, became the stuff of a mythologized hagiography that some argue resulted in a decidedly unIslamic blurring of the distinction between sheikh and idol.

When the French realized their attempt to weaken Bamba's influence by sequestering him had the opposite effect, they changed course and adopted a strategy of accommodation. The French saw an opportunity in the Murid sheikhs' ability to command large numbers of disciples who cultivated crops as part of their pious service, and they co-opted the system of devotional labor for the production of the primary cashcrop, groundnuts. Sheikhs then served as middlemen in the groundnut economy, selling the groundnuts cultivated by disciples to French buyers and receiving cash and state protection in return.<sup>56</sup> This revenue was both appropriated by the sheikhs and reinvested into the Murid community, to varying degrees. On the one hand, this partnership between the French and the sheikhs allowed Muridism to flourish without a great deal of direct French intervention; on the other, it fundamentally transformed the order into a corporation that had a vested economic interest in reproducing disciples' submission. While in Bamba's educational model, the disciple's total submission to the sheikh would ideally be replaced by sheikhhood once the former reached an advanced state of piety and knowledge, the Murid groundnut economy required a stable cohort of submissive laborers, thus fixing the disciple within a laboring relationship that had initially been conceived as part of a flexible economy of piety, not of cash.

Hierarchy within the Muridiyya was further codified after Bamba's death, when it was decided that leadership of the order would be accorded to Bamba's male next-of-kin.

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<sup>56</sup>Jean Copans, *Les marabouts de l'arachide : la Confrérie mouride et les paysans du Sénégal* (Paris: Le Sycamore, 1980).

The Murid caliphate took on a pyramid structure, with the head caliph functioning as sovereign leader to whom all Murids, including lesser sheikhs, pledged their allegiance; a disciple of a lesser sheikh would therefore be considered a disciple of both of that sheikh, with whom he has a direct relationship, and of the head caliph.<sup>57</sup> In an important victory of the principles of the Wolof aristocratic order over those of the pious meritocracy, status in the hierarchy of command, and the amount of *baraka* (divine grace) one is seen to possess, became determined not by one's degree of piety, asceticism, and knowledge, but rather by one's placement in Bamba's lineage.<sup>58</sup>

This conferral of status based on the order of succession has become a point of contention in the present, not only because the proliferation of Bamba's descendents, and therefore claims to sheikhly command, has made the hierarchy less discernible. Today, sheikhs have become members of a new media-generated elite comprised of CEOs of companies, politicians, pop stars, and famous griots. The public displays of wealth, style and generosity that produce elite status in a neo-Wolof mode are hardly in keeping with Sufi asceticism; indeed, Bamba's garb, consisting of a simple white tunic and scarf, continues to serve as the visible manifestation of his ascetic piety in his many pictorial representations.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the "people" magazines circulating in Senegal celebrate the elegant sartorial style of certain sheikhs, and feature the new ostentatious SUVs of others. The popular press has a particular obsession with controversial figure Cheikh Bethio Thioune, a well-heeled, well-fed sheikh condemned by many for his departure from the legitimate orthodoxies of both Muridism and international Islam. Thioune throws sumptuous parties for his disciples at his home in Dakar, officiating at mass wedding ceremonies in which the standard Muslim vows are replaced by multiple recitations of the name of Serigne Saliou Mbacke, the now-deceased head caliph who was Thioune's patron. Although Thioune is an extreme example, to belong to the Muridiyya today is not only to belong to a religious community, but to be attached to a patron whose caché may be derived both from his divine *baraka* and his worldly aura conferred by wealth, command of a large number of clients, and membership in a sequined elite. It is also to benefit from membership in a lucrative transnational corporation whose tight network and submissive workers generate significant income, income which is funneled to the sheikhs and redistributed to the larger community via direct support to disciples and infrastructural projects in Touba, the Murid capital.

Regardless of these historical shifts, many continue to adhere to a more ascetic and pious version of Muridism. To this day, there are sons of middle class Dakarais who forego urban comfort for a life of deprivation and toil in the fields of Khelcom, a large agricultural area owned by the Muridiyya. There are Murid schools that emphasize not only the tarbiyya tradition, but also the internationally-oriented scholarly tradition of which Bamba was proponent and participant. In the postcolonial period, some prominent sheikhs have revived the tradition of "speaking truth to power," although their frequent

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<sup>57</sup>Babou, *Fighting the greater jihad*, 98.

<sup>58</sup>Diouf also argues that it mimics the hierarchical structure of colonial command in Diouf, "The Senegalese Murid Trade Diaspora and the Making of a Vernacular Cosmopolitanism," 686.

<sup>59</sup>Roberts, *A saint in the city*.

and intimate involvement in politics hardly resembles the alternative, politically neutral sphere Bamba had attempted to carve out.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, the imbrication of caliphal command with postcolonial political power has become another contentious divergence from Bamba's original vision. Sheikhs often stage symbolic confrontations with the state that produce the illusion that they operate in a separate and independent sphere, but that are in actuality a way to gain concessions from the state and to consolidate their influence in a complex power matrix that includes the state. Head caliphs have notoriously issued *ndigal* to their disciples to vote for a specific presidential candidate in obvious violation of Bamba's principles.<sup>61</sup> In a heavy blow to civil society activism committed to the preservation and enhancement of state secularism in Senegal, the current president, Abdoulaye Wade, performed a highly publicized *njébbal* in which he pledged his allegiance to Serigne Saliou. In theory, if the disciple is expected to submit fully to the sheikh, and the disciple in question is the president of the republic, then it is the head caliph who is the de facto head of state. In reality, though, this pledge of allegiance was little more than a strategic performance of submission; Wade has proven to be a capricious, senile gerontocrat having little regard for anyone's counsel. Nevertheless, this symbolic gesture is an indication of the influence of the Muridiyya in contemporary Senegal and of the high regard in which many held (and continue to hold in memoriam) the recently-deceased head caliph, Serigne Saliou.

The figure of Serigne Saliou perhaps best embodies the cohabitation of ascetic piety, noble Wolof honor, and strategic worldliness that characterizes the current syncretic ideal of sheikhly exceptionalism. Considered to be the closest in character to the founder of the order, some even put forth the controversial claim he was inhabited by Bamba's spirit.<sup>62</sup> The elegy written by Ndiouga Sakho<sup>63</sup> and published in the state-run newspaper *Le Soleil* enumerates the qualities possessed by Serigne Saliou, virtues reiterated in his disciples' countless praise-songs and speeches:

Sa vaste culture et son érudition exceptionnelles, sa grande générosité et son humanisme universel, ses actions inégalées à l'image de Khelcom et des grands travaux de Touba, son humilité et sa discrétion, sa sobriété et son esprit d'ouverture (qui recevait tous et toutes sans discrimination y compris des chefs d'Etat de puissants pays venues nuitamment chercher sa bénédiction); surpassant tous, par sa grande générosité et son rejet de la médisance! Son regard profond sondait tous les cœurs et il savait traiter tout homme. Toute sa vie fut conforme à la Sunna prophétique, chez cet éducateur hors pair, soucieux de ce que, seule, l'éducation pouvait être le

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<sup>60</sup>Donal Cruise O'Brien, *Symbolic confrontations: Muslims imagining the state in Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Serigne Bethio is the most prominent proponent of this theory. There is no scriptural validation of reincarnation in Islam, but the popular Murid belief in Bamba's miraculous powers, intensified by Sufi mysticism, makes this exceptional case of transsubstantiation possible.

<sup>63</sup> Ndiouga Sakho is President Wade's nephew and CEO of SAPCO, a company that manages the development of the lucrative tourism industry on Senegal's coast. His praise of Serigne Saliou, then, can be seen as a telling artifact of the contemporary entanglement of economic, political, and spiritual interests.

socle sur lequel reposent, les étapes de l'Accomplissement pour l'Homme dans ce bas Monde et pour l'Au-delà.

Quel magistère d'un Khalife a pu connaître l'allégeance spirituelle d'un chef d'Etat? S'est distingué dans l'unanimité autour de sa personne de tous y compris des gens de religion différente? A accordé autant d'allocation de ressources aux "daaras" et autres nécessiteux? A consacré toute sa vie au "Khidmatoul khadim" au service exclusive d'Allah—swt—et du Très Saint Envoyé, Mouhamed—Psl—le Meilleur des hommes? Toutes les grandeurs et vertus furent réunies chez ce saint homme qui, pourtant, ne connaissait aucune vanité. Détourné des futilités de la vie, il était toujours sobrement habillé, frugal dans ses repas, parlant peu, chapelet à la main, consacrant entièrement ses journées à lire le Saint Coran et à demander pardon à Dieu—swt—pour toute l'humanité! [...] [II a] accomplit sa mission de digne successeur de Khadimou Rassol [sic; a sobriquet for Bamba]...[il] fut assurément un homme d'exception!<sup>64</sup>

This account of Serigne Saliou's exceptional virtue contains some elements we might attribute to Bamba, such as his erudition, commitment to education, frugality, and ascetic appearance. Other elements, like his discretion, generosity, and restraint (both verbal and cibational), are recognizable as components of the noble Wolof code of honor, albeit ones that are not easily disentangled from their counterparts in international Islamic traditions. Interestingly, the very quality that was controversial in Bamba—the one that enabled him to break with the Wolof establishment, partially circumvent French authority, and stage a successful non-violent jihad—is absent in the description. The image of Bamba that emerges in Cheikh Babou's biography is not of an indiscriminately generous, quiet, and accepting sheikh, but rather of a highly principled, rigorous, outspoken jihadist. It is difficult to envision Bamba receiving and blessing heads of state, many of whom are corrupt, in the same way Saliou did. Conversely, it is hard to imagine Serigne Saliou publically denouncing Wade, or making a statement that qualified the sheikh-disciple relationship to which Wade submitted, one that would categorically distance the caliph from the state.

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The difference between Bamba and Saliou—subjects who some purport are literally interchangeable—points to an unruly heterogeneity within "the Murid subject." Historical and cultural context, along with the crystallization of hierarchies within the Muridiyya, have produced different Murid subject positions—not to mention that real Murid individuals live complex lives that cannot be fully captured within those positions.<sup>65</sup> The ethnographic chronicling of this heterogeneity has been the aim of some recent scholarship. This scholarship has emphasized the proliferation of different kinds of Murid practices, divergent trajectories taken by different sheikhs, and varying degrees of

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<sup>64</sup>Ndiouga Sakho, "SERIGNE SALIOU, UN HOMME D'EXCEPTION", n.d., [http://www.xibar.net/SERIGNE-SALIOU-UN-HOMME-D-EXCEPTION\\_a7793.html](http://www.xibar.net/SERIGNE-SALIOU-UN-HOMME-D-EXCEPTION_a7793.html).

<sup>65</sup>Beth Buggenhagen, "Beyond Brotherhood" in Mamadou Diouf, *New perspectives on Islam in Senegal: conversion, migration, wealth, power, and femininity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 201.

submission among disciples, including a selective adherence to *ndigal*.<sup>66</sup> Scholarly attention has also been turned to ideological tensions between those who are committed to continuing Bamba's legacy of text-based Islamic education (and therefore are connected to a more "universal" Islam) and those who have embraced the legacy of Ibra Fall, Bamba's most famous and fervent disciple who legitimized the replacement of prayers and fasting with servile labor.<sup>67</sup>

In spite of this undeniable heterogeneity within the Muridiyya, it is the invocation of the normative disciple-subject of the *tarbiyya* relationship that has been put into the service of Mamadou Diouf's scholarly intervention into the field of African Diaspora Studies.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, Diouf's account of the success of the Murid diaspora within global circuits of capital relies on the interchangeability of Murid disciple-subjects for its coherence. His Murid subject fuels the order's accumulation of capital through his submission to a sheikh and his willingness to live a frugal and disciplined life; his impetus is not his desire to accumulate wealth for himself—a motivation that would be intelligible within a capitalist account of agency—but rather the conquering of his *nafs* through discipline and service to the sheikh and to the community as a whole. In the wake of the decline of the groundnut trade, the Murid immigrant is dispatched around the world and inserted into new environments and economic roles by the tariqa's network, but his spiritual and cultural compass remains pointed toward the holy city of Touba.

Diouf proposes that this transnational Murid formation is an "alternative modernity," a global culture that is enabled by modernity yet ordered according to a different logic than that of dominant Western modernity. As a form of modernity, it is not atavistic, but fully of the present and historically entangled with other *durées* or temporalities. Diouf's "cosmopolitan vernacular" differs from Paul Gilroy's "counterculture of modernity," a transnational black Atlantic culture formed through and against Western modernity's abjection of the black subject.<sup>69</sup> The black countermodern subject's striving toward freedom is made intelligible through the Enlightenment ideal of the autonomous subject, even though his access to the agency of the free subject is continually thwarted. The Murid subject, on the other hand, is not striving for autonomy, but for perfect submission to God through submission to the sheikh. The Murid self is realized through its willful cleaving to a discipline dictated by an external superior power, not by casting off the external shackles that prevent an underlying, fully-present self from directing its own actions.

According to Diouf, rather than resulting in the syncretism Gilroy privileges, the Murid's diasporic movement only serves to intensify his faith and attachment to Murid culture. Indeed, that movement can be modeled on Bamba's own exile to Gabon and

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<sup>66</sup>Leonardo Villalón, *Islamic society and state power in Senegal : disciples and citizens in Fatick* (Cambridge;New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>67</sup>Diouf, "The Senegalese Murid Trade Diaspora and the Making of a Vernacular Cosmopolitanism," 700–01.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Paul Gilroy, *The black Atlantic : modernity and double consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). Diouf more explicitly references a similar position in Manthia Diawara, *In search of Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).



Mauritania at the hands of the French. It is during his forced travels that Bamba allegedly performed his most spectacular miracles—such as spreading his prayer mat on the surface of the water when the French refused to let him pray on the ship—and reached the final stage of enlightenment. In Bamba’s version of the story of his exile, the French are completely evacuated of independent agency, serving as mere vessels through which God tests and challenges him so that he can reach new levels of piety and faith. If all suffering, adversity and hardship is sent by God (divine challenges called *nattu* in Wolof), and is therefore an opportunity for self-discipline and spiritual growth, then colonial and white supremacist oppression does not suppress or destroy the Murid self—as in the account of colonial alienation so ubiquitous in Francophone literature—but rather unintentionally enables its production.

The normative disciple-subject invoked by Diouf is male, as are the majority of the sheikh and disciple subjects discussed in the social science, political science, and historiographic literature on the Muridiyya. Murid agency tends to be located in male disciples and sheikhs; women are not visible as political agents in the political science literature—they are “passive” Murids—and their presence in historical archives is limited.<sup>70</sup> Given Murid women’s current prominence as dahira members, international traders, and popular cultural icons,<sup>71</sup> some have sought to correct the foreclosure of the female Murid subject in the scholarly literature through the ethnographic chronicling of various forms of Murid women’s pious engagement, thus investing the Murid female subject with a previously unacknowledged agency. Christian Coulon examines the rare case of Sokhna Magat Diop, a female sheikh with her own disciples, an example that he views as an indicator of the Sufi order’s flexibility and potential for providing a framework for the flourishing of Muslim female religious authority and *baraka*.<sup>72</sup> Eva Rosander’s research on the dahira of Mame Diarra Bousso, a woman-dominated organization devoted to the veneration of Bamba’s mother, reveals how women have creatively interpreted the Murid tradition so as to center the exceptional pious female subject. Without virtuous Mame Diarra’s role in the production of the saint via biological reproduction and the transmission of honorable qualities from mother to child, there would be no Bamba.<sup>73</sup> In another vein, Beth Buggenhagen has shown how the Murid diasporic economy, coupled with crisis at home, has enabled marriage practices in which the exchange of persons and wealth empowers senior women and junior men while disempowering senior men and junior women.<sup>74</sup> The existence of this latter formation—while not, I would argue, specific to Murids only—obliges us to nuance our perception of gender hierarchy, attending to the heterogeneous subject positions produced by the

<sup>70</sup>Eva Evers Rosander, “Mam Diarra Bousso - the Mourid Mother of Porokhane, Senegal,” *JENdA: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies* 0:4 (2009): 1, <http://www.africaknowledgeproject.org/index.php/jenda/article/viewArticle/82>.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid. ; Buggenhagen, “Beyond Brotherhood.”

<sup>72</sup>Christian Coulon, *L’islam au féminin-- Sokhna Magat Diop, cheikh de la confrérie mouride, Sénégal* (Talence France: Centre d’étude d’Afrique noire Institut d’études politiques de Bordeaux, 1990).

<sup>73</sup>Rosander, “Mam Diarra Bousso - the Mourid Mother of Porokhane, Senegal.” and “Le dahira de Mam Diarra Bousso a Mbacke” in Rosander, *Transforming female identities*, 160–73.

<sup>74</sup>Beth Buggenhagen, “Domestic Object(ions)” in Brad Weiss, *Producing African futures: ritual and reproduction in a neoliberal age* (Leiden;Boston, Brill 2004).

overlapping of different hierarchies within historically specific regimes of production and circulation.

These anthropological studies are revealing and necessary, but do they, in the last instance, solve the problem of the foreclosure of the female Murid subject in dominant accounts of Murid agency? If Murid women's participation in the order is so dynamic and important, why must interventions such as Diouf's continue to rely on the normative male subject for their coherence? Indeed, if Diouf had taken the female Murid subject as the paradigmatic subject of the Murid diaspora, would he have been able to celebrate the success of this alternative, vernacular cosmopolitanism and critique the universalization of the alienated black subject in African Diaspora Studies in the same way? Is the female Murid subject interchangeable with the male subject, and does she possess the same capacity for agentive pious submission as her male counterpart?

The answer, I believe, is to be found at the limits of history and anthropology. If Murid women rarely appear in the historical archive—an absence reproduced in historians' accounts—it is questionable that ethnographic research in the present can reverse that archival absence. Anthropological studies of current practices cannot stand in for evidence of female consciousness in the past without falling into an essentialist trap that sees consciousness (or “Murid women's culture”)<sup>75</sup> as unchanging over time, thus denying Murid women their historicity. This denial of historicity would reproduce the coloniality of anthropological knowledge on Africa, where representations of static, bounded cultures serve as proof that Africa is trapped in a premodern era and thus cannot make a claim to coeval existence (and therefore equal status) with the West.<sup>76</sup> Instead of attempting a problematic retrieval of consciousness, I propose instead that we investigate the logic of that historical elision. Historian Cheikh Babou, in his otherwise highly detailed account of Bamba's life and founding of the Muridiyya, acknowledges the paucity of information in his book on the saint's relationship with his wives and children, leaving a gaping lacuna in our understanding of the people closest to him and their possible influence on his thought and praxis. The reason for this dearth of detail is *sutura*: Babou writes, “in the tradition of Muslim conceptions of privacy, any information concerning his relations with his wives and offspring was and is considered taboo.”<sup>77</sup>

*Sutura* has structured the archive in advance, rendering unspeakable and unknowable the subjectivity of even the most elite Murid women of Bamba's time, not to mention that of the peasant women we would be quick to classify as subaltern. If this policy of non-disclosure remains in effect today, as the Cissokho affair would suggest, then it would also thwart contemporary anthropological attempts to access certain spheres of Murid women's lives. In the Wolofized Murid code of conduct, both men and women should be concerned to enhance their own *sutura* and cover others with *sutura*, and one could argue that part of Bamba's subjectivity is not available to us because of his own self-censorship which kept his familial life out of view. However, we have already seen how Bamba was able to publicly transgress *sutura* and *kersa* at his father's funeral in the

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<sup>75</sup>This is the effect of Buggenhagen's critique of Cruise O'Brien in “Beyond Brotherhood,” 193-94.

<sup>76</sup>Johannes Fabian, *Time and the other: how anthropology makes its object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

<sup>77</sup>Babou, *Fighting the greater jihad*, 57.

name of his holy struggle, thus turning what would have been Wolof death into Murid life. Ultimately, this outspoken defiance enhanced his sheikhhood rather than diminished it. Serigne Bara also broke with the code of restrained behavior when he allegedly attacked the Weekend journalist who interviewed his wife. As the head caliph of the Muridiyya, his unseemly violation of the code was without consequences, although many noted the significant divergence in character between Serigne Saliou and his successor.

The Cissokho affair indicates that the agentive violation of *sutura* becomes politically meaningful within specific relations of subordination. Covering the sheikh with *sutura* is a core component of the disciple's pious submission; as with *sutura*'s role in the production of hierarchical relationships in the Wolof social structure, the blanketing of the sheikh's private life with discretion is one of the practices through which the sheikh's superiority is reiterated. A sheikh's wife has an obligation to uphold the sheikh's *sutura* both as a disciple and as a wife, since *sutura* as a mandatory form of wifely submission is central to the generalized reproduction of hierarchy in the marital order. Popular Murid tradition enshrines ideal wifely submission in the hagiographic representation of Mame Diarra Bousso, Bamba's mother, who is presented as the model for all Murid women. The Wolof virtue of *muñ* (patience, quiet perseverance in the face of hardship) and the total disciple-like submission to her husband are welded in the apochryphal story of her night spent holding open the compound gate in the pouring rain because her husband had neglected to order her to shut it and come inside. Her exemplary *sutura* is evidenced in the accounts of the secret methods she deployed to feed her family so that her husband's inability to do so would not be exposed, an exposure that risked dishonoring him. It is thanks to these feminized virtues, the tradition posits, that God chose Mame Diarra to be the mother of the saint.<sup>78</sup>

If to violate wifely *sutura* is not only to violate a social pact, but to break with feminized Murid piety, then the stakes of disclosure are high indeed. The Cissokho affair points to the entanglement of *sutura* with questions of representation and narration, for here the willfully indiscrete subject is the one who turns private knowledge into public knowledge through unauthorized narration. *Sutura* has contributed to the subalternity of Murid female subject in the historiographic literature through its injunction against narration. Indeed, even though Mame Diarra is the sheikh's mother, not his wife, and therefore must play an important role in popular hagiography as generative mother and model of pious femininity, historians have not been able to corroborate the hagiographic myths with evidence from the available archives (including French colonial archives, oral histories, and written Murid archives in Wolofal and Arabic). They are able to offer only the sparsest of details about Mame Diarra's life.<sup>79</sup>

The subalternity I am associating with *sutura* indexes a specific relation to representation produced by the terms of representability. The subaltern subject is not invested with the capacity for intelligible self-representation within dominant

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<sup>78</sup>Rosander, "Mam Diarra Bousso - the Mourid Mother of Porokhane, Senegal," 7. Codou Bop, "Roles and the Position of Women in Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73: 4 (2005): 1114; Roberts, *A saint in the city*, 156–58.

<sup>79</sup>Rosander, "Mam Diarra Bousso - the Mourid Mother of Porokhane, Senegal," 5. Babou, *Fighting the greater jihad*.

representational regimes—she is outside the hegemonic formation—and therefore only appears as a trace in someone else’s story and someone else’s politics. Since it is the very terms of representability that renders her subaltern in the first place, she cannot be unproblematically written back into representation as a fully-present speaking subject once the scholar has collected enough subject-effects to string together into an account of consciousness. Nevertheless, subalternity is not fixed, but relational: Mamadou Diouf, Cheikh Babou, and John Glover<sup>80</sup> counter dominant historiography’s subalternization of Murid subjects—where the Murid disciple is the subaltern of the Gallocentric story of colonization, of elite nationalist Senegalese historiography, and of the prevailing account of globalization—by centering the Murid archive, thereby bringing into view previously unacknowledged life worlds and forms of historical agency. In so doing, however, they produce another subaltern, for *sutura* (and the broader gendering of pious agency) subalternizes the female subject in the Murid archive.

Since the subaltern subject is a location in discourse, and a person can be situated within multiple intersecting discourses, is it possible for Sophie Ndiaye Cissokho to be both subaltern subject and elite politician subject simultaneously? As a politician, she has the capacity to represent herself on the public stage and be heard by both the general population of Senegal and the international community. She has been active in the PDS for decades, and, ironically, her involvement in gender parity struggles in the Senegalese political arena has earned her international attention. This gender parity activism—which has gained at least lip-service legitimacy in Wade’s government—makes her a representative of a group previously subaltern to postcolonial politics, “Senegalese women.” However, the enforcement of *sutura* effectively subalternizes part of her subjectivity; it renders unspeakable and unknowable a great part of her experience. When she is occupying the subject position of politician, we could not call her subaltern; when occupying the subject position of wife of head caliph, however, she would appear to occupy a subject position that resembles that of the subaltern. As wife of a sheikh, she cannot be an agent of disclosure; indeed, as soon as she commits her public transgression, she is forcibly removed from that subject position when Serigne Bara divorces her. Her disclosure results in the death of her wifely subjecthood, but this death may not be total death for Cissokho, as she has access to other privileged subject positions.

The paradoxical split subjectivity to which the Cissokho affair points has been explored to some extent by feminist philosopher Aminata Diaw. Diaw suggests that the increased visibility of women on the political, economic, and cultural stage in Senegal is in fact not a fully transformative presence, but rather a paradoxical “presence/absence.”<sup>81</sup> Women have been mobilized in large numbers as party supporters, yet those who have reached the upper echelons of political power are powerful not because they are representing “women’s interests,” but rather because they have successfully conformed to party agendas and played the political game. Representation that would be a game-

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<sup>80</sup>John Glover, “Murid Modernity” in Diouf, *New perspectives on Islam in Senegal conversion, migration, wealth, power, and femininity*..

<sup>81</sup>Aminata Diaw, “Les femmes à l’épreuve du politique: permanences et changements” in Momar Diop, *Gouverner le Sénégal : entre ajustement structurel et développement durable* (Paris: Karthala, 2004), 229–45.

changer—the kind that would advocate women’s interests, thereby effecting change in the social construction of gender, the masculinist political imaginary, and women’s everyday lives—has not been sufficiently enabled by the formal political arena. Norms like *sutura* continue to determine what can and cannot be said, what can and cannot be articulated as political agenda. Diaw argues that women are still constrained to perform submission to husbands and fathers in spite of their increased economic and political power, and the observance of *sutura* is an important modality of that performance. While she credits feminist activism outside of party structures for bringing these issues into public discourse, Diaw does not acknowledge the blow that the injunction against disclosure has received in the sphere of popular cultural representation in recent years. Indeed, it is precisely because of the current instability of this norm that Cissokho felt comfortable in the first place revealing her intimate thoughts to a popular magazine that makes its money on its promise to tell all, a decision that would have been unthinkable prior to the advent of the new regime of exposure.

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If intention and willfulness in submission must be ascertainable in order for us to ascribe a Mahmoodian pious agency to the Murid woman, then *sutura* brings us to an impasse. Indeed, if she is located within the pious relation between wife and husband-sheikh, how can we know if she experiences submission as choice or compulsion, considering that that experience is part of the protected sphere of the husband-sheikh’s *sutura*, and that the virtuous wife-disciple must patiently endure hardship without complaint?

While, as I have already shown, the radical abnegation of the self in the second stage of Murid submission renders the normative male subject’s agency more ambiguous than that of the Mahmoodian reformist subject, the normative female Murid subject’s agency is even more ambiguous due to the gendering of the core practices of submission. According to the sociological literature and dominant Murid discourse, women do not perform the *njébbal*, the ceremony in which the disciple pledges his devotion to a particular sheikh.<sup>82</sup> Rather, they are expected to submit to the sheikh of their father or husband, but only indirectly.<sup>83</sup> Since the disciple-husband is the intermediary between the wife and the sheikh, much as the sheikh is the intermediary between the disciple and God, the disciple-husband takes on a sheikhly status in the domestic sphere, thereby turning the husband-wife hierarchy into a relation of pious submission. An oft-reiterated popular belief, unsubstantiated by the Quran, states that the wife’s total submission to her husband will ensure her admittance into Paradise,<sup>84</sup> even if she does not consistently fulfill the standard Muslim obligations of praying, fasting, and Quranic study.

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<sup>82</sup>Penda Mbow, “Les femmes, l’Islam et les associations religieuses au Senegal,” 148-59 and Rosander, “Le dahira” in Rosander, *Transforming female identities*.

<sup>83</sup> Cruise O’Brien, *The Mourides of Senegal*, 85–6. While this is certainly an oft-reiterated rule, it is no longer set in stone in practice in contemporary urban Senegal. There has been a significant recruitment of young disciples, including unmarried young women, by charismatic non-traditional sheikhs in recent years. There is also an additive practice that does not find having multiple sheikhs problematic; a couple could pay their respects to the sheikhs of both wife and husband, regardless of tariqa affiliation.

<sup>84</sup>Gueye, “Ode to Patriarchy.”

In keeping with this compulsory logic, a woman who is not Murid and marries a Murid man is seen to automatically become Murid upon her marriage, his sheikh becoming her sheikh regardless of her prior affiliation with a sheikh of a different Sufi order.<sup>85</sup> There seems to be little discussion of the fact that this practice is in marked contradistinction with the norms of conversion in Islam. (In Wolof, the word *tuub* can be used to refer to both conversion to Islam and conversion of a non-Murid Muslim to Muridism.) A non-Muslim woman who marries a Muslim man does not become a Muslim unless she converts to Islam, and her conversion is valid only if she truly intends to submit to God. The Quran establishes an ontological equality between male and female believers in the eyes of God, which makes a woman's submission to God equivalent to that of a man. In the Quranic ethical order, selves are not hierarchized along the lines of corporeal or social difference, but rather by degree of piety and knowledge,<sup>86</sup> a view that Bamba himself espoused at the turn of the century.

This mandatory submission is further compounded by the female Murid subject's capacity to be trafficked in the economy of pious gift-giving. In this pious economy, the adult Murid man gives gifts called *hadiyya* to his sheikh as an instantiation of his love for and devotion to him, as well as of his general willingness to commit sacrifices and his ascetic non-attachment to worldly possessions. This gift-giving practice directs the flow of wealth from disciple to sheikh, and the disciple receives protection, assistance, and knowledge from the sheikh in return—in addition, of course, to the accrual of spiritual favor and *baraka*.<sup>87</sup> Included in the list of possible pious gifts is the disciple's daughter, whom the sheikh can then marry or keep in his house as a servant or concubine. Adult men are the agents and recipients in this gift-giving relationship, but they themselves cannot be given as a gift by another; only women and children can be exchanged.<sup>88</sup> Granted, in the pledge of submission, the adult male subject also transfers his rights in his

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<sup>85</sup>Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village*.

<sup>86</sup>Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and woman: rereading the sacred text from a woman's perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>87</sup>Babou, *Fighting the greater jihad*, 93–94.

<sup>88</sup> There is a long-standing practice in which parents give their male children to sheikhs for religious education and character forging. Called *taalibe*, these boys have become a cause célèbre in national and international human rights circles. They roam around Dakar in pairs or groups begging for alms, and are the primary conduits of value in a *sarax* economy driven by divination practices. Seers and sheikhs of all sorts recommend a specific set of alms (*sarax*) that correspond to a person's concerns, and the *taalibe* accept the alms and offer a prayer on the giver's behalf. The boys are obliged to bring back a minimum sum to the sheikh every evening, and there are tales of brutal beatings and deprivations that result from non-compliance with the sheikh's demands, which the sheikh justifies by the sacrifice he makes to house and educate the boys. In the ascetic Sufi view, hardship, deprivation and submission are fundamental to the conquering of one's *nafs* and the forging of a better person. However, many would argue that the *taalibe* phenomenon in contemporary Dakar produces the opposite effect: the boys are little more than urban street children who are so busy begging that they have little time for Quranic education. Many of them work the system to their own material advantage, bringing the minimum to the sheikh and hoarding the rest, sometimes purchasing luxury items like MP3 players and sneakers with their stash. Dakarais bemoan their aggressiveness, rudeness, and general lack of piety. Donna L. Perry, "Muslim Child Disciples, Global Civil Society, and Children's Rights in Senegal: The Discourses of Strategic Structuralism," *Anthropological Quarterly* 77:1 (2004): 47-86.

own person to the sheikh, but that act is figured as a voluntary abnegation. The adult male subject possesses the right to voluntarily submit to the sheikh of his choosing—to offer himself up as a pious gift, as it were—but even the adult female subject possesses no equivalent right. Indeed, according to a Murid sheikh interviewed by Donal Cruise O’Brien in the nineteen-sixties, “women have the same rights as children.”<sup>89</sup>

While an analysis of these structural constraints on women’s submission allows us to provide one kind of account of the gendered Murid subject, our desire to know the Murid woman by accessing her voice is confounded. If for the normative female Murid subject, piety is mediated by the domestic, and the domestic must be shrouded by *sutura*, then a full account of her piety is inaccessible. If this mediation invests the male disciple with sheikhly command over his wives and children, then the sheikh’s wife, while elite, can be viewed as the paradigmatic limit case which brings the gendered politics of pious submission into the starkest relief.

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Ken Bugul’s *Riwan, ou le chemin de sable* is the only extensive exploration of this paradigmatic figure. Her text attempts to circumvent the ban on disclosure by narrating the experience of a diasporic subject who, after years of international pègrination, becomes the 28<sup>th</sup> wife of her hometown’s sheikh. This narrator brings the reader into the cloistered world of the sheikh’s compound, and shares the inner thoughts of the other wives as she imagines them. As the last installment in a trilogy of autobiographical novels that also includes *Le Baobab fou*<sup>90</sup> and *Cendres et braises*,<sup>91</sup> the text could claim a certain ethnographic authenticity due to its obvious overlap with the author’s life. While the publisher identifies the three books simply as novels, Bugul has been candid about their autobiographical content, thus revealing tensions around the classification of these texts (and the use of a *nom de plume*) that have been generated by the *sutura* imperative. When Bugul submitted *Le Baobab fou* to the publisher in the early eighties—a text which unreservedly details the author’s alienated dissipation against the backdrop of the European sexual revolution of the 1960s—it was deemed too scandalous, both to be advertised as the story of a real Senegalese woman and to be attributed directly to her. Her publisher insisted that she use a *nom de plume* (her real name is Mariétou Mbaye), and she chose “kenn bëggul,” a Wolof expression which means “wanted by no one.” This pen name was a clever choice, as it enabled her to turn a constraint into a two-pronged critique. The name can be construed as a direct reference to the experience of dislocation and loss of legible personhood narrated in her text, as well as to the undesirability of a woman writer who would disclose such a scandalous personal history.<sup>92</sup> But the pen name also has another function: it inserts her into a Wolof tradition of intentional misnaming, in which a woman whose previous children have succumbed to an early death tricks the evil spirits into thinking that her newborn is undesirable by

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<sup>89</sup>Cruise O’Brien, *The Mourides of Senegal*, 86.

<sup>90</sup>Ken Bugul, *Le baobab fou* (Dakar: Nouvelles Editions africaines, 1984).

<sup>91</sup>Ken Bugul, *Cendres et braises* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994).

<sup>92</sup>Ayo Coly, *The pull of postcolonial nationhood : gender and migration in francophone African literatures* (Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books, 2010), 4.

calling her “kenn bëggul” (or something similar).<sup>93</sup> The unflattering name is therefore a strategic method of protection, a way of covering the beloved newborn with *sutura* so that she will not be harmed.

Bugul’s strategic misnaming serves to protect the author and her text from death—a social death in the case of the former, and an editorial death in the case of the latter—but it also points to an indeterminacy that is infused throughout her work, and that is generated by the paradoxical nature of the autobiographical novel genre. Since an autobiographical novel can contain both fictional and non-fictional elements, it is difficult for the reader—who is in the subject position of the evil spirit who must rely on the mother’s verbal representation of the baby for the truth about the baby—to ascertain which parts are real and which are imagined.

On the one hand, the reader is called upon to recognize the vital importance of this indeterminacy, which can be employed in the service of protection or political intervention. The text can either emphasize its fictional status in order to protect the writer from death, or proclaim its anchoring in lived reality for the purposes of challenging the ordering of social and political power. As fiction, it is not obliged to reproduce “the effect of the real” to which news reporting, social scientific and historiographic writing, and classic autobiographies are bound<sup>94</sup>; it can imagine that for which there is no formal evidence, and that which cannot normally be revealed publicly. On the other hand, to be figured as the duped evil spirit is not a particularly comfortable position for the reader to be in, as she is obliged to constantly wonder if she is being played. While Bugul has claimed that she wants the trilogy to be recognized as autobiographical, the texts themselves repeatedly subvert the effect of truthfulness, thus precluding any autobiographical pact<sup>95</sup> that could be contracted between reader and author. The internal subversions in *Riwan, ou le chemin de sable* shock the reader into the realization that she has been manipulated, and that the consciousness of the sheikh’s wives to which she thought she had unfettered access is, in reality, a figment of the narrator’s imagination.

Indeed, the narrator repeatedly reveals her own unreliability, which then thwarts any unproblematized attempt to use the text as evidence of the consciousness of subaltern Murid women. The text makes visible the liberal feminist subject’s desire to invest the subaltern woman with a profeminist subjectivity, to mold the subaltern into a mirror image of her self, albeit an undeveloped version of her self that can only be fully realized once the shackles that constrain her are removed and she is free. At times, the narrator occupies this liberal feminist subject position, but at others, she is a Murid subject who chooses submission, a seemingly unreconcilable doubleness that contributes to the text’s pervasive schizophrenia. However, even when she is in the Murid subject position, she is not interchangeable with the other wives; as a middle-aged, Western-educated diasporic subject, she does not operate within the same set of constraints. This difference then serves to thwart the desire of even the Mahmoodian scholar-subject who, while

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<sup>93</sup>Lisa McNee, *Selfish gifts: Senegalese women’s autobiographical discourses* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 113.

<sup>94</sup>Spivak, *In other worlds.*, 241.

<sup>95</sup>Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).



provincializing the liberal feminist ideal, wants to see a particular kind of willful agency in pious submission but does not have enough evidence to make that case for the subaltern wife. Even in this no-holds-barred, revelatory autobiographical novel, the subaltern still cannot speak, and *sutura* maintains the upper hand.

The novel begins (and ends, as I will discuss later) with *sutura*'s ordering of the communal oral archive, a poetic and mysterious first act that produces a dramatic tension between that which is known and not known, revealed and concealed. News of an extraordinary occurrence in the Serigne's compound that has disrupted the tranquility of the rural town of Dianké emerges from an unknown origin ("il était impossible de savoir d'où avait surgi la parole") (9). Unidentified speakers haltingly and almost inaudibly ("murmurer quelques mots quasi inaudibles") begin to relay gossip about the event. We are told that those who are in possession of information have obtained it by indiscretion or chance, and only the brave dare to speak of the scandal, as to narrate it is to expose both the narrator and the sheikh: "En vérité la peur, la terrible peur de parler d'une chose qui devait être terrible et qui avait eu lieu chez le Serigne, le Grand Serigne, cette peur était tres forte."

Through free indirect discourse—again making it impossible to designate a specific speaker—we learn that in the memory of the townspeople, nothing like this scandal involving the Serigne had ever happened. That is, "presque jamais!" This "almost never" afterthought casts doubt on preserved communal memory, hinting at the possible white-washing of history for the purpose of enhancing both the honor of the religious elite and the community's self-image. The dialogue between two unidentified interlocutors that follows is a masterful rendering of a Wolof gossip session, where narrative confusion and imprecision abound. What we finally learn from one of the speakers—who ascribes a separate agency to her<sup>96</sup> mouth that does the revealing ("que ma bouche soit maudite de ce qu'elle répète") so as to figuratively displace her indiscretion—is that "Lady So-and-so" ("Sokhna Diw") an unnamed wife of the Serigne, had panicked and fled the compound after becoming involved with another man. Her parents' house, where she had allegedly taken refuge, went up in flames that same night, killing her and her family. The text then shifts from dialogue to a poetic third person description of the dramatic impact of the scandal on the community, a fallout that seems to result both from the event itself and the public discussion of the event that fully exposes it: "Les mains se refermèrent en poings sur les bouches. Les mouchoirs de tête devinrent des voiles... Soudain chacun s'en alla de son côté. Les chemins furent soudains désertés. Les salutations se firent plus brèves. Les devantures des maisons se vidèrent. La fontaine devint silencieuse. Les mots devinrent de brefs soupirs."<sup>97</sup> The shocked community veils and silences itself in an act of self-censorship, effectively emptying public space of all speech and activity and turning Dianke into a virtual ghost town.

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<sup>96</sup> As we are told at the beginning of the chapter that the setting is Dianké on market day, one might assume that the gossipers are women. However, the only tangible clue that suggests the speakers are women is the "headwraps became veils" line. Gossiping women are stock characters in the Wolof narrative tradition who provide crucial information, comment on the action, and judge the other characters' behavior according to the dominant ethical code.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

This scandalous event is not discussed again until the end of the novel, when we learn that the rogue character is in fact Rama, one of the Serigne's wives whose subjectivity is explored by the narrator in the body of the novel. In the opening chapter, the scant information about Rama and the event nevertheless includes an early assignation of consciousness; one of the speakers assumes Rama fled the Serigne's compound because she was "prise de panique surement." This detail is a harbinger of a tendency in the narrative to put thoughts into Rama's mind, thoughts to which neither the narrator nor the town gossips have access. Rama, the ultimate subaltern of the story, does not narrate her self; she is always-already talked about, judged, and, ultimately, effaced from the historical record.

While the novel begins with the communal rumor of the violation of the submissive relation that binds the wife-disciple to the Serigne, the second chapter—chronologically anterior to the market scene—explores the passage from rebellion to total submission through another striking figure, Riwan. The narrator, though she never names herself, is forced to acknowledge her presence in this chapter through the use of the first person in order to narrate her fascination with and curious desire for Riwan in his unruly, pre-submission incarnation.

Riwan makes his appearance outside the Serigne's compound, where the narrator is sitting with an incongruous book about women's history and feminist activism on her lap as she waits for an audience with the Serigne. He is described as an almost mythical creature, alternately subhuman and superhuman, but never human *tout court*. He is a "géant" that three men are trying to subdue ("maitriser"), but who are unsuccessful in spite of their superhuman efforts. He is not just a "fou," but a "fou fou," a "fou dangereux," a "déchainé enchainé"—all of which, in their hyperbolic logic, emphasize his seemingly insurmountable distance from normative social personhood. Both his hands and feet are in chains, his pants are torn, and his naked, powerful torso is glistening with sweat and covered with dust. His behavior recalls that of wild animals: "il tirait sur les chaines avec rage et soufflait tel un taureau blessé dans l'arène. Il rugissait comme un fauve mais jetait par moments des regards anxieux autour de lui" (13). Other healers have failed to restore him to sane personhood, and bringing him to Dianke to be cured by the Serigne is his handlers' last resort.

This scene positions the narrator as an observing and desiring subject, one who has signaled her difference from the assembled disciples by bringing a book about feminism—in English, no less—to the Serigne's compound. The desiring gaze of the cosmopolitan narrator directed at the chained man cannot help but disturb. It is precisely his wildness and inhuman power that the narrator finds attractive: "Le Fou était un bel homme, superbe même, comme si sa folie le rendait plus attirant. Son teint, perlé de sueur, brillait de mille feux sauvages [. . .] Debout, il était encore plus puissant et il me fascinait de plus en plus" (14). The crazy man, emptied of any recognizable human subjectivity, seems to embody the racial fetish, a wild yet enchained erotic object onto which fantasies of possession and danger can be projected. This racial fetishization is especially jarring given that the bearer of the gaze is not a white subject, but a black Senegalese woman. The narrator's description bears a discomfiting resemblance to the

Robert Mapplethorpe photos of black men critiqued by Kobena Mercer in Welcome to the Jungle, for both representations produce a confined, abjected black male body through their fixation on physical strength and the glistening surface of the skin, the primary marker of racial otherness.<sup>98</sup>

Unlike Mapplethorpe's photos, this novel falls short of exposing Riwan's sex, torn *pantalon bouffant* notwithstanding. However, there is a curious instance of phallic exposure in Bugul's first autobiographical novel, Le Baobab fou, which resonates directly with this passage. A twelve-year old Ken discovers the male sex—and her desire for it—in her aunt's house, which is occupied by tenants of all sorts:

Et parmi ces hommes, je découvris le sexe de l'homme. Un grand Toucouleur, beau comme les géants que les negriers embarquaient était toujours allongé à demi, accoudé sur un coussin. Habillé d'un pantalon bouffant, il s'installait dans la cour l'après-midi, quand le soleil passait de l'autre côté et s'arrangeait pour que son sexe passât par la fente du pantalon bouffant, gracieusement offert aux regards qui s'attardaient. Tel le mien. Au début cela m'amusait seulement et par la suite éveillait chez moi un désir très fort de le toucher, de la voir entièrement. (136)

While the Toucouleur in this passage is neither visibly crazy nor in chains, there are two points of convergence with Riwan worth noting. The first is that the bodies of the two characters are indecently exposed, only partially covered by the ubiquitous *pantalon bouffant*; and the second is the striking comparison in the second sentence, where the Toucouleur is "handsome like the giants the slave traders captured." Why, when admiring a handsome man, would she think of slavery? And why would she find the inhuman, exposed, chained Riwan particularly attractive?

In Le Baobab fou, the young Ken experiences a traumatizing form of racial alienation which develops throughout her childhood in Senegal and intensifies when she moves to Belgium in the 1960s. In a classic Fanonian bind, she ceases to be able to see herself through any lens other than that of the white gaze.<sup>99</sup> Shortly after she arrives in Belgium, she is shocked by her image in a mirror, a face she is loath to claim as her own:

La façade en miroir d'une vitrine me renvoya le reflet de mon visage. Je n'en crus pas mes yeux. Je me dis rapidement que ce visage ne m'appartenait pas: j'avais les yeux hors de moi, la peau brillante et noire, le visage terrifiant. J'étouffais à nouveau parce que ce regard-là, c'était mon regard [...] Comment ce visage pouvait-il m'appartenir? Je comprenais pourquoi la vendeuse m'avait dit qu'elle ne pouvait rien faire pour moi. Oui, j'étais une Noire, une étrangère. Je me touchais le menton, la joue pour mieux me rendre compte que cette couleur était à moi. (50)

She ends up a prostitute, deriving a superficial sense of power from her exploitation of whites' desire to possess an eroticized black object (172).<sup>100</sup> She is obliged to inhabit the

<sup>98</sup>Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the jungle : new positions in Black cultural studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>99</sup>Frantz Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*. (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Coly, *The pull of postcolonial nationhood*, 32.

<sup>100</sup>McNee, *Selfish gifts*, 116.

body assigned to her, for she has no means with which to resignify it, no positive alternative identity she could access. She could remove her body from active circulation in the colonial economy of desire, but that removal would not reverse her state of nothingness; constrained within the racist symbolic order as abject non-human, her only available choice is between two kinds of death. She evokes this complete corporeal alienation in her description of her last encounter with a John:

[j]e me déshabillai dans le même coin, afin d'offrir seul ce corps dont je n'avais plus aucune idée et qui émouvait tant ces Blancs qui ne m'acceptaient qu'à ces moments-là [...] Il était là devant moi, me regardant comme un objet inaccessible. Et ce corps noir, cette couleur qui prenait toute forme d'explosion de phénomènes aliénants, soutenus par des fantasmes non acceptés. La société avait créé des barrières pour la déchéance des rapports et à la décadence de tout ce qui était humain. (174-5)

There is, then, not only a convergence between the Toucouleur and Riwan, but between the narrator (in her earlier incarnation in *Le Baobab fou*) and Riwan as well. Her description of her image as “terrifying” and her emphasis on her “shiny black skin” contains echoes of the initial description of Riwan’s threatening physical power and glistening skin, and the degradation of her humanity mirrors his lack of recognizable humanity. Ken of *Le Baobab fou* and Riwan are also obviously connected through their *folie*, which in Ken’s case is linked to her alienation.<sup>101</sup> These similarities suggest that her desire for Riwan should not be read as prediscursive—a sort of primal response to a powerful animal physicality—but rather as structured by colonial discourse. Indeed, even though she has returned to Senegal, her gaze continues to be alienated, and she can only see Riwan’s body as she sees her own abject body.

This entrapment in the colonial symbolic is first unsettled during the narrator’s audience with the Serigne, which is also the moment of Riwan’s introduction to the latter. This encounter produces multiple vectors of affect-in-submission which do not follow the subjugating, unidirectional track of the colonial gaze. When Riwan is first brought into the room, the narrator makes the surprising assessment that the Fou and the Serigne resemble each other: “lui aussi il était imposant, aussi imposant que le Fou... Le Fou et le Serigne se ressemblaient”(21).<sup>102</sup> She compares the two men’s physical appearance: like Riwan, the Serigne is tall, but the direct physical resemblance ends there. The Serigne is older, has a slight paunch, wears starched, ample garments that are spread about him, and is enveloped by the scent of expensive cologne. Riwan, on the other hand is young, muscular, and in rags. Nevertheless, the narrator emphasizes again and again their similarity, suggesting that her cathexis to a physicality made legible by a racial regime of visibility is starting to give way to a new form of desire. Indeed, her fascination with

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<sup>101</sup>Coly, *The pull of postcolonial nationhood*, 25.

<sup>102</sup>Bamba's most famous disciple, Ibra Fall, was also referred to as a “fou” because of his immersive submission; see Cruise O'Brien, “Mourides” 144 and Charlotte Pezeril, “Histoire d’une stigmatisation paradoxale, entre islam, colonisation et « auto-étiquetage ». Les Baay Faal du Sénégal,” *Cahiers d'études africaines* 192 (2008) 791-814.

Riwan's physical power is equated with and then surpassed by her enthrallment to the Serigne's spiritual power.

Affect is not only directed from the narrator to Riwan and the Serigne, but also between the two men. While Riwan stands at the threshold of the room, both Riwan and the Serigne remain transfixed in each other's gaze; the narrator is still in the room, a curious observer. The Serigne then orders the men to unchain him, and Riwan continues to stare fixedly at the Serigne as they struggle to unshackle him (21). When the latter extends his hand to greet the newcomer and asks his name, Riwan (who heretofore has not been assigned a name by the narrator) makes his first human utterance, "Massamba." The Serigne excitedly exclaims: "Ha, toi, on te doit du respect! Tu portes le nom de Serigne Massamba et Serigne Massamba n'est pas n'importe qui pour moi. Tu es mon aîné, mon maître, mon guide" (22), and hastens to take care of him as if he were a distinguished guest. The other men are shocked at this reversal of hierarchy; the creature in chains is now heralded as the master and guide of the great Serigne. While absurd in the eyes of the handlers, who understand Muridism to be structured by strict, permanent hierarchies, the Serigne is engaging in an intelligible enactment of the Bambar pedagogical model in which the subject positions of sheikh and disciple are not fixed, but where every sheikh is also simultaneously a disciple of someone else. The present reversal is made possible by the fusion of Wolof beliefs with Sufism, for he who possesses the name of an elder is believed to take on the personality and virtues of his namesake, a mode of transubstantiation that recalls the alleged interchangeability of Serigne Saliou and Bamba. The Serigne's repeated gestures of care and respect serve to transform Riwan completely; the narrator observes that the man now sitting before her is radically different from the one who had arrived earlier, enchained and escorted (25). By the end of the day, Massamba is willingly doing the Serigne's bidding, assuming the new identity of disciple: "Massamba était dompté. Massamba était désormais Riwan" (29).

In one day, the Serigne successfully enacts the Murid ideal of "defar nit," fashioning an entirely new person out of rough raw material—a transformation made especially visible and dramatic given Riwan's initial distance from legible humanness. The sheikhly gaze which looks upon the rough Massamba is not one of objectification and domination, but rather one of recognition and love. Riwan's subsequent submission to the Serigne is not presented as compulsory—even though the narrator says he is "tamed" as a result of the Serigne's attentions—but rather appears to be a choice he makes once liberated from his chains. Riwan submits to the Serigne out of love<sup>103</sup>; he chooses the Serigne to be the one who reorders his self from its chaotic, "crazy," animalistic state, into a state of total, immersive submission. In keeping with the Murid paradox, the choice to submit involves the relinquishing of any further primary agency, and Riwan becomes an apparent automaton devoid of subjectivity, a mere body that works and obeys.

Indeed, the narrator is fascinated by the degree of Riwan's submission, a level of devotion to which she aspires but cannot imagine herself attaining. She fixates on his

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<sup>103</sup> This is not romantic love, but a Sufi form of love-in-submission that links a disciple to a sheikh. Babou, *Fighting the greater jihad*. 86.

apparent lack of independent feeling, desire, and thought: “Du matin au soir, Riwan ne songeait qu’à exécuter les ordres reçus et cela suffisait à remplir ses journées. Riwan ne parlait pas, ne riait pas, ne pleurait peut-être pas” (30); “Riwan pouvait tout braver parce qu’il ne sentait pas, ne raisonnait pas, ne faisait pas intervenir des notions de droit, de devoir, de dû, d’acquis, de Dieu. Riwan était dispensé des débats de la conscience” (31). Having neither consciousness nor conscience, he is not an ethical subject who is concerned to differentiate between right and wrong, as his existence is entirely defined by his obedience to an external will. Since everything he is ordered to do is necessarily right, his own capacity to judge between right and wrong ceases to have any usefulness.

While the Fou possesses an attractive, wild masculine power, Riwan the disciple is ungendered. The narrator informs us that no man could enter the courtyard occupied by the wives of the Serigne other than Riwan, which leads her to ask: “Cela voulait-il dire que Riwan n’était pas un homme?” (36). Riwan’s ungendered state recalls Abdellah Hammoudi’s work on the emasculation of male Sufi disciples in Morocco, where pious submission involves a relinquishing of what, in that cultural formation, are considered to be masculine agency and rights. For Hammoudi’s disciples, this emasculation is temporary; once they have completed a specific stage of their religious education, they then regain their masculinity and their place in the social hierarchy.<sup>104</sup> Riwan, on the other hand, is like a court eunuch for whom physical castration is unnecessary, as his submission is permanent and total.

In her contemplation of Riwan’s emasculation, the narrator associates manhood with a sexual desire directed toward women. Indeed, in this instance, it seems as if she subscribes to the classic Freudian scenario, where the proper channeling of heteronormative sexual desire is what genders the subject. To take the goal of conquering one’s *nafs* to its logical conclusion is to cease to have sexual desire altogether, so a loss of that desire would be consistent with Riwan’s state of total submission. The desire-bound narrator, however, finds this difficult to comprehend, and she conjures a titillating fantasy of his suppressed excitement: “Comment Riwan, jeune et fort, comment pouvait-il rester insensible à ces odeurs de femmes, à ces couleurs de femmes, à ces bruissements de femmes? Il ne les regardait pas, peut-être qu’il les sentait, les devinait, les imaginait et il n’y avait rien de plus excitant, sûrement, que d’entendre chaque fois la voix d’une femme qu’on n’osait pas regarder” (143).

Riwan does not talk, so we are obliged to rely on the narrator for all accounts of his consciousness, and she vacillates between seeing him as devoid of desire and imagining him as harboring a forbidden desire. Her authority on the subject of his consciousness is explicitly called into question by a pregnant “peut-être” (31) after a series of seemingly assured declarations about his lack of emotion and reason. Her monopoly of the narrative makes Riwan one of the subalterns of this story, even as he serves as the titular character and as the symbol of the organizing principle—submission—of both Muridism and the novel. If his total relinquishing of all thought and feeling is a product of the narrator’s imagination, then she has substituted the racial fetish with the

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<sup>104</sup>Abdellah Hammoudi, *Master and disciple: the cultural foundations of Moroccan authoritarianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

spiritual fetish, and Riwan is turned into the body onto which her fantasies of pious self-abnegation are projected. Indeed, Riwan is trapped by the narrator, both before his transformation and after. If he is illegible as human before he meets the Serigne, he is equally illegible after his *njébbal*, for the body that responds to force but does not possess force and intention of its own—not to mention the capacity for moral reasoning—has no legible human agency within the Enlightenment humanist tradition that continues to inform the narrator’s perception. He is humanized merely for a brief moment, when he is released from his chains, speaks his name, and submits to the sheikh.

Nevertheless, Riwan is not the most subaltern of the subaltern characters. We know that Riwan is capable of speech, for he utters his former name when prompted by the Serigne. After his *njébbal*, however, he stops speaking, a self-imposed silence that is complete: the narrator says he “ne parlait pas, ne commentait pas, ne discutait pas” (136). This total silence is a component of his willful submission; unlike Sophie Ndiaye Cissokho and the character of Rama in the novel, his speech and actions are not selectively constrained by *sutura*. Rather, as the figure of total submission, he embodies *sutura* as a fundamental modality of the Murid disciple’s docility. Indeed, it is this total silence-in-submission that allows him to serve as a relay between the cloistered women’s quarters and the rest of the compound, and between the compound and the outside world. He has complete access to all spheres of the Serigne’s domain, and will reveal nothing of what he sees and knows.

The important distinction between Riwan’s subalternity and that of Rama and the other wives is further consolidated in the narrator’s equivocation regarding Riwan’s ungendering. Though he is ungendered, he is not, as a result, a woman: “[M]ais Riwan n’était pas une femme” (31). Indeed, the narrator wonders if it is possible for a woman to occupy the subject position of the paradigmatic disciple: “Et si Riwan avait été une femme? Ou plutôt, une femme pouvait-elle être Riwan?” (31). These questions suggest that Riwan’s initial status as a man matters, and that the conditions of possibility for agentive submission are different for male and female subjects.

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It is the character of Rama that the narrator uses to think through the nature of women’s agentive submission within the Serigne’s household. At the age of sixteen, Rama is given to the Serigne as a pious gift by her father. Unlike the other noteworthy character Rama’s age who becomes the Serigne’s wife after having grown up cloistered in his compound, Rama has had a relatively cosmopolitan upbringing in the town of Mbos. Mbos is a regional trade hub, and the young women of the town are known for their beauty, their “ouverture d’esprit, leur jovialité, bref leur art de vivre, caractéristiques des personnes vivant aux portes et aux frontières de plusieurs mondes” (38). This environment has shaped Rama’s expectations and desires, including her dream, shared by her peers, of a sumptuous and honorable wedding. She has already been introduced to the game of flirtation, having been courted by a young public transport apprentice who vowed to ask for her hand when he could acquire the means. Her remittance to the Serigne does not mark a smooth transition to the next predictable stage in her life, but rather a traumatic rupture. She is summarily lifted from her family, without the

preparation or ceremony of a traditional wedding, and dropped into what seems like another life: “une petite fille qui venait d’être brusquement précipitée dans une autre vie, violemment jetée dans la vie d’un autre” (71).

Although her father has given her as an instantiation of his agentive submission, and her father’s sister (*bàjjan*) accompanies her to the Serigne’s compound, Rama experiences her remittance as entailing both a degree of natal alienation and a loss of the feminine honor accorded by the Wolof social structure. In the Wolof marital tradition with which she is familiar, key family members have important roles to play, both during the ceremony itself and throughout the duration of the couple’s life together. The status and honor of family members are performatively reiterated through their occupation of these roles, and the new bride acquires a different ontological and social status.<sup>105</sup> Through marriage, her relationship to others in her kinship network becomes reconfigured, as she transitions both from childhood to adulthood, and from a state of virginal innocence to sexual knowledge. She can now access wifely honor, and will soon access the virtue, status and authority over her children that comes with motherhood.

The text devotes several pages to the ceremony that proves the bride’s virginity—including the public display of the blood-stained sheet—where through the confirmation of her virtue, both her honor and the honor of her family are enhanced. The narrator cites cases of women who commit suicide because their virginity was in question, an instantiation of the Wolof dictum “ban gâce, nangu dee” (“eschew shame, accept death”), where physical death is preferable to the shame of dishonor—in this case, the ignominy of failing to guard one’s chastity (49). (She also mentions the default use of chicken blood in the event that none appears on the wedding sheets.)<sup>106</sup> In Rama’s case, the ceremony is superfluous; the labor she has devoted to guarding her virtue will not be rewarded by ceremony or social recognition, as the public display of something as intimate as the Serigne’s bedsheet would be unthinkable. The status conferred to her by her location within her family becomes almost meaningless, for she has been thrust into the state of wifely discipleship, and the relationship that ties the disciple to the sheikh trumps all others. However, as wife of the Serigne, she gains a new, elite status, and can look forward to a life of plenty and leisure. She is freed from labor thanks to the devotional work and gifts of the disciples, and she is the recipient of the latter’s respect, although she has little interaction with them. At the same time, she also becomes the inalienable property of the Serigne: as her aunt reminds her, “[n]’oublie pas que tu es la propriété d’un saint” (57).

What does this mean, that she has become the Serigne’s “propriété”? How exactly, the text asks, should Rama be classified—as a wife, disciple, or slave concubine? Were she a wife within the secular Wolof social order, she would have the right (called *fay* in Wolof) to leave her husband’s home if she was unhappy in the marriage, and then to remarry. The Quran also grants women the right to a divorce, although shari’a law does not accord equivalent divorce rights to men and women. Rama, on the other hand,

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<sup>105</sup> Abdoulaye Diop, *La famille wolof: tradition et changement* (Paris: Karthala, 1985).

<sup>106</sup> See Ousmane Sembène’s film *Xala* for a humorous take on this practice. Ousmane Sembène, *Xala* (New York, NY: New Yorker Films, 2005).



has no such right. According to dominant classical interpretations of shari'a, a Muslim man can marry up to four wives, but he can also be legally sexually involved with an unlimited number of women in his possession ("that which your right hand possesses"<sup>107</sup>). Although at one point the narrator claims that no one knows the exact number of the Serigne's wives, we are later told the narrator is considered to be his twenty-eighth wife. There appears to be no great difference between the first four legal wives and his subsequent wives, which renders the usual distinction between wife and slave concubine null.<sup>108</sup> All of the wives are also disciples, so in theory their pious submission has a leveling effect in the compound. The wives of the Serigne therefore inhabit a zone of indistinction between the subject positions of wife, slave, and disciple, an indistinction that complicates an understanding of their agency in the relationship of pious submission.

Indeed, Rama's father's decision to give her to the Serigne as a pious gift is a legibly agentive gesture of submission, but Rama's subsequent capacity for pious action in the subject position of the gift is not as legible. The narrator emphasizes Rama's status as gift—"Don. Don d'une personne. Don de sa fille bien-aimée. Don total. Don fatal. Don sans partage" (37)—where the the gifting can be read as both fateful and fatal, as it entails the death of Rama's former identity. By removing her from her family and social sphere, her father effectively kills her. However, the narrator does not settle on the complete transmutation of person into gift-object, and instead prefers a vacillation between terms that reinforces the indistinction mentioned above: "cela ne pouvait même pas être appelé mariage. Elle avait été remise au Serigne. Ce n'était pas un don, ce n'était pas un vrai mariage non plus" (42).

When Rama is given to the Serigne by her father, it is unclear if she can access the same benefits that he, as the legible disciple-agent, accrues. Her remittance is an enactment of her father's submission to the sheikh, which for him—not explicitly for her—serves to guarantee his own salvation: Rama is "une petite fille destinée à un homme qui était *pour son père* la garantie du Paradis" (58; italics mine). It is debatable that Rama herself believes that her salvation is dependent on her submission to the sheikh, or that she is motivated by piety at all. When Rama eventually assumes her role as *soxna* ("lady," or sheikh's wife) and arrives at the point where she actually wants to stay in the compound, it is not because of piety or duty. Instead, it is her sexual desire for the Serigne (127) that transforms her state of compulsory submission into a willful inhabiting of her wifely role. According to the narrator, what animates Rama is worldly pleasure—*jouissance*<sup>109</sup>(130)—not the promise of Paradise (134). Her sensual enjoyment of her

<sup>107</sup> Quran 4:24. It is important to note that the Quran grants certain rights to slaves. Also, while the Quran does not abolish slavery, it nevertheless calls upon the believers to manumit their slaves, thus turning manumission into a pious act.

<sup>108</sup> Unlike the official wife, the slave concubine is alienated from ascending generations, although not necessarily from descending generations if she bears the master's children. She is the master's property until manumitted, and she is tainted with the dishonor of her slave state. She therefore cannot compete for honor on equal footing with official wives. This distinction is examined in greater detail below.

<sup>109</sup> In Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, Rama is a desiring machine. Bugul toys with the notion of the libidinal economy throughout her work, albeit ambivalently. Gilles Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus : capitalism and schizophrenia* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2009).

intimate relationship with the Serigne forms her attachment to him, and when she is set aside for the extended turn of his new wife and denied that pleasure, she seeks it elsewhere.

Unlike Rama, the other wives in the compound maintain a discipline motivated by the spiritual dimension of their relationship with the Serigne rather than the physical one. This pious discipline enables them to master their feelings of possessiveness and jealousy, as well as their physical desires. The narrator sees these wives as disciples engaged in agentive Sufi submission, albeit in a feminized mode. In the tradition of Bamba's mother Mame Diarra Bousso, they work on conquering their *nafs* through their wifely submission to the Serigne, thereby transforming feminized suffering and deprivation into an opportunity for spiritual growth. While they are not invested with agency in the first stage of Murid submission, they can nevertheless be seen as pious agents if they actively inhabit the subject position of wife-disciple. A life choice is made *for* them (not *by* them), one that obliges them to silence their senses: "Quand une femme était remise à un serigne *on lui avait fait* un choix de vie. Et ce choix impliquait aussi le silence des sens"(135; italics mine). Nevertheless, they have the choice to turn this compulsory condition into the enabling condition of their own internal jihad, a jihad of the soul.

Rama's inability to embrace her disciplehood and engage in her own agentive submission is due both to her enthrallment to her desiring *nafs*, which she does not try to overcome, and to her inability to see her remittance to the Serigne as anything other than an imposition, a form of entrapment she has no power to contest. She is unable to recast this constraining state into a spiritually enabling one. While it is most immediately the law of the father she must obey, greater than her father's power is that of "society" and the entire Murid apparatus:

Rama se rendait compte maintenant, mais toujours comme dans un rêve, qu'elle était prise dans un engrenage dont elle ne pouvait pas se dégager. Elle était piégée. Impuissante face à la société, impuissante face à son père, impuissante face à cette forme d'allégeance. Elle n'avait rien tenté non plus pour y réagir"(67).

She is guilty of passivity—of not actively resisting the system—yet the text reminds us that resistance is not an enabling agentive mode in this case: "Qui pouvait réagir? Qui osait réagir? Et réagir à quoi, d'ailleurs? Que signifiait réagir? Dans une société régie par des dogmes, des règles, des rites institutionnalisés, la réaction n'était pas prévue" (42-43). Under these conditions, the narrator claims, it is unthinkable for a sixteen year old girl who has not yet developed a critical consciousness to "react," whatever that would mean.<sup>110</sup> She could rebel against her father, but where would she then turn, as society is more powerful than her father, and her father is acting in accordance with society's rules. Society, here, is figured as a disembodied sovereign power whose rights trump those of individuals, and who determines the distribution of life and death:

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<sup>110</sup> This is a distinctly Mahmoodian moment in the text: "I think it is critical that we ask whether it is even possible to identify a universal category of acts—such as those of resistance—outside of the ethical and political conditions within which such acts acquire their particular meaning." Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 6.

[c]ar appartenir à ces sociétés-là était un pacte, une alliance qu'il ne fallait pas rompre pour quelque raison que ce soit. C'était aussi un choix: vivre ou mourir! Vivre, c'était vivre en conformité avec les règles qui régissaient les conduits dans son environnement, son milieu, son espace de vie, surtout quand l'environnement était aussi restreint qu'une bourgade comme Mbos ou les gens se connaissaient tous... Ou alors vouloir se rebeller, rejeter toutes ces considérations, par défi, qu'il soit intellectuel ou autre, sans rien proposer à la place, ce qui revenait à se condamner à une mort certaine. Non pas à une mort physique, mais à une mort mentale, sociale, culturelle, si on voulait continuer à vivre au sein de la communauté. L'isolement serait tel que pour y survivre, il faudrait être fou et même la folie ne serait pas une excuse valable. Alors il faudrait partir pour toujours, disparaître, ce qui serait aussi une autre forme de mort. Et la pire. (51-52)

In this account, the only choice available to Rama is to live in accordance with the rules or to die a social death. To live in accordance with the rules is to accept her remittance to the Serigne, and since she experiences this remittance as a form of social death, the agency that is enabled by her subject position is necropolitical: she can choose either an isolating social death by resisting, or a socially-sanctioned pious death as wife of the Serigne. Were she able to distinguish between obeying and submitting (in the agentive Murid sense), she might be able to see the latter option as only a temporary death-like state that will be succeeded by eternal life. However, she is unable to make this distinction: "Se soumettre. Accepter. Obéir. Dans son cas, Rama ne savait pas si c'était de l'obéissance ou de la soumission. Une seule certitude pour elle: ce n'était pas de son plein gré" (51). In French, "se soumettre" is a reflexive verb which indicates that the subject is performing the action of the verb on herself, but "obéir" is not. The reflexivity of the former reinforces the agentive quality of submission; to obey is simply to do another's bidding, but to submit is to give oneself up entirely to a superior external will. For Rama, the difference between the two is unimportant; all she knows is that her remittance was not of her own free will.

While we are immersed in Rama's ruminations on agency and free will, a curious thing happens. In the midst of her account of Rama's feelings and thoughts, the narrator abruptly exclaims "Rama ne se posait pas ces questions!" (52) The narrator's subjectivity takes over in order to mark her difference from Rama: she claims that had she been in Rama's position, at one stage of her alienated trajectory she might have resisted and chosen social death. It is jarring moments like this, which appear again and again in the text, that snap the reader out of her complacent enjoyment of what feels like total access to the consciousness of the other wives. The narrative has seduced us into believing that Rama is a proto-heroine of bourgeois feminist individualism, desirous to struggle against rigid societal norms but unsure how to go about it. Her plight is almost assimilable to that of Hester Prynne, the protagonist of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*,<sup>111</sup> and countless other heroines of the Western literary tradition whose attachment to personal pleasure and

<sup>111</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The scarlet letter* (Pleasantville N.Y.: Reader's Digest Association, 1984).

passion endanger a socio-religious order that requires the disciplining of desire for its continued cohesiveness. However, the text's abrupt acknowledgement that these thoughts do not in fact belong to Rama, but rather are a projection of the narrator's own consciousness, thwarts our recognition of Rama as a subject we already know (or could claim to know and understand). Rama is doubly displaced by the ethnographic description that dominates the narrator's accounts of marriage rituals and gender roles—thus turning her into an interchangeable pawn of the social structure—and by the narrator's projection of her own liberal feminist consciousness that turns Rama's escape from the compound into a fantasy of individualist transgression.

Indeed, in spite of the narrator's continued exploration of Rama's consciousness, she repeatedly admits that Rama's thoughts and feelings are unknowable, and makes references to the inaudibility of Rama's speech. When Rama first hears the news that she is to be given to the Serigne, “[i]l était difficile de savoir ce qu'elle en avait pensé ou ce qu'elle avait ressenti” (37), and later, when the narrator imagines Rama's wedding night with the Serigne, she wonders “[q]u'avait réellement ressenti Rama? Que s'était-il passé? Comment cela s'était-il passé?” (79) The morning after her first night with the Serigne, when Rama is greeted by one of the wives, she responds with a “suite de mots et de sons indistincts, la tête baissée” (82).

*Sutura* comes to structure both her speech and actions in a modality specific to her subject position as wife of a sheikh. The *sutura* with which people cover the private life of the Serigne extends to the relationship between cowives, who would normally joke impertinently with each other about their husband (129), and to the relationship between paternal aunt and niece. Once Rama becomes a *soxna*, her *bàjjan* ceases to be her confidante and is prohibited from asking her intimate questions (84). Within the normative Wolof family, the *bàjjan* is responsible for her niece's sexual and marital education, and is available to discuss intimate problems a young woman might be too embarrassed to reveal to her own mother. The *bàjjan* prepares the young woman for her wedding night, verifies the blood-stained sheet the following morning, and continues to give advice as the bride navigates the challenges of married life.<sup>112</sup> In Rama's case, her *bàjjan* cannot play that role because of the exceptional nature of Rama's marriage, where Wolof kin positions are obsolete. Everyone in the compound is first and foremost a disciple, as the disciple-sheikh relationship takes precedence over all others. Rama must therefore uphold the Serigne's *sutura* with everyone, without exception.

Rama's *bàjjan* is nevertheless assigned the important task of remitting her to the Serigne, and staying with her in the compound until she gets settled. At her departure, her role in Rama's life ends, and she leaves her with final words of maternal advice: dress with decency; be completely submissive and follow the *ndigal* (the sheikh's command); be desirable, but with discretion; watch what you say and do; and avoid crying and complaining so as not to bring shame on the family (94). When Rama appears in public with the Serigne—a rare occurrence for a wife who lives most of her days in seclusion, going out only at the Serigne's bidding—she heeds this advice, assuming a submissive posture and lowering her head; “une épouse du Serigne, surtout une épouse du Grand

<sup>112</sup>Diop, *La famille wolof*, 49; 120.

Serigne, ne devait pas avoir le regard baladeur” (125). This mode of restrained comportment is in stark distinction with the joviality formerly attributed to her and the other young women of Mbos. As a *soxna*, she must diligently uphold the honor of her family by upholding the honor of the Serigne. To uphold the Serigne’s honor is to perfect her submission to him, with discretion, modesty, and self-discipline as that submission’s core modalities. Were she a Mbos bride, she would access honor not only from wifely submission, but also from proof of her virginity; her ability to withstand or outsmart the *xaxar*<sup>113</sup>; her respected place in her family lineage; her ability to catch and hold onto a rich husband; and the new power she would yield over people of lower rank, including her own children. These secular forms of honor are no longer available to her; the only honor she can access in this world is *sutura*-in-submission.

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While Rama experiences her remittance to the Serigne as a traumatic break with her family, her milieu, her desires, and the kind of social recognition she was conditioned to privilege in Mbos, the narrator’s marriage to the Serigne has the reverse effect. Indeed, the narrator’s marriage restores the social recognition and sense of culturally-embedded identity she had lost during her period of alienation and restless global wandering. From a young age, the narrator attended French schools that taught her that her people and home culture were inferior and savage, and she grew up wanting to be recognized as modern, civilized, educated, and emancipated. As she moved from French schools in Senegal to Europe, she sought recognition from the West as a modern subject. Her blackness impeded her access to modern European subjecthood, and she soon discovered that the gaze that would be fixed upon her would not be one of recognition, but rather one of rejection. Having already cast off her home culture, she experiences her identity as a void, and wanders about in search of connection and stability. She ends up in her home town after years of absence, and, unlike the majority of Senegalese who go abroad to seek opportunity, she returns, middle-aged and exhausted, with nothing—no wealth, no husband, no job (162). She hopes that her return home will heal the wounds of alienation, and that she will be brought back into the fold.

This wish does not immediately come true. She is unable to explain to the community the restlessness and dissatisfaction that propelled her years of pègrination, as she is convinced they will not understand. Her mother resents the narrator for preventing her from playing a role in the village, as she was unable to acquire status and honor through the marriage of her daughter, or even through her daughter’s expatriate material success (163). The narrator returns home a marginal non-person, filled with regret:

Comme je regrettais d’avoir voulu être autre chose, une personne quasi irréaliste, absente de ses origines, d’avoir été entraînée, influencée, trompée,

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<sup>113</sup> The *xaxar* is a ritual in which a new wife is insulted and harassed by her co-wives and/or sisters-in-law as she enters the house for the first time. It allows for the airing of all hostility that might eventually poison the women’s relationship within the household, and is actually one instance in which *sutura* is ritually breached. However, many noble women use *gèwél* (griot) women as proxy trash-talkers at the *xaxar* so as to avoid engaging in dishonorable forms of speech. Ibid., 131; 135–36. Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village*.331.

d'avoir joué le numéro de la femme émancipée, soi-disant moderne, d'avoir raté une vie, peut-être. Parce qu'on m'avait dit de renoncer à ce que j'étais, alors que j'aurais dû rester moi-même et mieux m'ouvrir à la modernité (111).

The rupture that the narrator experiences is an ongoing one that, even though she is physically reincorporated into her community, continues to create a distance between her and her environment: "Voilà pourquoi mon bonheur était si triste, par la rupture avec mon atmosphère et ces parades d'ailleurs, parades de vie à mi chemin entre la farce et la tragédie (113).

It is her surprise marriage to the Serigne that serves to effectively reintegrate her and her mother into the community, restoring her own honor and that of her family. The village is now at her feet. "Tout le monde cherchait à me faire plaisir. Pour avoir les grâces du Serigne, parce qu'à travers moi, c'était le Sergine qu'on honorait. L'épouse si proche intellectuellement du Serigne était presque un Serigne. Tout à coup, je me retrouvais en grande dame dans ce village où j'avais été rejetée, méprisée" (168). One could argue that the honor she accesses is a secondary one, as with Rama: she is honored because of her relationship with the Serigne, and by honoring her, they are really honoring him. However, in many ways the narrator's status is unlike that of the other wives. Ironically, though she regrets having left her home and lost herself in the West, it is the knowledge of the world gained from that experience that makes her desirable to the Serigne and garners a special respect from the community. She has earned honor that the other wives could not access, even though they are all *soxna*. She becomes not only his favorite wife, but a kind of partner in his healing and spiritual work (170). She wields the power of *ndigal* in the compound, often acting as a proxy for the Serigne. For example, on the nights she and the Serigne do not spend together, it is she who decides which wife will replace her for the night (172). Unlike the other wives, who are cloistered in the compound or in the Serigne's secondary residence, the narrator continues to live at her mother's house, and comes and goes as she pleases. While the Serigne often summons her, she is not obligated to respond to the summons. She does not experience the alienation from kin or the sudden restriction on mobility and comportment that (allegedly) feel so repressive to Rama.

Indeed, the fact that she was not given to the Serigne by a third party, but rather that the Serigne chose her, makes her marriage different from that of the other wives. At first glance, this seems to be an inconsequential distinction, as she had not consciously desired a marital alliance with him. After an extended period of friendship and spiritual mentorship, she suddenly learns that he sought her hand in marriage and that the contract had been signed without her knowledge. While no one in her community would dare oppose the Serigne's decision, she has to determine for herself how she is to respond. "Allais-je accepter, subir ou obéir comme Rama, mais obéir à qui. Je n'étais pas Rama. J'étais déjà une grande personne depuis des années et personne n'exerçait sur moi aucune réelle autorité. On ne refusait rien au Serigne. Je ne pouvais pas me refuser au Serigne. Je voulais le Serigne" (152). She agrees to the marriage because she discovers that she wants to be with him, not because she is forced to obey by those who have power over

her. She is in a uniquely privileged position because she has had other experiences and known other men, and she therefore perceives her choice to become the Serigne's wife as carrying more value ("...avait plus de valeur")(172) than the choice available to the other wives.

This notion that her choice is of greater import than the choice to submit made by the other wives is one of the many internal inconsistencies that trouble her repeated idealization of Murid submission. At one point, she makes the generalizing claim that submission is necessarily a choice, not an institutionalized imposition that one follows blindly. "C'était de lui [the *ndigal*] dont nous avons besoin pour nous redresser, nous remettre. Car accepter le Ndigueul était un choix. On ne suivait pas le Ndigueul à l'aveuglette ni par endoctrinement, ni d'une façon institutionnelle" (149). However, we already know from her discussion of the constrained conditions which determine the agency of the other wives that this generalization does not hold for all Murid subjects. The narrator wants to see the Murid subject as one who possesses an independent will and chooses submission, and this privileging of the agency with which she is uniquely invested—as an anomalous subject who is not under anyone else's authority—makes her idealized version of Murid submission dependent on a liberal-secular idea of the fully-present, autonomous subject.

What, indeed, makes her choice more worthy than that of the other wives? Does it have more value because she was more "free" to choose? Does it demonstrate a greater degree of agentive submission because, even after having been exposed to so many different options, she decides to become the twenty-eighth wife of a Murid sheikh? In other words, is it because she knowingly prefers submission to "freedom"? Arguably, a true disciple would not linger on an initial hierarchy of choice, but rather would be entirely preoccupied with the business of submission. Indeed, as the narrator obsesses over how the other wives might view her privileged status within the compound, she concedes that "peut-être pour elles, tous les choix se valaient" (172). It is possible that the wives see only equality in submission, and therefore view the narrator's authority as a mere contingent extension of *ndigal* that can only emanate from the Serigne. At this stage in her development, while she claims to aspire to total submission, she seems to be too attached to the ideal of free will to make the full transition to disciple, and too caught up in a liberal idea of what constitutes meaningful agency to be able to grasp the pious agency of the other wives.

Ironically, it is the Serigne's own teaching that encourages the narrator's most egregious departure from Murid *tarbiyya*. His successful rehabilitation of Riwan is one example of a method he uses for all those that seek his help. He heals people with their own potentialities, giving them confidence in themselves. He looks them in the eyes and involves them in what he is doing, integrating them into meaningful activity; "[c]hacun de nous avait des pouvoirs illimités mais inexploités, disait-il" (170). In what almost sounds like an echo of Tony Robbins's pop philosophy,<sup>114</sup> the narrator takes up this call

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<sup>114</sup> Anthony Robbins is an American life coach and self-help guru who has designed a program for accessing and developing one's own self-generated personal power. Like the narrator, Robbins is an agency fetishist of the liberal ilk: "Personal power is the ability to act: the ability to take action and produce results" (Robbins quoted on his official website at <https://www.tonyrobbins.com/products/personal->

to discover her inner personal power. The narrator's own rehabilitation is a process of disalienation; re-interpellated by the Serigne's gaze, she moves from a state of split subjectivity, of uncertain identity, of two-ness ("j'avais l'impression de mener une double vie")(160),<sup>115</sup> to one of harmony with herself and with her community. Instead of facilitating the annihilation of the self through the ecstatic merging with the Divine sought by Sufis, her marriage with the Serigne rescues her from an alienation that she experienced as a kind of death. The experience helps her to stabilize her identity and positively redefine herself as a black African, thus reanimating her with social life. "J'avais échappé à la mort de mon moi, de ce moi qui n'était pas à moi toute seule. De ce moi qui appartenait aussi aux miens, à ma race, à mon peuple, à mon village, et à mon continent. Le moi de mon identité" (168).

While the philosophy and practices that the Serigne employs to facilitate her transformation are not immediately recognizable as Murid orthodoxy, the narrator is nevertheless subjected to a discipline that forces her to reconsider her enthrallment to her *nafs*. This discipline does not issue from the Serigne's direct command, but rather is conditioned by the constitutive constraints of the marriage. Initially, she enjoys both the authority vested in her by the Serigne and her physical relationship with him, which she describes as extremely pleasurable, even sublime. He exposes her to a new kind of pleasure, a mode of *jouissance* she did not know existed in Europe, where, she claims, sex and pleasure are over-intellectualized. When the Serigne is given another young wife, this time the daughter of one of his closest disciples, the narrator must confront her own possessive and jealous nature. In spite of her privileged status in the compound, she, like all the wives, must come to terms with the reality of plural marriage, especially in an exceptional case where the husband is not limited to four wives. When she first learns the news, she is overwhelmed by feelings of hurt and betrayal, and stays away from the compound, ignoring the Serigne's summons (190).

She sees her inability to manage these feelings as a product of her indoctrination into modern subjecthood, and vows to work on them. This labor can be understood as an ethical practice "through which a subject transforms herself in order to achieve a particular state of being, happiness, or truth";<sup>116</sup> here, the narrator works to transform herself into a willing subject of the moral discourse of Murid polygamy. She engages in habitual actions that cultivate docility, thereby fashioning herself from the outside in. This view of the malleability of the self is in stark contradiction with the normative

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[achievement/personal-power-2.php](#)).

<sup>115</sup> This two-ness is evocative of a Deboisian double consciousness: "After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." William Du Bois, *The souls of black folk* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>116</sup>Mahmood, *Politics of piety*, 28.



liberal view that the narrator espouses at other moments, which sees the self as possessing innate desires—particularly the desire for freedom—that exist prior to discourse and embodied habit.<sup>117</sup> She takes her cue from the other wives of the compound, from whom she learns the secret to serenity by studying their reactions to various challenges. In a reminder of the international experience that informs her reading of the world of the Serigne’s compound, she claims that this apprenticeship is worth a thousand yoga lessons (178) or “un séjour initiatique au Tibet” (174). She does not figure her ethical regimen as particularly Muslim, but rather as intelligible within multiple spiritual traditions that seek to achieve true happiness by retraining the self to be unmotivated by selfish desires.

Indeed, the co-wife who achieves serenity in polygamous marriage has achieved transcendence; she is a Buddha. Her quest for mastery over her desiring self is stimulated by the presence of others who have an equal claim to her husband, and she is perhaps blessed with a special opportunity for spiritual growth to which a woman in a monogamous marriage does not have access. The narrator sees in plural marriage an alternative to the Western model she was trained to desire, a model informed by a decadent capitalist conception of love and relationships, where a person has exclusive rights to the possession of another: “Alors ce ‘nous unique’ prenait le gouvernail de la vie et manipulait deux êtres dans un tourbillon de concessions qui tuait un moi pas toujours haïssable, n’en déplaît au philosophe” (184). She learns to see herself not solely in relation to the man with whom she is romantically involved, but in relation to her family, to her community, to her people, and to God. She comes to focus on her own needs, to take care of her self, rather than to expect another to be the caretaker of her happiness. Her co-wives talk about the Serigne, certainly, but they also joke, sew, manage their fields, discuss politics, the cost of food, their family, God, life and death (177). Recognizing the narrator’s need to engage in meaningful action that does not revolve around him, the Serigne encourages her to start writing her autobiography—and even pays for the typewriter—a text that becomes her first published work, Le Baobab fou (212).

Rather than allow jealousy to poison her life, she transforms it into an enabling challenge, viewing it as an inescapable part of life that needs to be confronted and embraced. The absence of the *xaxar* in her case, a ceremony in which co-wives and inlaws subject a new wife to taunts, insults, and sometimes the disclosure of shameful family secrets when she first arrives at her husband’s home, deprives her and her co-wives of a ritual outlet for negative feelings towards each other (202-04). As she is a *soxna* who is not allowed to externalize these feelings, she must do the work of taming them quietly and discreetly, on her own. She eats the clean, sparkling sand of her village to purify her of all negative impulses (204), turning to the very earth of her home to detoxify her soul, to remove the buildup of psycho-spiritual gunk that had accumulated throughout the first part of her life. She leaves us with the lessons of her enlightenment, preaching that each person is responsible for her own happiness in this world and the next, for no matter her circumstance, she has the capacity to act upon herself, thus

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 5.

producing a new self in the process. “Alors qu’ici, le problème fondamental était pour chacune, son propre salut dans ce monde ou dans l’autre. Et chacune était responsable du sien, par engagement et par choix lucide” (177-78); “J’avais appris à m’occuper, à remplir ma vie, à croire en moi, à croire en Dieu, sans dogme rigide, sans interrogation mais en n’excluant pas le doute qui était comme le corps nécessaire et vivant de la foi. Je ne serais plus jamais la même personne. J’étais devenue ce que j’étais, j’étais devenue moi-même” (218).

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These are uplifting lessons, but, as we well know, the narrator is notoriously unreliable. My account of the narrator’s transformation above smooths over what is in fact a highly disjointed, achronological, contradictory sequence of narrative fragments that bounces around among subjectivities, anecdotes from the narrator’s adventures, anthropological descriptions of local cultural practices, and passionate political tracts. While at times the narrator seems to offer a coherent lesson about the subject’s capacity to fashion itself, at others she claims it is possible to rediscover one’s authentic self. A study in self-contradiction, she bemoans her aimless global wandering and alienation from her home culture, yet she does not regret having had fantastic adventures in places like Poland and Greece. References and asides that mark her as a global subject repeatedly interrupt idealized descriptions of home, reminding us that “home” and “the authentic self” are—her recent reimmersion notwithstanding—products of a nostalgic diasporic consciousness. Had the problem of her split subjectivity been entirely resolved, it is doubtful her narrative would have ended up quite this schizophrenic. As it stands, she cannot talk about Dianke or Mbos without in the same breath referencing London, Burma, Nigeria; nor can she argue for the spiritual benefits of polygamy without also revealing the tragedy that befalls Rama and others.

Her celebration of polygamous marriage as providing the ideal conditions for a gendered practice of spiritual growth is convincing at one level—it certainly seems to work for her—but it cannot hold for everyone. She briefly mentions her sister’s marriage, which she describes as fifty years of hell during which her sister’s co-wife subjected her sister to myriad forms of harassment and violence. The Serigne has the authority to assign additional wives to his disciples, although he does not always do so, as he knows what is best for each and every one of them. The narrator sees this as evidence that polygamy is not an “institution,” a curious claim that might mean that not everyone is expected to practice it. Regardless, these cases, along with that of Rama, complicate the narrator’s assertions that polygamy is a life choice, and that everyone is responsible for his or her path, and that we are fully present subjects who make lucid, rational decisions of our own free will. Instead of reproducing this fantasy of total agency, the text’s many internal subversions suggest that it is more useful to see agency as “the capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create.”<sup>118</sup>

Indeed, for the other wives of the Serigne, action that transgresses the gendered ordering of pious submission is possible, but, as Rama’s story shows, the inevitable outcome of that action is death, either social or physical. Since the state of the disciple in

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 10.

submission is a corpselike one in which the disciple ceases to have the recognizable properties of the socially-defined person, the other option is also a kind of death. This death-like state is further compounded by the fact that the sheikh's wives do not have the option of transitioning from disciple to sheikh once they have reached the next stage of their education. The life of the wives can be viewed as a form of bare life, life that can be killed but not murdered: Murid fathers can effectively "kill" their daughters by remitting them to the sheikh, both by removing them from their kin and social location and by converting them into the sheikh's property—an act that does not count as murder, but rather as piety. However, the sheikh's wives are nevertheless able to activate a different form of life through their own engagement in pious submission, thereby cultivating inner peace and enabling spiritual growth by cleaving to an externally dictated discipline and to a teleological understanding of the accrual of spiritual benefit that extends beyond the life of this world.

Rama's capacity for action is limited, but it exists nonetheless. She does not choose pious submission, but instead acts on her "blind and violent desire" by pursuing a furtive sexual relationship with a mysterious young man. The liaison takes place in the liminal spaces between the cloistered women's quarters of the compound and the public domain. In an echo of the young narrator's sexual awakening, her desire is first fueled by a glimpse of his sex caught while she is fetching herbs from the women's garden; they then meet in the intermediate courtyard where the sheep and goats are kept (208). Rama runs away from the compound, taking her belongings with her and triggering the novel's tragic conclusion. When he realizes she is gone, the Serigne refuses to eat, falls ill and passes away. Rama's family's compound in Mbos goes up in flames, apparently killing Rama and the rest of her family. The mysterious young man, who had been seen in a terrible state of suffering outside the Serigne's compound, is found dead in the Dianke town well with Rama's inner wrap-skirt wrapped around his neck "comme un long serpent" (222).

This incredible sequence of events is presented as the only possible outcome to the extreme ignominy that befalls her family, the Serigne, and the town, which derives a collective sense of honor from its harmonious ordering in accordance with the *ndigal*. Rama's act, although not a narrative form of disclosure, is nevertheless a transgression of *sutura*, for it exposes the Serigne (and herself and her family) to *gàcce* (dishonor). (Indeed, the Serigne's slow suicide is an instantiation of "ban gâce, nangu dee.") From a liberal feminist standpoint, Rama's act could be celebrated as an act of resistance to an oppressive patriarchal order that silences her and suppresses her innate desire for freedom. However, the end result of the act is not a liberation that would enable the flourishing of her true self, but the death of not only her, but her family and the Serigne—making the act not only suicidal, but murderous. In addition, it is difficult to attribute a resistant intention to her consciousness, as the narrator describes her as following a "blind desire"—a narrator we have been warned not to trust in any case. Since we cannot be sure of her intention, the political meaning we ought to ascribe to this agency is unclear.

Recent scholarly explorations of the agency of the death-bound subject in the context of American chattel slavery see the slave's willful embrace of death as a radical

political act that can take the form of both suicide and murder (in the case of the slave mother's infanticide, or the assassination of slaveowners). The slave's life is not proper life per se, but social death, and the slave system keeps the slave in her subjugated position through the constant threat of physical death. These scholars argue that, although the slave's choice is between physical death and social death, it is nevertheless a choice, and the decision to expose herself to the former is to engage in a politically meaningful act that rejects the slaveowner's claim to her body. Through this act, the slave not only removes her body from circulation in the economy of slavery, thus directly reducing the slaveowner's wealth and making fewer slaves available for exploitation, but "[by] using their bodies to precipitate structural and discursive crises, enslaved Africans staged an interrogation of the philosophical foundations of both African chattel slavery and the liberal humanist project."<sup>119</sup>

Through this lens, Rama's act could be read as bringing into view and into crisis the gendered order of submission that converts people into property, even if that crisis was not her intention. Rama's desiring body—though it does not possess the subjectivity of the fully conscious, willful human agent—can nevertheless be seen as an agential body that levels a resounding shock to the ordering of Murid patriarchy. Indeed, according to Karen Barad's posthumanist theory of "agential realism" that disarticulates agency from liberal notions of the human, "agency is about the possibilities and accountability entailed in refiguring material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production, including the boundary articulations and exclusions that are marked by those practices."<sup>120</sup> If we are going to subscribe to Barad's view that bodies habitually classified as objects can be part of an agentic formation, however, then we must recognize that Riwan and the sheikh's other wives also activate a material-discursive agentic matrix in their corporeal practices of submission—again, regardless of whether we can ascertain intent. This equivalence both disables the liberal humanist logic which hierarchizes modalities of agency, and opens up the possibility that the constant *willful* cleaving to pious discipline may not be an essential component of pious agency.

For whom, though, are these modalities of agency politically meaningful? Rama's act is obviously threatening to the communal order and to sheikhly authority, for the community moves quickly to erase both the memory of Rama and the dishonor she brought on the town and the Serigne. "Nul ne sut jamais qui fut sauvé des flammes. Nul ne sut jamais ce qui s'était réellement passé. Nul ne sut jamais ce qu'étaient devenus les corps de Rama et de ses parents. Nul ne voulut savoir ce qui était arrivé. Nul n'en parla plus. Rama n'avait jamais existé" (222). Because Rama is erased from the oral archive, the crisis she precipitates is not continually renewed within the town itself, so it is debatable how much of a lasting effect her transgressive act has. However, her trace remains in Bugul's text, and the narrator takes what is a mere subject-effect—the act itself, but not the consciousness that animated the act—and invests it with various meanings within the narrator's own political horizons.

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<sup>119</sup> Kaplan, "Love and Violence/Maternity and Death," 100.

<sup>120</sup> Karen Barad, "Getting Real: Technoscientific Practices and the Materialization of Reality," *Differences*. 10:2 (1998): 108.

Indeed, as a character with occasional psychological depth, Rama seems to be much more than a mere trace, but we really only have access to a few subject-effects that we can confidently attribute to “Rama”; the rest is pure projection by the narrator. Even the description of Rama’s desire for the young man and her split-second decision to commit the deed is highly suspect, for we eventually learn that the narrator is in Dakar buying her typewriter throughout the whole ordeal and is briefed only upon her return to Dianke.<sup>121</sup> While this unreliability reminds us of Rama’s subalternity, it also raises the question of the narrator’s account of her own consciousness—what she makes available, what she withholds, and what she invents, but also the inability of any self-narrating subject to be completely aware of all of her actions and all of her words. Further, since the narrator is also the sheikh’s wife, should not her speech be structured by *sutura* as well?

Indeed, the narrator shares a great deal of information about her private life before and during her marriage to the Serigne that should not be exposed. Her sexual desires, her account of her scandalous moral dissipation in Europe, her intimate relationship with the Serigne, details of life within the compound, and the story of her gradual pious awakening are all brought into representation by her and published for the (Francophone) world to read. She guards the Serigne’s *sutura* while he is alive, refusing to discuss her marriage with the media, who are eager to sell papers by revealing “une expérience exceptionnelle dans le domaine de la polygamie. Par respect pour moi-même et pour le Serigne, je refusai de donner notre vie en pâture au public” (171). Violation of the Serigne’s *sutura* apparently ceases to be a concern when she publishes the novel years after his death<sup>122</sup>; in the interim, Mariétou Mbaye publishes her first autobiographical novel, moves to Benin, remarries, and has a successful career as a writer and employee of international organizations. Unlike Rama, Mbaye, the Western-educated, diasporic woman, is strengthened by her marriage with the Serigne. She not only survives, but thrives in the wake of the scandal.<sup>123</sup> As she is not confined to a small-town Murid milieu, her public exposure of her life as a sheikh’s wife carries no real consequences.

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The salutary effect of her experience with the Serigne leads the narrator to prescribe Muridism as a general panacea for the problems of the country and the continent. She calls upon her compatriots to generate a new history, identity, and political system inspired by the values and order of the Muridiyya—an order that would be founded on local values and resistant to alienation, neocolonialism, and other forms of oppression, but that would also be dynamically flexible and open to the world. Submission is the organizing principle of this order, a submission that is also simultaneously a practice of freedom. Paradoxically, it is this individual relinquishing of

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<sup>121</sup> Similarly, after the narrator’s detailed and passionate recounting of her friend Nabou Samb’s wedding, we learn that the narrator was not even there as an eye-witness, and that she cannot recall where she was and what she was doing at the time.

<sup>122</sup> The lack of post-publication scandal may be a product of the changing times; *Riwan* was published in 1999, at a time when constraints on public exposure in general were loosening.

<sup>123</sup> Ada Azodo, “Azodo\_Interview\_with\_Ken\_Bugul.pdf”, n.d., [http://www.iun.edu/~minaua/interviews/Azodo\\_Interview\\_with\\_Ken\\_Bugul.pdf](http://www.iun.edu/~minaua/interviews/Azodo_Interview_with_Ken_Bugul.pdf).

freedom to the order which liberates Senegal from the regime of neocolonial subjectivation, allowing the Senegalese subject to refashion its dignity and history—its personhood and national identity—according to a logic that pulls it out of the colonial relation and offers another way of being in its stead. “Mais le Mouvement fondé par l’ancêtre, par sa dynamique spirituelle, culturelle et économique, pouvait nous refaire une autre histoire pour retrouver notre dignité et nos pouvoirs. Révolution. Libération. Renaissance” (98). This view is reinforced at several moments in the text by her figuring of Cheikh Amadou Bamba as an agent of resistance who fought against the encroachment of French schools and foreign ways of being in the world (98).

Her proposal that submission can be the means to liberation troubles the liberal-secular notion that all selves have an innate desire for a freedom that is understood as the capacity to act and reason without any externally-imposed restrictions. Unlike the liberal fantasy of atomizing individualism, it presents the disciplining of the self into a communally- and spiritually-bound ethical subject as the desirable goal of existence. However, the text’s examination of the female Murid subject’s *sutura*-mediated subalternity interrupts in turn any unproblematized attempt to proffer the Muridiyya (as it is currently organized) as the solution to all contemporary woes. Indeed, if we take into consideration not only the gendering of pious submission that allows for the conversion of people into property, but also the contentious contemporary debates around the religious elite’s imbrication with state politics, exploitation of disciples, and fetishization of worldly wealth that I explored earlier in this chapter, then it is unclear how the Murid order could serve as a revolutionary force in the present.

Feminist scholar Codou Bop argues that the structural marginalization of women in the Senegalese Sufi orders (as “systems of power”) thwarts the recent attempt on the part of anthropologists to celebrate the *tariqas* as ideal frameworks in which autonomous modes of women’s Islamic spirituality can flourish. While she acknowledges that women have creatively interpreted Murid traditions and manipulated some pious practices to their advantage, she claims that “[m]ost women appear to be unable or unwilling to challenge seriously this extraordinarily powerful system as a religious system.”<sup>124</sup> One of the reasons she gives for this inability is precisely the strand of Murid tradition that Bugul’s narrator finds potentially liberatory:

Moreover, the emergence and development of the *tariqas* have been deeply connected with the colonial experience and have been identified with “Black Islam” (Triaud 2000). Depending on one’s perspective, such identification entails a problematic form of fetishistic Islam or, more commonly, the only revealed religion that allowed Africans to survive colonialism and adapt their religion and culture to difficult circumstances. For many, this latter interpretation of the brotherhoods as a source of identity in times of crisis continues to support the ongoing power of the brotherhoods and contributes to the lack of motivation or resources really to challenge them. In good part, this history is why, at this point, except

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<sup>124</sup>Bop, “Roles and the Position of Women in Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal,” 1116.

for fundamentalism, challenges to religion or to the *tariqas* in Senegal are not really on anyone's, let alone women's, agenda.<sup>125</sup>

In this view, it is through the resistant male subject's will to power that the female Murid subject is foreclosed as bearer of politicized pious agency. Bugul's narrator's championing of the anticolonial Murid narrative is therefore caught up in this dynamic, one that consolidates the gendered relations of subordination that enable unequally distributed capacities for virtuous action.

Bop sees the secular state as the means through which Senegalese women can effectively challenge patriarchal power, seek rights, and struggle for their own increased opportunity and power. She argues that the shifts in the broader gendered ordering of power have been made by activists with secular agendas, not by those who make religion-based claims. Unfortunately, this privileging of the secular struggle for rights and equality as the only politically impactful form of agency obscures modalities of pious agency that can enable politically meaningful shifts in the gendered ordering of power, even if those shifts are not explicitly stated as the intended goals of pious action. Indeed, Mahmood's ethnography of Egyptian women involved in the Islamic reformist movement reveals that certain modes of women's pious attachment can challenge both secular and religious patriarchal formations. This challenge can result from a pedagogical agenda that encourages women to become versant in the scriptural and interpretive traditions of Islam, thus enabling them to offer up alternative (but still religiously-sanctioned) evidence that justifies the altering of marital relations of subordination and an unprecedented opening up of the public sphere to women. It can also be the result of their committed engagement in bodily practices of piety that elude the control of husband and father. The goal of these actions is to rediscipline the self in accordance with God's will, not to fight patriarchy in the name of secular humanist equality, yet they still have a destabilizing effect on the gendered ordering of power.

In her ethnography of the women's Islamic reformist (or "Sunnite") movement in Senegal,<sup>126</sup> Erin Augis shows that Mahmood's insights are equally valid for her informants, although the latter engage in a more explicitly self-conscious politicization of reformist identity. This is not a feminist politicization per se, but rather one that associates urban Senegalese reformism with global movements that challenge Western secularism as a cultural and political formation. Her informants see themselves as jihadists who are concerned not only to cultivate their own individual piety, but also to effect large-scale social and political change. In the process, Sunnite women defy the authority of parents, husbands, and extended kin; Wolof norms of refined beauty; and Senegalese Sufi traditions that have distanced female believers from scriptural Islam. Their direct engagement with interpretive traditions and transnational conversations about Sunnite orthodoxy enables and legitimates the fashioning of new selves, a production that troubles the pre-existing socio-religious order and shifts the terms of contemporary debates regarding the articulation of ethics and piety in Senegal.

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Erin Augis, "Jambaar or Jumbax-out? How Sunnite Women Negotiate Power and Belief in Orthodox Islamic Femininity" in Diouf, *New perspectives on Islam in Senegal conversion, migration, wealth, power, and femininity*.

The defiant positions adopted by many of Augis's informants recall Cheikh Amadou Bamba's refusal to follow Wolof and French rules in the name of non-violent jihad. Ironically, it is the reformist female subject who is vociferously anti-Murid that perhaps best embodies this aspect of Bamba's legacy in the present. The Murid woman subject's perceived passivity and constrained state within the *sutura*-governed regime of domestic piety would seem, then, to make her wholly incapable of politically meaningful action that would be legible in the frameworks proposed by Bop and Augis. In order to become a political agent, she would have to cease to be a Murid subject, and instead become either a secular subject who seeks power through its engagement with the state, or a reformist subject who turns away from a degraded "African" Islam and re-aligns herself with a "universal" Islam that takes its cues from the Middle East.

Is there, then, no possibility of a female Murid subject who could possess an agency that would be both political and pious, without ceasing to be Murid altogether? If for Mahmood's informants, tradition can be the grounds for making new kinds of claims, could Murid tradition be mined and reinterpreted to open up new subject positions for Murid women? There are movements comprised of Murid scholars and university students that seek to wrest Muridism from the caliphate and the proponents of myth-riddled hagiography, agitators who revisit Bamba's scholarship and pedagogical praxis in order to bring Murid practice back in line with Quran- and Sunna-based Islamic traditions. They do not discard Murid tradition, but rather mine it to construct their argument against popular Murid practices they deem to be in contradiction with Bamba's original vision. This movement is bolstered by the work of historians like Cheikh Babou, who, for example, cites letters sent from Bamba to Ibra Fall exhorting the latter to do his five daily prayers, fast, and perform the other obligatory rituals detailed in the Quran, thus demonstrating that Bamba did not unequivocally authorize Fall's disregard for Quranic obligations in favor of an immersive submission to the sheikh.<sup>127</sup> In Babou's account, the primacy of *tarbiyya* over formal Quranic study—also a major component of Bamba's pedagogical vision—resulted from the dearth of qualified scholars in Wolof country who could serve as the kind of *taalim* teacher Bamba envisioned. Allowing the mass of disciples to *permanently* perform devotional work at the expense of study and the performance of *farata* obligations appears to be a compromise dictated by circumstance, not a saintly injunction.

In order for the female Murid subject to engage in a similarly authoritative reinterpretation of Murid tradition, she would have to be able to access international Islamic scholarly traditions, Bamba's writings in Arabic, and more recent Murid scholarship in French, Wolof, and Arabic. This would require intensive and extensive study, an undertaking which would bring the female Murid subject into the agentic position of the female reformist subject. This educational project would put her on a path to sheikhhood of sorts, one that would fundamentally threaten the normative hierarchical domestic order, where the wife is eternally fixed in the position of *tarbiyya* disciple in relation to the husband/sheikh. Were she to mine tradition, though, she would find the

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<sup>127</sup>Babou, *Fighting the greater jihad*, 223 n.88.



necessary counterevidence to Murid orthodoxy that would legitimate the very violation of the gendered order of piety that education entails.

Indeed, in spite of Babou's abnegation—in the name of *sutura*—of the historian-biographer's responsibility to investigate Bamba's relationship to the women closest to him, he nevertheless provides telling details that, when magnified, serve as traces that enable us to read the Murid tradition against the grain. He includes an account of the contest between Bamba and his former Mauritanian teacher, Sheikh Sidiyya, in which the educational accomplishments of the two sheikhs' daughters served as the basis of comparison that proved Bamba's equality with Sidiyya:

Sources also refer to instances in which Sheikh Sidiyya displayed the intellectual achievements of his daughters to his host as a way of asserting the profound Islamic tradition of his family. Bamba is said to have later rejoiced before the Moorish cleric, who was paying him a visit (probably in Diourbel), at the accomplishment of his daughter Maymuna Kabiir, who not only successfully completed her education by writing the Quran in its entirety from memory but also prepared on her own the delicious dinner her father shared with his guest. The message he wished to convey was that the daughter was both a learned Muslim and an accomplished wife.<sup>128</sup>

This story suggests Bamba could be viewed as an advocate of women's religious education, thus opening up the possibility that female sheikhhood could be consistent with Bamban orthodoxy without requiring a total break with traditional feminine honor. In a report submitted to the French by an influential chief, Bamba, dismissive of the French-coopted Wolof chiefs, allegedly sent him away with exceedingly harsh words: "[I]f I did not ruin your life, it is because I have pity for you and I know your father. Also your aunt, whom I met at Ker Matar, recommended you to me. Beware, something bad could happen to you on your way back. . . . Mbakhane leave me alone and go away, I am not a man of this world, I belong to the hereafter, I only see God and my sight is beyond the mortals."<sup>129</sup> Babou includes this letter to provide a glimpse of Bamba's growing power and increasing defiance of colonial authority—developments that led to Bamba's second exile in Mauritania—but I find it noteworthy because of the reference to the recommendation of Mbakhane's aunt. This small detail suggests that, unlike the Murid sheikh in Cruise O'Brien's study, Bamba did not view all women as minors, but rather respected the authority vested in senior women by the Wolof social structure, an authority that cannot be conscionably contested with solid Quranic evidence.

The Murid woman's very engagement with scriptural tradition, even in the absence of an articulated oppositional discourse, necessarily effects a radical critique of the hierarchical system of heredity that undergirds both caliphal power and the patriarchal domestico-pious order. This engagement instantiates the Quranic idea that one's position in the pious order is not determined by birth, but rather by degree of piety and knowledge. Bamba famously invoked the meritocracy of the pious order to contest the authority of the traditional Wolof aristocracy and challenge the ethics of the caste system,

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<sup>128</sup>Ibid., 150.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 144.

and, as Muslim feminists have argued in other contexts, this logic can be mobilized in the service of a critique of the gender hierarchy as well. For this critique to be politically impactful, the Murid woman subject need not be a resistant subject, but simply a subject who seeks to perfect her orientation towards God through study and discipline.

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Women know if they have *baraka*, because it is an inner feeling. Such women attribute this gift to Amadou Bamba. Sometimes these women cannot separate themselves from him. If you let them, they will talk about Bamba and his *taalibes* twenty-four hours a day. They don't feel the heat, they don't feel hunger, all they do is praise the Holy Man.<sup>130</sup>

What, though, of the *tarbiyya* practices that have become central to Muridism? What of agentic submission in the sheikh-disciple relationship, in which the disciple gives up her soul to be refashioned by the sheikh? One of the lessons of Bugul's text is that submission can be salutary, and that a cultivated docility can be the precondition for spiritual growth and learning. Diouf demonstrates that the flexibility, pliability, and capacity for self-abnegation required of the *tarbiyya* disciple have contributed to the transnational economic success of the Murid diaspora, thus suggesting that these qualities can be the precondition to the increased power of both Murid individuals and the greater Murid community. While I am not advocating an unproblematized insertion into the preexisting order of global capitalism, I am suggesting that if Murid submission were disarticulated from caliphal, state and patriarchal hierarchies, it could open up an unprecedented space of spiritual *and* political possibility for all Murid subjects. The flow of *baraka* would not be predetermined, but rather would be activated and intensified by the dialectical movement between the disciple's practices of submission and the sheikh's disciplinary interventions and transmission of mystical knowledge. For this transmission, which transforms the self and the self's orientation to God, to become fully realized, the disciple does not need to constantly exercise willful intention, but could rather be in a corpse-like state for part of the process. Even though in this state the disciple appears to be an agency-deprived object, she is nevertheless a fundamental component of an agentic formation that she activates and that could not exist without her. Further, this state of immersive submission, while permanent in relation to God, need not be fixed or compulsory in relation to a particular sheikh, thus clearly distinguishing it from the socially dead state of the slave.

If submission is disarticulated from caliphal, state, and patriarchal hierarchies, then *sutura* as we know it might cease to be a core modality of that submission. This would not mean that *sutura* would cease to be a Muslim value, but rather that it would be recast within both scriptural Islamic and Senegalese Sufi traditions so as to have a

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<sup>130</sup>Sokhna Fatou Gueye quoted in Roberts, *A saint in the city*, 159.

different ethical function. Muslim feminist scholars like Amina Wadud<sup>131</sup> and Fatima Mernissi<sup>132</sup> have subjected the Quran and authoritative sources for information about the Prophet Muhammed to a close re-reading, a study that reveals that the practices of veiling, seclusion, and non-disclosure that have become so firmly articulated to feminine piety do not issue from straightforward injunctions. Indeed, some of the most intimate details of the Prophet's life were discussed publicly by Aisha and Umm Salama, wives who became major sources of hadith traditions and interpretive methods after the Prophet's death. Given this alternative reading, it is difficult to continue to justify the reproduction of the Senegalese sheikh's sovereignty through the "Muslim" guarding of his *sutura*. However, a *sutura* that is deployed in the protection and care of all becomes an ethical possibility in the feminism-inflected Muslim humanism I explore in the next chapter.

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<sup>131</sup>Wadud, *Qur'an and woman*; Asma Barlas, "Believing women" in *Islam : unreading patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an*, 1st ed. (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 2002).

<sup>132</sup>Fatima Mernissi, *The veil and the male elite : a feminist interpretation of women's rights in Islam* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1991).

## Chapter 2

### The Slave, the Maid and the Prostitute: *Sutura* and the Limits of Womanhood in Senegalese Video Melodrama

Discreet followers and servants help much to reputation. *Omnis fama a domesticis emanat* [All reputation proceeds from servants].<sup>133</sup>

Jusqu'à présent, mon patron ne cesse de coucher avec moi et j'ai peur de le dénoncer car je suis dominée par une peur intense, c'est-à-dire de perdre mon boulot. Il me paie cher et j'ai toute une famille à nourrir au village. Donc, je suis obligée de supporter ce monsieur et maintenant je suis comme une esclave pour lui. Mais mon salaire ne tarde pas.<sup>134</sup>

You are a woman, o Chandramukhi. Realize who you are. Woman, mother, sister, wife, friend. When she is none, she is whore. Could you be some[thing] else, Chandramukhi?<sup>135</sup>

Conservative Senegalese pundits have a penchant for giving radio lectures in Wolof on proper womanly behavior. According to one such lecture I stumbled upon in 2005, a woman (*jigéen*) should not be out and about all the time, but should go out only when necessary, and only with the permission of her husband. She should not be seen in the shabby clothing worn by maids (*mbindaan*); she should instead wear attractive, clean clothes, even when relaxing at home. She should conform to a feminine code of honor which includes politeness, self-control, humility, generosity, goodness, piety, discretion, and respect for others, especially for parents and in-laws.

At first glance, there is nothing particularly remarkable about this prescriptive discourse on ideal womanly behavior; it is reiterated formulaically in the media and everyday talk by a variety of speaking subjects. The panorama of women of all sorts going about their business at various Dakar intersections, like the heterogeneous one that enjoins the neighborhoods of Point E, Fass, and Zone B, is comforting evidence of the enduring disparity between common sense truisms and messy everyday life in the city, of

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<sup>133</sup>“Essays of Francis Bacon - Of Honor and Reputation (The Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral, of Francis Ld. Verulam Viscount St. Albans)”, n.d., <http://www.authorama.com/essays-of-francis-bacon-55.html>.

<sup>134</sup>A Dakar maid quoted in Wittmann, “Vers une réhabilitation de la presse populaire au Sénégal: Une enquête auprès des bonnes” in Taureg and Wittmann, *Entre tradition orale et nouvelles technologies*. 81.

<sup>135</sup> Dialogue from Sanjay Bhansali, *Devdas* (Eros International, 2002).

the inability to effectively control women's mobility in public urban space.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, at such an intersection, you might see the elite middle-aged women chatting next to their Mercedes as they pick up their \$200 outfits at Sargane Design, the older working class women sitting on the sidewalk by the canal hawking peanuts and fruit, the teenage girls in their tight jeans and skimpy tops strolling with friends and stopping in the convenience store for frozen yogurt. It is tempting to dismiss the formulaic lecturing as so much background noise, a script everyone feels required to rehearse but few feel obligated to put into practice.

This iteration, however, caught my attention. He says a woman—*jigéen* unqualified, not the enhanced *jigéen ju baax* (“good woman”)—should not look like a maid, thereby positing “maid” and “woman” as separate yet mutually constituting categories. Indeed, womanhood gains its coherence in opposition to maidhood; it is what maidhood is not. The maid cannot conform to the visible modalities of ideal womanhood prescribed by the pundit because her labor occasions her unkempt appearance and forces her out into public space to run errands. It is precisely because of the delegation of this

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<sup>136</sup>The difficulty of coming to terms with the disparity between ideals and everyday practice pervades all aspects of contemporary Senegalese society. Linguist Leigh Swigart's research on popular perceptions of the mixing of French and Wolof in Urban Wolof is one example; her informants bemoan the demise of pure Wolof and stridently call for a return to tradition while preferring a decidedly mixed version of the language for their own everyday talk. [Leigh Swigart, “Two codes or one? The insiders' view and the description of codeswitching in Dakar,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 13: 1-2 (1992): 83-102.] Scott London's ethnography of domestic disputes in St. Louis courts reveals a more germane discrepancy between discourses that seek to constrain women's public mobility and the inability to put mechanisms of control into practice. [Scott London, *Family law, marital disputing and domestic violence in post-colonial Senegal, West Africa*. Diss. (Tucson: U of Arizona, 1999.)] This thwarted attempt at control is perhaps due to the lack of sustainable historical referents for the claim that it is “traditional” for women to remain in the house, given the centrality of women's public labor (as traders, farmers, domestic workers who collected firewood in the bush and drew water at the town well) in the agricultural economy of the past. The ideal, then, would seem to refer primarily to itself, not to historical practices of confinement and seclusion. While many argue that Senegalese society has become pervasively hypocritical, hypocrisy may not be an adequate analytic for these Senegalese examples, as it implies a willful intent to deceive. Instead, we could see public discourse in Senegal as a contest of narratives, where it is ultimately the best, most beautiful, and most morally defensible stories (within metanarratives of tradition, religion, modernity) that gain legitimacy through their reiteration. As London's research shows, powerful storytelling can override the seemingly all-powerful letter of the law; women complainants seeking divorce following spousal abuse and neglect have a better chance at obtaining a favorable decision if they are able to successfully figure themselves as virtuous characters (the good Muslim wife and mother) in a melodrama of gendered honor and piety under assault, rather than as subjects seeking independence and self-determination. The law accords women the right to a divorce for whatever reason, but the year-long mediation period ordered and conducted by the judge before the divorce is granted enables the husband and judge to rewrite the story so as to transform the virtuous heroine into an honorless, negligent wife and mother. Regardless of the facts of the case and the content of the written law, these stories have the power to transfigure the complainant into a right-less subject who must be disciplined through renewed submission to her husband and in-laws. This narrative can be so powerful that the complainant ceases to see herself as a subject who bears the right to a divorce and submits to the outcome of the judge's “successful mediation.” See Scott London, “Constructing Law, Contesting Violence: The Senegalese Family Code and Narratives of Domestic Abuse” in Emily S. Burrill, Richard L. Roberts, and Elizabeth Thornberry, *Domestic Violence and the Law in Colonial and Postcolonial* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010).239-255.

labor to the maid that the mistress of the house can be a proper woman, as it relieves her of the actual execution of harsher domestic tasks (while still enabling her to take credit for them) and allows her to stay home in a sphere of respectability protected by *sutura*. The maid's continual dispatch into unregulated outside space calls her chastity into question and defines her as an exposed subject, and her inability to conform to a regime of refined beauty makes it impossible for her to be properly *taaru* (honorably beautiful).<sup>137</sup> This distinction between maidhood and womanhood, far from being anodyne background noise, serves to legitimize the exploitation of a class of poor, young, female workers. The maid emerges as the inside outsider of the urban domestic sphere, a figure of bare life unable to possess gendered forms of honor, illegible as properly human, and therefore exploitable.

This chapter examines the gendered, *sutura*-mediated modalities of abjection specific to the figure of the maid and to another related figure, the prostitute. I read contemporary representations of maids and prostitutes through the history of female slavery in Senegal, arguing that the two figures occupy a symbolic location vacated by the slave. Present-day calls for the ethical treatment of maids and prostitutes in the wake of public revelations of abuse, rape and exploitation include exhortations like “the maid is not a slave,” suggesting the maid and the prostitute are slave-like, *sutura*-less subjects who function as foils against which the gendered honor of good women can be constituted. I focus on popular Wolof films that dramatize the centrality of *sutura* in the production of the outsideness of these figures, a bare life status that marks their bodies as exploitable, violable and disposable. Through a reinterpretation of Wolof moral philosophy and Islamic scripture, and through an ingenious domestication of the melodramatic mode, the films posit that bare life is reversible, and that the maid and the prostitute can be resignified as honorable subjects via alternative ethical operations of *sutura*.

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At first glance, the respective conditions of the maid and the prostitute are more marked by their potential impermanence than that of the slave. Maids often work as such for a finite period of time; they then get married and become wives, accessing low-status wifely honor. Sociological studies show that maids see themselves as deserving of personhood and try their best to conform to gendered norms<sup>138</sup> Maintaining their own sense of honor can be of utmost importance both in the workplace—hence the high turnover rate in response to poor treatment—and in relation to their social peers. One is easily struck by the difference between maids' shabby appearance and limited hygiene while they are working, and the effort put into refashioning themselves as refined and beautiful when they are given leave to visit their family—donning clean and modest

<sup>137</sup>For more on the politics of self-presentation and beauty, see Huda Mustafa, *Practicing beauty : crisis, value and the challenge of self-mastery in Dakar, 1970-1994.*, Diss. (Cambridge: Harvard,1997); Hudita Mustafa, “Portraits of modernity : fashioning selves in Dakarois popular photography.” *Images and empires: visibility in colonial and postcolonial Africa.* (2002); Deborah Heath, “Fashion, anti-fashion and heteroglossia in urban Senegal,” *American Ethnologist* 14:1 (1992).19-33

<sup>138</sup>Kristen Velyvis, *The sexual networks of migrant Serere women and the spread of HIV in Senegal.* Diss. (Madison ,Wis.: Center for Demography and Ecology University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998).

clothes, neatly coiffing their hair, and wearing perfume. For maids who do not live with their employers, this transformation is a daily ritual.

It is precisely because of the flexibility of the condition of the maid, I would argue, that the mistress-subject puts a great deal of effort into reinforcing the maid's dishonor. In the face of the *mbindaan*'s dangerous potential humanity—dangerous in the sense that she could both cease to be super-exploitable and seduce the husband, supplanting the wife<sup>139</sup>—the mistress produces a discourse that performatively reiterates the maid's outsideness and physically marginalizes her within the domestic sphere, thus enabling the mistress to consolidate own honorable femininity and domestic power. This power is real and enforceable: since the mistress is in charge of all things domestic, the maid is entirely under her authority, and she can fire her at will. She often pays the maid out of her own salary or out of the monthly allowance her husband gives her, and therefore decides the amount of the maid's salary, what she eats, where she sleeps, and how much she works. This may mean that the maid sleeps on an old mattress in the hallway in full view of the household, changes her clothes in the pantry, and eats alone after everyone else has eaten their fill.

The mistress-discourse tends to be a variation on the following script: “These maids are all the same. They are naturally bad, you cannot trust them. You can treat them so well, feed them, clothe them, offer them comfortable shelter of a kind they would never even see in the village, treat them like one of your own daughters—and they betray you. You share everything with them, and they repay you by acting insolent, stealing from you or trying to seduce your husband.”<sup>140</sup> Mistresses stave off the threat of being replaced by the maid by emphasizing the latter's innate badness, positing their inability to escape the dishonorable state of maidhood even if their condition changes.<sup>141</sup> They also argue that maids are incapable of sophisticated thinking or developing a refined sense of aesthetics, and therefore cannot master the art and science of managing and beautifying a

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<sup>139</sup>This is the mistress's ultimate nightmare. Fifty-five percent of the maids interviewed by Frank Wittmann reported having worked for women who accused them of stealing and/or trying to seduce their husband. The jealous anxiety of the mistress is not unfounded; sixty percent of the maids had been subjected to uninvited sexual harassment by men in the household, ranging from inappropriate gestures and talk to repeated rape. One of the interviewees claims that some maids intentionally seduce their mistresses' husbands, trying to force them into marriage by getting pregnant. Since polygamy is widely practiced, the transformation of the maid into co-wife constitutes a major blow to the first wife's honor, as it turns the dishonorable maid into a social equal or *nawle* (although not an equal within the household hierarchy, where the first wife is the queen of her home [“aawo buuru kēram”]).

<sup>140</sup> This discourse is dramatized in slightly modified form in the théâtre “Mbindane dou Diam” analyzed below; its components are also explored in Wittmann's article. It was ubiquitous in my Dakar milieu. See also Ababacar Samb, *Jom ou l'histoire d'un peuple : un film de Ababacar Samb*. (Paris: la Page blanche, 1982).

<sup>141</sup>My use of the analytics of “state” and “condition” is inspired by Claude Meillassoux's distinction between the two in his theoretical work on West African slavery. In a system structured by slavery, a slave's condition may change, but her state does not—she and her descendants will always be seen as dishonored and kinless slaves. See Meillassoux, “Female Slavery.” Cheikh Anta Diop also recognizes the impossibility of ennobling the slave subject in Cheikh Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa : a comparative study of the political and social systems of Europe and Black Africa, from antiquity to the formation of modern states* (Westport, Conn.: L. Hill, 1987). 50.

home and keeping a husband. This discourse produces an honorable mistress-subject who is generous, good, honest, and desirous to treat her maid as if she were kin. According to its logic, if the maid is marginalized within the household, it is her own fault because she is inherently incapable of being good. The material conditions of the maid's existence—taxing physical labor, seven days a week, twelve to fourteen hours a day, including sweeping, mopping, hand-washing laundry, childcare, cooking meals that take three hours to prepare over a single gas burner, running back and forth to the market and general store, lack of consistent access to a private area for bathing, changing, and sleeping—are mystified by the discourse. The effect is seen as the cause, and the maid's lack of propriety, bodily odors, and detachment from her kin remove her from social womanhood and reduce her to mere biological femaleness.

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The radio pundit's exhortation to “bayyil dox”—literally, “stop walking”—draws a gendered boundary between outside and inside spheres. It produces an inside that is structured by the authority of parents and husband, and that is protected by *sutura*; this inside space is denoted by the expressions “ci biir” (“inside”) or “ci biir kër gi” (“inside the house”). The outside is unregulated, un-surveillable, and exposed: it is the *mbedd* (the street), the *àll* (the bush), and “ci biti” (outside). These inside and outside spheres are not necessarily coextensive with physical space<sup>142</sup>; for example, it is desirable for a woman to go about visiting her relatives and her in-laws conformant to her obligation to care for and perform submission to them. In so doing, she leaves the physical space of her house, but only to circulate among other spaces structured by familial authority. Conversely, a woman who is under the authority of no one else (“ku amul kilifa”) is by definition outside, regardless of her actual lifestyle.

In her ethnographic study of a rural Wolof village in the early 1970s, Judith Irvine observed that the higher status a person had, the less he moved around. This norm structured the behavior of both men and women: the person of the highest status, the town warden, rarely left the house, venturing out only to attend Friday mosque service and town council meetings. Instead, people came to him. Who visits whom was one site at which the hierarchical relationship between two people was produced; by visiting, the visitor affirmed his subordinate position in relation to the host. Lower status people, especially those from the *gèwél* caste, were associated with travel and constant circulation among nobles' houses, a mobility linked to their professional activities that reinforced their subordinate position within the caste hierarchy and the classification of outside activity as dishonorable. Noble men who spent too much time away from home were criticized by the townspeople for violating noble norms of restrained action and circulation, as they were seen to threaten the distinction between *gèer* (non-casted, noble) honor and *gèwél* or *ñeeño* (casted, inferior) dishonor central to the reproduction of the social hierarchy and the *gèer*'s right to govern.

<sup>142</sup> “[T]he division inside/outside involves a metaphoric use of space for the purpose of making boundaries, however transient these boundaries may be. Actual spatial arrangements may embody this division, but the cultural practices productive of boundary markers cannot be reduced to the question of how physical space is used in particular circumstances” Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of modernity: essays in the wake of subaltern studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 72.



Since immobility is associated with high status and nobility, it follows that the good woman would have to stay put in order to be considered elite and honorable. In Irvine's study, the general injunction against noble movement was compounded by the preoccupation with female chastity as marker of feminine honor, and the *ñeeño* woman was seen to be sexually licentious, exhibiting a sexuality that was outside any regulating authority. In contemporary urban society—where the link between status and space has been completely reorganized<sup>143</sup> in the wake of the breakdown of the caste/slavery system, colonization, Islamization, the creation and expansion of the middle class, and the dizzying and uncontrollable distension of the city—the fixation on women's mobility has intensified and men's mobility has become less problematic. One rarely hears prescriptive discourses that order men to stay in the house. Mobility in urban space has been reconfigured as a masculine right, a marker of men's authority and honor, even though the “who visits whom” paradigm continues to indicate hierarchy in a variety of familial and patron-client relationships. In hip-hop and other forums, young urban men have vociferously claimed the street as masculine territory, partly because the ongoing economic crisis (“la crise”) has impeded access to other forms of masculine honor like the ability to provide for and command wives and children.

Because of her continual dispatch outside, then, the maid not only signifies as low status but also as improperly gendered. At the same time, she is partially incorporated into the domestic sphere and operates under the legitimate authority of the mistress, and therefore can be assigned the ambiguous fictive kin designation of “daughter.” The figure that emerges at the furthest limit of womanhood in urban society is the “janqu mbedd,” the street prostitute or *caga*. The prostitute is multiply outside, multiply exposed: she walks around outside at all hours of the night, she exposes her body for consumption by wearing revealing clothes and cultivating a suggestive comportment, and her sexual availability places her outside the system of regulated reproduction. She is completely outside the domestic sphere, under the command and protection of no legitimate, honorable authority, for the pimp and the brothel madam do not count as socially recognized *kilifa*. By willfully exposing herself in this way, she violates the boundary that *sutura* produces between inside and outside, and that defines the discreet, covered, stationary woman as honorable. As wholly dishonored—and therefore dehumanized—

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<sup>143</sup>Outside and inside spaces were constituted differently in rural, agricultural societies of the past. A woman could work in her or her husband's fields without being “outside.” The sum of the area of a small village is under surveillance most of the time, so a woman could go back and forth to the well (within the *géer* part of town, if the town is caste-segregated) without moving outside authority. The dangerous, unregulated outside was the bush, a space beyond the village. Donna Perry recorded a conservative discourse produced by men in contemporary rural Senegal that expressed nostalgia for a prior time in which women used to spend most of the day inside their compound and avoided the masculine space of the public square. They compared this lost masculinist paradise to a degraded present in which women are excessively mobile. See Donna L. Perry, “Wolof Women, Economic Liberalization, and the Crisis of Masculinity in Rural Senegal,” *Ethnology* 44:3 (2005): 207-226. Given what we know of the centrality of women's labor in the past, however, it is hard to reconcile the two views. In the contemporary urban context, the *all* is sometimes used metaphorically to designate outside space, but the *mbedd* (street) has more resonance.

she loses the right to communal protection and respect that *sutura* confers.<sup>144</sup> The prostitute is the bare, ungendered figure of the street, exposed to dishonor, exploitation, and death.

A striking image of the prostitute as exposed figure of bare life is in Jean-François Werner's account of his involvement with a Dakar sex worker in his urban ethnography *Marges, sexe et drogues à Dakar*. When M. develops painful symptoms from what is eventually diagnosed as syphilis, Werner takes her to a research clinic for treatment. The doctors make her disrobe in the courtyard of the hospital, in full public view, and have her bend over so that her sore is visible; they then proceed to photograph it from various angles. He tries to comfort her, saying "Fii, amul sutura!" ("Here, there's no *sutura*!"), and explaining that she must "se plier aux exigences des médecins" ("submit to the doctors' demands"; "se plier" also means "to bend") if she wants to be healed.<sup>145</sup> Werner is embarrassed, for himself and for the doctors, but the doctors themselves show no shame. The prostitute is, by definition, without virtue, always-already exposed, and therefore has no *sutura* that can be violated.

Werner's account is also consistent with the representation of the prostitute as a socially dead subject alienated from kin by her own fault. At sixteen, M. was banished from her step-father's home because of her shameful "vagabondage,"<sup>146</sup> her dishonorable roaming around in the street. She narrates this banishment as a condemnation to a life of wandering and dissipation, the destruction of her future, and certain death:

Si je sors de sa maison, où est-ce que je vais? Je vais rester dans la rue, ça va être encore plus mauvais pour moi, tu sais. Celui-là, il a démoli mon 'avenir,' parce que, en sortant dans la rue, je ne vais pas me comporter correctement, n'est-ce pas? [...] Même s'il m'avait battue jusqu'au sang, cela aurait mieux valu pour moi que 'Sors.' Parce que quelqu'un qui te dit 'Sors,' c'est comme s'il te disait: 'Va te détruire! Continue à déconner!'<sup>147</sup>

Her stepfather has exercised his sovereign right to "kill" a child under his authority by evicting her, and her mother, while opposed to her stepfather's decision, is powerless to help M. Her mother is not the owner of the house, and she is dependent on her husband for the livelihood of her and her children. While M. has some other sympathetic family members, and even marries a few times, her inability to conform to norms of proper

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<sup>144</sup> An informant in Foley and Nguer's study of sex-workers in Senegal testifies to this bareness: "One night I was beaten in the street as I was walking home. The old men who were on their way to the mosque told the other passersby not to help me because I was a sex worker and a scourge on society." Quoted in Ellen E Foley and Rokhaya Nguer, "Courting success in HIV/AIDS prevention: the challenges of addressing a concentrated epidemic in Senegal," *African Journal of AIDS Research* 9:4 (2010): 325-336.

<sup>145</sup> Jean-François Werner, *Marges, sexe et drogues à Dakar : ethnographie urbaine* (Paris: Karthala; Editions de l'ORSTOM, 1993), 104.

<sup>146</sup> The term "vagabondage" made a strident entrance into the Senegalese discursive field when the French colonial administration became concerned to manage the movement and labor of former slaves after emancipation. The extrication of the ex-slaves from their masters' authority, compounded by their alienation from their kin, turned them into potentially subversive wanderers and loiterers. It was then up to the administration to insert them into a new structure regulated by colonial authority. Similar laws were passed to regulate the public movement of prostitutes. See Thioub, "L'enfermement carcéral." 272.

<sup>147</sup> Werner, *Marges, sexe et drogues à Dakar*, 146.

womanly behavior, her drug and alcohol use, and her sex work eventually estranges her from all of her kin.

Since the prostitute is estranged from kin, she ceases to have a recognized social location, and becomes effectively dead—except, perhaps, in the illegitimate pseudo-kinship formations of the brothel or the pimp family, which do not count in the eyes of respectable society. As with my discussion of the maid’s lack of honor above, the figuring of the prostitute as dishonored and socially dead in dominant representation is not meant to be a statement about how the members of the heterogeneous community of sex workers in Senegal perceive their own honor and connection to kin. Emilie Venables’ ethnographic research on sex workers in the southern city of Ziguinchor reveals that many female sex workers have children born out of wedlock or in failed marriages that are being cared for by relatives in other towns. They send the income they earn from sex work back home for the upkeep of their children and parents, a steady flow of money that continues to bind them to their kin and that ensures their kinfolks’ basic survival. They do not, however, tell their parents how they earn the money—their position, quoted in the title of Venables’ article, is “they don’t know, and I don’t want them to know”—but instead cover their activities with *sutura*.<sup>148</sup> For their kin to learn of the source of the income would be to expose the sex workers to social death and to bring *gàcce* (ignominy) onto the family should the word get out to the community.<sup>149</sup> It is the young women’s physical distance from kin that enables them to engage in sex work without repercussions within the family and in the family’s community, maintaining their honorable location within the kinship network. This kind of public prostitution, then, necessarily involves a certain degree of alienation from kin and home community.

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As I intimated above, the dishonor of the maid and the prostitute can be read as a reconfiguration of the dishonor of the *ñeeño*—and more specifically *gégél*—woman in the Wolof caste system. In the caste system, *gégél* women are not held to the *gээр* code of feminine honor; indeed, the dishonorable *gégél* woman is one of the foils against which the honorable *gээр* woman subject is constituted. The *gégél* women can be lewd and sexually suggestive in public in accordance with her performance tradition, and she is expected to have multiple sexual relationships outside of wedlock. She is perpetually moving around outside—carrying messages for nobles, performing at wedding and naming ceremonies, and soliciting gifts and patronage. The comparison between the maid/prostitute and the *gégél* hits a wall, however, when one takes into consideration the *gégél*’s power to kill the *gээр* by publicly dishonoring her, the *gээр*’s reliance on the *gégél* for proxy communication, and the ease with which the *gégél* accumulates wealth through her appeals to noble patrons. The *gégél* occupies an important, recognized position within the social order, and plays a crucial role in the reproduction of that order by reinforcing it through the recitation of genealogies, the oral narration of morality tales, and the exhortation to nobles to be true to their beautiful birth (“rafet juddu”) by

<sup>148</sup>Emilie Venables, “‘They don’t know and I don’t want them to know’: Sex-workers and uncertain identity in a Senegalese STI clinic” in Charlotte Baker and Zoë Norridge, *Crossing places: new research in African studies* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007).

<sup>149</sup>Foley and Nguer, “Courting success in HIV/AIDS prevention.”

conforming to the *géer* code of honor. The *gével* is not alienated from kin, but firmly situated within a long performance tradition in which knowledge and skills are passed down from generation to generation.<sup>150</sup> The *gével*, therefore, can be seen as possessing caste-specific honor and powers, rights that many consider to be the basis of *gével*'s interest in the perpetuation of the caste system.<sup>151</sup>

Rather than continue to read the figures of the maid and the prostitute through the figure of the *gével*—a move I find more productive for thinking through the outsideness of the *góor-jigéen* in the third chapter of this dissertation—I propose instead to compare them to the natally alienated figure in the Wolof imaginary: the slave. A paradigmatic socially dead subject, the female slave is the historical figure that continues to be invoked in contemporary meditations on the substance of normative womanhood, thus serving as the limit through which the norm can be constituted.

According to Orlando Patterson, the slave is invariably represented as a subject who has been rescued from death by the sovereign master. The only “choice” for the slave is between physical death and the social death of enslavement, making the slave a dead subject, a figure of bare life defined by his exposure to death.<sup>152</sup> Patterson’s exhaustive comparative study of slavery across cultures and throughout history yields three constituent elements that characterize the social death of the slave: the slave is subjected to the complete authority of the master, under threat of violence and physical death; he is natally alienated, which means he can make no claims to social belonging via his connection to ascending and descending generations; and he is a degraded being without honor who cannot compete for honor with free persons.<sup>153</sup> In Senegalese popular representation, the maid and the prostitute are defined by these three elements, to varying degrees: they are subjugated to sovereign power wielded by employers, pimps and brothel madams; they are alienated from their kin by disownment or physical distance; and they are dishonored subjects who cannot possess feminine virtue. The three elements are mutually constitutive, as the young women’s distance (and/or estrangement) from kin makes it difficult or impossible to call upon their families for protection and support. If they cannot appeal to another authority, they become entirely dependent on their employers or pimps and wholly subject to their authority. Further, their detachment from the embedded kinship location that confers status and permits the realization of feminine personhood excludes them from the competition for honor in which other young women can engage.

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<sup>150</sup>Diop, *La société wolof*; Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village.*; Isabelle Leymarie, *Les griots wolof du Sénégal* (Paris: Servedit-Maisonnette et Larose, 1999).

<sup>151</sup>Emil Magel, “Caste identification of the hare in Wolof oral narratives.,” *Research in African literatures*. 12:2 (1981); Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa*. Sylla, *La philosophie morale des Wolof*.

<sup>152</sup>“Social-death as a mode of ‘life’ is made possible only by the fact that it harbors at its center the threat of actual death (as well as its occasional tactical deployment )” JanMohamed, *The death-bound-subject*.57. See JanMohamed for an elaboration on the compatibility of Agamben's bare life with Patterson's social death.

<sup>153</sup>Patterson, *Slavery and social death*.

The comparison of the maid or prostitute to the slave invokes an image of the slave informed by multiple traditions and representations. In the film *Linguère VDN*,<sup>154</sup> the brothel madam brands Aby—a prostitute who is trying to leave the brothel and become an honorable wife—with a cigarette in order to signal her claim to Aby’s body and mark Aby as *sacer*. I have seen no historical accounts of branding in the Wolof system of slavery, so Aby’s corporeal branding would seem to refer to practices associated with the transatlantic slave trade. This referencing of Euro-American slavery is enhanced by the mannerisms, dress, and distinctive speech of the two thugs the brothel madam employs to physically assault and terrorize Aby. They wear American flag bandanas, pepper their Wolof with American vulgarity, and adopt gestures and behaviors associated with the gangster-thug. While these signifiers of Americanness may simply be consistent with the glorification of the African-American thug in marginalized, masculinist urban cultural formations in Senegal, they also ascribe a foreign character to the extreme exploitation of the prostitute dramatized by the film, suggesting that the violent performance of sovereign power is inconsistent with the Wolof ethico-political tradition.

Contemporary representations of the slave are also informed by the long tradition of slavery in pre-colonial Wolof society. The powerful Wolof kingdoms consolidated wealth and influence by accumulating slaves, harnessing their labor and trading them in the trans-Saharan and transatlantic markets for guns and horses.<sup>155</sup> Individuals and lineage groups also owned slaves, which enabled them to have more laborers at their disposal, and therefore accumulate more wealth. Since land was abundant, but making it yield crops highly labor-intensive, wealth was primarily instantiated through people whose labor could be mobilized for agricultural and domestic production. The more wives, children, clients, and slaves a man could have under his authority, the greater labor capacity he could wield, the more crops he could produce, and the more wealth he could accumulate. This wealth would then attract more free clients in search of patronage and enable the purchase of more slaves.<sup>156</sup>

Command over a large group of people signaled not only wealth, but enhanced honor. Within the caste system, one of the signs of the *géer*’s honor was his ability to maintain his patronage of casted clients. In the performance of patronage, the noble *géer* subject was constituted as honorable (generous, commanding, superior) and the *ñeeño* subject as essential but dishonorable (begging, submissive). Within this system, the accumulation of material wealth by *géer* was less important than the ability to distribute it to clients, ensuring the continual enhancement of the *géer*’s honor, the growth of the client base, and therefore an increased capacity to mobilize the *ñeeño*’s labor. Because *géwél* in particular had the power to publically dishonor *géer* (if the latter did not comply with the former’s request for gifts), and did not need to redistribute the *géer* gifts to enhance their own honor, *géwél* often hoarded more material wealth than *géer*. While they could not command casted clients, and, bound to their trade, could not engage in

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<sup>154</sup>Cheikh Diop, *Linguère VDN*. (Paris: Africa productions, 2006).

<sup>155</sup>Klein, “Servitude,” 340.

<sup>156</sup>*Ibid.*, 351-52.

noble agricultural production, they could use their wealth to accumulate slaves, thus allowing rich *gévél* to access the prestige derived from owning a slave. The *jaami géwél* were at the very bottom of the Wolof social hierarchy, providing a negative foil for the *gévél* and attesting to the slave's state of negative sovereignty.<sup>157</sup>

While the *gévél*, born inferior and with tainted blood, could not choose his moral status, he was “politically” free<sup>158</sup> and could choose to glorify or abandon individual patrons. This was not the case with the slave, who—distanced from kin and denied a location within his own genealogy—was entirely dependent on and bound to his master. Many insist on the gentle nature of Wolof domestic slavery, highlighting the tendency for masters to arrange and facilitate their slaves' marriages and to allow their slaves to set up separate households, demanding only part of their labor and a portion of the yields from the slaves' own fields in return.<sup>159</sup> This partial autonomy does not translate into the possession of honor and status: however wealthy a slave may become from the cultivation of his own fields, he must continue to perform submission to his master and to other men of free origin, thus publicly enhancing the master's honor by degrading himself. Mid-nineteenth century observers Carrère and Holle say the slave

always owes profound respect to men of free origin. Even if they [the slaves] are rich, which is not rare, they must salute any *jaambu* who passes. If the *jaambu* insults or mistreats them, they can neither answer nor respond. A man with a slave ancestor can never sit on a chair in the presence of a *jaambu*; he sits on the ground. No marriage is possible between a former slave or his descendants and the daughter of a *jaambu*.”<sup>160</sup>

Regardless of the extent of the master's generosity and kindness—or of the comfort that the slave of an elite master might have enjoyed—they were still operating within a slave system that reproduced the slave as natively alienated, dishonored and subjugated subject. Even though Wolof masters (allegedly) rarely exercised their right to

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<sup>157</sup> Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village*.; Diop, *La société wolof*. Slaves who accumulated enough wealth could also purchase slaves. However, they could not be considered proper masters of their slaves, since all of their wealth could be appropriated by their masters upon their death. Slaves' children did not have the right to inherit their parents' wealth—including wealth-in-persons—as slaves did not belong in a lineage, but rather belonged to a master. So, while a slave's acquisition of another slave may have improved the conditions of the former's life, it ultimately added to the wealth of the master and extended his sovereignty. Masters continued to claim their right to their slaves' possessions decades after emancipation; Klein gives the example of a court case in Kajor in 1957 in which “a widow sued because, after her husband's death, his former master seized his papers and sold his possessions. She sued for the papers and the right of their son to succeed. The court awarded her the papers, but denied the succession, which was granted only on appeal.” Martin A. Klein, *Slavery and colonial rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge; New York, NY, Cambridge University Press, 1998).222.

<sup>158</sup>Yoro Dyao in R Rousseau, “Le Sénégal d'autrefois : Étude sur le Cayor : cahiers de Yoro Dyao.” *Bulletin du Comité Historiques et Scientifiques de l'Afrique Occidentale Française*. (1933): 48.

<sup>159</sup>Klein, “Servitude”; Rousseau, “Le Sénégal d'autrefois” Ibrahima Thioub, “Regard critique sur les lectures africaines de l'esclavage et de la traite Atlantique” in .Issiaka Mandé, Blandine Stefanson, and Association of African Historians, *Les historiens africains et la mondialisation: actes du 3e congrès international des historiens africains, Bamako, 2001* (KARTHALA Editions, 2005).

<sup>160</sup> Carrère and Holle quoted in Klein, “Servitude” 347.

appropriate and sell their slaves' children, that right was continuously reiterated and legitimated in the discourses of the slave system. Slaves could not possess the full authority parents normally exercise over their children, and therefore could not access the honor derived from parenthood. In addition, however integrated slaves were in the domestic life of the master, and however many generations the slave's family was in the service of the master's family, the slave was *not* the master's kin, for the slave had to remain symbolically kinless in order to continue to signify as *jaam*.

Indeed, it is the slave's kinlessness that is the grounds for the exclusion of the slave from the Wolof human. The refined human's honor and right to command is produced through the public recitation of genealogies that locates him—the *gээр* (honorable non-casted person) who is also a *gor* or *jaambur* (honorable free person)—in relation to his ascending and descending generations. Even now, a hundred years after formal emancipation in the Senegal region,<sup>161</sup> descendents of slaves who are no longer politically unfree but have remained attached to their master's family are still denied inclusion in the genealogies sung by the *гээр*, in spite of the crucial role they and their forebears may have played in the history of that family.<sup>162</sup> As a symbolically natally alienated being, the slave cannot have a formally recognized genealogy.

This dishonorable, kinless status—even in the absence of violent subjugation—is tantamount to death in the Wolof context. Wolof slavery may have been gentle—or perhaps not, depending on the version of history you privilege—but it was still a gentle form of death. Evidence that most slaves found their status undesirable is to be found in the large number that left their masters after emancipation and started new lives as disciples of Sufi orders, farmers, migrant laborers, or city-dwellers. Many former slaves migrated away from the place of their enslavement and created new identities, inventing genealogies with which they could found their honorable location within their new community. This reinvention of identity has posed a challenge to oral historians seeking to produce a more detailed historical account of slavery in Senegal and to develop a better understanding of the experience of slavery from the perspective of the enslaved.<sup>163</sup> Descendants of slaves who managed to reinvent themselves cover their dishonorable past with *sutura*, staving off the death of *гacce* and rendering the slave's subjectivity irrevocably subaltern.

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Scholarly discussions of the dishonor of the Wolof slave tend to assume a normative male slave subject whose exclusion from the human is figured as an alienation from honorable manhood. This tendency is not uncommon in the wider literature on slavery;<sup>164</sup> it is to be found even in Patterson's work, which nevertheless includes details that could form the basis for a theory of gendered honor in the slave system, and which, in some cases, distinguishes between the respective conditions of male and female slaves.

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<sup>161</sup>Legally enforceable emancipation in most of French West Africa came in 1905, not in 1848 when France abolished slavery.

<sup>162</sup>Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village*; Sow Fall, *Le juburier du patriarce*.

<sup>163</sup>Martin A. Klein, "Studying the History of Those Who Would Rather Forget: Oral History and the Experience of Slavery," *History in Africa* 16 (1989): 209-217.

<sup>164</sup>Robertson, *Women and slavery in Africa*, 3.

Indeed, Patterson does not comment upon the interchangeability of “manhood” and “honor” in the excerpt from Frederick Douglass’ narrative which he uses to illustrate the slave’s general lack of honor in American chattel slavery: “A man without force is without the essential dignity of humanity. Human nature is so constituted that it cannot honor a helpless man, although it can pity him; and even that it cannot do long, if the signs of power do not arise.”<sup>165</sup>

U.S.-based black feminist scholarship has problematized this interchangeability of the “human” and “man” in slavery discourses, arguing that it props up the black man as the paradigmatic injured subject while foreclosing the specificity—and the systemic centrality—of the black female slave’s exclusion from honor and personhood. The critique begins with the premise that all slaves were ungendered in American chattel slavery. Both male and female slaves were natively alienated, and therefore had no claims to their spouses, parents, siblings, or children. Both were forced to perform harsh labor, and, as telling details in Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*<sup>166</sup> reveal, both could be sexually exploited by masters and mistresses. All slave bodies, regardless of sex, could be publicly exposed and tortured. At this level, a gender distinction between slaves is moot; male and female slaves were equally injured by their exclusion from gendered humanity.<sup>167</sup>

American chattel slavery existed within a white supremacist patriarchal system whose strict gender hierarchy ascribed gendered forms of honor to white sexed bodies. For slaves to move from a non-human, ungendered state of honorlessness to the state of a free honorable person, they had to enter into gendered modes of intelligible humanness. This is why Douglass’s narrative is preoccupied with the acquisition of a manhood defined by the ability to fight back, protecting both self and kin from danger and exploitation. This is also why Harriet Jacobs’ narrative is so concerned with the question of virtuous chastity. She is anxious to show that the slave woman’s exclusion from the ranks of “true womanhood” is the product of a condition forced upon her, not a product of her own agency or desire. For, however much a slave woman may want to guard her chastity, her institutionalized sexual availability to the master makes this desire unrealizable. Were she a true woman, this “sexual availability” would be classified as rape, and therefore an egregious violation of her feminine honor.<sup>168</sup>

In the Wolof context, it is unfortunate that scholars have not paid more attention to the alienation of the female slave from feminine honor, especially considering historians’ argument that there was a higher demand for female slaves than for male slaves in the region.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, the feminization of slavery in the region begs a consideration of the female slave subject as the exemplary figure of social death. Historians have offered different theories as to why more women were enslaved than

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<sup>165</sup>Quoted in Patterson, *Slavery and social death*, 13.

<sup>166</sup>Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the life of a slave girl: written by herself* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

<sup>167</sup>Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe”; Kaplan, “Love and Violence/Maternity and Death” and Davis, “Reflections.”

<sup>168</sup>Carby, *Reconstructing womanhood*.

<sup>169</sup>Robertson, *Women and slavery in Africa*.



men. One theory is that women are seen to have a greater capacity for labor in many Africa societies, contrary to the Western patriarchal ideology that classifies women as the physically weaker sex.<sup>170</sup> Local gendered divisions of labor often assigned women to both domestic and agricultural labor, whereas men were assigned to a specific sphere of agricultural labor and occasional warfare. Since enslaved men were rarely trained in the domestic tasks, to have more women at one's disposal through the acquisition of female slaves was to ensure greater productivity. It also served to relieve the women of the slave-owning class from labor, which produced a prestige distinction between the elite and the lower classes and contributed to the consolidation of elite feminine honor.<sup>171</sup>

One could also make the argument that female slaves were more desirable because they reproduced the slave class. However, this theory has been challenged by evidence of low fertility rates among female slaves. West African data instead suggests that slave women tended to miscarry, as their lives were likely to be unstable, their health poor, and their working conditions harsh. There is also evidence that they often aborted or resorted to infanticide, perhaps to avoid the added burden of pregnancy and child rearing while working.<sup>172</sup> These examples of thwarted reproduction serve as indices of the social deadness of the slave woman: since her children would belong to the master, she would be alienated from her progeny, unable to both care for and assert parental rights over them. To kill them would be to deny the master the added value of slave children, and to refuse their incorporation as commodities into the slave system. Since the slave system confers sovereignty over the slave to the master, the slave woman's murder of her child could be read as a radical act which brings to view the only form of political agency she possesses: the ability to kill her own child before that child becomes a socially dead slave. Rather than allow the master to dispose of her child's body as he will, she disposes of it herself. In doing so, she arrogates—however briefly—parental sovereignty over her progeny.

The gendered context of the slave woman's natal alienation provides yet another theory as to why female slaves were more sought after than male slaves. Female slaves were especially exploitable when removed from kin, and it was more difficult for them to

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<sup>170</sup>Meillassoux, "Female Slavery."

<sup>171</sup>Robertson, *Women and Slavery in Africa*, 15.

<sup>172</sup>Meillassoux, "Female Slavery," 52-53. Infanticide and abortion could also be an indication of the slave woman's own sense of honor, an expression of shame at having a child out of wedlock: by eliminating the shameful evidence, she cleanses her dishonor in her own eyes (although not in the eyes of the system, in which she is always-already dishonored). The numerous infanticides committed in Senegal in recent years tend to be *gâcce*-related; the offending mothers are either unwed, or the wives of international migrants whose husbands have not been back to Senegal in several years. They prefer to kill their children rather than have their lack of virtue be exposed. While I was living in an eight-story apartment building in downtown Dakar, one of the maids who worked for the tenants directly above me induced a late-term abortion and flushed the fetus down the toilet. The fetus got stuck in the pipes, causing major flooding in the building that necessitated the intervention of the *sapeurs-pompiers* at nine o'clock at night. An act that was supposed to cover her dishonor ended up exposing it in the most dramatic way; she was quickly found to be responsible, and she and the nurse who had illegally administered the inducement were arrested and imprisoned. According to building gossip, she had already had one child out of wedlock who was being cared for by her family in the village. This complicates the *gâcce* reading of her motivation; in this case, it is perhaps more likely that she was trying to avoid the loss of income due to suspension or termination.

start a new life were they to run away. While the practice of splintering off from the lineage group and forming new households, or even new villages, was not unheard of for men, it was unimaginable for women in the Wolof context.<sup>173</sup> A lone woman escaping slavery would be unprotected and exposed, and would have a hard time integrating into a new community as anything other than a slave. Kopytoff and Miers argue that women were desirable slaves in Africa because they could be incorporated into lineages as fictive daughters and legal wives, a desirability enhanced by the women's distance from their kin: their owner-husbands would not have to pay bridewealth or give gifts to in-laws for the duration of the marriage, and could expect total obeisance from wives who did not have kin to petition on their behalf in the event of domestic conflict or poor treatment. The position of Kopytoff and Miers assumes that the slave's inhumanity is a temporary state that is ultimately transformed by her incorporation into a new community, and that this incorporation necessarily involves relocation within a kin group and its attendant rehumanization.<sup>174</sup> In this theory, the slave woman is alienated from ascending generations at the moment of her enslavement, but becomes disalienated from descending generations when integrated as daughter or wife into the master's kin group.

The nature of the slave women's natal alienation has been a point of contention among scholars of slavery in Africa; on the Kopytoff/Miers side, the goal of African slave systems is to integrate the slave by assigning her a subordinate position within a kin group, and on the Meillassoux/Klein side, the goal is to reproduce her as a kinless, dishonored, non-human stranger within. These opposing positions are possible because these scholars work on different African societies that have different conceptions of "slavery"; Meillassoux and Klein focus on West African societies that had highly developed slave systems in which slaves were often seen as chattel, while Kopytoff and Miers specialize in Central African communities that had developed methods for integrating foreigners of all kinds. Wolof slavery, to which Martin Klein has devoted some attention, conforms primarily to the former. However, since slaves were not seen to have the tainted blood that *gével* had (and that confined them to an endogamous caste), endogamy was not as strictly enforced. It was possible for slave women to become their masters' concubines or junior wives, and, by giving birth to the master's children, change both their status and that of their progeny.

This did not mean, however, that Wolof slave wives or their progeny achieved equal status with free wives and their descendants.<sup>175</sup> The slave wife could not call her kin to her defense, nor could she pack her bags and return to her kin if she was unhappy in her marriage, a right called *fay* that was granted to free Wolof women.<sup>176</sup> In the polygamous household, the children of slave women could not compete on the same footing with the children of free wives.<sup>177</sup> As I have argued above, the honor of the slave woman is fundamentally called into question, and therefore the slave wife would have to

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<sup>173</sup>Klein and Roberts, "Gender and Emancipation in West Africa" in Suzanne Miers and Richard L. Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, Wis: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

<sup>174</sup>Miers, *Slavery in Africa*.

<sup>175</sup>Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village.*, 94.

<sup>176</sup>Fatou K. Camara, "Women and the Law: A Critique of Senegalese Family Law," *Social Identities* 13:6 (2007): 787-800.

face the scorn and denigration of the honorable wives and of the larger community of honorable women. The transformation of a slave woman into official wife appears to have been rare in the pre-colonial period, given its potential to seriously destabilize household dynamics and the hierarchical timocratic system.<sup>178</sup> As we have already learned from the tale “Fari, jeegu mbaam” with which I opened this dissertation, to marry a woman without kin is to risk exposing the family and the community to dishonor and death.

If the official marriage of the slave to the master risked destabilizing the system, the master’s sexual enjoyment of the slave woman’s body outside the institutional confines of marriage did not necessarily have the same effect. Instead, the master’s legitimate sexual access to the slave woman’s body—called “droit de cuissage” in French—confirmed the slave woman as dishonored and not-kin, and therefore constituted a minimal threat to free women’s honor.<sup>179</sup> If the slave woman were truly incorporated into family as one of the “children”—like a daughter, or a niece—then she would not be sexually available to the master. If the slave were a bona fide wife, then her sexual availability would be paired with an ability to defend her rights as wife and mother, as well as to access the honor and power that comes with legitimate motherhood. As in the American chattel system, the slave woman could not enhance her feminine honor by guarding her chastity, for she had no rights over her own body—it was at another’s disposal.<sup>180</sup> Indeed, by virtue of her slavehood, she was already dishonored, and therefore had no virtue that could be defended. As such, the slave woman inhabited a category that

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<sup>177</sup>Irvine reports her village called children of a slave mother and free father “children of one foot.” Irvine, *Caste and Communication*, 95.

<sup>178</sup>In Aminata Sow Fall’s novel *Le Jujubier du patriarce*, the decision of a man of royal blood to marry a woman descended from a long line of family slaves triggers instability and conflict within the family, particularly among the wives and daughters.

<sup>179</sup>One might think that the constraints on noble honor, which ideally restrict the sexual behavior of both men and women, would prevent honorable men from exhibiting a sexual appetite that exceeds the bounds of regulated marriage. Judith Irvine gives examples of noble men whose honor was diminished in the eyes of the community because of their sexual involvement with low-status (particularly caste) women. However, David Ames’ ethnography conducted in the early 1950s suggests that rules of honorable restraint (*kersa*) and *sutura* were suspended when it came to slave and other low-status women: “Freeborn men show a lessened restraint in their behavior toward ja[a]m and other lower class women. They may caress them in public, and tell risqué stories in their presence as they never would with women of their own class.” David Ames, *Plural marriage among the Wolof in the Gambia with a consideration of problems of marital adjustment and patterned ways of resolving tensions*, (Chicago, Northwestern: 1953). The noble woman’s honor is reinforced by the difference between noble men’s restrained behavior with them and the men’s sexually explicit behavior with slave women, but it is threatened by slave women’s instatement as official wife. One of Fall’s characters in *Le Jujubier du patriarce* articulates this difference: “Cette Sadaga, une salope... Pourquoi Waly ne s’était-il pas contenté de son droit de cuissage... Aller jusqu’à l’épouser... Si elle avait été une taara [concubine]... C’est elle qui a tué Kantome... Elle lui a inoculé la misère, comme un poison... Penda, l’enfant de la trahison... Quelle idée de lui avoir donné le prénom de l’honorable ‘reine de la maison de Sogui’” (94).

<sup>180</sup>“For the freeborn woman, one of the horrors of enslavement was to be suddenly removed from a situation where her sexuality was carefully controlled and her virginity valued to one where her body was someone else’s property and subject to that other’s will” Klein, *Slavery and colonial rule in French West Africa*, 247.

was not constrained by norms regulating honorable gendered bodily comportment, mobility, and legal sex. Even if she avoided engaging in the practices of exposure associated with the *gével* woman, and even if she was a technical virgin until she was “married” to a slave husband, her slave “state” defined her as unchaste and “outside.”

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If, in the Wolof system of slavery, the slave state was difficult to transcend, and a significant amount of ideological work was put into the reproduction of the dishonored slave subject, what would an ethical project that seeks to resignify the slave as human look like? In the U.S., the association of slavehood with blackness facilitated the extension of black unfreedom past emancipation and troubled ex-slave attempts to access gendered honor. Race enabled the reproduction of a dishonored, natively alienated and subjugated black subject who was excluded from the human. The black subject was represented as degraded, ignorant, sexually licentious, and bestial, a symbolic location invoked when President Obama said in a recent speech that his opponents were “talking about me like I’m a dog.” The subjugation of black bodies to white sovereign power was enacted by violent state repression and white vigilantism, often staged in carefully-orchestrated scenes that publicly affirmed the black subject as a figure of life who could be killed but not murdered. The natal alienation of the black slave was also extended through the post-emancipation period through discourses that posited American blacks as having no history, the forced sterilization of black women, the wrenching of black women from their families to take care of white people’s homes and children, the mass incarceration of black men, and the state’s continual incursion into black domestic spaces in the form of social services and police raids. Given the enduring impossibility of disentangling the American notion of the human from whiteness and a hierarchized gender order, post-humanists argue that a radical politics should not seek to humanize black subjects, but to do away with the notion of the human altogether.<sup>181</sup>

In the Senegalese context, the slave’s “racial” difference is less stable, and somatic markers that would facilitate the reproduction of a subjugated population after emancipation are absent. The dramatic societal shifts of the past few centuries left a small number of people who continue to be seen as slaves in their home communities, and whose political unfreedom has been transformed into a caste-like moral unfreedom.<sup>182</sup> The figures that have come to occupy the symbolic location vacated by the slave—the maid and the prostitute—are not necessarily of slave descent. Rather, the reproduction of a symbolic order inherited from the slave system produces discursive slots into which exploitable bodies can be placed. The new iteration of this order does not require a distinct population differentiated by race or caste—even as old discourses on blood purity are sometimes mobilized to rationalize the abjection of dishonored subjects—but rather exploits a situational alienation from kin to produce an honorless subject against whom others’ honorable humanness can be shored.

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<sup>181</sup>This is shorthand for a sophisticated critical position. See, for example, Sara Clarke Kaplan, “A Response to Maurice Wallace,” *American Literary History* 20:4 (2008): 807-813.

<sup>182</sup>Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village.*; Diop, *La société wolof.*

Brian Carr’s argument in “At the Thresholds of the ‘Human’: Race, Psychoanalysis and the Replication of Memory”<sup>183</sup> is helpful for building a conceptual bridge between the well-theorized exclusion of the American slave from the gendered human, and the under-theorized problem of the humanization of the slave/maid/prostitute in Senegalese popular representation. Carr uses a reading of the film Blade Runner<sup>184</sup> to show that the human is signifiable only through the assignation of sexual difference, and therefore that the ungendered slave can become resignified as human only when the slave becomes legible as either man or woman. In Blade Runner, the slaves of the dystopian future are artificial clones who have the physical appearance and capacity of humans—meaning they look like men or women—but are not human. There are no somatic marks which differentiate the clones as a group from the main human characters in the movie, which, at first glance, allows the story to bring to the fore less obvious processes of human signification. Rachel, the main slave character, undergoes “a transformation from a body convertible to and produced as laboring property to a body signifiable within a discourse of human (hetero)sexual differentiation and romance.”<sup>185</sup> It is when she acts in accordance with her desire for the human male hero, which manifests as feminized romantic submission to the possessor of the phallus, that she becomes intelligible as human and the male hero names her as such. The state of humanness does not precede the state of womanness, or vice versa: “It is not that Rachel first signifies ‘human’ and *then* she can enter into sexual normativity. Rather, sexual normativity constitutes the hegemonic field of the human’s intelligibility as such.”<sup>186</sup>

Rachel can successfully make the transformation from ungendered slave to human woman because all of the slave characters and all of the main human characters are white. In the American symbolic order within which the film operates, a slave inhabiting a white female body can come to signify as a human woman in a way that a black female body cannot. At one level, the film is a fantasy re-drafting of American history, and by making a white female body stand in for the historically enslaved black female body, it forecloses the black female subject and her unique and enduring exclusion from the gendered human. When the slave is a racialized other, Carr argues, “sexual difference stands to guard a racialized boundary between the ‘ungendered’ nonhuman (historically racialized/colonized) and the human whose circulation in a symbolics of (hetero)sexual difference constitutes its very definitional contours.”<sup>187</sup> There is then, another slave who is under erasure in the film, but nevertheless exists as a foil for the white woman’s entry into womanhood and that makes the entire field of gendered signification possible.

Wolof films also dramatize the process by which the slave (in the incarnation of the maid or prostitute) can be humanized through gendering, and, in the case of Linguere VDN, this humanization requires other not-quite-human foils to be successful. However, there is a significant difference between the nature of gendering in Blade Runner and that

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<sup>183</sup>Brian Carr, “At the Thresholds of the ‘Human’: Race, Psychoanalysis, and the Replication of Imperial Memory,” *Cultural Critique* 39 (1998): 119.

<sup>184</sup>Michael Deeley, *Blade runner* (Burbank, CA : Warner Home Video, 1999).

<sup>185</sup>Carr, “At the Thresholds of the ‘Human’,” 134.

<sup>186</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup>*Ibid.*, 125.

of the Senegalese film. In *Blade Runner*, the subject becomes gendered through a process rendered intelligible by psychoanalytic narrative. In this schema, a woman becomes a proper woman by directing her sexual desire towards and submitting to a man, the subject who wields the phallus (symbol of authority, power, law, and language). In the classic Freudian scenario, children learn how to become proper men and women by observing this dynamic in their parents and striving to take the place of the parent whose body resembles their own.

In the Senegalese context, this narrative of gendered becoming has less explanatory power given the different family structures and complex social hierarchies unique to the region. A Senegalese girl child could grow up in a household in which her father's mother or sister wields more power over her mother than does her father, as her mother became the wife of all of her father's kin when she married him, and senior women can wield authority over younger men.<sup>188</sup> She could also grow up in a polygamous household where her mother and the other wives are locked in a struggle for power among themselves. This struggle might not have the aim of being the only one to be romantically possessed by the husband; indeed, it might have nothing to do with the husband at all, even as one of the game's challenges is to see who is most skilled at catering to his needs and desires. Instead, it could be about guaranteeing one's status and the status of one's children in the kinship hierarchy, and consolidating one's power in the wider community of women. Even though the subject position of "wife" necessarily symbolizes subjugation to the husband and his family (even as it marks the female subject's passage from childhood to adulthood), the subject position of "mother" signals an empowered relationship vis-à-vis one's children.<sup>189</sup> When a woman becomes a mother, she becomes the owner of her children, and her status in relation to everyone else in the community is reconfigured, a shift that the *ngénte* (baptism) ceremony marks. A mother can also eventually become a powerful mother-in-law who wields power over her daughter-in-law.<sup>190</sup>

Further complicating relations of power within the (free, non-casted) household is the presence of the non-kin maid—over whom the mistress wields total authority—and perhaps of casted clients, whose personhood is of a different order than that possessed by members of the family. The household might also include an unmarried nephew, whose status—possibly due to a lack of independent means to provide for a family—is still that of a dependent, regardless of age.<sup>191</sup> It is difficult, therefore, to claim that there is a

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<sup>188</sup>See Maam Jën, *Aawo bi* (IFAN Cheikh Anta Diop ;; Agence de Cooperation Culturelle et Technique (ACCT), 1992).

<sup>189</sup>Oyeronke Oyewumi, "Family Bonds/ Conceptual Binds: African Notes on Feminist Epistemologies," *Signs* 25: 4 (2000): 1093.

<sup>190</sup>Jën, *Aawo bi*.

<sup>191</sup>Maternal uncles and their nephews have a special relationship; the authority of the maternal uncle over his nephew can trump that of the nephew's father, and the nephew is expected to play the role of submissive client/disciple of his uncle. The nephew can be sent to the uncle's house to work for him and learn under his tutelage, and the uncle in turn is responsible for maintaining the nephew and arranging his marriage. See Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village.*; Diop, *La famille wolof*. This practice is a vestige of an old order in which the authority of the mother's kin was continually reinforced and provided a counterweight to the authority of the father and his kin. Rousseau, "Le Sénégal d'autrefois."

symbolic order in which men possess the phallus (the symbol of masculine power) and women are the phallus to be possessed, as one's power in the Senegalese household and in the wider community is not solely determined by one's position in the husband-wife hierarchy, nor is there a necessary link between the possession of a penis and the wielding of power.

Given these complexities, I would like to propose an alternative account of the gendered human. Within the discursive formation that I am placing under the "Senegalese" (or "Wolof") sign for the sake of analysis, to be human is to occupy a subject position within a complex kinship hierarchy. The subject positions within that hierarchy are necessarily gendered and rely on a conception of normative sexual difference: only sexed female bodies can be mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, aunts.<sup>192</sup> However, a natively alienated person whose body is sexed female but is who is neither wife, nor mother, nor daughter, nor sister, is not legible as human. At life cycle ceremonies like weddings and *ngénte*—which are often held in the street, and involve a large segment of the community—the griots sing the praises of the members of the family, publicly situating the newcomer (the baby, or bride) in relation to her forebears. The greater part of these songs is a stating and restating of filiation: "O X, you are the daughter of Y. Y is your mother. Z is your father. W is his father, T his mother, etc." When one is squarely located within a respectable genealogy, simply to be born is to already possess honor. It is to embody familial, and therefore social, personhood. It is to be a known entity that has obligations towards other members of the family and the community, and also the rights and powers that comes with one's relational position. The process by which one comes to possess gendered humanity—which, in the Senegalese context, is also necessarily the possession of gendered honor—is therefore more complex than the scenario presented by *Blade Runner*, as it is informed by the articulation of multiple hierarchies.

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My detour through the slave subject is inspired by Wolof films that dramatize the exclusion of the maid and prostitute from honorable womanhood through direct

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<sup>192</sup>I am not making the claim that sex is not gender [see Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter : on the discursive limits of "sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993).] (Indeed, the reiterative practice through which children are ascribed a male or female body in Senegal would be a fascinating line of inquiry that is outside the scope of this project. There is a Wolof word for hermaphrodite—*nguunu-ngaana*—but I do not know how this subject might be made intelligible within the kinship order.) Rather, I am differentiating this order from Nigerian systems to which much attention has been paid in African gender scholarship. In formations analyzed by Amadiume, Oyewumi, and others, women can attain the status of "husband"[ Ifi Amadiume, *Male daughters, female husbands : gender and sex in an African society* (London ;Atlantic Highlands N.J.: Zed Books, 1987).] This is not the case in Senegal. While all of a woman's in-laws can informally call her their "wife"—because she has married into their family and owes them all submission—her female in-laws are not referred to as her "husbands." Ultimately, I am building on Hortense Spillers' suggestion "that 'gendering' takes place within the confines of the domestic, an essential metaphor that then spreads its tentacles for male and female subjects over a wider ground of human and social purposes. Domesticity appears to gain its power by way of a common origin of cultural fictions that are grounded in the specificity of proper names, more exactly, a patronymic, which, in turn, situates those persons it 'covers' in a particular place" (Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe", 69).

references to slavery, as well as through a more subtle manipulation of the various elements that reference the “state” of the slave. These dramas, called “*théâtres*” in Senegal, are morality tales that derive part of their legibility from within the rich tradition of Wolof oral storytelling. Like Wolof tales, they endeavor to stake out an ethical position on the relationship between honor and humanness while tackling a contentious social problem. As products of contemporary urban culture, however, they draw from, and sometimes place into tension, the multiple ethical traditions currently vying to impose their understanding of the human and its attendant rights. The melodramatic mode adopted by these films attempts to stabilize the present ethical confusion by redistributing good and evil in unexpected configurations, crystallizing virtue in characters not normally viewed as honorable and disarticulating honor from social location.

My classification of these *théâtres* as melodramas follows film theorist Linda Williams’ broad definition: “If emotional and moral registers are sounded, if a work invites us to feel sympathy for the virtues of beset victims, if the narrative trajectory is ultimately concerned with a retrieval and staging of virtue through adversity and suffering, then the operative mode is melodrama.”<sup>193</sup> The Wolof oral narrative tradition includes some elements of this melodramatic mode; for example, the tale “Kumba-amndey ak Kumba amul-ndey”—oft cited for its similarities to the Cinderella story—features a virtuous young heroine whose stepmother subjects her to suffering and hardship, but whose exemplary behavior is rewarded in the end with wealth, a noble husband, and communal recognition of her honor. (Her evil, impolite stepsister does not fare as well: her punishment is a painful death, after which her organs are ripped out by vultures and dropped over her hometown.) However, references to virtue and emotion in the Wolof oral tradition tend to be formulaic and didactic, and do not have the same effect as the devices deployed in modern melodramas that aim to generate intense emotional investment in the plight of suffering characters.<sup>194</sup>

The current ubiquity of the melodramatic mode throughout the diverse spheres of Senegalese representation—in tabloid newspaper and magazine articles, court discourse, everyday talk, local television serials, Wolof video films, and wildly popular imported cultural products like Latin American *telenovelas*<sup>195</sup> and Bollywood films—is an

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<sup>193</sup>Linda Williams, *Playing the race card: melodramas of black and white from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 15. The *théâtres* also contain the five components of “typical melodrama” identified by Williams: “Home: Melodrama begins, and wants to end, in a ‘space of innocence’” (28); “Melodrama focuses on victim-heroes and on recognizing their virtue. Recognition of virtue orchestrates the moral legibility that is key to melodrama’s function” (29); “Melodrama’s recognition of virtue involves a dialectic of pathos and action—a give and take of ‘too late’ and ‘in the nick of time’” (30); “Melodrama borrows from realism but realism serves the melodrama of pathos and action” (38); Melodrama “present[s] characters who embody primary psychic roles organized in Manichaeian conflicts between good and evil” (40).

<sup>194</sup>Lila Abu-Lughod makes a similar observation in the Egyptian narrative tradition. Lila Abu-Lughod, “Egyptian melodrama: technology of the modern subject?,” *Media worlds: anthropology on new terrain*. (2002).

<sup>195</sup>Jean-François Werner, “How Women Are Using Television to Domesticate Globalization: A Case Study on the Reception and Consumption of Telenovelas in Senegal,” *Visual Anthropology* 19:5 (2006): 443-472.



indication it is performing a crucial ethical function in the contemporary moment. Indeed, melodrama may be the paradigmatic narrative mode of the new regime of exposure, as its dramatic tension is produced by the staging of the unjust concealment of certain truths—a concealment which enables the persecution of the virtuous victim—and the subsequent revelation of those truths which makes visible the true distribution of virtue and vindicates the victim. In his study of the advent of theatrical melodrama in revolutionary and post-revolutionary France, Peter Brooks argues that melodrama is a democratic, post-sacred genre that provided a format for the reformulation of ethics in a post-Enlightenment era in which the ethical symbols of the church and the nobility no longer had authority, the individual became the site of moral reasoning, and honor was disarticulated from noble birth. The revolution necessitated a symbolic democratization of honor, and the theater became the site of the production of a new kind of moral education in which even lower class women could be legibly virtuous heroines:

Villains are remarkably often tyrants and oppressors, those that have power and use it to hurt. Whereas the victims, the innocent and virtuous, most often belong to a democratic universe: whatever their specific class origin, they believe in merit rather than privilege, and in the fraternity of the good. Among the repressions broken through by melodramatic rhetoric is that of class domination, suggesting that a poor persecuted girl can confront her powerful oppressor with the truth about their moral conditions.<sup>196</sup>

In contemporary Senegal, melodrama steps in to redistribute virtue in the wake of the delegitimation of the Wolof timo-aristocratic order in which honor is linked to birth, an order subjected to continual challenge by Muslim moral orders since the jihads of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; by globalized, liberal Western ideals of freedom, equality, and individualism; by popular democratic movements of the post-independence period, often spearheaded by youth frustrated with gerontocratic rule; and by the increasing pressure of transnational discourses on women's rights and gender parity.

Rather than follow the secular direction of French melodrama, however, the moral universe of Wolof *théâtres* is a complex fusion of religious, liberal-secular, Wolof, and feminist ethics. The idea that the moral order is meritocratic—that the individual earns her virtuous status through her willful cleaving to the good, and that we can perceive this virtue through a clear set of legible practices and signs, including those referencing internal emotional states—is not incompatible with Muslim moral orders that emphasize the individual believer's internal struggle to fashion herself into a pious subject. In Sufi ideology, the disciple overcomes the pull to vice exerted by the lower *nafs* by submitting to a set of ascetic disciplinary practices dictated by a sheikh. This is ultimately an internal struggle that can only be waged by the self against the self, a jihad of the soul. If in the eyes of God, people are hierarchized not by birth or social status, but by the degree of their commitment to cleave to goodness and piety, then anyone can be virtuous provided they engage in a truly committed struggle. Since this struggle is partially invisible to an outside observer, melodrama's deployment of visual, aural and narrative devices that

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<sup>196</sup>Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1995), 44.

render characters' internal states both perceptible and morally legible makes the mode particularly conducive to dramatizing Muslim morality.

Piety that is perceivable as habitual embodied practice is also compatible with melodrama's conventions of meaning-making. When melodrama was in its infancy in eighteenth-century France, the verbal content of all theatrical performance was controlled by a state body, which forced early productions to rely on pantomime and music to tell stories. This yielded a language comprised of gestural and aural signs that were invested with moral meanings, and that continued to be central to melodrama's unique mode of meaning-making after the dismantling of state control of the theater. In the Senegalese Muslim melodramatic mode, embodied practices of piety are available as signs of virtue, but only if embedded in an ethos of genuine, body-and-soul submission to God. For example, a visual symbol of piety, like a hijab, might mark a woman as virtuous, but her virtue would not stick if it were discovered that she donned it hypocritically or cynically—to accrue honor she did not really deserve—and that it was not part of a genuinely pious orientation toward God. *théâtres* teach us to be wary of surface indices of honor which can deceptively cover a cankerous underbelly, thereby mounting a critique of a strand of Wolof thought that assumes that a beautiful exterior is goodness itself. In their redistribution of virtue, then, Wolof films must convincingly establish a correspondence between internal states and external practices, both deploying the visual in order to ascribe virtue and cautioning against the fetishization of that which can be perceived by the human eye.

While popular Wolof films employ some devices that produce moral meanings legible to a variety of viewers because they are part of a transnational melodramatic language, many corporeal and verbal indices of virtue are culturally specific, and therefore illegible to cultural outsiders. Unlike Nigerian and Ghanaian popular films, whose dramatic languages Africans of other nationalities have quickly learned, Wolof video dramas are not accessible to viewers who are not fluent in Wolof and intimately familiar with the cultural context. To my knowledge, they are never subtitled or dubbed, and therefore are intended strictly for a Wolof-speaking audience. Since they are domestic dramas whose action consists predominantly of visiting, sitting around, and talking, with only the occasional verbal and physical conflict, it is nearly impossible to appreciate the story lines without access to the verbal content. Filmed in low-budget, low-tech video, *théâtres* are shown on local television stations, normally as a two- or three-part miniseries, and sold in the market and on the street in DVD format (or VHS until recently). They circulate widely throughout the Senegalese diaspora, and often have overseas distribution centers in Paris or New York. There are a limited number of dramatic troupes that regularly produce films; the two feature-length films on which I focus were both made by the Daaray Kocc troupe, which is composed of a steady group of actors, a director who also writes the screenplays, and a small crew. Daaray Kocc is called “the school of Kocc” after Kocc Barma, a seventeenth century Wolof philosopher famous for pithy sayings like “buur du mbokk” (“a king is not a relative”), “jigéen, soppal te bul wóolu” (“admire a woman but don't trust her”), “mag, mat na bayyi cim réew” (“elders are worth keeping in the country”) and “doomu jiiite, du doom” (“a child

born from your wife's previous marriage is not your child").<sup>197</sup> The troupe consciously places itself within a long tradition of Wolof moral philosophy, sometimes reexamining Kocc Barma's own adages. For example, the film *Muchiba*, which I will discuss at greater length below, explores the ethical implications of the notion that your stepchild is not your child when the stepchild in question is an unmarried maid who has contracted HIV while employed and comes to your home seeking refuge and care.

A modern Kocc-esque adage that has become ubiquitous in popular discourse, and fodder for melodramatic narrative across the spectrum of Senegalese popular representation, is "mbindaan du jaam," or "a maid is not a slave." A call for the ethical treatment of the maid, it links the two figures in the popular imaginary, and serves as ironic evidence of the continued confusion of the two conditions. Technically, a maid is not a slave; she is a "free" laborer who can, in theory, choose her employers, just as the prostitute can theoretically choose her profession and her customers. However, these young women are extremely poor, and tend to be uneducated (in the formal French school system) and illiterate (in French).<sup>198</sup> The need to survive—and often to help their families survive—obliges them to accept the terms of an exploitative system. At its most extreme, the choice is between exploitation and death. On the one hand, then, "mbindaan du jaam" is a hyperbolic melodramatic statement that posits the maid as a victim of unjust oppression through a negative analogy to the most oppressed figure in the imaginary; on the other, as I will show in my readings below, the saying points to a zone of indistinction between the two figures that suggests not that the maid is *like* a slave, but that the maid *is* a slave. In order for the maid (and prostitute) to signify as virtuous victim, then, she must undergo a laborious rehumanization that must reverse the terms of her social death.

The 2010 television series *Mayacine ak Dial* provides a straightforward illustration, and obligatory critique, of the confusion of the categories of maid and slave in the episode "Mbindane dou Diam."<sup>199</sup> Mayacine and Dial form a middle-aged couple living on the outskirts of a new Dakar neighborhood (under construction, as is much of the Dakar sprawl) with their four children, who appear to be in their late teens and twenties. Their income is limited and they lack sophistication on both cosmopolitan and refined Wolof registers, but they could be considered members of the lower rung of the rapidly expanding urban middle class with aspirations of upward mobility. The series is structured like a satirical sitcom in the tradition of *Góorgóorlu*,<sup>200</sup> with each ten-minute

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<sup>197</sup>Sylla, *La philosophie morale des Wolof*, 92-94.

<sup>198</sup>Wittmann, "Vers une rehabilitation," 79. Some young women are educated in Quranic schools, where they learn Arabic and recite scripture. These skills are difficult to mobilize in a white collar labor market which requires mastery of written French.

<sup>199</sup>"A maid is not a slave." I have retained the Gallicized orthography used by the series for both the title and the characters' names, but I switch to the standard orthography when quoting dialogue. "Mayacine ak Dial 'MBINDANE DOU DIAM' S01E12 - YouTube", n.d., <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IChfjMIS3u4>.

<sup>200</sup>*Góorgóorlu* is a popular series produced for Senegalese TV in the early 1990s that satirically chronicles the daily travails of a lower-class urban couple. *Góorgóorlu* is a verb that is best translated as "to hustle," "to make ends meet" or "se débrouiller," and that has come to refer to a specific tragicomic mode of survival in the era of extended postcolonial crisis. While *góorgóorlu* is *Mayacine ak Dial*'s most obvious

episode both poking fun at and offering a moral evaluation of an aspect of contemporary domestic life in the city.

Dial, the mistress of the house, is a comic figure who ascribes to herself a higher degree of honor and status than her mannerisms and lifestyle signal. She is anxious to be considered a peer of the elegant, elite women called *diriyaanke*, but she is often loud, confrontational, and unkempt. When a young woman looking for work is brought into her courtyard in the “Mbindane dou Diam” episode, Dial jumps at the opportunity to relieve herself and her daughters of the domestic labor; given to hyperbole and quick to represent herself and her daughters as virtuous, suffering victims, she dramatically exclaims that the young woman has arrived in the nick of time, as her daughters are almost dead with exhaustion.

The first indication of the maid’s slaveness emerges in the negotiations between Dial and Nila, the maid, before Nila is hired. Nila tries to obtain a higher salary so that she can pay for transportation between Dial’s house and her family’s home in Guediawaye. Guediawaye is a sprawling working class suburb of Dakar, so the young woman is not from the village and is less geographically removed from kin than many maids that work in Dakar. However, Dial insists that Nila live in Dial’s house rather than commute back and forth. This allows Dial to pay her a lower salary—30,000 CFAs a month, or sixty U.S. dollars—and greatly extends the maid’s availability for labor. It also has the effect of cutting her off from her family; she will now only be able to visit her family if Dial grants her permission to leave. While this exchange initially figures the maid as a free laborer who can choose her employer and negotiate the terms of the contract, ultimately she feels constrained to accept Dial’s terms if she wants to work. Her distancing from kin and incorporation into the household as a full-time servant brings her condition closer to that of the slave.

When Nila is first brought into the courtyard, she is attractive, clean, and appropriately dressed in a modified Western style common to young urban women. This initial image is important, since presenting oneself well is a public sign of self-respect that is a component of the code of honor, and to possess refined beauty is to be recognized as honorable to others. When she makes the transformation into Dial’s maid, she is henceforth depicted wearing shabby maid’s garb and in constant, sweaty, laboring motion. In contrast, Dial’s daughters are clean, well-dressed, and at leisure. Dial, plump and imperious, props up her feet on a stool and barks non-stop commands at Nila from her perch next to the kitchen area of the courtyard. She micromanages Nila’s every move, finding fault in everything she does. Transforming Nila into a dishonorable subject, she repeatedly calls her dirty (“saleté nga kat!”), and accuses her of seasoning the rice with malicious intent (“Mbaa du kaani?! Danga nu bëgg gaañ”: “That better not be hot pepper! You want to hurt us?”). Even though Nila says nothing and tries her best to execute all of Dial’s orders, at one point she makes her frustration visible by shaking her head and sighing, and Dial pounces: “Danga sonn? Yow loo fi liggéey bay sonn? Lii lanuy wax ci janq yi léegi. Janq boo ci yor, di ko yërëm, di ko def comme sa doom, mu di la kayitloo.

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predecessor, I also see a filiation with American series like Married with Children, “GORGORLOU - LA DETTE - YouTube”, n.d., <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-kZxmvAvc>.

Yow suba boo xéyee, yaak xale yi bokk liggéey. Soof ba bëgg dee” (“What is it? You’re tired? What kind of work have you done here to make you tired? This is what they say about maids these days. When you provide for them, take pity on them, treat them like your own children, they disrespect you. Yet when you [addressing Nila] get up in the morning, you share your work with the kids of the house. You’re a real pain”).

This melodramatic tirade in which the mistress is the generous, virtuous subject and the maid is the evil, inherently bad outside force that disrupts the harmony of the domestic sphere corresponds to the first part of the generic mistress discourse I identified above. The missing components, where the maid is identified as both seductress and thief, emerge in the following scenes. Dial’s claim that she treats her maid “like a daughter” is revealed to be utterly disingenuous when it becomes clear that Nila is violable and can be disposed of with ease.

The *théâtre* produces a stark contrast between the status of Dial’s daughters and that of the maid by alternating shots of Nila sweeping and wiping the sweat off her brow, with those of Dial’s daughter, Kine, emerging from her room yawning after a *grasse matinée* following a long night of clubbing. Kine whines that she has a pounding headache, and Dial coos over her, wanting details of the fun had the night before. Dial notices Kine’s nail polish, which Kine says she won’t remove now that the maid has relieved her of her domestic duties. Dial strokes her daughter’s hands, anticipating the ecstasy of Kine’s future husband at their softness. Dial’s daughters are being groomed for legitimate marriage, but, as the events that follow demonstrate, the preservation of the maid’s beauty and virtuous chastity are of little concern to her employers.

In what is a ubiquitous visual trope in popular Senegalese visual representation, Seni, one of Dial’s sons, catches a rear view of Nila, who is bending over cleaning, and desires her.<sup>201</sup> He calls her into his room, and locks the door. While all we see is a sustained shot of the door, shaking and rattling from a series of impacts, what we hear indicates an intense struggle. We hear the maid screaming “Bëgguma! Bàyyi ma!” (“I don’t want to! Leave me alone!”), and then see her running to Dial, disheveled and out of breath. The maid tries to tell Dial what happened, and we see a shot of Seni run out of his room, frustrated and holding up his pants.

Before the maid can fully articulate her accusation, Dial quickly launches a counter-offensive, accusing her of stealing a piece of her jewelry, insulting her and asserting her inherent badness (“yow xale bi yaa bon”: “you, little missy, are a bad person”), and firing her on the spot. In the argument that ensues, the maid holds her own, asserting “mbindaan du jaam!” and insisting she be paid her month’s salary before she leaves. In a ridiculous attempt to turn the tables, Dial falls back on the trope of the loose, wanton maid who will do anything to snag a high-status husband, accusing Nila of trying rape her son, not vice versa.

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<sup>201</sup>This shot is reprised in Senegalese comedian Kouthia’s reenactment of Dominic Strauss-Kahn’s alleged sexual assault of Nafissatou Diallo, a satirical rendering that Senegalizes the encounter, and thus functions as a critique of both the powerful Frenchman’s *and* the elite Senegalese man’s assumption of sexual rights in their maids. “La scene de DSK dans kouthia show - YouTube”, n.d., [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRI1C0ZD9\\_I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRI1C0ZD9_I). Maids are forced into this “seductive” posture by the nature of the housework they are obliged to perform; traditional brooms are short, and cooking pots and laundry buckets are at a low level.

While the actions of Dial and Seni reinforce the maid's status as not-kin—were Nila Dial's daughter, Dial would be incensed at the violation of her chastity, and were Nila Seni's sister, the incest taboo would prevent him from seeing her as sexually available—Dial's eldest son, Sope, often the voice of reason in the series, echoes Nila's insistent claim that a maid is not a slave. Rather, Sope reminds his mother, she is an employee who possesses certain rights as both worker and citizen. Nila could go to the police with her accusation, which would expose the family to *gacce* and possibly result in Seni's incarceration. While Sope's faith in the criminal justice system is perhaps exaggerated, the discourse that the maid is a citizen who possesses the same rights as other citizens in the eyes of the state and the national community has been legitimized by the tabloid media's exposure and condemnation of their abuse. The majority of the maids Frank Wittmann interviewed see the new regime of exposure as offering an effective stage for their resignification, not only as virtuous victims whose rights and honor are often violated, but as powerful agents who can legitimately violate the rules of *sutura* that dictate they cover their employers with discretion or risk their own demise. Even if the police do not pursue their accusations of workplace harassment and rape, maids can go to the press with their story—a press that no longer feels obliged to protect the privacy of high-status members of the community, and that turns a profit by trafficking in salacious “real-life” melodramas.

The recognition of the maid's power to expose the family, as well as Sope's critique of his mother's motivations for hiring a maid, forces Dial to reconsider her treatment of Nila. Given their tight household budget, and the two daughters' availability to perform the domestic tasks, Sope argues Dial has no need for a maid. Dial's response reveals that the maid's usefulness exceeds her cheap labor capacity, and that her ultimate functionality derives from her symbolic centrality in the production of elite feminine honor: “du question mën walla ñakk mën; système la” (“it's not a question of having money or not having money; it's a system”). All the *diriyaanke*<sup>202</sup> in the neighborhood have maids, and Dial is anxious to be considered their peer. In order to compete with her peers on an equal footing, she must be able to access the enhanced honor a mistress accrues by having a subjugated woman under her command. As Sope points out, the system requires not only that the maid be present performing domestic labor for a token wage, but also that the mistress constantly remind the maid, the household, and the community that the maid is both subjugated *and* dishonored: “système boobu moo tax nga abuser sa mbindaan mi” (“so it is because of that system that you abuse your maid”), “di leen toroxal” (“that you denigrate them”). The absence of Dial's husband throughout the entire episode enables this isolation of the mistress-maid hierarchy, establishing both

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<sup>202</sup>The *diriyaanke* is another iconic urban figure, a powerful middle-aged woman known for her sartorial elegance, her generous curves, her financial independence, and what some term a freedom to do what she wants. *Diriyaanke*, and senior women more generally, wield a great deal of power in contemporary Senegal through their control of life cycle ceremonies and the large amounts of money and valuable goods (cloth, jewelry) that are redistributed through them. They also tend to be prominent businesswomen, traders, politicians, and show business celebrities. See Francis Nyamnjoh, “Fishing in Troubled Waters: Disquettes and Thiefs in Dakar,” *Africa* 75:3 (2005): 295.

categories as mutually constituting and figuring the mistress as sovereign who wields absolute authority over the maid.

The ethical values the episode juggles gain a provisional coherence through a unique fusion of melodramatic and satirical modes, where the allocation of right and wrong, virtue and vice, can be quickly undone and reconfigured by devices of ironic distancing. Dial attempts to figure herself and her family members as virtuous victims who have fallen prey to an evil outside force embodied by the maid, thereby rendering the hierarchical system in which the maid's agency must be contained through her forced submission to the mistress's command properly ethical. When placed within a genealogy that sees the maid as occupying the symbolic location vacated by the slave, the maid's social deadness makes her an honorless non-person who cannot embody virtue, and therefore cannot play the victim role. This ethical order, performatively constituted by Dial's narrative, is undone by the ironic distance at which the film holds Dial and her family, turning them into objects of mockery rather than standard-bearers of noble Wolof honor with whom we might identify. Distancing devices include strategically timed laugh tracks and other comic sound effects pilfered from clown repertoires, including one that approximates a "boing" and another I immediately associate with a drooping flower. Compounded by these devices, Dial's obvious nonconformity to honorable feminine behavior and desperate attempts to climb up the new social ladder make her claims to virtue untenable.

The film instead encourages sympathy with the maid through its insistent portrayal of Nila's suffering, a suffering rendered palpable and virtuous because it is produced by the visual narrative of the film, not solely by Nila's interested verbal narrative embedded within it. We have evidence that Nila is not inherently bad and dirty, for we see how clean and well-dressed she is when she first walks into Dial's courtyard, and then we witness the back-breaking labor that produces the sweat that sullies her brow. We are privy to the "seduction" scene, where Nila, unaware of Seni's presence, is simply bending over sweeping, and is then pulled into his room and assaulted. These visual indices of virtue constitute the counter-evidence to the timocratic order espoused by Dial; as Sope reminds his mother, hard work is honorable and pious,<sup>203</sup> and Nila has opted to earn an honest living rather than turn to illegal means to alleviate her family's poverty. Nila's insistence that a maid is not a slave and that she be paid for her work is reinforced by Sope's resignification of the maid as a rights-bearing worker and citizen, both invoking an alternative order in which all citizens are equal before the law. In this latter order, the dishonor that would result in exclusion derives from a refusal to contribute to the well-being of the national community through hard work and law-

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<sup>203</sup>The idea that hard work is a form of pious practice is reinforced by the oft-cited proverb "Yalla Yalla bey sa tool," and by the Murid work ethic.

abiding behavior.<sup>204</sup> Here, Nila can easily embody virtue, but Dial, lazy and quick to cheat others, cannot.<sup>205</sup>

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Unsurprisingly, Dial resorts to a different mode of humanization of the maid rather than participate in the resignification of Nila as citizen-worker: she concedes at the end of the episode that people really ought to treat maids like their daughters. In an order in which social recognition and protection is conferred through kinship, turning the maid into a daughter reverses her kinlessness and brings her into the family fold. Ultimately, transforming the maid into a daughter is more advantageous to the mistress than turning her into a rights-bearing worker, since daughters must perform total submission to their parents, and both they and their labor are the property of their parents until married. The call to treat maids as daughters is not restricted to mistresses, however; the protection of the state, the entity which is supposed to enforce the rights of workers and citizens, is notoriously unreliable, so some maids and their advocates continue to see the kinship order's conferral and protection of rights as more binding. In 2010, socially conscious reggae singer Njaaya released "Mbindaan," a single which invites sentimental identification with the exploited maid through an emotional first-person lament and has as its chorus "don't treat me like a slave, treat me like your daughter."<sup>206</sup>

This proposed passage from not-kin to kin is not actually realized in the Mayacine ak Dial episode, only suggested. The ten-minute episode does not fundamentally undo the structural dynamic that permits the confusion of the maid and the slave, where the maid is an unknown entity, detached from kin, both symbolically and literally outside (a stranger to the neighborhood, she is picked up outside by Seni and brought into the domestic sphere run by Dial)—a detachment that makes her subjugation and denigration possible. The full-length video drama to which I will now turn presents a much more complicated scenario which tracks the passage of the maid from kin, to not-kin, to human on other terms. The initial classification of the maid as daughter enables this film to make a more forceful critique of the outsidership of the maid. Here, the maid has been raised by her employers since childhood, and has been incorporated into the family as kin. It is only when a crisis hits—one that threatens to bring dishonor onto the family—that the maid's status as kin is revealed to be a fiction.

Daaray Kocc's Muchibe: la Racine du mal opens with a jubilant scene of three young women dancing nightclub-style *mbalax* to a Youssou Ndour song. They are in the clean, airy courtyard of a rich Dakar home, and an older, portly woman in traditional

<sup>204</sup>Calls to "defar réew mi" ("to fix the country") are part of a "société civile" (civil society) discourse that interpellates responsible citizens who contribute to the national good. Like Egyptian television melodramas, *théâtres* participate in the production of national sentiment and the normativization of modern citizenship. Abu-Lughod, "Egyptian melodrama."

<sup>205</sup>In another episode, "Courtière," Dial poses as an informal real estate agent in order to make a quick buck off of a man looking for a rental in the neighborhood. Her ruse is exposed when it becomes clear that the apartments she has been showing him are not really for rent. In "Yakaar bou tass" ("Dashed Hopes"), Dial is eager to marry Seni off to an American girl he meets on the beach so that they can access American wealth and she can finally live the *diriyaanke* life of leisure, glamor and prestige. While Seni is working on an English letter to the girl, Dial suggests he learn how to say "send my mother money."

<sup>206</sup>MBINDAAN, n.d., <http://www.myspace.com/njaayaa/music/songs/mbindaan-10191891>.



clothing is encouraging them and clapping them on from her comfortable seat, until the rhythm moves her to get up and join the girls. The young women are all stylishly dressed in Western-style tight pants and skirts, and there is nothing in their outward appearance that would indicate a hierarchy among them. The older woman, addressed as *yaay* (mother), is asked to judge who is the best dancer among the girls. She chooses Coumba, who promptly gives the mother an affectionate kiss upon hearing of her victory. The losers of the competition start to tease Coumba, jokingly accusing her of having faked illness the day before in order to get out of laundry duty. Coumba, also in joking mode, claims she felt truly sick the day before, but that the *mbalax* has healed her.

This warm, inclusive domestic scene is disrupted by the revelation in the scene that follows. Abou, the father of the household, is at the hospital picking up the results of Coumba's tests that were taken when she was ill the day before. Abou has come alone, and when the doctor asks what Abou's relationship to Coumba is, we learn that Coumba is not one of his birth daughters, but his maid. In spite of the fact she is not his blood, he nevertheless claims to see her as a child he begat ("suma bonne la, mais dama koy considérer comme doom bi ma jur"). Coumba's mother gave her to his wife when Coumba was a little girl, and she has been in their house for fifteen years now. The doctor then drops the fatal bomb that initiates the dramatic unfolding of the tragic narrative: Coumba is HIV-positive.

This revelation results in a total reversal of Coumba's integration in the family. When Abou relays the shocking news to his wife, Raby (the mother of the opening scene), her first reaction is to wonder where Coumba could have picked up HIV, a reaction quickly replaced by indignation at Coumba's lack of concern for the family's reputation. Abou and Raby decide that Coumba, who just hours before was their "daughter," should be sent back to her birth family in the village, effectively disowning her. In the meantime, she should be kept away from their daughters, and she should no longer touch the family's food or laundry. (They are aware that HIV is sexually transmitted, but believe that there is also danger of transmission through other kinds of bodily contact. Also, they do not make a meaningful distinction between HIV and AIDS.) They make no plans to break the news to Coumba herself, nor do they display any concern for her emotional and physical well-being.

If the opening scene presents an idealized tableau of Coumba's ostensibly secure place among the daughters of the family, the next scene is that tableau's nightmarish reverse image. It opens with a shot of the three girls eating a lunch of *ceebu jën bu xonq*<sup>207</sup> out of the same bowl. They are chatting, laughing, and eating well, judging from the close-up of the near-empty bowl. Yaye Raby approaches the table with haste, carrying a smaller covered bowl. She sternly admonishes Coumba and commands her to get up from the table and eat her lunch separately. The three girls stare at the mother in shock and confusion. The two daughters, Sophie and Ndeye, protest—Coumba has always shared their bowl, why would she now be separated and isolated ("lan moo tax

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<sup>207</sup>*Ceebu jën*, or "rice with fish," is the iconic national dish of Senegal. The dish carries all sorts of important symbolic meanings and is put to multiple metaphorical uses, in addition to being delicious and nutritious.

nga ko beral”)? Yaye Raby responds that she is not obligated to explain anything to them, and leads a stunned but obedient Coumba away.

In subsequent scenes, Coumba is yelled at for attempting to wash Pape Abou’s clothes, which he now sends off to the cleaners, and for washing her clothes with the daughters’ garments. None of these moments, however, has the power of this primal scene of her exclusion from the family.<sup>208</sup> Banning Coumba from the communal bowl is tantamount to excommunicating her, as eating *ceeb* with loved ones has the aura of sacred ritual; it is the daily scene of the reconstitution of family and community, complete with ritualized gestures and small talk. In large households, family members eat with members of the same gender and of comparable status, so Coumba’s exclusion from the daughters’ bowl effectively reverses her classification as one of them and renders her unlocatable within the family unit.

This banishment from legible familial personhood is even more acute when the practice of *teraanga* is taken into account. *Teraanga*, commonly translated as hospitality or generosity, is, along with *sutura*, one of the core components of both the Wolof code of honor and contemporary Senegalese national culture; popular representation establishes Senegal as uniquely virtuous because it is the country of *teraanga*. According to the code, it is incumbent upon honorable persons to share food with whomever shows up for lunch, regardless of their relationship to the family. Since women are in charge of managing all things domestic, including cooking and serving food, the daily practice of *teraanga* is predominantly feminized. Maids inhabit the limit zone of *teraanga*: some mistresses have their maids eat separately as a rule (but not necessarily alone, as they could be joined by other low-status employees of the house, like guards and laundrywomen); some reserve only the most undesirable leftovers for the maids, if there are any; and some loudly proclaim they have the maid eat with the family as evidence of their noble generosity and willingness to treat the maid as kin. For Coumba, who had previously enjoyed a place at the bowl, her exclusion from it establishes her as a polluting outsider, one who is not even worthy of the sweeping inclusiveness of *teraanga*.

Coumba’s exclusion from both the family and the larger community of the neighborhood is facilitated by the dissolution of her claim to protective *sutura*. Word of Coumba’s HIV status is leaked by both the parents and the younger daughter, Sophie, who is shocked her mother has allowed Coumba to stay in the house. Other members of the community also condemn Coumba and argue for her immediate expulsion to the village. The neighborhood gossips, stock characters in the Wolof narrative tradition that comment on the action and pass moral judgments, claim they are not surprised at the news. Coumba is, after all, a maid, and, like a slave, can change her condition, but not her dishonored state. The gossips argue the family made an error by treating Coumba like a daughter and according her privileges above her station. She was granted too many liberties, including being allowed to wear provocative fashionable clothes; this led her to be excessively *fuuy*, an adjective that in urban Wolof indexes an attachment to rich,

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<sup>208</sup>There is a common practice of giving distinguished guests and male heads of household bowls of their own, which guarantees they will get the best morsels and a copious serving. They are not excluded, but fussed over and served by the women of the household.

trendy things beyond the appropriate purview of one's station. Given the maid's inherent lack of virtue, it is to be expected that she would not know how to handle herself honorably in an elite milieu. Gossip Maguette's ruling is especially harsh: "comme dafa trainer-u ci mbedd mi ba am SIDA, genne ko ci biti comme xaj buy raam" ("since she got AIDS out wandering the streets, kick her out on the street like a crawling dog"). Here, the maid's outsideness is symbolically enjoined to the outsideness of both the prostitute and the dog<sup>209</sup>, resulting in the removal of all human claims to protection and honor. Coumba has not cultivated her own *sutura*—she has been out in the street wantonly displaying her body—and therefore does not deserve *sutura* in the form of protection from the family and the community.

While her HIV-positive status and the community's condemnation would seem to elicit a similar judgment on the part of the spectator, the melodramatic devices employed by the film instead conspire to present Coumba as virtuous victim. Empathy is encouraged by close-up shots of her stunned, hurt face; her continued silent submission to the new injunctions instituted by Yaye Raby; and the fact that she is the only one in the neighborhood who does not know she is HIV-positive. The final nail in the coffin of her social death in Dakar is also a scene of melodramatic revelation: the young woman's neighborhood association refuses to take her dues and bans her from the club. Since she is in the company of her age-mates, she demands to know why she is the victim of such egregious discrimination, a challenge she is unable to pose to her *kilifa*. In an ironic but ineffectual attempt to reverse the distribution of honor and dishonor through a speech act, Coumba says "Dungeen ay gor. Ay jaam ngeen" ("You are not honorable people. You are slaves"). She has faithfully paid her dues and participated honorably in the association, yet she is being banned for no good reason; she, therefore, is the honorable subject, and the other association members are slaves—not because they are laboring property, but because their actions are obviously dishonorable. When the moment of revelation finally comes and she is told she has AIDS, her denial again takes the form of a reversal of the distribution of virtue: "SIDA? Deedeet. Duma caga comme yeen. Yeen ni nga xam ne, guddi gu jot, yeen angiy fanaan ci bal yi ak boites de nuit" ("AIDS? No way. I'm not a whore like the rest of you. You're the ones who are out all night every night at parties and clubs"). While this inversion has no immediate effect on her interlocutors, the spectator is nevertheless encouraged to entertain the possibility that Coumba's upside-down version is in fact the true story. In an effective melodramatic device, a voiceover that communicates her internal monologue as she walks dejectedly home, she wonders how she could have possibly contracted HIV, since she never goes out. Our access to her innermost thoughts lends credibility to her claims, and her plight seems even more heart-wrenching and dire.

The peripety that exposes Coumba to knowledge of her illness precipitates her exile to the village, but, rather than offer refuge, this exile seals her complete social death. When she refuses to disclose the cause of her banishment to her birth mother and

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<sup>209</sup>In the symbolic hierarchy projected onto animals, dogs, along with donkeys and hyenas, are among the most abject. Dogs are degraded, promiscuous, and unclean, a moral and physical pollution which makes their exclusion from the domestic sphere mandatory.

stepfather, her stepfather, Aly, is obliged to make a fact-finding trip to Dakar. His audience with Yaye Raby reproduces the social hierarchy that posits the high-status subject as bearer of both honor and commandment, and the low-status subject as accessing honor only through the enhancement, via perfect submission, of the elite subject's honor. Aly does not question Raby's version of the story which figures her and her family as the virtuous parties who have been injured by Coumba's shameful actions, a melodramatic claim enhanced by a show of (obviously feigned) emotion. Aly is quick to indict Coumba for not following Raby's *ndigal* ("command")<sup>210</sup> and renegeing on her obligation to protect her patrons' honor above all else, thus cleansing the Dakar couple of any responsibility or associational ignominy.

Once Aly removes all responsibility from the shoulders of Raby and Abou and returns to the village, he must contend with the implications of Coumba's actions on his own honor as head of the household. Coumba is not initially kinless; she has a family, and, as low-status clients, that family's honor is predicated on the perfection of their service to their high-status patrons, but they also have status relative to the other remaining families in the village. When her birth mother, Yaye Ngoné, learns of Coumba's HIV status, she accuses Coumba of sullying her people with dishonor ("tilimalnga askan wi"). Aly goes further, crying "Dafa doon cagatu!" ("She was out prostituting herself!"). In Aly's eyes, the only way to cleanse the family's dishonor is to disown and banish her, as she is the bearer of *gacce* ("ignominy") and *musiba* ("calamitous misfortune"), and he commands she return to Dakar where she picked up the *musiba* in the first place. In his disavowal of all parental protection of her, he purges his family of *gacce* by externalizing it and concentrating it entirely in Coumba's person.

The village gossips, homologues of the Dakaroises Maguette and Adama (albeit less chic and worldly), see this alienation from kin as the inevitable consequence of Coumba's initial separation from parents and village: "Dafa weddi sunu aada maam. Bayyi ndey, bayyi baay. Dem uuti fa beneen ndey, uut beneen baay. Wolof njaay nee na, 'tank bu toogul nag...'" ("She went against the traditions of our forebears. She left her own mother and father, and went looking for another mother and father over there. As the saying goes, 'the leg that doesn't stay put...'""). In order for this argument to be convincing, they must misrepresent Coumba's agency. Rather than acknowledge she was sent to Dakar when she was a seven year old child and given to her employers by her mother after the death of her birth father—hardly an instance of primary agency, as she did not give herself away—they instead represent her as having willfully discarded her parents and traded them in for new ones. This originary act is seen as a modality of "walking outside" or *dox*, a straying from family space regulated by parental authority into an unregulated outside. Again, the gossiping young women imagine that Coumba could have contracted HIV only in that most outside of activities, prostitution. In their narrative, Coumba cannot signify as virtuous victim with whom we could empathize, but rather as evil agent who willfully brought *musiba* onto herself, her family, and her employers.

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<sup>210</sup>Aly's use of the term *ndigal* recalls the command of the sheikh over the disciple, thus putting Raby in the position of sheikh and Coumba in that of disciple.

It seems that Coumba is now completely adrift, a homeless non-person fully alienated from family and community in both Dakar and the village. Luckily, she is not entirely without allies. Ndeye, the elder sister of the Dakar family, has been Coumba's vocal advocate from the moment she is informed of her illness. Ndeye criticizes her parents' reaction to the news, arguing Coumba should continue to be treated as sister and daughter, and that they should focus their energy on caring for and protecting her as they would any other family member. While her disagreement is initially communicated via the mannerisms of a respectful daughter, the tenor of her intervention changes after Coumba's exile. She first aggressively confronts her mother, standing imposingly over her, demanding to know how a girl who has been in their house for over ten years can be disposed of so easily. Yaye Raby fires back, asserting her parental authority (and general seniority) over Ndeye: "I am not your peer, you will not disrespect me, you are 'waane' and 'fumiste'!" Someone who is *waane* is crafty and wily; it is often used for children who are acting wiser than their age, as in the English idiomatic expression "smart Alec." To be *fumiste* is to be a dissimulator, to strategically engage in subversive activities behind a smokescreen, often with the aim of sowing discord among people. The obvious irony is that Ndeye's stated position has been entirely transparent and consistent with her actions, whereas it is the parents and other members of the community who in certain company claim to be sympathetic to Coumba's plight—as when Raby tells Aly that she had tried to get treatment for Coumba, which the audience knows is a blatant lie—while in others denigrate her and devise schemes to dispose of her with minimal impact to their own reputation. Ndeye directly accuses her father of stabbing Coumba in the back by withholding the truth from her and delaying taking her to a specialist while indiscreetly leaking the news out to the neighborhood.

Ndeye makes the radical move of arrogating parental agency, vowing to go to the village and bring Coumba back for medical treatment, to do what should have been her father's "devoir" or responsibility as head of the family: "Dama wara sauer bakkano doomu Aadama" ("I must save a human being's life"). Ndeye's radical stance asserts Coumba's humanity, resignifying her as a person deserving of familial protection and care. This stance requires a subversion of family hierarchy; Ndeye becomes the *kilifa* who possesses *jom* (an honorable form of responsibility) and *faayda* (a modality of self-respect that can take the form of a principled stand for justice), and who covers all under her care with *sutura* (here, a form of protection that involves discretion). She rejects the limited agency of the child subject, and takes on a warrior-like agency appropriate to the struggle in which she must engage. Her entry into this new subjecthood endangers her right to receive protection and upkeep from her parents; as her mother says, Ndeye does not own the house, and if wants to show that she is an adult ("majeure") and assert her attachment to Coumba, she can be banished along with Coumba to the village.

Coumba's mother, Yaye Ngoné, also rejects Aly's banishment of her daughter, and insists they seek medical help in Dakar, for which Aly repudiates her. In what is perhaps the most powerful, brilliantly structured scene in the film, images of the exiled Coumba and Yaye Ngoné en route to Dakar are alternated with images of Ndeye on her way to the village. All three are subjects in motion, propelled by the same moral

imperative, moving outside of the authority of husband, parents, and neighborhood/village. Close-up shots of the women's faces are accompanied by a voiceover that provides access to their internal monologues; Coumba is praying that her mother will forgive her, and Ndeye is praying that Ngoné will watch over and understand Coumba, as it is a mother's "devoir." Their prayers converge, even though they are both unaware of each other's plans. When they physically converge at the half-way point, their surprise meeting marks a shift in the narrative. A lengthy slow-motion shot has Ndeye and Coumba running towards each other and hugging like previously separated lovers, a shot which recalls the devices that produce the idealized, destiny-driven, divinely-ordered romantic universe of Bollywood cinema. The sisterly love that unites them, and Ngoné's motherly love for her daughter, is now a greater force than the authoritative structure that attempts to direct their behavior. The three women form a vanguard, embarking on a noble, pious quest to heal Coumba and challenge the forces that have dehumanized and dishonored her. Ndeye praises Ngoné for risking everything to support her daughter: "Tante, li nga def nii, mooy devoiru kilifa. Li ngay def moo lay siggil" ("Aunt, what you are doing is the duty of a *kilifa*. What you are doing will bring you honor"). Coumba vows to fight because of Ndeye and Ngoné, who are all she has left in the world. Ndeye rallies the troops, telling them they have a battle ahead of them in Dakar, but *inch'allah*, they will win.

Coumba, however, breaks rank. When interrogated by the doctor in Ndeye's presence, she continues to deny any sexual experience. Rather than disclose the truth, she decides to resort to the most drastic of measures: suicide. If both her employer and birth families resolved the problem of her contaminating *gacce* by expulsing her, thus cleansing the family body by "killing" her, her suicide is figured by her as final assurance that the hurt and shame that would spread from public knowledge of her story would be checked. In the audiotaped confession she leaves for Ndeye, she admits she has been with one man, but refuses to disclose his identity—it is best for everyone if she takes her secret to the grave ("moo gën ma denc secret boobu, ànd ak secret bi ba biir suuf ba suma bàmmeel"). The taped confession is an effective device at this point in the narrative, as it furnishes Coumba with a technology of indirect disclosure. She can provide a partial explanation for her suicide, but, as the tape permits monologue but not dialogue, she can control the terms of disclosure, and is not present to answer any further questions. A shot of Ndeye listening to the tape in despair cuts to one of Coumba standing over one of the steep cliffs that line Dakar's northwestern shore—it is too late for Ndeye to intervene, and we steel ourselves for Coumba's tragic demise.

Luckily, an intervention comes in the nick of time: as she relates to the doctor later, something in her mind and spirit holds her back. A *deus ex machina* taking the form of a disembodied, unidentified woman's voice enters her consciousness, warning her if she jumps, she will leave more *musiba* behind her. If she dies without disclosing how she was infected, the disease will spread—an inversion of the traditional timocratic relationship between contamination and suicide, where the suicide of the dishonored subject checks the contamination of the communal body, and where discretion, not disclosure, ensures protection. The voice charges her with the responsibility of protecting

“the people” as a collective body, “aar askan wi yepp.” She should not despair, but rather have faith in God, who wants only the truth.<sup>211</sup>

The truth, she finally tells the doctor, is that she was infected by Abou, Ndeye’s father. In a series of flashbacks, we are shown the ruses he employed to sexually assault her without the rest of the family knowing. He calls her up to his bathroom to collect a dirty towel, and approaches her from behind as she bends over to pick it up, a scene reminiscent of the beginning of the attempted rape in “Mbindane dou Diam.” She resists, crying, “Tante Raby suma yaay la, déédéet papa!” She attempts to deter him by asserting that Raby is her mother, and by calling him “papa,” thus recoding the impending sexual contact as incest. This rhetorical strategy is unsuccessful, as she is not really their daughter, but their maid. Her degraded subjecthood is actualized in this scene, and compounded by Abou’s offer of a large amount of money for her consent, signaling a convergence of the degradation of the maid and that of the prostitute. On the pretext of taking Coumba to visit her birth mother in the village, he instead brings her to a hotel, slips a drug in her drink, and rapes her in the hotel room while she is passed out.

<sup>211</sup>The *deus ex machina* in the film is not a “cheap trick” plot device that hampers the effect of the real, as critics of the device in the Western literary tradition have argued. An audience that believes in the possibility of divine intervention in human affairs, as well as the presence of unseen, mystical forces and entities that exist alongside and can impact the tangible world, would not necessarily see this device as “unrealistic” or facile. Rather, the intervention seals Coumba’s new status as holy warrior who now has a clear mission from God, which is fundamental to the character’s positive legibility within a Muslim ethos. One could also read the voice as a manifestation of Coumba’s own consciousness, in keeping with the melodramatization of split subjectivity Peter Brooks identifies as part of an increasing orientation towards individuation in the Western literary tradition. Here, the individual consciousness is the site of the struggle between good and evil. It is also possible for both readings to be simultaneously valid, as in the Sufi “jihad of the soul” discussed earlier. The scene resonates in intriguing ways with the story of Aline Sitoe Diatta, a fascinating historical figure who has been recently included in the pantheon of Senegal’s anti-colonial heroes. While Diatta, a Diola from Casamance, was working as a maid in Dakar in the early 1940s, she began to receive visual and oral messages from Emitai (Diola for God) instructing her to return to Casamance, as she was now invested with the power to bring rain to the drought-stricken region. Djib Diediou, the journalist Wilmetta Toliver credits with popularizing Diatta’s story in the 1980s, provides a melodramatic account that may have informed the scene in *Muchiba*: “Aline Sitoe finally obeyed the ‘Voice’ who had asked her to return to Casamance to put herself in service for her people victimized and spoiled by the colonial” (Wilmetta Toliver, *Aline Sitoe Diatta : addressing historical silences through Senegalese culture*. Diss. (Stanford University, 1999), 162; I assume this is Toliver’s translation). Back home, she began preaching and performing ritual sacrifices, successfully bringing rain and starting a “cult not based on lineage but on the village; it also admits strangers to the village who wish to participate in it. It gathers into a fraternity, almost a church, all who adhere to the truth of Alinsitoe whatever their ethnic origins or their religious beliefs may be. It is a sort of initiation on the human scale which takes on the aspect of a mystery open to all men of good will, grouping them into a unitary movement centered on welfare” (Thomas qtd. in Toliver 173). Her wide influence, emphasis on traditional rice production, frequent ritual slaughtering of cattle, and reinstatement of the Diola work week (which allows for a day of rest every five days instead of every seven) was considered a threat to French colonial interests. In the throes of World War II, the French tried to appropriate Diola rice and cattle to feed the soldiers stationed in Dakar while imposing cash-crop groundnut production on much of the land—thus leaving the people of a drought-stricken region with little to eat—and forcibly conscripted young Diola men into the colonial army. Diatta was arrested for instigating the Floups rebellion that resisted both the above appropriations and colonial taxation, although Toliver’s historical research suggests that Diatta’s influence was probably more indirect than direct.

In the melodramatic universe of the film, Coumba's revelation of the truth turns her into a legibly virtuous victim, but it also turns her into a holy warrior invested with the pious agency of the jihadist, a revision of the entitling of heroic action that virtuous suffering enables in Western melodrama.<sup>212</sup> "Yalla buur bu baax la" ("God is a good ruler"), which is why she will fight to live: "Dinaa yokk suma ngem, takk suma fit, yokk suma doole, xeex ak feebar bi ma dal" ("I'm going to become more pious, more courageous, more strong, and fight the illness that has befallen me"). She bravely confronts Abou in his room; he is lying small on the bed, and she towers over him, one hand on her hip. "Abou, yaa bon! Yaa sew, yaa soxor, yaa mince. Yow jaroo wax sax 'paap,' ndax matuloo kilifa" ("Abou, you are a bad person! You are vile, you are evil, and you are small. You don't even deserve to be called 'father,' because you don't measure up to a *kilifa*"). As in the earlier scene where Ndeye challenges Yaye Raby, the upside-down distribution of moral authority, where the junior woman is more of a *kilifa* than the senior man, is visually communicated through the tableau's distribution of the characters' bodies in space. Abou tries to shut down the conversation by threatening to go to Raby, reminding us that it is the mistress who has direct authority over the maid, and that Abou's power over her is in fact limited. She replies, "Deedeet, suma compte man ak yow. Noo koy regler ci Yalla!" ("No way, this is between you and me. We will settle it before God!") She orders him to get tested and throws the doctor's convocation on the bed.

When Abou's tests reveal he is HIV positive, he admits to the doctor that he has strayed, but only with good girls: "ay xale yu baax, yu bokk ci famille yu honorable, yiy nu respecter" ("good girls, that belong to honorable families, that everyone respects"). As he only dallies with girls from good families, never with prostitutes, he does not see how he could have been infected. The doctor challenges this assumption that women from honorable families are necessarily clean, while prostitutes are dirty and diseased. (This lesson is consistent with the pedagogical thrust of the film, which seeks to correct inaccurate popular understandings of HIV/AIDS transmission and counter the stigmatization of low-status women.) He claims that prostitutes are less likely to be HIV positive because they are more familiar with and use methods of prevention, and are more likely to consult with doctors about the hazards of their trade.<sup>213</sup> This is not the case

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<sup>212</sup>"We have seen [...] how the powerlessness of tears that flow too late can be the proof of a virtue that, at another point in the narrative, can give moral authority to action. Both Moretti and Neale note that tears are a product of powerlessness. It seems to me, however, that if tears are an acknowledgment of a hope that desire will be fulfilled then they are also a source of future power; indeed, they are almost an investment in that power. The pathos of suffering thus not only ensures virtue, but also seems to entitle action" (Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, 32). Williams' reading of this dynamic in D.W. Griffith's *Way Down East* resonates in obvious ways with *Muchibà's* propulsion of Coumba to action and disclosure: "Wronged by the upper-class villain Sanderson but silenced by his power throughout the bulk of the film, Gish's Anna is forced to serve Sanderson as a guest in the home of the family that has taken her in. But she cannot speak of his wrong to her because of the double standard that would shame her more than him. It is only when a busybody gossip reveals what all believe to be her sexual taint that she is forced into action—to name Sanderson as her seducer" (32).

<sup>213</sup>This claim is not supported by scientific research, which shows that the highest rates of HIV infection in Senegal are among prostitutes and men who have sex with men. Prostitutes who have a "carnet de santé"



with the “good girls” whose activities are shrouded in discretion, which is why Abou should remember that “tout ce qui brille n’est pas or” (“not everything that glitters is gold”), that death can lurk under beautiful, lively surfaces—much as Fari’s donkeyness lurked under her elegant human exterior.

Not only Abou, but his four wives, and everyone with whom he has slept, must get tested, and the whole family is swept up in a tidal wave of ignominy. At the end of the film, he is again lying, diminutive, on his bed. He has a moment of truth, in which he acknowledges that he brought this *musiba* upon himself and others—that he is the villain in his own domestic tragedy. Yaye Raby enters the room, and stands over him, her girth and senior stature making her even more visually imposing than Coumba in the same formation previously. She echoes Coumba’s accusations, but, unlike the young woman, she is unable to see her disgraced state as a starting point for a new kind of pious and agentive subjecthood. Her despair at the shame and dishonor that has befallen the family renders her hysterical, and the last image is of her falling on top of him in slow motion, her fall mirroring the lapsarian state of the formerly respectable family.

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For the most part, I have preserved the original ordering of the narrative in my discussion of *Muchiba*, as I wanted to show how the unfolding of the plot relies on incremental revelations. These revelations involve a gradual tearing of the veils that cover the characters with *sutura*, a narrative progression that is enhanced by the deployment of peripety (as well as more subtle forms of reversal) typical of the tragic melodramatic mode.<sup>214</sup> The revelations peel away the shiny surface layers of honor and respectability, showing, as the doctor reminds us, that not all that sparkles is gold, and exposing the hypocrisy at the heart of the hierarchical system of honor and authority. The series of revelations begins with our discovery that Coumba is a maid, not a daughter as the happy opening scene suggests, and is therefore easily un-kinned. The disregard for Coumba’s *sutura* is concomitant with this revelation: the doctor does not tell her of her HIV status directly and in private, but rather reveals it to her employer. Abou then tells his family, and the family relates in to the neighborhood. They are under no obligation to treat her illness with discretion, as she is of the lowest status and is not seen to be the bearer of honor in the first place. Coumba, however, must cover Abou with *sutura*, as she is his servant, and her role is to performatively reinforce his honor—and therefore the reputation of the whole family--through her discretion and daily submission to Raby’s authority. Had she publicly accused him of sexually assaulting her prior to her knowledge of her HIV infection—that is, without the incontrovertible evidence of their diseased bodies—violation of his *sutura* would have resulted in her expulsion from the family and a concentration of culpability in her person. The rules that govern the unequal deployment of *sutura*, then, produce a relation of domination in which the maid’s

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and are registered with the state actually comprise a small part of the larger population of sex workers. Senegal has a low overall rate of HIV infection, which many attribute to early and effective prevention campaigns. Foley and Nguer, “Courting success in HIV/AIDS prevention.”

<sup>214</sup>Melodramas can have endings that are either tragic or happy. In tragic melodrama, the space of virtuous innocence with which the story begins (often taking the form of a garden or cozy domestic interior) cannot be recaptured, although the narrative still does the work of redistributing virtue (Williams, *Playing*).

obligation to remain silent allows the master and mistress to act with impunity. This modality of *sutura* renders Abou's sexual assault of Coumba legitimate, as it reaffirms her slave-like, honorless status. In the moral logic of the slave system, the sexual violation of the slave is not a violation but rather the master's lawful enjoyment of an object in his possession that is not a proper human, and therefore has no honor that can be impugned.

Coumba's decision to expose the truth, thereby tearing Abou's *sutura*, involves a reorientation, rather than a wholesale discarding, of *sutura* as it designates an ethical way of being in the world and relating to other people. A product of the contemporary regime of exposure, the film suggests that *sutura* in the form of oppressive discretion—a gag rule, as it were—enables all sorts of horrors. As the voice of the *deus ex machina* warns Coumba, if she takes her secret to the grave, the disease will spread unchecked, resulting in the death of innocent people. *Sutura* in the form of divine protection, on the other hand, provides an alternative model that emphasizes an egalitarian commitment to the protection of all from harm. When someone is in a car accident and comes out without a scratch, one might say “Yalla moo ko suturaal” (“God protected him [covered him with *sutura*]”); when the faithful wish each other a happy Eid, they pray that God will cover them with His protection (“Yalla na nu Yalla suturaal”). *Sutura* as gag-rule may hide vice from the eyes of the community, but no bad deed can be hidden from God; the Quran reminds the believers that God knows everything that is revealed and hidden—all that is in the hearts and minds of the people—and therefore only He is the source of total protection.

Some interpretive traditions see the principle of *sutura* as enshrined in the Quran in the stipulation that four believers witness the act of adultery for the accusation to have legal validity. Since this is a near-impossible feat, some see it as an indirect command to refrain from prying into the private lives of others.<sup>215</sup> However, it is also possible to argue that *sutura* used as a tool for exploitation, where bad deeds remain successfully hidden from other people and go unpunished, is incompatible with the teaching of the Quran and the example of the Prophet Mohamed. The Quran exhorts the faithful to care for orphans, the sick, the poor, and the powerless; to free slaves; and to stand up against all forms of oppression. It asserts the inalienable value of human life, arguing that to kill one person is to kill all of humanity; viewed as murder, then, spreading death via *sutura*-protected HIV-transmission cannot be sanctioned by God. The film's positing of Ndeye, Coumba and Ngoné as the true *kilifa*, and Abou as undeserving of *kilifa* status, is a forceful reminder of the responsibility accorded to humans by God in the Quran. Islam appoints humans to be the *kilifa* (translated by Amina Wadud as “trustees” or “vice-regents”)<sup>216</sup> of

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<sup>215</sup> According to the Medinese-based scholar Ali al-Qari' al-Harawi (d. 1614): 'It is a condition that the witnesses [necessary for a conviction of fornication] are four . . . and this is because God the Exalted likes [the vices of] his servants to remain concealed, and this is realized by demanding four witnesses, since it is very rare for four people to observe this vice.' Far from encouraging people to denounce their fellows, the jurists explicitly upheld the ideal of 'overlooking' or 'concealing' (*satr*) the vices of others, except in the cases of repeated and unabashed transgressions." Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic world, 1500-1800* (Chicago Ill.; Bristol: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>216</sup> Wadud, *Qur'an and woman*, 85;74.

the earth, so that they will do God's work of protecting the earth and the creatures on it. A true *kilifa* is not a big boss who has been accorded authority by a social hierarchy, but rather someone whose actions are guided by an ethics of care and justice. In the eyes of God, people's *anfus* (singular: *nafs*)—the “self,” the “soul,” the part of the person that matters—are hierarchized not by wealth, social standing, or gender, but rather by degree of piety, goodness, and knowledge.

The film suggests a radical subversion of a hierarchical social order in which one's authority, or *kilifteef*, is determined by gender, caste, and position in a kinship structure. This subversion is even more complete than the one effected by the jihads of the nineteenth century, whose adherence to a tradition of patriarchal interpretation of the sacred texts stymied the radical potential of Islamic revolution in Senegal. When Yaye Ngoné chooses her daughter over her husband, she rejects the patriarchal ideology that posits her husband as her *kilifa*, or boss to whose authority she must submit in all cases. She finds more honor in embracing her duty to care for her daughter than in submitting to a husband who is quick to renege on his duties as a divinely appointed *kilifa*. On the one hand, this is consistent with Senegalese common sense which sees the ties that bind a mother to her child as stronger than those that tie a wife to a husband. However, more importantly, the film argues that all *kilifa* should protect all of humanity, just as parents care for their birth children. Everyone should take care of those afflicted by disease, whether the disease is sexually transmitted or not, and whether those afflicted are your direct kin or not. In Islam, all members of humanity are kin—all are “doomi Aadama,” or children of Adam—and in the *umma*, all are brothers and sisters in faith.

Ndeye is the paragon of this kind of desirable *kilifteef* in the film; as in many *théâtres*, it is the figure of the principled, educated, young urban woman that poses a challenge to an old, oppressive order, acting as the agent of societal transformation. It would be tempting, then, to see her as embodying the triumph of “modern” morality over “traditional” morality, not unlike the young female characters in Ghanaian popular cinema that wield an enlightened, urban Christian ethos against the backward, malevolent, pagan world of the elders and the village.<sup>217</sup> However, *Muchiba* demonstrates yet another level of complexity that complicates such a schematic reading. Aly's overly literal interpretation of his patriarchal authority, which leads him to disown Coumba and repudiate Ngoné when she insists on caring for her daughter, is criticized by his peers in the village. A group of elder men and women, who have known Aly for a long time and know that Ngoné has always been a dutiful wife, caution against his extreme actions. Aly insists that he is the man of the house, and therefore Ngoné should do whatever he commands, or he divorces her. His peers find fault with his reasoning in regards to both his rejection of Coumba and his repudiation of Ngoné, and when he accuses them of being ignorant, they show they are better informed about HIV/AIDS than he is (thanks to their faithful following of awareness-raising radio programs). They remind him that it is not just medication that heals people, but having family and community supporting and loving them, an echo of the Wolof proverb “nit, nit ay garabam.” They invoke proverbial

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<sup>217</sup>Birgit. Meyer, “Popular Ghanaian Cinema and ‘African Heritage’,” *Africa Today* 46, no. 2 (1999): 93-114.

wisdom that asserts Coumba’s humanity and right to communal care, and that counters the exclusionary logic of Kocc Barma’s proverb “doomu jiitle du doom.” The fact that Coumba is his stepdaughter should make Aly treat her better than he would his own daughter, not worse, as to care for someone who is not your blood kin as if they were kin is to do God’s work. Much as the character of Obierika serves as a counterpoint to Okonkwo’s inflexible attachment to masculine power in Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart,<sup>218</sup> the presence of these wise elders in Muchiba should complicate any attempt to read the main conflict of the film as a confrontation between “tradition” and “modernity.” Instead, it situates Ndeye’s stance within a long tradition of flexibility and communal care, one that has coexisted with the timocratic ethics of hierarchy and constitutive exclusion. The film, then, not only stages a conflict between a progressive pious ethics of care—of which a violation of *sutura*-as-gag-rule may be a necessary component—with a regressive timocratic ethics linked to birth and status, but it also reminds us that the Wolof philosophical tradition is not as monolithic and easily codified as the oft-reiterated conservative script that seeks to stabilize *cosaan* (tradition) would have it.

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Part of what enables Coumba’s reintegration into the human through a progressive Muslim ethos is that she is not, after all, a *caga*. Coumba’s behavior has been consistently exemplary; as Yaye Raby tells Aly, Coumba had always been respectful and obedient, and at another moment chronologically anterior to the HIV scandal, Raby jokingly accuses Coumba of having too much *kersa* (honorable restraint). Coumba does not contract HIV through a purposeful and wanton “walking outside,” nor does she succumb to Abou’s advances, but is rather raped when deprived of all agency and turned into a passive body by the drug. The Quran offers at least three forms of scriptural evidence that would support a position absolving her of the guilt of engaging in unlawful sexual activity. While sexual contact between masters and slaves is licit, it is preferable for masters to manumit female slaves and marry them as official wives, thus transforming the slave into a woman who can possess virtue, rights, and the power of consent.<sup>219</sup> The second case is the explicit exculpation of the female slave who is forced to become a prostitute by her master; in this case, it is the master who has sinned, not the slave.<sup>220</sup> The third is the story of the people of Lot, which Scott Siraq Al-Hajj Kugle reads as a condemnation of rape, not of “homosexuality” as the dominant conservative interpretation claims. While the Quran calls upon women and men to be chaste and faithful, and contains special instructions to women which recommend they avoid certain behavior that would be seen as inviting illicit sex in the context of seventh century Medina, there is no textual evidence that a woman be allotted part of the sin of rape because, through dress or demeanor, she “asked for it.”<sup>221</sup> Although it does not explicitly

<sup>218</sup>Chinua Achebe, *Things fall apart*, 1st ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1994); Biodun Jeyifo, “For Chinua Achebe” in Kirsten Petersen, *Chinua Achebe : a celebration* (Oxford; Portsmouth, NH;Sydney: Heinemann; Dangeroo Press, 1991).

<sup>219</sup>Quran 4:25; M Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>220</sup>Q 24:33; Ibid.

<sup>221</sup>Scott Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam : critical reflection on gay, lesbian, and transgender Muslims* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010).

reference these Quranic passages, the film aligns itself with a progressive reading of scripture that circulates in Senegal as both popular and academic feminist discourse. Within this progressive view, Coumba's virtue is unassailable.

What, then, of the *caga* herself? What of the woman who has "chosen" to move outside the zone of familial regulation to engage in illicit sex? Would it have been as easy to resignify Coumba as human subject within a Muslim ethos had she contracted HIV while out partying rather than from rape? What would it take for the prostitute to become legible as a proper woman? Another offering from Daaray Kocc, a three-part miniseries comprised of *Linguere VDN* (Parts 1 and 2) and *Linguerou Keur*, stages the transformation of an honorless street prostitute, Aby, into a noble wife. This entry into legible womanhood is again facilitated by principled young people, aided by senior allies, whose interpretation of Muslim ethics challenges an inflexible hierarchical system that links honor to noble birth. However, unlike *Muchiba*, *Linguere* does not propose a radical ungendering of the human as the grounds for the honorless subject's resignification as *kilifa*. Instead, the latter—while radical in its assertion that people have the capacity to change—seems to argue that the only path to womanhood, and therefore human status, is through perfect wifely submission to husband and in-laws.

In proper melodramatic form, *Linguere VDN* opens with a scene of harmonious domesticity. The setting is the living room of a middle-class Dakar home, in which mother, father, son and daughter have convened for a formal family meeting. Pape has called the meeting to seek approval from his parents and elder sister for his wedding plans, and his polite, restrained demeanor (*kersa*), deferential praise of his parents, and responsible consideration of his financial means and obligations establish him as an honorable young man. Pape's goodness is further enhanced by his family's response to the news; they praise him in return for fulfilling his many duties to his family, and say that the news itself—as well as the exemplary way in which he has included them in the process—has made them very happy. The "happiness" produced by this scene does not take the smiling, jubilant form of the opening scene of *Muchiba*—indeed, a non-Wolof speaker unfamiliar with the cultural context might easily misinterpret the characters' serious expressions and tone—but can rather be classified as an "emotion" whose melodramatic function is more intelligible within the tradition of Hindi cinema than in Western cinematic and theatrical traditions. Instead of referring to the internal state of an individual, "emotion" in the Hindi cinematic vocabulary is produced by "placing a character in a web of social relations of which kin are the most significant and common."<sup>222</sup> The idealized circulation of honor among kin is what renders happiness legible in this scene; each character performs the appropriate role dictated by his location in the kinship order, and through an adherence to the formulaic scripts of kinship, the family's nobility is successfully reproduced.

This happiness is further enhanced by Pape's subsequent announcement of his plans to his best friend, Mansour, who sees marriage as essential to the consolidation of virtuous masculinity. Through marriage, Pape enters into full personhood by accessing

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<sup>222</sup>Tejaswini Ganti, "And Yet My Heart is Still Indian" in Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin, *Media worlds: anthropology on new terrain* (University of California Press, 2002), 291.

the right to command wives and children: “góor dëgg, balaa mat góor, il faut mu am soxna [...] Dafa wara am lu mu jiite ci kërám. Tèye jigéen, di ko yor, loolu mooy tax ngay am jom” (“A real man, before he can become a full man, must have a wife [...] He must have someone he leads in his house. To keep a woman, and support her, that is how you obtain the honor that comes with responsibility”). Mansour assumes Pape intends to marry a young woman Pape dated named Aida, who Mansour sees as the model of honorable femininity: she is well-behaved (*yaru*), virtuous (*baax*), and comes from a respected family (“famille bu bien”). Most importantly, the strongest evidence of her appropriateness as a wife is that she is always at home, never out walking around; whenever you visit her house, she is there, sweet and hospitable.

This initial happiness is disrupted by a shocking revelation: Pape’s intended is not virtuous Aida, but her polar opposite: a street prostitute. The film introduces us to her through a sequence of chiaroscuro images of her body, standing and walking by the VDN at night; we catch fractured glimpses of her high heels, her tight, revealing pants and tank top, long braids, and a flash of glossy makeup. Commonly employed in melodrama, this chiaroscuro technique produces a visual tension between concealing and revealing which stokes a desire to discover the truth of the character and heightens the audience’s emotional investment in subsequent narrative revelations.<sup>223</sup> While this scene clearly identifies the prostitute as a creature of the night, the play of light and dark suggests moral ambiguity rather than decisive condemnation.

Her location on the VDN also situates her in the contradictions and ambiguities of the simultaneously crowded and alienating modern city. The VDN is a long, multi-lane thruway that links the area enjoining Point E (a middle class residential area), the university, and the elite neighborhood of Fann Residence to the road that veers toward the airport via the working class Lebou neighborhood of Yoff and to the highway that leads to the sprawl of working class suburbs. The VDN passes through Mermoz, Sacré Coeur 3, Liberté 6, Siples 1, Ouest Foire, Nord Foire, up to Parcelles (home of Mayacine and Dial), neighborhoods which have been the site of a dizzying urban expansion that has changed the landscape and urban culture of Dakar over the past few decades. Unlike the socially dense old neighborhoods, with their low-level homes and pedestrian-centric streets, the VDN is characterized by its capacity to quickly link disparate parts of the city via automobile and bus, its new multi-story apartment buildings, and the relative anonymity of the people circulating on and around it. Several long traveling shots of the expansive, empty highway lined by street lamps frame our introduction to the prostitute; filmed in 2001, the highway’s banks appear relatively uninhabited.<sup>224</sup>

As a gossiping secretary in Pape’s office building later asks, how is it possible that such a well-mannered, well-born young man like Pape could have anything to do with this creature of the VDN? Ironically, it was Mansour who pushed Pape to discover “Dakar by night” and introduced him to the prostitute. As Pape lies in bed—sheepish,

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<sup>223</sup>Martin Meisel, “Scattered Chiaroscuro: Melodrama as a Matter of Seeing” in Jacqueline Bratton et al, *Melodrama: stage, picture, screen* (London: British Film Institute, 1994).

<sup>224</sup>Until recently, the VDN had the reputation of being unsafe for single young women; in 2004 when I was looking for an apartment, I was advised not to rent near the highway--it was the paradigmatic outside urban space in which good women should not circulate.

giddy, and smitten—he observes her reapplying her mask of makeup, flipping her braids, laughing heartily, and striking exaggerated seductive poses. She tells him to call her “Linguerou VDN”—the queen of the VDN—because she commands a territory that includes the stretch of highway from the Route de Ouakam to the Route de l’Aéroport, and she dismisses him from her company as if he were one of her vassals. Pape is not convinced by this imperious performance, and is sure that if given the opportunity, Linguere VDN would choose to trade in the prostitute life for the virtuous happiness of domesticity.

In a subsequent visit, Pape proposes to make her his wife. We witness this conversation through a sheer, floral-patterned veil that has been placed between the camera and the actors, a device that both enhances the scene’s intimacy—thus turning the spectator into a hidden voyeur peering through the curtain at a private scene—and reinforces the ambiguity of the chiaroscuro palette through which we apprehend the figure of the prostitute. We get the sense that all is not as it seems with Linguere VDN; indeed, Pape is convinced that unhappiness lurks underneath the brash and brassy veneer, and he proposes to transform Linguere into Aby (her real name): “duggal la ci yoon wu baax. Fas yéene sa royaume bi nga tudde VDN, nga génn ci royaume boobu, dugg ci biir kër. Yow laa bëgg def jabar” (“[I will] put you on the right path. [I] intend for you to leave your VDN queendom, and move inside the home. You’re the one I want to make my wife”). Sobbing, Aby finally admits she wants what other women her age have: a husband and children. If he is serious, she will put her shameful past behind her and “toog suma wetu jëkkër” (“stay by my husband’s side”). The honorable personhood she could access from her relocation in the kinship order is far more desirable than the degraded “freedom” and command of territory she enjoys as a prostitute.

The shadows associated with Linguere dissipate when Aby lifts the veil that shrouds her true identity. During a visit to Pape’s office, she insists on telling him the truth of her past before he makes the fatal decision to marry her. In an inversion of the timocratic relationship between *sutura* and honor, her commitment to disclosure is central to her resignification as virtuous subject. It is not the details of her past that will reverse her degradation—indeed, they make her look worse, not better—but her willingness to tell the truth as a first step to changing her life. While links could be made here to the incitement to confession in twelve-step programs and born-again Christianity, her invocation of the Wolof proverb “kuy naan di nëbbu, boo màndee feeñ” (“you can drink [alcohol] in hiding, but when you get drunk, you will be exposed”) situates this disclosure within a strand of Wolof philosophy that questions the ethics of hiding vice under the veil of *sutura*.

During a close-up shot of her brightly-lit, obviously sincere and regretful face, she reveals she did not become a prostitute out of financial necessity. She was born into a highly-respected, well-off, noble Kaolackois<sup>225</sup> family, and had almost finished high school when her penchant for going out dancing and drinking with the fashionable crowd led to her dissipation and social death. In a flashback, a young man escorts her to her Kaolack house as a crowd of children surrounds her, clapping and chanting “Mandikat!

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<sup>225</sup>Kaolack is a city located a few hours southwest of Dakar.

Mandikat!” (“Drunkard! Drunkard!”), publicly announcing her shame. She stumbles, giggling, into her parents’ courtyard; her father is in the midst of prayer, and her mother approaches her in concern. She orders her mother to shut her mouth, and she whacks the cap off her praying father’s head. The image of a young Senegalese woman returning home drunk is shocking enough, but her utter disrespect for her mother and father—one can hardly imagine an act more disrespectful than disturbing one’s father in prayer—transgresses all bounds. This scene serves as the nightmarish, calamitous reverse image of the opening scene of the film; while Pape helped to reproduce familial harmony and happiness, Aby is the agent of domestic disorder and unhappiness.

Aby has dishonored her father (“kii toroxal na ma”), and he exercises his sovereign right to banish her from his house, thus purging the family of the *gàcce* she embodies. His refusal to speak to her directly is an indication that she is already dead to him; he condemns her to an ignominious “outside” existence through a command directed at her mother: “Na mu génn suma kër, ci biti!” (“May she leave my house immediately, outside!”) Her mother pleads with him on her behalf, begging him not to kill her (“bul rey sa doom”). She wants to heal (*faj*) Aby, and knows that banishment is not the solution. She argues that parents should guard their daughter’s honor (“doom bu jigéen, danga koy sagal”); to disown her is to expose her to certain death. She cries “Suturaal ma! Sarax ma!” (“Protect me! Cover me with discretion! Be charitable!”), but her pleading is for naught. Aby careens out into her new life on the streets, where she steals, drinks alcohol, does all sorts of drugs, sleeps with all sorts of men, and ends up turning tricks on the VDN. She contracts a venereal disease and battles a long-term illness, but luckily is not infected by HIV. Her sinful life catches up with her, and no amount of money or alcohol can chase away her feeling of shame and dissipation. Her narrative ends with an image of her holding a pile of cash that burns through her skin as she is haunted by satanic, mocking laughter.

Instead of recoiling from horror at Aby’s shameful past, Pape rewards her for her candor. Pape has a surprising revelation of his own: Aida, the young woman Mansour had praised for her virtue and whom Pape had initially planned to marry, had been unfaithful. Aida never went out, but that did not prevent her from entertaining a procession of suitors in her bedroom. Pape’s experience with Aida led him to the conclusion that “Caga yi, du rekk ñi nekk ci VDN. Waaye caga yangi ci biir kër yi ci famille yooyu yu naan famille yu baax lañu” (“The prostitutes on the VDN aren’t the only ones. There are prostitutes operating inside the houses of families that are considered to be respectable”). For Pape, neither the sphere of operation, nor the contractual exchange of sex for money, is grounds for a meaningful distinction between the *caga* of the street and the *caga* of the respectable home; both have sex with multiple partners outside marriage, and both are equally degraded. His argument contributes to the public debate about the practice of *mbaraan*, a modern phenomenon in which “good” young women discreetly maintain multiple suitors who retain their affection through generous gifts (cell phones, money, clothes, etc.).<sup>226</sup> Engaged in virtually the same

<sup>226</sup>Nyamnjoh, “Fishing in Troubled Waters”; Thioub, “L’enfermement carcéral”; Foley and Nguer, “Courting success in HIV/AIDS prevention.”



transactions, the film asks, why would one be branded a pariah and the other continue to signify as honorable? It is *sutura* that establishes a boundary between the two subjects, a boundary Pape finds morally suspect.

What matters to Pape is not the judgment of the community, but that of God, and since God sees all that is hidden, it is God's *sutura* rather than social *sutura* that he seeks. Since people are flawed and weak, and cannot go throughout life without making mistakes, Aby is no different from everyone else. Just as honorable people can be secretly engaged in fundamentally dishonorable activities, goodness can be cultivated in people who are ostensibly honorless. The self is not fixed, but rather can be worked on, disciplined, changed, provided there is an agentive will committed to the project of transformation. If Aby asks for God's forgiveness and commits to the path of righteousness, she will become a different person, a proper woman: "Mën nga changer. Mën nga rectifier le tir. Mbuub bi nga solu, mën nga ko simmi. Fas yéene nga génne ci janqu mbedd, doon jeegu biir kër" ("You can change. You can rectify the wrong. The dress you are wearing, you can take it off. [You have to] intend to leave the girl of the street behind, and become a woman of the house"). Aby vows to remove the "mbubb bu tilim" ("dirty dress") she had donned, and prays to God to give her strength ("kàttan") to go through with her transformation and commit to their marriage. She will need strength, not only for her jihad of the soul, but to confront the opposition of Pape's family and friends, as well as the brothel's claims to rights in her laboring body. Her prayers echo those of Ndeye and Coumba in *Muchiba*, for she is engaging in a struggle that figures her as a kind of warrior subject: "Damay ñaan Yalla mu jàppale ma ma am ndam ci xeex bi may door" ("I pray God will help me be victorious in the battle I am embarking on").

Aby does not underestimate the categorical opposition of Pape's family and community, who believe that honor is determined by a fixed, inheritable social status. Mansour, shocked, reminds Pape that a man of his status does not choose a wife by looking at the girls on the street (or "ci àll bi," in the bush) and picking the one he likes. Pape's father is a "notable bu mag ci koñ bi, kenn yabuko" ("a highly regarded man in the community, no one disrespects him"), and his mother is a "jigéen ju baax" ("a good woman"), so to marry a prostitute would bring shame, dishonor, and catastrophe onto the family. Mansour does not believe Aby's nature can be changed, for she is "marked" as bad forever ("marqué na ba pare"). Pape's family reprimands him harshly, telling him he should be ashamed to even utter his desire to marry a prostitute out loud. Pape should marry someone like him "ci yax ak deret" ("in bones and blood"); he is of an illustrious Dakar lineage ("ci yax bu rey nga bokk") whose honor he should be concerned to enhance. Pape's father is especially worried about the impact on his own reputation; he was born in Dakar, everyone knows who he is, and as a result, he will never in a million years approve of the marriage.

Aby's slaveness is reproduced through Mansour's simultaneous approval of Pape's sexual enjoyment of Aby's body in the context of a bit of boys-night-out fun and intense disapproval of Pape's plans to marry her. A prostitute is flesh, not woman, as the brothel proceeds to remind her. She attempts to extricate herself from its iron grip, refusing to entertain customers, although she has no choice but to continue living there

until the wedding. When a john enters her room, demanding her services, she feigns illness. He insists, affirming that his claim to her body is greater than her claim to her own body, that to be sexually available without condition is the nature of her work. When she resists, the brothel madam, Tante Adja, vows to put Aby in her place (“teg ko ci palaasam”), because, like Coumba the maid, Aby has become “fuuy” (wanting what is beyond her station). When Aby states her intention to leave, Adja responds “Bàyyi! Kër Adja gii, ku fi dugg ba bàyyi te sa mandat jeexul, du sedd noonu” (“Leave!? Whoever enters Adja’s house, and tries to leave before her mandate is up, is not going to get off easy”). Adja claims full ownership of Aby’s body, and she reminds Aby of that sovereignty by calling in her two thugs, who proceed to violently beat Aby with fists and belts. When Aby continues to insist on leaving, Adja cries “man ngay toroxal?!” (“you’re dishonoring me?!”)—a reminder that the slave has no honor of her own, but rather exists to enhance her master’s honor—as she orders the thugs to hold Aby down, lights a cigarette, and burns it into Aby’s cheek. No one leaves without being branded with Adja’s “signature,” the proof of her claim to ownership.

Just as Pape and Aby’s cause looks hopeless, a reversal of fortune comes in the form of Pape’s principled elder sister, Aïssata, clearly the homologue of Muchiba’s Ndeye. Aby convinces Aïssata of her resolve to become a good wife by vowing to submit entirely to Pape’s will: “Lu mu tere, dinaa ko bàyyi. Lu mu sant ma def ko” (“Whatever he forbids, I will abandon. Whatever he asks me to do, I’ll do it”). This submission is then extended to Aïssata herself: “li nga bëgg, loolu laay def” (“Whatever you want, that’s what I’ll do”). As she is not only an ally, but her future elder sister-in-law, Aby owes Aïssata submission in all cases, and it is precisely this docility<sup>227</sup> that makes her disciplining into “wife” conceivable. This evidence leads to Aïssata’s attempt to engage the opposition, thereby risking her own standing in the family and community. When she makes an appeal to her parents on Pape and Aby’s behalf, they accuse her of conspiring to subvert their parental authority and turning the proper kinship hierarchy upside down; her father cautions, “Duma sa moroom. Mag laa, kilifa laa, maay sa baay” (“I am not your peer. I am an elder, I am a kilifa, I am your father”); and, in response to Pape’s attempt to invert the structure of command, “duma jur doom ba pare mu jiitu. Man maay jiitu, mu topp suma ginnaaw” (“I did not give birth to a child so that he would lead me. I am the one who leads, and he follows behind me”).

Aïssata remains undeterred, for not only is she committed to a cause she believes is just, but she is clever and knows how to work the system. She thinks she can bypass her father’s authority by appealing to the authority of her maternal uncle (*nijaay*), a figure who, in an older order in which the power of the matrilineage balanced that of the patrilineage, had as much, if not more, right to command his nephew than that nephew’s father. Uncle Omar shares Pape and Aïssata’s belief that people can change, and he claims he has full authority to represent Pape in marriage, even in the absence of Pape’s father’s consent. For Omar, the only obstacle to the young couple’s union is Aby’s

<sup>227</sup>“Although we have come to associate docility with the abandonment of agency, the term literally implies the malleability required of someone in order for her to be instructed in a particular skill or knowledge—a meaning that carries less a sense of passivity than one of struggle, effort, exertion, and achievement” (Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 29).

alienation from her kin; they must first disalienate her before she can marry into the family.<sup>228</sup> Omar brings Pape and Aby to Aby's parents' home in Kaolack, where he has Aby beg for the latter's forgiveness. Her parents' love and concern for their daughter trumps their anger and shame; they forgive and bless her, and her father and Omar seal the marriage contract at the mosque.

Omar's announcement of the news to Pape's parents triggers the film's most condensed staging of the conflicting claims of the ethico-political orders vying for legitimacy in contemporary Senegal. Moustapha, Pape's father, denies the validity of Omar's authority over his son, thus rejecting the checks and balances that the matrilineal order would place on his own patriarchal power. Indeed, Moustapha claims that Omar has no power over anyone in his house, including his younger sister, since he alleges that Omar relinquished that decision-making power (*dogal*) when his family gave her to Moustapha in marriage. Rather than frame his rebuttal as a legitimate return to the matrilineal order, Omar instead contests Moustapha's claim to total sovereignty over his wife and children by invoking the ultimate authority—Islam—which gives the bride and groom the decision-making power in regards to their marriage, and does not specify which representatives must participate in the marriage ceremony for it to be considered legally binding. While he may have angered Pape's father, he insists he has committed no sin in the eyes of God, the supreme *kilifa*. In Moustapha's eyes, Omar has illegitimately arrogated his paternal authority, but since he cannot contest the legality of the marriage, he attempts to manage the impact of the scandal on his own patriarchal reputation by externalizing it, placing all responsibility for the affair in Omar's hands and ordering Pape to relinquish his house keys and move elsewhere.

Now that she is married, the onus is entirely on Aby to prove that she has made a complete transformation from Linguere VDN to Linguerou Keur, that a prostitute can indeed become a virtuous wife. It is only the perfection of her submission to Pape, her in-laws, and God that can convince everyone Pape has made a wise choice. As with the Murid subjects I discussed in the first chapter, this submission is not passive, but agentic: Aby willfully engages in a set of disciplinary practices that mold her into a virtuous subject. While one of the aims of these practices is not only her social reintegration, but the perfecting of a pious orientation toward God—a transformative process that may not be fully visible to other people—the film emphasizes performed practices that we can ascertain as spectators and that serve as visual and aural indices of her virtue. She replaces her animated, suggestive gestures and laughter with a lowered gaze, hushed tone, and sweet, shy smile. Her tight pants and tank tops are traded in for traditional outfits (“yére olof”) that are modest yet fashionable and topped by an artfully

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<sup>228</sup>As a prostitute of the street, she is seen by the wider community as always-already kinless; as the gossiping secretary in Pape's office building opines, “Nit ku baax, sooy takk, dangay xam ki ngay takk. Moom au moins, waroon na xam ci ban deret la bokk, xam ci ban yax la bokk, xam ay mbokkam” (“a good person, when he gets married, should know who he's marrying. At the very least, he should know what blood she belongs to, what bones she belongs to, and who her relatives are”). She automatically figures Aby as a creature of unknowable and lowly origin, unaware that Aby is in fact from a noble Kaolackois family.

tied head-wrap. Her body is no longer outside, on display, but discreetly suggested under voluminous and rich fabric.

When she and Pape go visiting, she is deferential, speaking only when it is appropriate. She is pious, praying regularly and remembering God in her everyday speech and actions. Evidence she recognizes the piety in hard work, she insists on doing the housework herself, rather than leave it all for the maid. She manages the superhuman feat of maintaining her refined beauty while engaging in domestic labor; in a priceless shot that has as its only referent the idealized domestic universe of Senegalese laundry soap commercials, we see her washing dishes, elegantly dressed in a rich tunic, headwrap, and gold jewelry. She sends gifts and food to her in-laws—instantiation of her *teraanga*, or generosity—in spite of their refusal to acknowledge her. As Aïssata tells her father, Aby takes exemplary care of Pape, doing everything that a wife should do, and being everything that one would want a woman to be. When Aby is close to giving birth to their first child, Aïssata makes the rounds of friends and family, citing both Aby's wifely perfection and the fact that Pape's child is their blood as reasons to end all animosity and attend the baby's naming ceremony (*tuddu* or *ngénte*).

The naming ceremony is the stage for Aby's definitive reintegration into the social through her realization of full female personhood. Her position in Pape's family is sealed when she moves from wife to mother, and the *ngénte* is the public acknowledgement of her role in the perpetuation of the family line. All are present at the ceremony—Mansour, Aby's parents, Pape's parents—and everyone is overjoyed when they announce they have named their son after Pape's father. When it is time for the latter to give a speech, he is so overwhelmed with emotion that he breaks down in tears. He calls Pape's marriage blessed (“sey bu barke la”), a union planned by God. He formally thanks and praises both Pape and Aby, reinstating Aby as a woman of honor: “ku yaru la, ku baax la, ku teey la, ku bëgg suma doom la, ku ko tēye ci kaw la” (“she is polite and good, she thinks before she acts, she loves my son, and holds him above her”). Aby's “géwélu juddu”—a griot whose family has been linked to Aby's family for generations—erupts into the festivities, and testifies to Aby's place in a noble lineage, as the company claps and sings along. In this moment, Aby's honorable subjecthood is defined by her motherhood (and therefore her authority over her progeny), by her wifely submission to her husband and in-laws, and by her exalted status in relation to her griot client. She is no longer in the shadowy, outside, kinless zone of ignominious whoredom; she is now wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend, woman. She is in a clear, known location, a place of both rights and obligations. She is a person.

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Lingueroou Keur could end here, with the happy restoration of familial and social order. Were it to end, though, the film would sacrifice melodramatic impact, for Aby has only just begun to signify as virtuous. We could not fully embrace her as a victim of injustice until her past degradation had been overcome. Indeed, Aby has more challenges to face. The previous scenes suggest that Aby's resocialization is dependent on her capacity to act upon and change herself, that she has the choice and the power to become a legible woman. She is able to reverse both her condition and her state, to use

Meillassoux's terms, completely shaking off her slaveness. This full reincorporation into the social would seem to ally the film with Kopytoff and Miers' argument that African kinship systems are eminently flexible and inclusive, and that the slave state is temporary and easily transformed into a situated personhood. The *théâtre* takes the argument further, locating the agency of incorporation not just in the society/family of reception, but primarily in the slave herself. The slave can be incorporated, but only if she fashions herself into an incorporable subject. She is integrated not simply by the legality of her marital union, but by reversing her degradation through an act of her own will and by proving her full commitment to the prevailing order through her submission.

There are troubling moments in the final installment of the miniseries that interrupt the logic of this counterintuitive distribution of agency. There are forces outside Aby's control, and those forces may not allow her to reverse her slave state. In the striking scene that opens Part 3, Aby is alone in their new apartment, praying. Accompanying a close-up shot of her illuminated face is a voiceover in which we hear her asking God to bring her out of the darkness and into the light, an invocation of the Manichean symbolism of good and evil through which both Islam and melodrama produce ethical meaning. Aby's pious cleaving to the light renders her fully signifiable as virtuous, and sets the stage for the impending violence which we can now experience as an undeniable violation of her personhood. Tante Adja's thugs burst into her apartment as she is praying, immediately laying their hands on her body—grabbing, pushing—as a tactile reminder of the brothel's claim to it. They have found her new home with ease, and make it clear that they will continue to follow and harass her and her husband. Aby is not a free person who can leave at her whim: “réseau bi, kenn du ci dugg di génne noonu” (“no one who enters the network can leave just like that”). It is thanks to Adja's tutelage, they claim, that Aby snagged a husband, so it is only just that Adja receive continual returns on her investment. They proceed to spread rumors of her shameful past around Aby's new neighborhood—a neighborhood that had initially welcomed her—and one day Aby finds “Linguere VDN” scrawled in big, screaming letters on her front door.<sup>229</sup> Pape has renamed her Aby, and she has renamed herself Aby, but the brothel asserts its sovereign right to name her Linguere VDN, and, through that naming, to extend her social death indefinitely.

In keeping with the film's critical stance toward concealment, Aby's attempt to keep the incident secret (and the brothel quiet by discreetly paying the thugs off) is ultimately ineffective; one night the thugs pull Pape from his car and beat him savagely. Aïssata, ever the fighter and clear-headed problem solver, insists that Pape and Aby counter the sovereign claims of the brothel with a show of their own “force” by contacting the police. In what we might classify as a wish-fulfilling fantasy in which state apparatuses swoop in to defend virtuous victims from oppressive villains—a perplexing faith in the state we have already encountered in *Mbindane dou Diam* and *Muchiba*—the

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<sup>229</sup>In a similar scene in Susan Lori-Parks' American play *In the Blood* (an adaptation of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*), the main character, a homeless black woman with five children from five different fathers, wakes up in her makeshift home under a bridge to find “SLUT” scrawled on the wall. Suzan-Lori Parks, *In the blood* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 2000).

police conduct a successful sting operation at the brothel, and Aby is finally freed from its vigilante tyranny.<sup>230</sup>

Once Pape and Aby have transformed all outside opposition into support and neutralized the brothel menace, they are free to live a life of peaceful, normative domesticity. The penultimate scene, however, contains a twist that critically interrupts the narrative's ostensible championing of wifely submission as path to rehumanization. A dapperly dressed Pape is preparing for an evening out to an unspecified location. Aby complains his outings have become too frequent, leaving her alone in the house with their child. She appeals to his honor as responsible *kilifa* whose role is to cover his family with protective *sutura*: what if a thief or attacker was to break into the house while he is absent, who would hear her scream? She vowed to stay by his side, and in turn she wants him to stay by hers rather than hang around in the street (“taxawaalu ci mbedd mi”). Unfortunately, as a wife, Aby does not have the right to demand that her husband stay home; the command only works in the opposite direction. As the radio pundit quoted at the beginning of this chapter sermoned, women should ask permission before leaving the house, but men are under no such obligation; Pape asserts, “bu ma amee suma ay soxle, dama koy dox” (“when I have things to do, I will go out and do [‘walk’] them”). His harsh reprimand is a shocking indication that the caring, polite Pape may have turned into a villain: “Mënuma accepter jigéen di ma def ay observations, waxatuma nak suma jabar. Que ça soit la dernière fois” (“I won’t allow a woman to take me to task, let alone my wife. This better be the last time”). He reminds her of where he found her, and that she could easily be replaced with another just like her, a “Linguere Corniche.”<sup>231</sup> While she was able to wash the graffiti off her door, put the brothel crowd in jail, and win over her in-laws, there is nothing she can do about Pape’s invocation of her prostitute name, and therefore she cannot be assured she will ever fully overcome her slave state. As Pape storms out the door, she reminds herself of the promise of total submission she made in order to reenter the social, acknowledging “amatuma benn droit” (“I no longer have any right[s]”).

While out, Pape remembers all of the horrible things Aby went through, realizes he was wrong, and comes home begging for her forgiveness. Aby forgives him as he had forgiven her, repeating the adage “nit du dund, te du juum” (“a person can’t go through life without erring”) and the final shot is of the couple reunited, hugging happily. This reconciliation is too quick, too easy, and too unsatisfying, and we are left with the discomfiting implications of the penultimate scene. Like Rachel in *Blade Runner*, whose escape from the subjugated existence of the non-human slave is only possible through her romantic submission to Decker,<sup>232</sup> Aby’s entry into womanhood via wifehood

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<sup>230</sup>It is also possible to read this faith in state justice from within the Wolof oral narrative tradition. Griots would use tales to model ideal behavior, sometimes as a way to critique an existent deviation from justice or honorable comportment among the ruling class. In these *théâtres*, then, the effective and just intervention of the state may not be a misrepresentation, but a prescription for how the state should operate.

<sup>231</sup>The Corniche is another major artery in Dakar. It is the scenic route that runs along the coast from downtown Dakar to the westernmost point of the peninsula.

<sup>232</sup>Rachel and Decker’s ride off into the sunset at the end of the theatrical cut of *Blade Runner* is similarly unsatisfying; the alternative ending, in which they walk out onto the putrid streets into an uncertain future,

seems to be little more than a trading of one form of subjugation for another. The salient difference between Rachel and Aby is that Rachel is legible as woman through a romantic and sexual submission to Decker—marriage and insertion into Decker’s family does not come up—whereas Aby’s womanhood becomes legible through a submission to the norms of wifehood. Indeed, her desire or love for Pape is not presented as a factor in her decision to leave the *caga* life to marry him, rather her stated motive is to seize the opportunity to have the life that her “moroomu jigéen ñi” (woman of her age) have—the honor, respectability and protection that come from being a wife and mother.

The fight between Aby and Pape serves as a reminder that Pape *made* her—that it is ultimately thanks to his agency that she has reentered the social. At the early stages of her transition, Pape had insisted on renaming Linguere VDN “Aby.” This power to rename—thus erasing her previous identity and turning her into a *tabula rasa* onto which a new woman could be writ—contains a troubling echo of the master’s right to rename the slave, a right which is bound up with the right to own both the slave and her progeny. In the slave-holding Wolof communities of the past, “[w]hen first assimilated in the new community, [the slave] received a new name, and, by implication, a new identity. His children were not his own, but belonged to his wife’s master. According to a Wolof proverb, the eggs belong to the hen’s master.”<sup>233</sup> Similarly, in the context of the transatlantic slave trade, “[t]he captivating party does not only ‘earn’ the right to dispose of the captive body as it sees fit, but gains, consequently, the right to name and ‘name’ it.”<sup>234</sup> One could argue that Aby simply has to reclaim her first identity, since she was Aby before she became Linguere. However, Pape proposes to create a new Aby before he knows of her noble birth and respectable upbringing, and seems to be especially enamored of the challenge to create a woman out of the commodified and degraded flesh of the prostitute. Further, the literal and symbolic branding (the cigarette burn, the graffiti on the door) that mark Aby as property are traces that preclude a return to a pure, prelapsarian state of virtue. As Mansour says, she is irrevocably marked. While her state in the brothel order resembles that of the abducted slave—where her only agency is

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is more consistent with the film’s dystopian vision.

<sup>233</sup> Klein, “Servitude” 349. Dyao claims that the big families rarely took advantage of their rights over slaves’ progeny (Rousseau, *Le Senegal* 62). I would argue, along with Meillassoux and Spillers, that what matters is not the degree of the master’s generosity, kindness, or willingness to treat the slave as fictive kin, but the very existence of the master’s recognized right to another’s offspring. Even if it is true that children born to slaves in the context of Wolof domestic slavery were almost never sold off, and masters often arranged and sanctioned their slaves’ marriages and formation of family units, reiterated discourses of ownership and degraded personhood ensured the reproduction of a natively alienated and dishonored slave-subject. At the material level, slaves who formed their own family units and were allowed to work land for their own profit were still required to remit a fixed portion of their annual crop yield to the master and to perform submission to him. At the symbolic level, having been cut off from ascending generations through enslavement, the slave, even if allowed to enjoy some authority over his progeny, is still entirely dependent on the master for his identity and location in the community. In the rural community Judith Irvine studied in the early 1970s, inhabitants of slave descent were still identified as such, nearly seventy years after the total legal abolition of slavery. While everyone knew who was descended from slaves, slave genealogies were never acknowledged or recited (Irvine, *Caste* 439), a symbolic extension of their social death in the post-emancipation present.

<sup>234</sup>Spillers, “Mama’s Baby” 64.

necropolitical—she willingly gives herself up to be refashioned by Pape’s command, thus accessing a modality of agency enabled by the order of submission. “Freedom” is not a choice for her, only a subjugation that is a living death or an agentive submission to a social order that grants her an ambiguous form of gendered life. Pape resembles the Sufi *seriñ*, and Aby the disciple: in order to both reenter the social and save her soul, she entrusts herself to the *seriñ* to be remolded into a new person (a process called “defar nit” in Muridism, or “to make a person”).<sup>235</sup> Like the disciple, she engages in the disciplinary practices of agentive submission, her prostitute past an enthrallment to the lower *nafs* that must be overcome through hard spiritual labor.

However, Pape is not vested with the special spiritual authority and *baraka* of the Murid *seriñ*, nor is Aby’s disciplining into wifehood totally equivalent to the *taalibe*’s abnegation of desire. Pape is merely a husband, and his endowment with *seriñ*-like powers contributes to the normativization of the husband’s command over the wife. It is considered to be a structural norm that the husband is always the *kilifa* of the wife, never vice versa. One of Judith Irvine’s informants in a rural Wolof village in the early 1970s cited a popular song to illustrate the ideal hierarchical relationship between husband and wife: “What’s good for the slave (jaam) is his master (san[g]), what’s good for a woman is her husband.”<sup>236</sup> The analogy between wife and slave is one of many that posit the various hierarchical relationships in the Wolof social structure as involving a similar logic of submission (but only in the context of the axis of hierarchy in question): the nephew is to the maternal uncle as the slave is to the master; the disciple is to the sheikh as the nephew is to the maternal uncle; and so forth.<sup>237</sup> It is, then, problematic to claim that the wife and the slave share the *same* subordinate status—that the wife is a slave—since the wife’s placement in the lower slot of a hierarchical dyad is fixed only in the context of the husband-wife relationship. The call to submit to a higher authority is not limited to the wife; ideally, everyone in the Wolof social structure submits to someone else, which means that no one possesses total, unchecked authority. As I have already shown, the wife can be in the “slave” position in relation to her husband, but she can be in the “master” position in relation to her maid (or slave), griot, and children. In Wolof society, the free, noble wife is necessarily differentiated from the slave because she is able to access honor not only through the perfection of her submission to her husband, but through the fact of her noble birth, her maternal power over her children, her command of low-status clients, and a host of other means. The slave, on the other hand, cannot possess honor in her own right; she can only derive a secondary form of honor through her involvement in the enhancement of the master’s honor, through the perfection of her submission to him/her. Aby, in her restored nobility, could strategically harness the various sources of power available to her in order to redirect Pape’s behavior, one of the advantages of the complexity that results from the overlapping of multiple hierarchies. However, she has abnegated those other rights in order to re-enter the social

<sup>235</sup>Indeed, Pape’s power to pull her out of social and spiritual death is almost divine; at one point, she says that Pape pulled her out of the *lendem* (darkness, obscurity) of her former life, an echo of her prayer at the beginning of Part 3.

<sup>236</sup>Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village.*, 271. See also Gueye, “Ode to Patriarchy.”

<sup>237</sup>Ibid.



—“amatuma benn droit” (“I no longer have any rights”), she says—thereby enabling the merger of the subjectivity of the wife with that of the slave, and granting the husband total patriarchal sovereignty.

In the vein of Moustapha Gueye’s refusal to acknowledge the authority granted to Pape’s maternal uncle by the matrilineal order, the husband’s uncontested patriarchal authority is further consolidated by the power vested in Pape to rename Linguere VDN, a renaming which symbolically supplants matrilineal authority. *Lingéer* is a royal title that was conferred to certain mothers, sisters, and cousins of Wolof rulers. According to Yoro Dyao, the *lingéer*, along with the *aawo* (the first wife of the king), were endowed with royal power, and given authority over districts, slaves, and clients. They accumulated discretionary income, although they were required to host the sovereign and his entourage at their own expense when he visited (and, of course, to support and give gifts to clients).<sup>238</sup> Most of the Wolof kingdoms privileged matrilineal descent over patrilineal descent; the degree of nobility of one’s mother would therefore take precedence over the degree of nobility of one’s father.<sup>239</sup> In the case of inheritance, a significant percentage of wealth would be transferred to the *meen*, or matrilineage, making the mother’s family a formidable force and ensuring that part of women’s wealth was inalienable by father, husband, and son.<sup>240</sup> Even though Linguere VDN the prostitute does not have the real power of the *lingéer*—she is slave to the “réseau” of the brothel—her royal claim to territory invokes a past order in which noble women could be centrally involved in the operation of political power. The claim sets up a radical equivalence between certain feminized modalities of power of the past and the prostitute’s “freedom”<sup>241</sup> to walk outside and to exist outside the patriarchal authority of father and husband. Indeed, Adja’s brothel could be seen as a kind of degraded matriarchy, a domestic-political order in which women rule over other women and command male clients (the thugs who terrorize Aby), and where the wealth accumulated from the prostitutes’ labor returns to the brothel “mother.”<sup>242</sup>

Through his domestication of Linguere VDN into Aby, Pape re-enacts the historical submission of the matrilineal order to the reformist Muslim order of the

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<sup>238</sup>Rousseau, “Le Sénégal d’autrefois,” 40–41.

<sup>239</sup>The mother is “la seule personne pouvant transmettre le sang noble et en même temps certains droits” (Rousseau, *Le Senegal* 26). Dyao also asserts that the good or bad qualities of the *lingéer* played a role in the election of the sovereign, in keeping with the adage “liggéeyu ndey, añub doom” (literally, “the work of the mother, the child’s lunch,” or the child will be good if the mother has done her job well) (Ibid., 42).

<sup>240</sup>Rousseau, “Le Sénégal d’autrefois,” 28.

<sup>241</sup>Robertson, *Women and slavery in Africa*, 7.

<sup>242</sup>Another complex representation of the prostitute as degraded matriarch is in Djibril Diop Mambéty’s arthouse film *Hyènes* (*Hyenas*). Djibril Diop Mambéty, *Hyènes* (Ennetbaden: Trigon-Film, 2006). Linguere Ramatou becomes a prostitute during her exile from her hometown, where she was socially killed after her pre-marital pregnancy exposed her as unchaste and her lover refused to marry her. When she returns to the town as an old woman, wealthy and worldly but bitter and half-prosthetic, she installs a hyena regime, taking over the town court and demanding her former beau’s head in return for the riches she will donate to the impoverished town. Both the *lingéer* title bestowed upon her by the townspeople and the accoutrements of Wolof royalty (queenly costumes of centuries past and ladies-in-waiting in traditional garb) invoke a feminized modality of command of the past whose manifestation in the present can only be twisted.

nineteenth century.<sup>243</sup> While this reformist movement challenged hierarchies of birth, asserting the radical equality of believers before God and the capacity of the soul to purify itself through askesis—thus contesting the idea that one is irrevocably tainted by one’s lowly birth—it was informed by a patriarchal reading of the Quran. This patriarchal interpretation hinges on the Quranic verse which posits that men have been placed a degree above women and the verses detailing procedures for punishing a disobedient wife, a hierarchical principle codified by dominant shari’a traditions. This reading must suppress the many verses that assert the ontological equivalence of men and women in the eyes of God, as well as the possibility that the “degree” refers only to the culturally-specific divorce procedures that are the subject of that passage, and not to a fixed, inherent superiority of men over women.<sup>244</sup> It must also willfully ignore that the same word understood to refer solely to the wife’s disobedience to the husband—*nushuz*—can also be used to index the husband’s breach of marital obligation, which can then be grounds for divorce.<sup>245</sup> An oft-cited hadith in Senegal—proven weak and unsubstantiated by the Quran—posits that the husband will ensure the wife’s entrance into heaven, provided she is unfailingly obedient to him.<sup>246</sup> The hadith produces a husband-subject who is like the Murid sheikh through whom the disciple hopes to access paradise; it precludes the possibility of women’s pious submission to God outside of a hierarchical domestic structure, and places the husband as intermediary between the wife and God.<sup>247</sup> Yoro Dyao, writing in the early twentieth century to a French audience in the wake of both the spread of Islam and colonization, insists that the prior matrilineal order co-existed with a patriarchal order in which, “au point de vue moral, l’homme est en tous sens le chef de la femme”<sup>248</sup> and the importance of the father was considerable. Indeed, in spite of the existence of *lingeer* and *aawo*, he sees primary political power, the “droits de commandement” as “chose essentiellement masculine.”<sup>249</sup>

Regardless of the scope of the overlapping patriarchal order, the Wolof matrilineal order placed great importance on the noble woman’s capacity to be a generative mother, to be the source of other people, to *make* other people, and to *produce* the sovereign (even if the sovereign is necessarily a son, and not a daughter). This order is fundamentally different from the patrilineal order privileged by Muslim reformists. Pape’s power to remake Aby into a person—and the generic husband’s power to fashion the wife’s pious soul, or the male sheikh’s power to “defar nit”—effectively displaces the centrality of the generative mother. Men can now produce people all by themselves. Even outside these cases, which some would argue are extreme exceptions, an order that is

<sup>243</sup>For an account of this historical shift, see Fatou Sow, “Muslim Families in Contemporary Black Africa,” *Current Anthropology* 26, no. 5 (December 1, 1985): 563-570.

<sup>244</sup>Wadud, *Qur’an and woman.*; Abdel Haleem, “Introduction,” xxv.

<sup>245</sup>Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an.*; Wadud, *Qur’an and woman*, 75.

<sup>246</sup>Gueye, “Ode to Patriarchy.”

<sup>247</sup>This logic is seen by some to absolve women of the obligation to keep up their prayers, attend the mosque on Fridays, and to compensate for their frequent ritual impurity due to menstruation. Similarly, the *tarbiyya* disciple in the tradition of Ibra Fall can substitute submission to the sheikh for praying, fasting, and other obligatory rituals.

<sup>248</sup>Rousseau, “Le Sénégal d’autrefois,” 27.

<sup>249</sup>Ibid., 33.

both patrilineal and patriarchal ensures that personhood is conferred, first and foremost, by one's placement in relation to father, husband, and son. The penultimate scene of the film effects a dramatic erasure of the more complex and politically diffuse recourses to authority and honor suggested throughout the rest of the film, instead presenting Aby as isolated, alone, and wholly dependent on Pape for her existence.

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Even though it has a happy ending in which the couple's *sutura* is restored, Linguere VDN is a melodrama that confounds rather than satisfies. The penultimate scene further consolidates Aby's virtuous victimhood, suggesting she is unjustly persecuted by the orders of slavery and patriarchy, but at the same time it troubles the clear Manicheism of melodramatic meaning-making and the moral didacticism of Wolof storytelling. While Coumba can be reborn as virtuous *kilifa* in Muchiba through an agentive submission to God's will, Linguere VDN does not allow Aby to fully disarticulate agentive submission to God from a socially-prescribed submission to the husband, a submission whose agentive nature is ultimately ambiguous. The partnership-in-protection model of marriage the conclusion unconvincingly proposes is not sufficiently legitimated through an appeal to an alternative ethical order in which feminine virtue can be disarticulated from a modality of wifely submission easily confused with the subjugation of the slave. If, as Pape argues, there is a potential *caga* lurking underneath the veneer of honorable womanhood, thus confounding any essentialist distinction between the prostitute and the noble wife, then the figures of the wife and the slave become merged, and the solution to that hidden threat is a generalization of women's submission to patriarchal command.

Pape's change of heart is individualized and predicated on his empathetic capacity to imagine himself in Aby's shoes, rather than propelled by the moral imperatives of a powerful alternative social order. Indeed, the couple's adoption of the lifestyle of the isolated urban nuclear family pulls Aby's wifely submission out of its ensconcement in the shifting matrix of checks and balances of the extended Wolof family and community. There is no one around to check Pape's behavior, to serve as homologues of the village elders in Muchiba. Pape's tempering of his own will to arbitrary, sovereign power is meant to model the honorable male individual's ideal restraint and commitment to protecting his wife and children, but can this move, by extension, function as a critique of the gendered order of submission? This potential critique is thwarted by the film's own terms: since the melodramatic narrative relies on wifely submission as a sign of Aby's virtue, and it is thanks to this virtue that she can be perceived as victim, then her victimization at the hands of the gendered order of submission cannot be condemned without generating a crisis in the film's field of signification.

While this crisis may be undesirable for those viewers seeking melodramatic resolution, it can productively be put in the service of feminist critique. If the figures of the slave, the maid, and the prostitute serve as foils against which feminized kinship locations like daughter, mother, and wife are stabilized, then the instability of those terms in the popular films discussed in this chapter enables a critique not only of the exclusion of those subjects from womanhood—resulting in a definition of womanhood that is

expanded but not dismantled—but of kinship itself as field in which the human is defined. Coumba and Nila’s appellation as “daughter” is revealed to be catachrestic, as are both the terms “wife” and “prostitute” in *Linguere VDN*. This misnaming generates a “kinship trouble” that cannot be fully resolved by the melodramatic mode, and that, by extension, troubles the term “woman” itself.<sup>250</sup> Ndeye’s vocal opposition to sovereign parental law and arrogation of her parents’ roles, making her simultaneously father, mother, daughter, and sister, exposes her to death, but also opens up a future in which the human can be radically redefined. While this future remains uncertain, the films suggest that it may not be the liberal feminist future of fully autonomous, ungendered, free individuals equal before the law, but rather one in which selves are produced through submission on other terms, a pious submission that enables unexpected forms of ethical action.

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<sup>250</sup>This crisis recalls Antigone’s occupation of multiple simultaneous kinship positions and arrogation of masculinized public speech in Sophocles’ tragedy: “She is not of the human but speaks in its language. Prohibited from action she nevertheless acts, and her act is hardly a simple assimilation to an existing norm. And in acting, as one who has no right to act, she upsets the vocabulary of kinship that is a precondition of the human, implicitly raising the question for us of what those preconditions really must be.” Judith Butler, *Antigone’s claim : kinship between life and death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 82.

The *Góor-jigéen* Exposed:  
Gendered Honor and Death in Aminata Sow Fall's Le Revenant  
and the Same-Sex Marriage Scandal of 2008

Ban gâcce, nangu dee.<sup>251</sup>

The term *gor jigéen* frightens us. When someone says it in our presence, it makes us shiver. The term is like a siren sound that we expect to be followed by insults, blows, or stones thrown at us by out-of-control mobs.<sup>252</sup>

In 2009 and 2010, Senegal witnessed a spate of vigilante disinterments of the bodies of those identified as *góor-jigéen*, a composite Wolof term whose literal translation is “man-woman,” and that has now become interchangeable with “gay,” “homosexual,” “transvestite,” and “transgendered.” This rash of exhumations, accompanied by increasing incidents of manhunts and community surveillance,<sup>253</sup> gained momentum in the wake of a media-generated scandal in 2008 that brought attention to the informal practice of same-sex marriage<sup>254</sup> in Senegal through the unauthorized publication of the photos of the alleged wedding in *Icône* magazine, a pictorial spread accompanied by articles and editorials condemning the degradation of Senegalese secular and religious values.

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<sup>251</sup> A Wolof proverb; “Reject shame, embrace death” or “death is preferable to the shame of dishonor.”

<sup>252</sup> These are the words of an informant in Cheikh Niang’s study of the Senegalese MSM (“men who have sex with men”) community. In the public health and NGO literature, MSM is the preferred moniker for the members of this community, as the primary concern of these sectors is the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, in addition to the stigmatization that accompanies non-heteronormative sexual behavior. Cheikh Niang, “‘It’s raining stones’: stigma, violence and HIV vulnerability among men who have sex with men in Dakar, Senegal,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 5: 6 (2003): 499-512.

<sup>253</sup> A recent investigative news story produced by the television station 2STV’s “Caméra de rue” and circulated on the internet is entitled “La traque des ‘góordjiguenes’ à Colobane”; the video shows a group of young men trying to catch another young man fleeing from an abandoned corrugated tin structure next to the Colobane railroad tracks. The hunters claim that the structure is frequented by men from the working class suburbs, and that they regularly surprise their targets engaging in compromising acts; if they catch them, they beat them. The former claim they engage in vigilante moral policing because homosexuality “ruins society” (“day yaq société bi”). To date, the video has had 54,472 hits on Youtube. [http://www.seneweb.com/news/commentaire/la-traque-des-quot-góordjiguenes-quot-a-colobane\\_n\\_50888\\_c\\_1012012.html](http://www.seneweb.com/news/commentaire/la-traque-des-quot-góordjiguenes-quot-a-colobane_n_50888_c_1012012.html)

<sup>254</sup> I have opted to use the more politically correct English term “same-sex marriage,” even though the French-language press in Senegal and popular discourse refers to this alleged wedding as a “mariage des homosexuels,” “mariage gay,” or the more pejorative “mariage des pédés” and the bilingual “mariage des góor-jigéen.” In popular homophobic representation, this Senegalese case is considered to be an offshoot of movements in Western countries to legalize what is commonly termed gay marriage, so it would not be entirely inaccurate to refer to this scandal as implicating “gay” marriage.

The tragic story of Madièye Diallo is particularly noteworthy, as his exhumation in the city of Thiès was filmed on cellphone video, circulated via cell and sold in the market in DVD format. Madièye Diallo was a leader of the MSM support organization *And-liggéey*, an HIV/AIDS activist, and had appeared in the Petit Mbao wedding photos published in *Icône*. He was HIV-positive and on medication; when he went into hiding after the marriage scandal, he stopped taking his meds for fear of being exposed by doctors or pharmacists. He died in the hospital, where he had continued to hide his HIV status. When his family took his body to the mosque to be prepared for burial, they were chased out; they then made haste to the cemetery, where they quickly buried him. The video shows a group of young men digging the corpse up out of the ground, spitting on its torso, dragging it to the Diallo household and dumping it in front of the home of his elderly parents, who were then obliged to bury him on their property. In an Associated Press article, one of the young men, Diallo's neighbor, is quoted as saying "A man that's known as being homosexual can't be buried in a cemetery. His body needs to be thrown away like trash. His parents know that he was gay and they did nothing about it. So when he died we wanted to make sure he was punished."<sup>255</sup> A web comment posted in response to a Senegalese press article on the Diallo affair further reinforces the *góor-jigéen's* dehumanized unburiability: "tous les musulmans doivent veiller sur leurs cimetières pour qu'aucun gordjigene ni [sic] soit enterré parce que nos defunts parents ont besoin de prieres et de la grace de Dieu et non des personnes perverses moins que des animaux avec eux."

Those sympathetic to or directly involved in gender rights activism and NGO work in Senegal were in a state of shock and despair at this drastic swing from a relative tolerance, however uneasy in some circles, of both non-normative gender performance and non-normative sexual practices (provided the latter were hidden from public view)—an environment that had allowed for state-authorized research on the MSM community and the formation of activist organizations—to a full-blown homophobic moral panic<sup>256</sup> that culminated in consumer demand for what is, in essence, a snuff film. This chapter seeks to provide one account of this shift by tracking the ways in which *sutura* mediates the production of the *góor-jigéen* subject. Now located at the furthest end of the spectrum of *sutura*-less, ungendered subjects, the *góor-jigéen* is always-already exposed to death, a negative ontological state performatively reiterated through the exhumers' insistence on the exposure of his corpse. The *góor-jigéen*, by his very being, has broken the social contract and violated the *sutura* that enables the harmonious reproduction of the community. He is therefore seen as undeserving of the right to privacy and to the

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<sup>255</sup> "Even after death, abuse against gays continues," *Boston Herald*, n.d., [http://bostonherald.com/news/international/africa/view/20100410even\\_after\\_death\\_abuse\\_against\\_gays\\_continues](http://bostonherald.com/news/international/africa/view/20100410even_after_death_abuse_against_gays_continues).

<sup>256</sup> According to Stanley Cohen, a moral panic occurs when "[a] condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests" Stanley Cohen, *Folk devils and moral panics: the creation of the Mods and Rockers*, 3rd ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).1. In Cohen's classificatory schema, the conservative religious pundits and the sensationalist press are the "moral entrepreneurs" who instigate the Senegalese homophobic panic—strange bedfellows who are opposing parties in other debates—while the *góor-jigéen* are the "folk devils" who threaten society.

communal protection *sutura* confers both before and after the death of the physical body. Unlike previously honorable subjects of the Wolof social order who are shamed and then cleanse their dishonor through physical death, he, in an echo of the low-caste *ñooole/géwél* subject of the past, possesses a contaminating pollution that extends past his physical death.

Given the striking resonances between older accounts of the *ñooole/géwél* subject and contemporary representations of the exhumable *góor-jigéen*, an examination of these stories serves as one genealogical point of departure. This genealogical track reveals a dynamic specific to the Wolof context, where *sutura*-less, improperly gendered subjects whose existence is defined by an indistinction between death and life—an indistinction that also blurs the boundary between the biological and the social—have long served as the constitutive outside of the upper-caste Wolof human. In a move inspired by Agamben's extension of Foucault's analysis of modern biopolitics to the history of sovereign political formations in the West, I argue that the contemporary expulsion of the *góor-jigéen* from the Senegalese human—a purging that seeks to enhance the life of the Senegalese national community—can be read as both a continuation of and a break with the containment of the *ñooole/géwél* in an abjected endogamous caste by the Wolof caste system. In this latter timocratic system, the honorable life of the *géer* (upper-caste) community, as well as the *géer*'s right to political power, was enhanced by the symbolic degradation of the *géwél*, and its biological life was protected by segregated burial practices and the interdiction of intermarriage.

A review of the historical sources that contain references to the *góor-jigéen* suggests that this figure was not as visibly problematic precisely because he could be subsumed under the categories of *géwél* and slave. In the next artifact I privilege, Aminata Sow Fall's 1976 novel *Le Revenant*, the *góor-jigéen*'s status as sub-category of *géwél* is rendered explicit. However, the text seeks to define a postcolonial moment in which the old social hierarchy and its ethics are being distorted and reconfigured by a new order in which wealth, not birth, determines status and honor. In this newly configured order ostensibly commandeered by powerful women called *diriyaanke*, the *góor-jigéen*—as consort of the *diriyaanke* and Master of Ceremonies of their parties, the scene of the display and distribution of wealth—takes on a special, more visible role, becoming a sign of the queering of postcolonial power. Bakar, the main character of the novel, sees himself as a victim of this queer order and its topsy-turvy distribution of life and death. His bitterness at his loss of power and masculine *géer* honor—as well as at the widespread demise of the proper distribution of *sutura* and other forms of gendered honor—is primarily directed at his sister, who has become the queen of the *diriyaanke* milieu, usurped his authoritative role as eldest brother and husband, and contributed to his ignominious downfall. Malobé, her *góor-jigéen* client, is a cipher of her unnatural authority and of what Bakar perceives to be a generalized degradation of an ethics enacted through the normative performance of gender and gendered honor.

Given this generalization of degradation, along with the caste system's loss of legitimacy, dishonor can no longer be concentrated and contained in low-caste subjects, but rather seeps out into the population, bringing death into the community of the living.

Bakar’s predicament is an early iteration of the present-day homophobe’s lament, where the *góor-jigéen* becomes the paradigmatic figure of the polluting forces that seek to subvert Senegalese values and undermine so-called traditional masculine authority at a moment of acute economic, political and social crisis. The *góor-jigéen*’s current isolation and heightened visibility makes the illusion of containment and the dream of wielding sovereign power possible again; in this view, were the *góor-jigéen* to be purged, the community as a whole would be cleansed of dishonor and the normative masculine subject could regain his rightful place at the head of the family and at the head of the state. The last texts on which I focus, articles published in *Weekend* magazine following the wedding scandal and immediately preceding the first cases of disinterment, illustrate the popular media’s role in legitimizing this postcolonial masculinist will to power by producing the named and exposed *góor-jigéen* subject as multiply dead—as a creature who, because he is already morally and socially dead, can (and should) be killed without that killing counting as murder.

My emphasis in this chapter on the entanglement of this masculinist will to power with the fear of the economic and political ascendancy of women and the homophobia instantiated in vigilante exhumations<sup>257258</sup>—a convergence that the tracking of *sutura* in the constitution of gendered subjects makes visible—is part of a plea to expand Senegalese feminist agendas so as to include a situated critique of heteronormativity and support for LGBTI political claims. This position, while still unarticulated in Senegalese feminism, is progressively gaining ground in other African feminist circles, of which Ugandan legal scholar and activist Sylvia Tamale is the most prominent figure.<sup>259</sup> My insistence on contextualizing an analysis of the present within a Wolof-specific genealogy, however, yields a different explanation than that proposed by Tamale to explain the recent swell of homophobia on the continent. In her Abiola Lecture presented at the 2011 African Studies Association Annual Meeting,<sup>260</sup> Tamale argues that the recent vilification and criminalization of non-heteronormative desires, practices and identities is a cynical ploy on the part of dictatorial regimes to consolidate power and to divert the population’s attention from the more serious problems of government corruption, lack of infrastructure, inadequate health services, widespread unemployment, unjust taxation,

<sup>257</sup> In *Policing the Crisis*, Hall et al. call this kind of entanglement a “signification spiral” in which “a specific concern centring around a subversive or antagonistic minority is mapped onto a matrix of other fears, concerns or anxieties” Helen Davis, *Understanding Stuart Hall* (London; Thousand Oaks Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2004), 112.; Stuart Hall, *Policing the crisis : mugging, the state, and law and order* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

<sup>258</sup> Marc Epprecht tracks the entanglement of homophobia and misogyny on the continent in his work; see, for example, Marc Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa? : the history of an idea from the age of exploration to the age of AIDS* (Athens ; Scottsville, South Africa: Ohio University Press; University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008).

<sup>259</sup> Sylvia Tamale, *Homosexuality : perspectives from Uganda* (Kampala: Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), 2007); Sylvia Tamale, *African sexualities : a reader* (Oxford: Pambazuka Press, 2011); and “Out of the Closet: Unveiling Sexuality Discourses in Uganda” in Cole, *Africa after gender?*.

<sup>260</sup> Sylvia Tamale, “Whose Democracy Are We Talking About? Non-conforming Sexualities as a Metaphor for African Dictatorships” “Activities > Brochure > ASA”, n.d., [http://www.africanstudies.org/index.cfm?FuseAction=Programs.ViewProgram&Program\\_ID=10069](http://www.africanstudies.org/index.cfm?FuseAction=Programs.ViewProgram&Program_ID=10069). Nov. 19, 2011.



and so forth. She cites Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade among the list of rulers who are guilty of deploying this particular strategy.

While Wade's government has engaged in repressive measures, it is, I think, erroneous to view him as direct instigator of the shift. Indeed, his government had initially supported research on and health initiatives for the MSM community. Rather, it is the new regime of exposure that developed during the mass popular movement for democratic change—the movement that ultimately put Wade in power in 2000—that made, perhaps unintentionally, the current wave of homophobic sentiment possible. Even as the popular media represents the *góor-jigéen* as the agent of exposure, it is in fact that media's incitement to sensationalist discourse on sexuality—following its breach with the communal *sutura* contract—that has exposed him and made him available as an abjectable object. While the current abjecting of the *góor-jigéen* is an operation of power, that power is not a dictatorial one concentrated in the ruling few of the postcolonial state, but is rather a product of a democratizing energy which seeks to enable the Senegalese common man to wield sovereignty in the defense of the population—defined as national community and as *umma*—and its collective honorable life.<sup>261</sup>

Since this wielding of sovereign power is also figured as a pious act intelligible within the logic of moral jihad, it is possible, as Tamale and others at the conference argued, to see contemporary globalized, heteropatriarchal formations of Islam and Christianity as generating habits of intolerance and criminalization foreign to indigenous African traditions. This argument provides one explanation for the seemingly sudden reversals on the continent, but it limits feminist politics to either resuscitating a precolonial, pre-Christian/Muslim ethos or petitioning for state-sanctioned rights within the terms of Western secularism. Given the intensity of piety in Senegal—as well as the history of the inequality of the pre-Islamic caste system that Islam directly contests—the representation of Islam as an intolerant, alien religion whose orthodoxy must be discredited so that a tolerant society can come into being cannot be a component of an effective political strategy. Instead, can the pious feminisms elaborated in the first two chapters bring the *góor-jigéen* subject into their fold? Or can the *góor-jigéen* become a rights-bearing subject only in secular law, and only by being incorporated into the normative “human” of human rights?

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The figure of the *ñoole*, whose first detailed elaboration in writing is by Yoro Dyao in the early twentieth century, is held up by Abdoulaye Bara Diop in *La Société Wolof: Les Systemes d'inégalité et de domination* as an exemplar of the racial ideology that legitimates the segregation of Wolof society into endogamous castes.<sup>262</sup> In its most simplified form, the caste system produces a primary distinction between the superior *géer* (sometimes translated as “nobles” or “non-casted”) and the inferior *ñeeño* (members of the artisan or performance castes). Within the category of the *ñeeño*, there is another distinction between the *sab-lekk*, which groups the various kinds of performers (oral

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<sup>261</sup>For an historical account of the development of this democratizing energy, see Mamadou Diouf, “Urban youth and Senegalese politics : Dakar 1988-1994.,” *Public Culture* 8 (1996): 225-299

<sup>262</sup>Diop, *La société wolof*, 42–43.

historians, singers, drummers, jesters) and the *jef-lekk*, which is an umbrella term for the artisan castes, including the blacksmiths, leatherworkers and carpenters. These castes generally practice strict endogamy, although there is some flexibility among certain sub-groupings. While there are various ways of hierarchizing the *ñeeño* castes, the primary hierarchy—that of the *géer* over the *ñeeño*—is reproduced through a pure/impure binary, where the *géer* have clean blood and *ñeeño* have tainted blood, are morally impure, and continually sully themselves through their degraded work.<sup>263</sup> The *ñoole*, an archaic designation that Dyao considered to be a separate caste but has now been absorbed by the *sab-lekk* or *gével* (griot) grouping, is the lowest, most scorned figure in the hierarchy—a *bouffon* (buffoon, jester) whose moral degradation mirrors his biological degradation.

In the origin myth of the *ñoole* Dyao recounts, a man passes away after a long illness. While his body is being prepared for burial, members of the community notice that the corpse has an erection, and an elder recommends they summon the man’s wife to minister a special last rite. She becomes pregnant from this posthumous sexual encounter and gives birth to twins. The twins initially have no problem integrating into the community—they marry, and have children in their turn. When the children and their descendants start to die, however, the community notices that their bodies decompose with abnormal rapidity, and are covered with gaping, oozing sores. The descendants of this union—called *doomi néew*, or children of the corpse—came to constitute a distinct race of people whose blood is contaminated, and whose corpses require special methods of disposal.<sup>264</sup>

Unusual burial practices for the *gével* reflect a similar association of corpses with contamination. Rather than being interred in community cemeteries in accordance with dominant ritual practice, in some regions *gével* corpses were strung up in the hollowed-out trunks of baobab trees. The corpses were elevated above the ground to prevent them

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<sup>263</sup>Diop, *La société wolof*.

<sup>264</sup> Dyao’s version of the story is corroborated by shorter versions told by Diop’s informants. In a more recent detailed account of the history of the *ñoole* included in Kesteloot and Dieng’s 1989 *Du Tieddo au talibe*, the threat of degradation through marriage with the *ñoole* is maintained, along with the loss of parentally-transmitted *géer* rights that that degradation entails: “ñoole yi nag ñoom képp ku fasante ak ñoom rekk booba yàqu nga, waawaaw, yàqu nga yaxee ndax fan gay doxe nekk ñeeño, te dinga des ci say waakër, waaye dootoo fa amati dogal buy jóge ci sa baay mbaa sa ndey” (179). (The French translation provided is “Quant aux Nyole, tout individu s’alliant à l’un d’eux est considéré comme ayant contracté une souillure personnelle; il devient lui-même Nyole et, sans cesser d’appartenir à son clan, perd tous les droits qu’il aurait pu tenir de son père ou de sa mère”) (178). This version also corroborates Diop and Leymarie’s etymology of the word *ñoole* as deriving from the Peul word for “rotten.” However, it departs from the other accounts in its classification of the *ñoole* as an intermediate caste between the *jaambur* (a subcategory or synonym of *géer*) and the *ñeeño*, not as the basest caste; it also posits that the *ñoole* were nicknamed “doomi jambuur,” or children of the *jaambuur*, because death “cleanses” all people, regardless of caste, and therefore has a leveling effect (179). This last claim democratizes the logic of the proverb “ban gâce, nangu dee” which sees death as cleansing the dishonored subject and the wider community of the polluting effects of shame. This view contradicts the belief that the *ñoole/gével* can threaten contamination even after death, and that the noble is the only subject who can experience a meaningful form of shame, having been in a previous state of purity. Kesteloot and Dieng indicate that this version of the *ñoole* story was collected by Aïssatou Fall, but it is unclear who narrated the story and when it was relayed to Fall.

from rendering the soil infertile and poisoning the water,<sup>265</sup> and the baobab trees, said to possess powerful mystical properties, further contained and neutralized any threat of contamination the bodies might pose.<sup>266</sup> While this practice is no longer current, Abdoulaye Bara Diop's research in the 1970s found that there were still a few villages in Wolof country that refused to bury *gégél*, and some that had segregated *gégél* cemeteries.<sup>267</sup>

This original, biological impurity—the living body carrying the taint of death, passed on through the blood from generation to generation—is one justification for the containment of the *gégél* in an endogamous caste, and their representation as always-already morally “outside” society,<sup>268</sup> even as they play a central and indispensable role in that society. In addition to their function as entertainers, praise-singers, historians, and proxy communicators, they were traditionally charged with tasks that involve handling impure substances like blood and excrement (slaughtering animals, cleaning latrines).<sup>269</sup> Since they are already impure, they cannot be further tainted by contact with impure substances, as would clean-blooded, non-casted *gээр*.

This biological impurity mirrors and perpetuates *ad infinitum* the *gégél*'s morally dead state, a state that is performatively reiterated in the *gégél*'s social functions and public behavior. This death-like moral state serves as the constitutive outside of the idealized honorable form of life possessed by the *gээр*. The *gégél* is allowed to be loud, crass, bawdy, indecent, and strategically indiscreet; s/he can beg, consume large quantities of food, and wear conspicuously gaudy jewelry and clothing. The *gээр*, on the other hand, is bound by a strict code of modesty, restraint, discretion, circumspection, and self-respect. The *gégél*'s indecent behavior makes him morally inferior to the *gээр*, while at the same time enables him to manipulate the field of *gээр* actions—hence Yoro Dyao's distinction between the “moral unfreedom” of the *gégél* and the “political unfreedom” of the *jaam* (slave). Restrictions on the *gээр*'s ability to engage in a variety of communicative practices without incurring dishonor makes him reliant on the *gégél* for

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<sup>265</sup> Diop cites Raffanel, a mid-nineteenth century French colonial chronicler: “Leurs corps empoisonneraient les grains et les fruits, prétendent les autres negres, et ils empoisonneraient également l'eau et les poissons; alors ils ne sont ni enterrés ni jetés dans la mer ou les rivières. Les griots passent, en outre, ... pour vivre dans un commerce familier avec le diable, et cette croyance ne contribue pas peu à leur interdire l'accès des lieux de sépulture ordinaire” (Diop, *La Société wolof*, 40).

<sup>266</sup> According to a *gээр* informant in Irvine's study in the early 1970s, “The baobab is a holy tree, because it is so useful. In the past, the griot was buried inside it to segregate him from others, but also to erase his uncleanness—if he is buried here, maybe even he can be saved. At that time, the griots were not Muslims. In the beginning of the world, the baobab had sinned; God uprooted it and thrust it back in the ground upside down. After this it was holy.... The baobab has a hollow space inside, and the important thing was to hang the griot up inside the hollow so that his body did not touch the ground....But nowadays we do not bother. Perhaps the griots are not saved” (Irvine, *Caste and Communication*, 136).

<sup>267</sup> Diop, *La société wolof*, 39.

<sup>268</sup> “Des variantes de ce mythe présentent le premier nôle comme descendant d'un homme mort, c'est-à-dire d'un être déjà ‘en dehors’ de la société, et souillé parce qu'il est en train de pourrir” (Leymarie, *Les Griots*, 14).

<sup>269</sup> Irvine, *Caste and Communication*, 142; Leymarie, *Les Griots*, 57-58. For a striking image of an obscene *gégél* woman covered in animal blood and brandishing a butcher's knife, see Djibril Diop Mambéty's 1973 arthouse film *Touki Bouki*.

those services; the *gɛwɛl*'s authorization to reveal shameful secrets or publicly insult people—as well as manipulate genealogies that prove the *gɛer*'s degree of nobility, and therefore his right to status and political power—forces the *gɛer* to comply with *gɛwɛl* demands for gifts and patronage to avoid being publically shamed.

In public life, the *gɛwɛl* embodies a form of lively exuberance, excess, and worldly pleasure. This liveliness, however, is coded as both death and life, or rather the dangerous blurring of the two: if the *gɛer* were to adopt this liveliness, he would invite the death of his honorable identity, a social death that could only be reversed by his physical death. In the myth, the *ñoole* forefather embodies both death-in-life and life-in-death; he symbolizes a boundary confusion between the state of life and the state of death. His body exhibits a sexual agency and capacity to reproduce after formal death, an agency which is eventually revealed to be deviant and polluting by the dead bodies of his descendants, and therefore cause for communal containment through segregated burial practices. His descendants are the product of an abnormal sexual encounter between a dead man and a living woman, and therefore carry dead blood in their living bodies. The caste system exerts biopolitical control over the spread of death-in-life by enforcing strict endogamy and policing the boundary between *gɛer* and *ñeeño*.

In this iteration, the Wolof caste system resembles a Foucauldian biopolitical formation in that the enhancement of the life of the *gɛer* community—conceptualized as superior race—is actualized through the cordoning off of a group that is internal to the larger community but that is seen to possess a tainted form of life.<sup>270</sup> The pure life of the community is threatened by the *gɛwɛl*'s state of moral death-in-life, as well as by his abnormal physically dead state that cannot enjoy the cleansing and leveling benefits of normative *gɛer* death; indeed, the idea that the *gɛwɛl* corpse could cause widespread contamination of crops necessary for the community's survival enables the conflation of the *gɛer* community with the community as a whole, thereby placing the *gɛwɛl* necessarily outside. The reiteration of the *gɛwɛl*'s degradation and impurity is a form of “killing” that does not count as murder; following Foucault, this killing need not be of the physical kind in order for it be legible as an operation of biopower, but rather can be “political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on.”<sup>271</sup> This mode of power does not use modern technologies to define, direct and enhance life, but it nevertheless makes the optimization of the harmonious and honorable life of the community (which I am making stand in for Foucault's “population”) its primary goal.

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<sup>270</sup> “What in fact is racism? It is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die. The appearance within the biological continuum of the human race of races, the distinction among races, the hierarchy of races, the fact that certain races are described as good and that others, in contrast, are described as inferior: all this is a way of fragmenting the field of the biological that power controls. It is a way of separating out the groups that exist within a population. It is, in short, a way of establishing a biological-type caesura within a population that appears to be a biological domain. This will allow power to treat that population as a mixture of races, or to be more accurate, to treat the species, to subdivide the species it controls, into the subspecies known, precisely, as races. That is the first function of racism: to fragment, to create caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower” (Foucault, *Society must be defended.*, 255).

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

Indeed, as Giorgio Agamben shows in Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, biopower predates modern biopolitical technologies, which makes it a potentially useful analytic for illuminating undertheorized facets of Wolof and other precolonial African political formations which have as their aim the protection and reproduction of a community conceptualized as dynamic, living whole. Agamben argues that the differentiation between forms of human life is the defining function of sovereign power throughout Western political history. He traces two forms of life that emerge in that tradition: bare life—a raw, unrefined, animal-like form of life that can be killed without that killing constituting a violation of the law—and political life, the life of the properly human citizen that is protected by law. It is the figure of the sovereign who decides who may live and who must die, and this distribution of life and death is never a violation of the law because the sovereign *is* the law and can declare the state of exception in which the formal letter of the law is suspended. Since the figure of bare life, for which the “homo sacer” of Roman antiquity (the man who can be killed but not sacrificed) is Agamben’s exemplar, is by definition exposed to death, the sovereign function is simultaneously biopolitical and necropolitical.

While not identical to any political formation Agamben describes, the Wolof caste system could be seen as a sovereign political formation that has at its foundation the distinction between two forms of life: the ideal refined, honorable life of the *géer*, and the degraded, dishonorable life of the *gégél* and the other foils of the normative Wolof human. This distinction is rendered, if only symbolically, in the conception of *nit*, which can be translated as “human” or “person.” In addition to serving as a species designation, “nekk nit”—to be a person—is an ontological state which is performatively reiterated by an adherence to the *géer* code of honor. Shameful or antisocial behavior makes one *nitóodi*, or unpersonally.<sup>272</sup> It is therefore possible for a subject in the Wolof social order to be simultaneously human (in the biological sense) and non-human, to occupy a position in between life and death, both inside and outside society and the political order, that, following Agamben, we could call “bare life.”

Since the Wolof caste system is a timocracy, power is articulated to honor, and the possession of honor is a precondition for accessing certain rights and political positions. Technically, the monarch of the past, appointed from a handful of the purest bloodlines, had the power to put his subjects to physical death. However, his power was checked by a council of nobles who could depose him should he be guilty of abusing it. Rather than sovereign power being concentrated solely in the figure of the sovereign, and *géer* power/honor being reproduced solely in the interest of the *géer* class, the ideological articulation of dishonor and death (physical, social, and moral) actually ensured a more diffuse distribution of the sovereign function throughout the caste structure. For example, both the mystical interdiction on intentionally causing the physical death of a *gégél*<sup>273</sup> and the *gégél*’s power to “kill” the *géer* by publicly exposing him complicate our understanding of the *géer*/*ñeeño* binary. Cheikh Anta Diop argues that the power wielded by the *gégél* and other *ñeeño* made them invested in the reproduction of the system and,

<sup>272</sup>Sylla, *La philosophie morale des Wolof*, 196.

<sup>273</sup>Leymarie, *Les griots wolof du Sénégal*, 8.

even though they were locked in an inferior moral position within the social hierarchy, made banding together as a class and rising up against *géer* supremacy undesirable.<sup>274</sup> The *gével* were well aware that if they were to cease to confirm and reproduce of *géer* honor (through the telling of morality tales, guarding of noble history, and recitation of genealogies), there would be no way of stabilizing *géer* identity.

This central, active role in the reproduction of the honorable life of the normative community is, in the *gével*'s eyes, the source of a *gével*-specific form of honor. Emil Magel explores this *gével*-specific honor in his analysis of the figures of the hare and the hyena in the griot narrative tradition, where the hare, a stand-in for the *gével*, is at first glance a fast-talking rascal quick to break the rules, but is ultimately redeemed for using his wiles to protect his family and the community. The hyena, on the other hand, represents an antisocial, death-oriented outcast who serves as the foil of the relatively honorable figure of the hare. Indeed, in some *gével* tales the hyena—because he is wholly without honor—is presented as an exemplar of life that can be killed but not murdered: “Why can the hare beat the hyena on the head with a club, and throw him into a well without subsequently being punished for such violence? On the other hand, why is the hyena punished for beating up the hare and tossing him into the same well?”<sup>275</sup>

Our understanding of the distribution of sovereign power in the caste system is further complicated by the imperative for the dishonored *géer* to kill himself, or, in the event that the dishonored subject is a daughter or son, to purge the family and noble community of dishonor by banishing him/her, thereby killing that child by condemning him/her to social death. The caste system produces a *géer* subject who willingly commits suicide in order to stave off the social death of dishonor—hence the ubiquity of the dictum “*ban gâcece, nangu dee*”<sup>276</sup>—thereby investing all *géer* subjects with a

<sup>274</sup>Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa*, 2.

<sup>275</sup>Magel, *Hare and hyena*, 192. *éer* versions of the hare-hyena tales do not present the hare as semi-honorable, but rather as a lying trickster in conformity with dominant stereotypes of the honorless *gével*.

<sup>276</sup>Reported cases of suicide in Senegal are overwhelmingly of the *gâcece* type. Brave warriors of the monarchical period took their own life rather than face the shame of defeat in battle. In this context, the impending dishonor was not only the soiling of one's reputation, but the real threat of being taken as a prisoner of war and consequently enslaved, transforming the noble warrior into a subjugated, dishonored, and natively alienated being. See Boubakar Université de Paris (1896-1968). and Ly, *L'honneur et les valeurs morales dans les sociétés Ouolof et Toucouleur du Sénégal étude de sociologie*. Magel, writing in the 1970s, cites the case of a public employee whose embezzlement of public funds was discovered, and who shot himself rather than face being shamed in front of family and friends. The narrator of Ken Bugul's *Riwan* details several cases of *gâcece*-related suicide in the Dianké town well: young women who are not virgins at marriage, the *naar*'s wife who finds out her husband has been sleeping with their daughter, and Rama's alleged lover. Magel also reads Diouana's suicide in Ousmane Sembene's 1960s film and short story *La Noire de...* as a refusal to accept a shameful existence as subjugated maid to a bourgeois French couple. Magel says she “aspires to a more honorable life, one reflecting her inherent dignity” (Magel, *Caste Identification*, 105). Given Sembene's repeated references to slavery, I would take the analysis a step further and read Diouana's suicide as Sara Kaplan reads Margaret Garner's murder of her child and attempted suicide—as a radical act which brings to crisis a logic that has enabled the white subjugation of people of African descent (including Africans) to be extended from slavery and colonization into the present (Kaplan, “Love and Violence/Maternity and Death.”) I would also argue that Sembène stages Diouana's alienation from personhood as a gradual alienation from womanhood, and that her shame involves specifically gendered modalities of dishonor. In Aminata Sow Fall's novel *Le Jujubier du*

necropolitical agency that can be wielded against themselves and their children (or spouses, in the case of repudiated wives). If it is a *gével* who has exposed a particular noble, then that *gével* can be seen as wielding the sovereign function in the first instance; the noble's subsequent suicide would be a secondary enactment of necropolitical agency enabled by the terms of the timocratic order. The dishonored noble's state is simultaneously enabling and constraining: it is obviously constraining in that the only choices available to him are social death or physical death, but it is enabling in the sense that the noble is allowed the possibility of cleansing his reputation and that of his family—as well as of removing the taint of his dishonor from the community, thereby enhancing its pure life—through physical death. For the *gével/ñoole* whose dishonor cannot be reversed upon physical death, but rather whose degradation extends into the afterlife, that self-purifying modality of necropolitical agency is inaccessible.

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In dominant *géer* discourse, a component of the inalienable dishonor of the *gével* subject is its improper gendering, suggesting that bare life in the Wolof mode is ungendered life. Irvine recounts the story of a *gével* father in Kir Matar who allegedly allowed his daughters to entertain multiple lovers and who took bride price payments from suitors to whom he had no intention of giving his daughters. He made no attempt to act as principled household patriarch who possesses *jom* and *kilifteef* and is concerned to command his daughters and guard their chastity, but rather is a pimp who turns his house into a pseudo-brothel while deceiving his fellow men.<sup>277</sup> In *géer* discourse, his behavior serves as evidence of the *gével* subject's distance from the honorable masculine ideal. *gével* husbands are similarly incapable of husbandly shame; according to one *géer* informant, “[g]ewel women have many lovers—they are almost whores, they want money from their lovers. Their husbands do not divorce them for this; they are not angry.”<sup>278</sup> The *gével* household is therefore a queer household of sorts, one that dramatically departs from the norms of sexual decency and is composed of men who are not proper husbands and fathers—and therefore are not men—and women who are not proper wives and daughters.<sup>279</sup>

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*patriarche*, Dioumana, the female ancestor immortalized in the noble family's epic, throws herself into the belly of a whale in order to reverse the feminized shame of no longer being desired by her husband. Not incidentally, as she runs towards the river, she is multiply exposed: her father asks “Femme d’Almamy, ou cours-tu/Sans voile de chasteté” (184) and she responds “Tu m’as appris *gacce-ngaalama* [which Fall translates as “non à la honte”]/Fondre comme noix de karité/Dans les sables insatiabiles du Sahel/Quand l’harmattan, sous midi./Fouette le kapok/Plutôt que de porter la honte à califourchon” (185).

<sup>277</sup> Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village.*, 137–38.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>279</sup> The a priori queerness of the *gével* subject recalls the inalienable queerness of the black subject recently made visible by black queer studies. In white supremacist discourse, since blackness is tethered to sexual excess, the black subject's sexuality is always-already abnormal, deviant, and bestial, regardless of the direction of its desire or the success of its performance of normative gender. In addition, the black subject's natally alienated state also makes its occupation of proper gendered kinship roles impossible. In the U.S., this discourse presents black households as queer formations in which black men have abnegated their roles as husbands and fathers, and black women wield an unnatural, masculine power. In the infamous Moynihan report of the 1960s, this degraded matriarchy is seen to be the root cause of social problems attributed to the black community. For a focused articulation of this position, see Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in*

In another striking field observation, two women who were unable to conceive children—one a *géer* and the other a *gévél*—dressed up like men to attend a *xaxar* ceremony. The *géer* woman performed manhood simply by donning a modest man’s caftan and workcap, but the *gévél* woman strapped on an oversized phallus under her skirt which she exposed during her dance. According to Irvine, “[s]he was very anxious to have photographs of herself dancing with the penis to give to all of her friends.”<sup>280</sup> The *gévél* woman is not expected to feel feminized shame, but rather can expose her body, as well as any prosthetic parts attached to it, and turn this exposure into a stylized performance. In this case, the instantiation of the *gévél* woman’s lack of *sutura* is also a drag performance that literalizes her ungendering.

In his incarnation as cross-dressing performer, then, the *góor-jigéen* seems easily assimilable into the *gévél* category. If the *gévél* is already queered, then the *góor-jigéen*’s stylized transgender performance is merely another instance of the *gévél*’s predictable dishonor. Indeed, many famous *góor-jigéen* performers are from prominent *gévél* lineages, and they praise and serve as proxy communicators for elite female patrons in exchange for protection and material support; they also dance, sing, and cook at the latter’s parties, as do female *gévél*. In *Le Baobab fou*, Ken Bugul mentions she had inherited a *góor-jigéen* slave attached to her family,<sup>281</sup> suggesting that the *góor-jigéen* was also incorporable into the community as socially dead, and therefore ungendered, subject.

There is other evidence that the *góor-jigéen* enjoyed a relatively safe position as an inside outsider, even if this evidence does not explicitly link him to the slave or to the *gévél*. According to Niang et al., the Lebou, Wolof considered to be the original inhabitants of the Dakar peninsula, protected *góor-jigéen* as they did the insane. Armand Corre, a French ethnographer who studied criminality in the region in the late nineteenth century, noted the presence of transgendered prostitutes in St. Louis, the capital of the French colony.<sup>282</sup> Corre attributes both transgendered performance and same-sex erotic practice to the influence of the French and Islam, arguing that the word *góor-jigéen* is a neologism that, while Wolof, was invented to describe a subject who emerged in the post-contact era. Others have held up the existence of the Wolof term as proof that these practices are indigenous, not European or Arab imports; indeed, Corre provides no convincing evidence as to the newness of both the term and the practices, instead (perhaps unwittingly) problematizing his prior claim in his observation of a male *gévél*

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*black: toward a queer of color critique* (U of Minnesota Press, 2004).

<sup>280</sup> Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village*, 139.

<sup>281</sup> “Je savais que les homosexuels existaient, il y en avait dans mon pays. J’avais eu moi-même un esclave homosexuel hérité de longue tradition. ‘Gor Djigen,’ on l’appelait ainsi. Cela restait abstrait pour moi” (Bugul, *Le Baobab fou*, 71).

<sup>282</sup> “J’ai rencontré à Saint-Louis des noirs, parés à la manière des femmes et en affectant les allures, qu’on m’a dit faire métier de leur prostitution” Armand Corre, *L’ethnographie criminelle d’après les observations et les statistiques judiciaires recueillies dans les colonies françaises*, (Paris: C. Reinwald & cie, 1894), 80, fn.1.



who performed lascivious dances in the court of a Peul ruler in an interior region that had not been Gallicized (but had been Islamized).<sup>283</sup>

In the 1950s, Crowder was surprised at the visibility of *góor-jigéen* in public urban space; in spite of opposition in conservative Muslim camps, young men cruised openly in the streets of downtown Dakar.<sup>284</sup> Since Senegal was still under French rule, and French colonial law did not criminalize homosexuality or prostitution, one could again make the argument that this public protection afforded the *góor-jigéen* was in fact a French protection, not an indigenous protection. However, Michael Davidson's account of his visit to the boy brothels in Dakar's *ville indigène* during the same decade suggests that both the location of the brothels and the boys' culturally-specific gender performance—a performance that Davidson found opaque and off-putting—are evidence of a long-standing indigenous tradition and an embedded Senegalese clientele.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> “A Boké, j'ai vu, auprès d'un prince foulah, un griot, dont les danses lascives traduisaient bien le rôle plus intime qu'il devait remplir en la maison de l'altesse. Les habitudes de pédérasie ne sortent pas des milieux musulmans. Dans le langage Wolof, l'expression pour les designer serait de date récente, et elle n'existerait pas dans la plupart des idiomes africains” (Ibid.).

<sup>284</sup> “On the other hand homosexuality had a much freer rein, being prevalent amongst Africans, Mauretians and Europeans alike. In Place Protet, the main square of Dakar, young African boys, more often than not Jollofs, could be seen waiting to be picked up. Under the Code Napoleon it is, of course, legal, and in theory presents no problem, though many people are worried by its spread in the city. Of course, to many of these boys with no work, it is one way of making money. But amongst the Jollofs it seems to be more deeply rooted. Contact with Frenchmen in St. Louis, who often preferred black boys to black mistresses and contact with the Mauretians may provide an explanation. Today one can even see Jollof men dressed in women's clothes. I once met one in a small bar outside Dakar. He was obviously pathetically feminine. The Jollof must be used to this since they even have a word for them—Gor-Digen. The elders and faithful Muslims condemn men for this, but it is typical of African tolerance that they are left very much alone by the rest of the people.” Michael Crowder, *Pagans and politicians*. (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 68.

<sup>285</sup> “In 1949...the French still ruled, and Dakar was already the 'gay' city of West Africa. When I returned nine years later, the French rulers had gone, and Dakar was gayer than ever...For some reason, buried in history and ethnography, the Senegalese...have a reputation in all those regions for homosexuality, and in Dakar one can quickly see that they merit this reputation...The Dakar of 1958 was the Paris of Africa... That one didn't have to be shy in Dakar, and even less furtive, if one was queer became pretty plain to me almost my first evening there...I'd been introduced to an official of some sort in one of the ministries: a middle-aged Senegalese of great charm and culture—and himself a lover of boys. Would I care to see a very special side of Dakar night-life, off the regular beat of most foreign visitors to the city?” [Davidson, “A 1958 Visit to a Dakar Boy Brothel” in Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe, *Boy-wives and female husbands : studies in African homosexualities*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 111]. Davidson and his guide leave the modern city and visit a few clubs in what he characterizes as the sinister and depressing world of the slums: “The place was full of adolescent Africans in drag. In drag. I mean that most of them were indeed in girls' clothes: some in European, some wearing the elaborate headdress of the West African mode....They danced together. They pranced around like a pride of prima donnas. They came to our table and drank lots of beer with us, simpering, blinking their white-powdered eyelids, widening their great carmined lips...They have pleasant manners, these transvestite Senegalese boys. They were friendly and undemanding, and bubbling with jokes of a tartish kind. They seemed, on the surface, to be as cheerful as boys of that age out to be. But one couldn't, through all that paint and camp hilarity, see beneath the surface....The most interesting lesson of the evening was that these boy-brothels...hadn't been set up for a special branch of the tourist trade. Their remote and dingy situation alone was evidence of that. They were the spontaneous acknowledgement of a native demand, an African taste. For some reason, which I

More recently, testimony provided by the MSM informants in Niang et al's study further problematizes the argument that same-sex erotic practices are a Western import. Some men were introduced to these practices by masters or schoolmates in rural *daara* (Quranic boarding schools)—hardly hotbeds of Western influence—and one claims that the practices are common among fishermen who spend lengthy periods of time at sea, which is where he had his first exposure. For a quarter of the men who took part in the study, their first same-sex erotic experience was instigated by a senior man in their family, again overwhelmingly in rural settings.<sup>286</sup>

It is possible, then, that the *góor-jigéen* has not always been so dramatically dead in the Senegalese symbolic. Rather, even while dishonored and marginalized, he may have enjoyed the position of a non-conformist subject tolerated by an order that musters a certain degree of flexibility in the interest of maintaining social harmony, and that expects queerness and excess from its low-status members. It is also conceivable that he has always been palpably there, but, because of one modality of *sutura* that protects that which is not named and brought into the field of representation, he was not turned into a problematic subject by public discourse. *Sutura*, here, functions as a kind of unstated social contract, where the status quo is maintained as long as the *góor-jigéen* community shrouds certain activities in secrecy, and the community of honorable persons avoids turning it into a public issue in conformity with the noble norms of restraint, modesty, and discretion.<sup>287</sup> In a recent interview, Maniang Kassé, identified as Senegal's most famous homosexual in the article's subtitle, articulates the pro-*sutura* position allegedly adopted by older generations of *góor-jigéen*, but that has now been breached by the younger generation. "Quand on est majeur et vacciné, on peut mener sa vie tranquillement et discrètement, comme on l'entend, sans déranger personne. Je ne suis pas pour qu'un homosexuel s'affiche au su et au vu de tout le monde."<sup>288</sup>

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In spite of the alleged prevalence and visibility of transgender performance and same-sex prostitution noted by some foreign visitors, there were no systematic ethnographic or historical studies on non-normative sexuality and gender performance in Senegal until the 1990s.<sup>289</sup> It is possible that, as in Muridism Studies, *sutura* had

don't pretend to know, homosexuality, including the love of adolescent boys, seems to be immeasurably more widely and more conventionally inveterate among the Senegalese than among any other African people that I have knowledge of" (113).

<sup>286</sup> Cheikh Niang, *Meeting the sexual health needs of men who have sex with men in Senegal* (Washington DC: Population Council/Horizons, 2002).

<sup>287</sup> Niels Teunis, "Same-Sex Sexuality in Africa: A Case Study from Senegal," *AIDS and Behavior* 5, no. 2 (June 1, 2001): 173-173-182.

<sup>288</sup> The complete title is "Entretien avec Maniang Kassé. Le plus célèbre homosexuel du Sénégal se prononce sur le mariage entre homos: 'Je suis musulman... je n'ai pas aimé ce que ces gosses ont fait'" (L'As, Feb. 12, 2008; accessed on xibar.net). It is, of course, ironic that Kassé can simultaneously be the most famous homosexual of Senegal and a proponent of discretion. The visibility of his transgender dance performances and his open relationships with European men give the lie to his pro-discretion stance and the distance he attempts to establish between himself and the young men involved in the marriage scandal.

<sup>289</sup> Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa?*, 50. Niels Teunis' first ethnographic article on the MSM community was published in 1996: Niels Teunis, "Homosexuality in Dakar: Is the bed the heart of a sexual subculture?" in the *Journal of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Identity* 1 (1996):153-69

structured the field of possibilities for research, and the researcher was placed in the position of a *géer* subject<sup>290</sup> who would not go around inquiring about such things, given the risk of compromising his/her own status and destabilizing the delicate harmony of the community. However, while we do not have scholarly studies that predate the nineties, we do have access to literary and filmic representations that offer telling accounts of the *góor-jigéen* subject and his symbolic function in the Senegalese imaginary at key moments of social transition—texts that, because they are fictional and classifiable as avant-garde art, did not pose as great a threat to the *sutura* contract.<sup>291</sup>

Fetishized by Francophone literary scholars as the first novel in French published by a Senegalese woman,<sup>292</sup> Aminata Sow Fall's 1976 novel *Le Revenant* is remarkable for its centering of the *góor-jigéen* figure in its examination of the reconfiguration of honor in the decades after independence. Fall disappointed Western feminist critics who

<sup>290</sup> In Ker Matar, Irvine was classified as a *géer*, which meant she had access to *géer* attitudes towards *ñeeño*, but could not access *gégél* subjectivity beyond their interaction with her as clients seeking the favors of a patron and her observation of publicly visible subject-effects.

<sup>291</sup> In addition to the Fall novel examined below, an important text in this category is Mambety's 1973 film *Touki Bouki* ("The Journey of the Hyena"), which features a rich, predatory gay character who tries to seduce young Mory, but whose plan is foiled when Mory and Anta steal his belongings. In this instance, the *góor-jigéen* fills the symbolic function of the hyena, and Mory and Anta are the hares who outwit him. He is not only rich but well-connected to state power; he has several contacts in the police department from whom he can solicit favors. While at first glance a standard homophobic representation, the character should be read as one example of the complex queerness that pervades the universe of the film through its deployment of tropes of sexual deviance, gender ambiguity, and the symbolics of *gégél* degradation. Djibril Diop Mambéty, *Touki bouki the journey of the hyena* (New York, NY: Kino on Video, 2005). For a limited reading of this queerness in Mambéty's films, see Kenneth Harrow, "The Queer Thing about Djibril Diop Mambéty: A Counter-Hegemonic Discourse Meets the Heterosexual Economy," *Paragraph: the journal of the Modern Critical Theory Group*. 24:3 (2001): 76.

<sup>292</sup> As Lisa McNee shows, this assumption that written production in French entails a radical breaking of Senegalese women's "silence" problematically reduces the field of politically meaningful representation (and especially self-representation, since she is interested in autobiography) to the written, and in so doing disappears long traditions of women's orature: "The widespread view that francophone African women must break their silence with the written word assumes that chirographic writing and liberation are linked in the inert and causal fashion refuted above. If we accept the argument that the written word alone offers a space for women's empowerment, it follows that writing alone can validate women's social visions. We would then have to accept the notion that women have failed to develop any coherent social vision, as they are latecomers in the world of African letters. Celebrating women's entry into the world of francophone belles lettres as the only possible 'coming to voice' thus has the effect of erasing their voices when lifted in song or declamatory poetry" (McNee, *Selfish gifts*, 87–88.) I would add that *sutura* is a more useful analytic with which to think through the politics of women's public self-presentation than "silence," as it leads us to an investigation of what sort of representation is acceptable, and in what context, and by whom. While McNee acknowledges that most women who *publicly* recite *taasu* (an oral poetic form traditionally associated with women) are *gégél*—some *géer* women are talented wordsmiths, but they limit their performances to intimate, private gatherings of women of the same social status (44)—the implications of this distinction are not sustained throughout her analysis, and she reverts to subsuming *gégél taasukat* into the undifferentiated category of "woman" that we see above. This is a problematic move given that *gégél* often serve as the constitutive outside of normative womanhood. Marame Gueye's work on *woyyi céet* (wedding songs) and other forms of women's orature also displays this tendency. Marame Gueye, "Woyyi Céet: Senegalese Women's Oral Discourses on Marriage and Womanhood," *Research in African Literatures* 41:4 (2010): 65-86.

expected a more legibly feminist and revelatory statement from the first novel written by a Senegalese woman, one that would include a clear representation of women's oppression, a condemnation of patriarchy and a promotion of so-called women's views and interests. (They had to wait until the 1980 publication of Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*<sup>293</sup> for this desire to be assuaged.) Indeed, Fall's early work has often been called "masculine" writing for its ostensible championing of allegedly oppressive traditional gender roles and its foregrounding of unsympathetic female characters who, in their enthrallment to postcolonial modernity, deviate grotesquely from normative gendered honor. As critic Nicki Hitchcott argues, this surface reading has obscured the nuances of Fall's texts, and skewed our understanding of the complex gender politics those texts explore.<sup>294</sup> I would add that these misreadings are enabled by the critics' fetishization of the category of "woman"—a monolithic formation whose production through caste, class and kinship hierarchies is obfuscated—and the reduction of feminist politics to a concern with that woman.

If the publication of *Le Revenant* represents a break of some kind, that break would be of the *géer* subject with *sutura*, not of the "Senegalese woman" with "silence." However, the novel is not autobiographical, and therefore does not directly implicate Fall's husband, family, and sexual life as does Bugul's autobiographical trilogy. Further, as Médoune Gueye argues, the text can also be easily inserted into a Wolof philosophical tradition that explores the link between humanness and honor,<sup>295</sup> a tradition in which the philosophers have not always been *gével*.<sup>296</sup> Since at one level the text can be read as an exercise in conservative Wolof moral philosophy, its author can be lauded as a courageous defender of the old noble order pushed into speech/action by the urgent need to reverse the decaying state of contemporary society.

Both the Western feminist critics that condemn the text and the conservative Senegalese critics who praise it are guilty of violating two golden rules of literary criticism: first, that the narrator's (or the main character's) subjectivity is not always that of the author; and second, that the text can exceed—or even subvert—the author's stated intentions. Aminata Sow Fall is well-known for her "cultural reactivation" campaigns which call for the resuscitation of traditional Wolof values and practices;<sup>297</sup> if her novels are to be read as a straightforward legitimation of that project, however, then her conscious understanding of traditional Wolof culture must be complex indeed. Rather than focus on authorial intent or whether or not we can classify Fall as a feminist, I am instead interested in what the text itself does, and how this reading of what the text does might intervene in our understanding of the historical moment it seeks to define.

In an interview with Médoune Gueye, Fall gives the following account of how she came to write *Le Revenant*:

<sup>293</sup>Mariama Bâ, *Une si longue lettre : roman* (Paris: Le serpent à plumes, 2010).

<sup>294</sup>Nicki Hitchcott, *Women writers in Francophone Africa* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000), 89.

<sup>295</sup>Médoune Guèye, *Aminata Sow Fall, oralité et société dans l'œuvre romanesque* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), 36.

<sup>296</sup>Leymarie, *Les griots wolof du Sénégal*, 19.

<sup>297</sup>"Aminata Sow Fall s'installe au Cirlac", n.d., <http://senegal-actu.com/culture/aminata-sow-fall-s%E2%80%99installe-au-cirlac-643.html>.

Quand je suis revenue de Paris, j'ai trouvé que cela avait changé. Vous savez qu'entre temps, il y avait eu les indépendances, il y avait eu l'émergence d'une certaine bourgeoisie bureaucratique et le sens même de l'argent avait changé. Et le sens-là, c'était qu'on se paradait. Il y avait pas mal de voyez-moi. C'est moi qui suis puissant. Si j'ai de l'argent, je suis quelqu'un; celui qui n'a rien, il n'est rien. Je me suis dit que cette perception par rapport à l'argent déshumanise et j'étais très choquée par la déshumanisation de la société.<sup>298</sup>

The explanation establishes the occurrence of a major social shift accompanying the post-independence the rise of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, a shift that changed the very meaning of money and rearticulated honor to visible displays of wealth. Power came to be ascribed to those who paraded their wealth in public, and the state of nothingness became attached to the have-nots who could not perform the same display. While she does not express any explicit nostalgia for the caste system, the redistribution of honor she describes involves a clear violation of the code of *kersa* and *sutura* which would restrain the *gээр* from showing off his wealth. The *гэwэл* was expected to wear his wealth on his body and to parade around in public; therefore, the shift is drastic only for the *гээр* community, which has undergone a sort of *гэwэл*ization. This *гэwэл*ization is figured as a form of dehumanization, where the *гээр* takes on the deathlike, inhuman, degraded state of the *гэwэл*.

Since the position that Fall articulates above is also voiced by the character of Bakar in the novel, it is easy to assume that the text's sympathies lie with him. Bakar is the *гээр* protagonist who is rendered socially dead after his embezzlement of state monies is discovered. A "good" young man, well-raised but poor, he is pushed into crime by the demands of a new urban milieu that assigns honor to those who conspicuously display wealth rather than to those who are of noble birth and act in accordance with the traditional code of honor. He stages his own death and return from the dead, a morbid performance designed to bring to crisis a system that dehumanizes and zombies its subjects at the altar of wealth and artifice. This milieu is commandeered by social-climbing *diriyaanke* like Bakar's sister Yama, and its dehumanizing forces are emblemized by the *гóor-jigéen* character, Malobé, who is key to the consolidation of Yama's power and embodies the various forms of transvestism (gender, race, class) that, in Bakar's eyes, mark all of the milieu's subjects as degraded.

Indeed, this degradation is figured by Bakar as a queering or loss of noble gendered honor, and therefore of gender itself. His wife, Mame Aïssa, and his mother, Tante Ngoné, embody the ideal modalities of feminized honor-in-submission—of which *sutura* is the synecdoche—but that ideal is no longer the norm. Instead, the new feminine norm is enacted by his sister Yama, who possesses an abnormal, castrating female power that has brought on his emasculating social death. In Bakar's nostalgic account, before the advent of the new order, women were sweet, submissive, self-abnegating, discreet, and unselfish; the redistribution of honor, however, has occasioned a massive shift and inverted an age-old dyadic gender hierarchy. While at one level the text sustains and

<sup>298</sup>Quoted in Guèye, *Aminata Sow Fall, oralité er société dans l'œuvre romanesque*, 44.

substantiates Bakar's view throughout the narrative, at another level it subverts this account by complicating our understanding of the "traditional" ordering of gendered power in Wolof society and by satirizing Bakar's crisis in masculinity.

While Yama is ultimately vilified by Bakar, the text nevertheless emphasizes her intelligence, capacity for hard work, and ability to wield the power vested in her by the Wolof kinship structure and by circumstance. She becomes the queen of the nouveau-riche milieu by savvily and tirelessly appropriating the signs and accoutrements of nobility—including a large entourage of low-status clients—and inserting them into a context in which honor is conferred to the ostentatiously wealthy. Her social success is due not only to her exceptional beauty and charm, but also to a shrewdness, work ethic, and sense of authority fashioned by the hardships of her impoverished childhood. The eldest sister of the Diop household, she was responsible for all the domestic labor and had become the second mother of her siblings at a young age. This responsibility translated into a general sense of authority over her siblings and peers:

En aînée attachée à ses prérogatives, elle stipulait, décréait, commandait et ne souffrait pas la contestation. Elle faisait preuve de la même autorité auprès de ses copines de quartier. Plus d'une jeune fille, jalouses de sa beauté et chagrinées par le succès de Yama dans toutes les cérémonies où elles avaient l'occasion de se retrouver, l'avaient provoquée et pas une seule fois elle n'avait manqué d'avoir le dessus (23).

Yama's authority is problematic for Bakar from childhood; while he loves his sister, "garçon choyé et conscient de la supériorité que lui conférait son sexe, Bakar n'acceptait pas toujours de gaieté de cœur l'autorité de Yama. Mais après tout, disait-il, elle est l'aînée et il est normal que nous la respections" (23).

As Judith Irvine observed in Kir Matar, power struggles between elder sisters and younger brothers can be particularly contentious in Wolof families. The eldest sister is in the superior position in the sibling age hierarchy, but the younger brother is placed in the superior position in the gender hierarchy, so each has a legitimate competing claim to authority over the other.<sup>299</sup> As I will show below, Bakar's submission to Yama (and the excessive demands of her milieu) leads to a particular kind of Wolofized oedipal drama, where Bakar becomes obsessed with replacing not only his father, but also with unseating his sister from the throne of phallic power. He comes to realize that his masculine honor has been and continues to be entirely in Yama's hands; it is because of her notoriety that he wins Mame Aïssa's hand and achieves status in the respectable Gueule Tapée community, and it is because of her pressure to display extravagant generosity to reinforce that new status that he embezzles millions of francs while director of money order transactions at the postal service. It is the visibility of this social success that invites suspicion in his workplace, leading to his shameful termination from a position won thanks to his own hard work and intelligence.

When they first hear of Bakar's crime, the Diop family hopes to stave off *gâcce* by paying back the embezzled sum and avoiding a lawsuit or imprisonment, thus covering Bakar and his crime with *sutura*. Yama—via her spectacularly wealthy

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<sup>299</sup>Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village.*, 266.

merchant husband and other rich connections—is the only one capable of drumming up such a huge sum, and she is initially committed to that strategy in order to save her hard-earned reputation and that of the family. When she learns Bakar’s imprisonment is inevitable—a punishment that necessarily renders the crime public—she loses all interest in his case, and does not pay him a single visit during his five-year incarceration.<sup>300</sup> When he is released from prison, she could have used her power and influence to partly resuscitate his social standing, but instead reinforces his dead, dishonored status, both within the family and in public. In the scene which dramatizes Yama’s final blow to his masculinity, Bakar decides to attend a lavish party hosted by Yama, “naturally” choosing to sit with the other adult men. An incensed Yama discovers him among the men, and, in front of a muted company observing the scene, orders him to relocate to the children’s room: “Bakar, va dans la chamber des enfants! [...] C’est à toi que je m’adresse. Je te dis d’aller dans la chamber des enfants” (83). Bakar has been demoted from adult man to child—a demotion only possible in extreme cases of social death, like enslavement—and condemned to a subjugated existence subject to his elder sister’s command.

Prior to his fall from grace, even as he submits to Yama, he bemoans the demise of the idealized order in which women upheld their feminine honor for fear of dying of shame. Bakar is drawn to Mame Aïssa because she and her family represent the old, noble tradition of honor. When Bakar first meets her, Mame Aïssa’s qualities are immediately recognizable as those of a *jigéen ju baax* (a good, virtuous woman): she is shy, reserved, and modest (“On devinait dans son ton et sa mine la timidité et la retenue”; “la jeune fille hésita, par pudeur”) (30). In the interest of guarding his daughter’s honor, Mame Aïssa’s father summons Bakar to discuss his intentions when he notices the frequency of the latter’s visits. Bakar is overjoyed by this adherence to decorum:

Voilà qui est réconfortant, se dit-il. Une maison où il y a de l’ordre! Maintenant les choses ont tellement évolué, les mentalités si reconverties, que l’on est surprise lorsque l’on voit que quelques parents veillent encore à la bonne réputation de leur progéniture. Les traditions avaient reçu un coup de poignard, et ce que Bakar déplorait le plus dans cet état de fait, c’était la dépravation des mœurs et sa conséquence nécessaire: la dégradation de la femme. La honte ne tuait plus. La femme, en déchirant le voile de mystère qui l’avait recouverte depuis l’aube des temps, avait en même temps détruit sa propre valeur. D’or elle était devenue simple métal, bravant les scandales les plus sordides. Ce n’était pas sans nostalgie que Bakar se répétait un refrain qu’il entendait souvent chanter par sa mère et dont il avait retenu ce vers: *Ban gatia nangoo dee*. (31)

Bakar’s recourse to the veil metaphor establishes *sutura* as the central feminine virtue, the membrane that forms the boundary between inside and outside, honor and

<sup>300</sup> “Voilà le pétrin ou il nous met! Sa honte, il l’essuiera tout seul. Oser ‘salir notre peau,’ ternir notre réputation, faire de nous la matière à commentaires dans toutes les maisons, dans tous les bureaux, sur toutes les places publiques! Partout on ouvrira le ‘dossier’ Bakar Diop qui deviendra inéluctablement au fil des discussions, le ‘dossier Yama Diop.’ Comment Yama pouvait-elle pardonner à Bakar d’avoir assombri tant de renommée qui lui avait valu d’énormes sacrifices, d’incessantes luttes pour braver les moqueries, les sous-entendus, le mépris?” (48)

dishonor, protection and exposure, life and death. When someone is covered with *sutura* (or covers someone else with *sutura*), the verb *sang* is used, which normally describes covering with a blanket or another piece of cloth; when someone's private business is exposed to public scrutiny, one says "xotti sutura," or to tear *sutura* like a cloth. Now that exposure has become the norm, *gээр* women can no longer accrue value or honor by conforming to the norms of *sutura*, and they have been demoted from gold to simple metal. The death that used to result from dishonor—and that kept the community of the living pure and noble—has now been replaced by a generalized degradation, an infiltration of death into life.

It is, of course, a central irony of the story that Bakar is guilty of an extreme deviation from honorable behavior, and that he has brought death onto himself, even as he makes every attempt to blame Yama and the new order over which she rules. This skewed perception of his own honor extends to an inability to perceive Mame Aïssa outside of his fetishistic image of her as the embodiment of perfect wifely *sutura*. As his incarceration drags on, Mame Aïssa's visits become less and less frequent, but Bakar holds on to this idealized vision. She does not discuss the horrific pain and shame she and her family have endured as a result of his crime, and her increasing reserve is interpreted by Bakar as a sign both of her sympathy for *his* suffering and of her natural discretion: "D'ailleurs elle est naturellement discrète, et malgré sa jeunesse elle incarne toutes les vertus féminines qui deviennent si rares, et je crois que c'est ce qui me plaît le plus en elle" (63). Even after she succumbs to familial pressure to request a divorce, he continues to praise her: "il avait pu apprécier, tout au long de sa détention, les énormes sacrifices qu'elle avait consentis en se montrant une épouse douce et digne. Jamais elle ne s'était plaint de quoi que ce fut. Toujours la même discrétion, le même 'sutura,' la même retenue" (67).

By placing her on the pedestal of virtue, Bakar cannot perceive his wife's suffering through the veil *sutura* hangs between husband and wife, and Mame Aïssa contributes to the reproduction of this distance by her own fanatical adherence to normative virtuous behavior. Every time she visits Bakar she intends to divulge her woes, but loses her will when she crosses the prison's threshold. The description of the power these norms have to structure the individual's field of behavior recalls the invocation in Bugul's *Riwan* of an all-powerful social order outside of which there is no life:

L'éducation à l'étrange pouvoir de modeler l'individu selon des normes inviolables et de le rendre quasi impuissant dans toute tentative de se libérer de ces normes. Il eut fallu une volonté de fer, un courage herculéen. Mais Mame Aïssa était femme, il n'était donc pas question pour elle d'assumer librement ses actes. Elle était conditionnée par un milieu où toute tentative de libération était considérée comme un scandale, comme une trahison. C'est pourquoi, inconsciemment, elle ne pouvait jamais parler à son mari: "ce n'est pas décent que je lui parle des problèmes que j'ai avec ma famille. D'abord cela pourrait le faire souffrir, ensuite cela pourrait me déprécier à ses yeux." (63)



Mame Aïssa's milieu ends up pushing her in directions that seem contradictory and nonsensical, and which her rigid, textbook understanding of the rules has a hard time accommodating. Her family had initially agreed to her marriage to Bakar, although it violated the strict endogamic norms to which they normally adhere; they then force her to divorce him once he is dishonored, although she was always taught that divorce was to be avoided at all costs. Her parents are from old, respected noble stock; her father, El Hadji Wellé, is "un des notables les plus considérés du quartier, grand dignitaire, connu et respecté de tous, connaissant l'état civil des représentants de toutes les grandes familles non seulement de la Gueule-Tapée, mais de tout Ndakaarou" (33). When Bakar asks for his daughter's hand, El Hadji Wellé is troubled by the fact that Bakar is an unknown entity; he is not of the big families, and therefore cannot be situated: "situer l'autre par rapport à son origine, son rang social, sa famille, son travail, telle est la démarche fondamentale avant toute transaction matrimoniale" (34). In order to reproduce the pure *géeer* community and protect it from any outside taint, the parents must take on the responsibility of ensuring their children contract desirable marriages. Bakar is ultimately locatable only because of his famous sister; Adja Dado, Mame Aïssa's mother, has heard of Yama, and therefore can situate him in relation to the order of prestige in the nouveau-riche milieu.

Yama quickly identifies Adja Dado as the weak link in the respected family's ramparts, and she goes in for the kill. Bakar's marriage to Mame Aïssa would represent a further consolidation of Yama's power, as it would bring the Diop family into an alliance with a big Dakar family in addition to the pre-existing alliance with the *ndaanaan* milieu sealed by her own marriage. She knows that finalizing Bakar and Mame Aïssa's marriage will be a challenge, as the old order of nobility continues to resist the ascendancy of the new order of wealth:

Elle avait beau être une épouse aimée et comblée, une grande diriyanke entourée d'une cour de thuriféraires d'hommes-femmes et de griots, les réalités ne lui échappaient pas. Elle connaissait les rapports entre deux conceptions, deux attitudes, deux manières de résoudre les problèmes. Avec le bouleversement des structures sociales, une puissance nouvelle avait été créée et faisait concurrence à celle qui, jusque-là, s'était considérée comme seule digne d'égard. Les uns, se retranchant derrière la naissance, le passé glorieux et le rôle historique des ancêtres, regardaient avec un certain mépris ce qui ne devaient leur notoriété qu'à l'argent. Ceux-ci pourtant se croyaient les plus forts, et Yama aussi le croyait, qui vivait chaque jour le paradoxe. Des principes aussi durs que l'acier pouvaient être réduits à néant, et des murailles naguère interdites et infranchissables pouvaient être enjambées au nom de cet idéal matériel qu'on faisait semblant de mépriser. (35)

Clever Yama knows that it is senior women who "pull all the strings" in marital transactions, and she blitzes Adja Dado with cash for the "kola" (35-36). The strategy works, and Adja Dado presents an equally clever argument to El Hadji Wellé: Mame Aïssa should accept Bakar's offer in order to save her honor, to pre-empt the shame that

would befall them were Aïssa to bear a child out of wedlock. Her husband is worried he will be denigrated by his principled peers for marrying his daughter to money, but Adja Dado convinces him the other fathers will do so only out of jealousy; if they were in his shoes, none of them would turn him away (36-37). Adja Dado rhetorically pulls Bakar into the community of men who could potentially marry their daughter by invoking two foils of normative personhood: she says he is neither a “dëmm” (organ- and soul-eating witch) nor an “esclave” (slave). Instead, he is a well-raised man who will ensure that Mame Aïssa will want for nothing (36), in accordance with the principles of *jom* and *kilifteef* which demand that the honorable male head of household provide for his wife and children.

Adja Dado and the other senior women in Mame Aïssa’s family creatively reinterpret the rules pertaining to gendered honor again when they try to convince Mame Aïssa to break off her marriage after Bakar’s incarceration. Bakar’s ignominious fall has grave repercussions for the entire family; when two large trucks driven by agents of the state come to reclaim the expensive furniture Bakar had bought the Gueye family with embezzled money and which had been the envy of the neighborhood, the family is further exposed to public shame. The idiom of *sutura* conveys the extent of their dishonor: Adja Dado “avait la sensation qu’on la promenait toute nue dans les rues de la Gueule-Tapée pour le plus horrible des méfaits” and Wellé Gueye is immobilized, “dans le mutisme le plus total.” The neighbors burst into the intimate spaces of the house normally protected by *sutura*: “ces femmes n’avaient fait irruption dans sa chambre que pour contempler son déshonneur” (55). El Hadji Wellé blames his wife for the affair, assimilating her to the *diriyaanke* community deemed responsible for degradation of traditional values, for the death of *sutura*. “Tu as compté sur l’argent et maintenant tu nous fais récolter le déshonneur. Vous les femmes, vous êtes des démons, des démons trop sensibles à l’argent, aux folies, à la renommée” (56).

Adja Dado then attempts to shift the blame onto Mame Aïssa for supporting her husband, forcing her to acknowledge that the rest of the family has shunned them since Bakar’s imprisonment because “ils ne peuvent pas supporter l’opprobre” and asking her if it is fair that the family be “mis au ban de notre société” because of Bakar (56). She calls all of the senior women to a family meeting, staging an intervention to pressure Mame Aïssa into a divorce. Mame Aïssa is seated on the floor in the center of her mother’s bedroom, “transformée pour les besoins de la cause en salle de tribunal,” surrounded by and subjected to the scrutiny of all of her paternal and maternal aunts, and all of her mother’s friends and aunts. These senior women—former recipients of Bakar’s generosity who had sung his praises in flusher times—now unanimously agree that Mame Aïssa can get nothing out of her marriage with Bakar, and that he can and should be replaced. The aunts selectively invoke ideals of feminine comportment, reminding Mame Aïssa that a woman should not be stubborn, and that she should do what her mother tells her. Mame Aïssa is understandably confused: “Moi je ne comprends plus rien de tout ceci. Pourtant je vous ai tant entendu dire que le principal mérite d’une femme est de sauvegarder son ménage, d’être fidèle à son mari et de le suivre. Ne m’avez-vous pas toujours dit qu’un ‘mari n’est pas un égal mais un maître’?” (65)

Mame Aïssa is caught in a structural bind produced by multiple overlapping hierarchies that interpellate her submission in different directions. The complexity of the social order makes it possible for her mother's rights over her to supercede those of her husband in certain circumstances; indeed, Bakar's rights over Mame Aïssa are valid only as long as he is classified as a *gor*, or man of honor. In the aunts' eyes, Bakar's dishonorable behavior has proved that he is of low birth—he is “nothing,” an unknown—and a non-being cannot claim to have husbandly authority over their daughter. As Mame Aïssa's *bàjjan*, the paternal aunt who has almost the same rights over her as her mother, reminds her: “Et n'oublie pas que c'est un badoo; s'il ne l'était pas, il n'aurais pas volé. Un 'gor' ne vole pas” (66).

Her *bàjjan*'s structural authority is reinforced by her powerful and fear-inspiring physical presence, which the text codes as masculine: “C'était une femme autoritaire, à la voix masculine, à la parole sèche. Elle était une espèce de géante, longue et large, avec un teint de noirceur très foncé [...] Même quand elle était joyeuse, on avait l'impression qu'elle allait vous dévorer, tant sa mine inspirait la crainte” (66). It is she who has the final, authoritative word: “il faut savoir interpréter les choses selon les situations. As-tu jamais vu une femme, fut-elle la plus exemplaire, suivre son mari jusque dans la tombe! Le mari le plus méritant n'a jamais eu cet honneur, et le tien n'est même pas digne de toi” (65-66). Her aunt argues that it is not virtuous for a woman to follow her husband to the grave, setting up an equivalence between physical death and the social death of dishonor to which Mame Aïssa would be condemned should she remain married to Bakar. This position echoes the Wolof expression “kenn du la gënal sa bopp” (“no one is better for you than yourself” or “another person is not worth the loss of your self”) often used to invoke a limit to the suffering one should be expected to endure at the hands of a spouse. Her aunt's goal is to wrench Mame Aïssa—and by extension the whole family—from the grips of social death and reintegrate her into the community of the living. It is through her submission to the elder women's authority, “comme doit le faire tout enfant bien élevé” (66), that she can reoccupy the recognized location of “daughter,” and thus actualize her reentry into the social.

It is not surprising that Bakar fetishizes Mame Aïssa's *sutura*, synecdoche of her perfect submission within the husband-wife dyad. Bakar, while obliged to negotiate the complexity of sibling hierarchy which posits Yama as his *kilifa*, is raised by parents who are geographically removed from kin, and therefore grows up in a family unit that is almost nuclear. Tante Ngoné and père Oussèye are recent migrants from rural Ndiambour, so Bakar does not witness the intervention of senior women and men in his parents' marriage. Untempered by the balancing forces of the extended family, his parents embody the extremes of gendered behavior within the husband-wife hierarchy.

Ngoné is the model of wifely and motherly self-abnegation and askesis. During his childhood, she wakes up at four in the morning to buy fish directly from the fisherman to resell at the market; like many working class Senegalese women, she is able to guarantee a more steady income for the family than her husband, but, in accordance with the norms of wifely *sutura*, would never claim economic power as the basis for authority over her husband. Indeed, she endures all hardships without complaint,

devoting herself to her children's education and well-being and consistently performing perfect submission to her husband. According to the Wolof proverb, "ku muñ, muuñ"—"she (or he) who patiently endures hardship without complaint will eventually smile"—the submissive subject will be rewarded for her self-discipline. As a child's character is determined by his mother's degree of virtuousness and self-abnegation—another oft-cited proverb is "liggéeyu ndey, añub doom" or "the mother's work is the child's lunch"—sacrifice produces good children, who then materialize the good mother's virtue. Bakar's striving to attain social status and wealth is partly motivated by his desire to instantiate his mother's virtue in his person and reward her for her sacrifice: "Comment payer cette mère infatigable, soumise, discrète? Elle ne veut rien pour elle; tout pour nous. S'il existe ici-bas une justice, elle sera des plus récompensés!" (21-22) Mame Aïssa shares his mother's virtues;<sup>301</sup> his attraction to her and desire to fulfill all her wishes can thus be read as an oedipal reenactment in which he feels compelled to continuously reward his mother through the proxy of Mame Aïssa, in addition to an adherence to a norm which obliges an honorable man to fully provide for his wife.<sup>302</sup> By possessing and spoiling Mame Aïssa, he replaces the severe père Oussèye with generous and understanding Bakar.

Scenes from Bakar's childhood provide further fodder for this oedipal reading:

Et Bakar se souvenait de quelques scènes de sa jeunesse qui avaient laissé une marque indélébile dans sa mémoire et qui, chaque fois qu'il les rappelait, grandissaient l'image de sa mère, la sanctifiaient même. Car tante Ngoné n'avait pas connu toujours la tranquillité d'un ménage heureux. Oussèye Diop n'était pas d'un caractère facile, il était intransigeant et voulait régner en maître. L'abnégation totale de sa femme ne l'empêchait pas d'exercer son instinct male de domination. (74)

In one such scene, Oussèye beats Ngoné in the courtyard for not responding to his summons, which she had not heard. He smacks her so hard that she doubles over and the neighbors feel compelled to intervene (75-76). A mute and powerless Bakar witnesses the abuse,

... et deux larmes jalonnèrent ses joues et il n'oublia jamais ce jour. Il se rappelait que le lendemain et bien d'autres jours, après, il avait vu sa mère, comme tous les matins après la prière, se présenter devant son seigneur et maître, le saluer avec génuflexions. Mais celui-ci n'avait même pas daigné répondre, ce qui n'empêchait pas tante Ngoné de répéter toujours les mêmes gestes. (76)

Père Oussèye exhibits an extreme form of patriarchal behavior; when he has no valid excuse to punish Ngoné, he invents one in order to publicly stage the wife's subjugation

<sup>301</sup> In an echo of Mame Aïssa's reticence to discuss her own tribulations with Bakar while he is in prison, thus allowing *sutura* to set up a curtain between husband and wife, Tante Ngoné has also been trained to filter both what she divulges and asks her adult son to divulge: "Entre elle et son fils une barrière s'était dressé depuis que celui-ci était sorti de l'adolescence. Une pudeur toute féminine enseignée par l'éducation qu'elle avait reçue et qui lui avait appris à ne jamais essayer d'aller au fond des choses, lui interdisait de poser des questions à son fils" (12).

<sup>302</sup> "Il pensait qu'il était du devoir d'un mari respectable de combler tous les désirs de sa femme" (38).

to the husband. While structurally the husband is the wife's *kilifa*, Oussèye's behavior demonstrates an overinvestment in phallic power that would normally be checked by senior members in the kinship hierarchy. That the neighbors feel compelled to intervene in what would be considered a private conflict is indication that he has transgressed socially acceptable bounds. At the same time, the scene reveals the accepted non-equivalence of the husband's *sutura* and that of the wife: were Ngoné to slap and denigrate her husband in public, she would break entirely with feminine virtue and risk the death of *gàcce*. While it may give him the reputation of being harsh, there is no indication that Père Oussèye's honor in the eyes of the community is permanently damaged by his public humiliation of his wife. In fact, in an echo of the logic by which Mame Diarra Bousso, the mother of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, enhances her pious virtue, Oussèye actually offers Ngoné an opportunity to seal her reputation as virtuous, submissive wife. In Bakar's eyes, his mother's endurance of his father's abuse only enhances her honor—she becomes a saint, an ascetic disciple whose submission to her master's challenges is the path to the perfection of her soul.

Even though this scene is painful to Bakar, it does not cause him to formulate a productively critical stance toward gender hierarchy, but rather further normalizes his view of marriage and ideal gendered comportment. The effectiveness of his fantasy replacement of Oussèye with a kinder, gentler husband in his own marriage—but where masculine and feminine powers and virtues remain intact—is predicated on the isolation and enshrining of the oedipal triangle. Yama, the figure of non-subjugated feminine power, erupts into this fantasy gendered order and queers the scene. Her authority over him, while initially inherent to the structure of overlapping hierarchies that comprise the Wolof social order, comes to resemble a patriarchal/monarchical sovereign power that arrogates the right to determine whether he lives or dies. This power disrupts a gender order predicated on the female subject's performance of virtuous submission; Bakar is forced to submit to her, and she is in no way forced to submit to him. Yama's power is not only derived from her position as eldest sister—which in the idealized Wolof social order would be mitigated by a complex system of checks and balances—but abnormally enhanced by her position in the *nouveau-riche* milieu. In this new urban culture, her control over the distribution of wealth and command of a large group of clients enables her to disable the caste supremacy of the nobility, and makes even her parents beholden to her.

In Bakar's eyes, the *diriyaanke*'s power is an improperly gendered, queer power—a sign of the end of the world as we know it—and the figure of Malobé and the host of other unnamed *góor-jigéen* in Yama's entourage instantiate this queerness. As in the *géer-géwél* or *gor-jaam* relationships, as a low-status client, the *góor-jigéen* is essential to the reproduction of high status among *diriyaanke*. Malobé, a celebrity party planner and master of ceremonies, is responsible for making the reputations of individual *diriyaanke* within the milieu, and Yama enlists his services at the *ngénte* (naming ceremony) for Bakar and Mame Aïssa's first child—a ceremony of unprecedented proportions Yama stages as the scene of her second victory over the noble Wellé Gueye family (38).

Pour cette cérémonie, elle avait fait appel à Malobé Niang, l'homme-femme le plus redoutable, le plus redouté, mais aussi le plus recherché. C'était lui qui agençait les cérémonies des vraies "diriyanke"; il faisait la fine bouche; rares étaient celles qui il acceptait d'offrir ses services, car il était exigeant. Il voyait les choses en grand et ne souffrait pas que l'on discutât ses propositions. Toute grande dame cherchait sa compagnie; entrer dans ses faveurs était un gage sur de célébrité. (40)

According to Cheikh Niang, the role of the *góor-jigéen* in the consolidation of women's power is not a new phenomenon. It is not by chance, he argues, that elite women and their *góor-jigéen* clients in Saint Louis became central to the mobilization of political parties in the 1950s and 1960s, as Saint Louis was formerly part of the Waalo kingdom, a kingdom in which royal women like Ndate Yalla could wield sovereign power.<sup>303</sup> One of the older focus group participants in Niang et al's study of the community of men who have sex with men "explained that during the years from 1950 to 1960, each 'great lady' affiliated with one of the competing political parties had around her a group of men who have sex with men who acted as her publicists, advertising her virtues and verbally attacking the women's rivals. In return, [they] received material and financial support."<sup>304</sup>

Regardless of the *diriyaanke's* claim to noble lineage, the *góor-jigéen* takes on the *gévél* role of proxy communicator which marks the *diriyaanke* as elite and powerful. As Judith Irvine has shown, the deployment of proxy communication is not limited to the *gээр* and the *gévél*, but can be performed by any two people in a hierarchical relationship; the person of higher status speaks almost inaudibly, and the lower status person loudly communicates the high status person's words to the public, thus enhancing

<sup>303</sup> "Vous savez très bien que dans les villes de Saint-Louis, par exemple, Gorée et Rufisque, à un moment donné, il y a une grande culture d'acceptation de l'homosexualité. Une culture de tolérance vis-à-vis de l'homosexualité. Les homosexuels vont jouer des rôles importants avec les femmes. Quand le Président Léopold Sédar Senghor se battait contre Lamine Guèye, ils avaient besoin de femmes leaders qui vont jouer un rôle important dans la mobilisation sociale des deux côtés. Cette capacité de mobilisation des femmes sur le terrain politique, c'est un détail typique des organisations sociales en Afrique de l'Ouest. Ce n'est pas par hasard que la zone de Saint-Louis était sous l'influence du Walo, que ce Walo soit dirigé par des femmes pendant longtemps. Et qu'il y a des réseaux de femmes qui vont avoir des pouvoirs décisionnels et des pouvoirs politiques extrêmement importants. Depuis Blaise, quand il y a un vote, ce sont les femmes qui constituaient la force de mobilisation, d'influence des électeurs. **Vous voulez dire que les homosexuels participaient activement à la politique ?** Mais oui. Les femmes leaders, qui menaient les grandes mobilisations sociales, avaient autour d'elles des homosexuels. Il y avait systématiquement des homosexuels qui habitaient dans leur cour. Il faut savoir que quand Senghor est entré à Saint-Louis pour déraciner Lamine Guèye, il a été accueilli par des femmes et par des homosexuels, qui ont organisé toute la mobilisation. C'est tellement ancré dans la culture que vous allez entendre des mots comme «Mbakalou góordjigen». C'est même jusqu'au niveau culinaire". ["Cheikh Niang, sociologue : ' Nous avons besoin des homosexuels' - Blog politique du Sénégal news et commentaires sur la vie politique sénégalaise", n.d., <http://www.blogs-afrique.info/senegal-politique/index.php/2009/04/20/1979-cheikh-niang-sociologue-nous-avons-besoin-des-homosexuels>]. Ndate Yalla was a queen who ruled Waalo in the 1840s and 1850s, famously resisting French colonial incursion. The long history of women's accession to royal power in Waalo complicates Yoro Dyao's assertion in the early twentieth century that in the Wolof kingdoms, commandment was "chose essentiellement masculine" ( Rousseau, "Le Sénégal d'autrefois.").

<sup>304</sup>Niang, "It's raining stones", 507.

the high status person's *kersa* (honorable restraint).<sup>305</sup> When Yama's gifts at the *ngénte* in Fall's novel are announced, it is Malobé who first details them in public; Yama does not say a word. Malobé sits in the middle of the circle of guests; he is dressed in a richly embroidered blue grand boubou, his masculine physical stature contrasting starkly with his voice, establishing him as study in gender contradiction: "il avait une stature de géant, un cou de taureau qui faisait contraste avec la note toute féminine, légère, trainante qui sortait de sa voix lorsqu'on l'entendait annoncer" (41). A skilled master of ceremonies, Malobé artfully enumerates the extravagant gifts that Yama offers to the baby, to slaves and members of the lower castes, to the baby's cousins, and to the grandparents.

Décidément, Yama avait battu tous les records. Malobé exultait, la victoire était sienne, et c'est seulement dans ces atmosphères surchauffées, lorsqu'il avait créé le suspense et fait éclater l'insolite, qu'il se sentait dans son élément, car pour le grand maître de cérémonies qu'il était, chaque rencontre était un combat et il ne s'agissait pas seulement de le gagner, il fallait terrasser les antagonistes; c'était un duel moral ou la pudeur et la décence exigeaient que l'on fut le vainqueur. Et Malobé était toujours vainqueur parce qu'étant au-dessus des calculs et de la mesure. (42)

The ceremony is the battlefield on which *diriyaanke* compete for honor<sup>306</sup>; the winner is the one who displays the most generosity (*teraanga*) by giving the most gifts in number and in value. Adja Dado's clan is obliged to match Yama's generosity, or risk facing dishonor in the milieu; if they are able to anticipate her moves in advance and prepare to surpass them, then they emerge as victorious. Malobé then cedes his place to Courou Mbaye, Yama's casted personal assistant, suggesting a degree of interchangeability between the *góor-jigéen* and the *ñeeño*:

Elle était comme l'ombre de Yama, elle la suivait partout, exécutait ses moindres ordres, assurait les commissions les plus secrètes. C'était une espèce de secrétaire particulière et presque toutes les femmes de caste lui enviaient cette fonction. Et pourtant quelle vipère que cette Courou Mbaye! Dès qu'elle en avait l'occasion, elle n'hésitait jamais à sortir les pires insanités, à proférer les médisances les plus sordides à l'encontre de sa protectrice. (43)

Yama then dictates more gifts to Courou Mbaye who announces them to the company, including a generous offering to Malobé and to Courou Mbaye herself, thus acknowledging their role in the enhancement of her honor: "Ce que jamais un homme libre n'a fait pour un homme de caste, Adja Yama Diop vient de le faire pour moi ... Adja Yama m'honore encore une fois. Que faire, que dire, devant tant de noblesse et de générosité?" (43)

Yama is not noble by birth, but in her milieu, money talks, and the possession of wealth makes possible the generosity which establishes one's honorable reputation. *gével* leave the nobles to whom they were linked for generations, but who are now by

<sup>305</sup>Irvine, *Caste and communication in a Wolof village*.

<sup>306</sup>In this role, Malobé is akin to a *ceddo* warrior, or slave soldier who fought for the noble elite during the monarchical period.

comparison shabby and modest, and sing the praises of rich patrons. While she needs them for strategic purposes, Yama has nothing but contempt for these *gével*, and for the noble women who go broke trying to establish reputations as *diriyaanke*. Success in the milieu is not only guaranteed by money in the bank, but also by the ability to mobilize connections and clients to ensure money and valuable objects get pooled and flow in strategic directions, which requires skill and hard work. What Yama does not anticipate is the lengths Bakar feels he must go to in order to live up to the ridiculously high standard set by Yama at the *ngénte*. Bakar gets caught up in the milieu's game of honor, and, as a man who does not have access to community resources and whose own sense of masculine *gээр* honor restricts his wealth-accumulation behavior, turns to quiet embezzlement to maintain a reputation built for him by Yama.

Bakar's fall from grace involves a loss of masculine *gээр* honor, the death of his male personhood. During his imprisonment and after his release, when he is unable to find a job due to his criminal record, he is incapable of providing for his wife and daughter, essential to a man's sense of *jom*; his wife asks for a divorce, and his daughter tragically dies of an illness. He is condemned to an existence in which he feels powerless and constrained, a feeling he does not explain to his mother because he assumes that she, by contrast, is content in her limited and repetitive domestic universe (10). In a telling scene that satirically literalizes his loss of power, he is squashed and immobilized between two corpulent women in the bus. One of the women has a hanging flap on her head-wrap, and every time she moves her head, the flap slaps Bakar in the face. When he politely asks her to tuck in the flap, she takes offense and the rest of the passengers jump to her defense, arguing that "she is just a woman" and "one shouldn't argue with a woman." Faced with a logic that allows women to physically overpower him—while discursively asserting their weakness and therefore right to special treatment—Bakar gives up (14).

When Yama deals the final emasculating blow at her party, banishing him from the community of adult men, Bakar realizes that the world today is "bouleversé," upside down, and that it is "pourri," rotten. He takes a cue from his fellow prisoners, juvenile delinquents who "réaliseraient leur bonheur dans la guerre impitoyable qu'ils menaient contre la société qui les ignorait et leur meilleur titre de gloire était de troubler la tranquillité de cette même société" (50-51). He vows to take vengeance against Yama, to "trouble" the society that has rejected him. He gives up all pretence to noble behavior, embracing the chaotic rottenness of the city. He integrates into the marginal world of the Colobane underclass, where society's degraded upside-downness is lived and celebrated with honesty. He takes up with Héléne, a maid who, like the majority of the female seasonal workers that reside in the neighborhood, is from the village and therefore no longer under the patriarchal authority of her father, nor under the authority of a husband—the very opposite of the constrained situatedness of virtuous Mame Aïssa.

Bakar begins to frequent seedy nightclubs and drink excessively; after one particularly bacchanalian evening, Héléne is obliged to bring him home in the wee hours of the night. When Bakar's mother opens the door and finds him passed out, she thinks he is dead and cries out, waking the neighbors of the respectable Gueule-Tapéé



neighborhood and further exposing the family to scandal (96). At that moment, Tante Ngoné would rather have been dead than endure the shame that her son continues to pile upon the family. From that day on, he is dead to his father. He explains this form of death to Héléne: “Quand je le salue, il ne me répond pas. Il ne m’adresse pas la parole. J’ai deux autres soeurs pour qui également je suis mort... Je n’ai plus de raison d’être. Peut-tu comprendre la solitude d’un homme lorsqu’il n’accomplit aucun rôle humain?” (109) His social and moral death is mirrored in his rapidly aging and deteriorating appearance, rendering him ghostlike: “Il devint rapidement une loque. A quarante-cinq ans il était vouté comme un vieillard; ses joues étaient creuses...Il avait effroyablement maigri. Il était devenu un fantôme” (98). He decides to exploit his multiply-dead state—what would it matter if he killed himself once more?—and he enlists Héléne’s help.

Striking from the first description of Héléne, whom Bakar nevertheless eventually manages to idealize and place on a pedestal of virtue,<sup>307</sup> is both her lack of the feminine virtues of *kersa* (she is direct and informal) and *sutura* (she is wearing a transparent top through which her bra is visible), and her outrageously painted face. The amount of powder and eye makeup is so excessive that she reminds Bakar of a circus character (78). While he is beyond judging Héléne, her mask is symptomatic of what he sees as the generalized, degraded performance of modern personhood. Bakar never fails to notice and condemn the women in the novel who have lightened their skin (*xeesal*), which he sees as a symptom of neocolonial alienation, a form of racial drag. The sales pitch of a *xeesal* hawker at the market confirms this reading: “en une semaine, il te donne une ‘diongama’ qui n’aurait rien à envier à une toubab.” He decides that *xeesal* will be a key component of his subversive performance piece:

Je vais à présent faire comme eux, entrer dans leur pantomime. Je leur jouerai le tour le plus ignominieux qui ait jamais été joué. Quelques touches de *xeesal*, et je serai autre, aliéné, dépersonnalisé comme ils veulent tous être. Tout se passé à présent comme sur les planches, le naturel, la vérité n’ont plus droit de cité. C’est à celui qui se travestira plus, qui feindra mieux, qui dissimulera avec plus de subtilité. Personne n’est plus soi-même et vouloir garder son intégrité morale, refuser de participer au mensonge social, est un risque sûr de se voir considéré comme un élément marginal. (106)

Transvestism has become the norm, and moral integrity, figured as the absence of artifice, a deviation. In this topsy-turvy order, then, the *góor-jigéen* is fully normalized; indeed, he becomes the most visible incarnation of the milieu’s privileging of artifice. Bakar’s transformation of his skin with *xeesal* is not only a form of racial drag, but a gendered one as well, for skin-lightening is a feminized practice in Senegal. (When she finds out, Héléne is shocked: “Du *xeesal*! Un homme...du *xeesal*!”)(107) As I will show in my reading of contemporary media representations of *góor-jigéen* below, *xeesal* is a ubiquitous sign of the *góor-jigéen*’s deviation from gender normativity, at the same time

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<sup>307</sup> “Et même peut-être voudra-t-elle m’épouser. Mais je ne lui demanderai pas; si elle acceptait, cela ternirait son image dans mon cœur. Je préfère la voir toujours, dans sa pureté” (121).

as it signals his alienated attachment to whiteness and attendant rejection of Senegalese values.

After Bakar stages his own death-by-drowning with H el ene’s help, his appearance is so transformed that he is able to attend his own funeral without being recognized. As anticipated, Yama sees his death as yet another occasion to enhance her reputation; his radio obituary is a thirty-minute-plus who’s who list of all the people Yama considers important, including the *g oor-jig een* in her entourage (115). The funeral crowd treats the ceremony as an opportunity to briefly perform sadness, but then to eat, gossip, and show off their fabulous clothes; many of the attendees did not even know Bakar when he was alive. Malob e officiates yet again, announcing the provenance and amount of each gift offered to the family of the deceased. At the end of the day, Bakar bursts into the room in which the family has retired to count their money, and removes his turban and boubou, unveiling his identity. His *xeesal*-induced pallor and skeletal frame give him the allure of the ghost he purports to be; with a lugubrious and sarcastic laugh, he claims he has returned from the dead to pick up the *sarax* (alms) that belong to him. His family is immobilized by shock and fear, and he gathers up the money at Yama’s feet. Yama loses all self-control, undoing and discarding her head-wrap, dancing out into the dark street barefoot, tearing her clothes and crying “Il est revenu—Wooy il est revenu! Bakar Diop dekki na!” (125) Bakar’s revenge is complete, for Yama experiences the death of dishonor by succumbing to insanity and exposing herself in the street.

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If we are to take Fall’s (and Bakar’s) word that Le Revenant describes the dehumanization of postcolonial Senegalese society, then what is the substance of the humanness from which this new order deviates? Who is its exemplar? M edoune Gueye reads the novel as a direct scriptural instantiation of Wolof moral philosophy, which, following Assane Sylla, he sees as fundamentally humanist and anthropocentric.<sup>308</sup> In La Philosophie morale des Wolof, Sylla posits that “l’homme” (read “human” here; “nit” in Wolof) is the central problem of Wolof thought: “le conna tre, chercher   gu rir son  me et son corps des insuffisances dont ils peuvent souffrir, l’habituer des son enfance   une morale de l’honneur, du sacrifice, du don de soi, tisser entre les hommes des relations sociales qui, pour contraignantes qu’elles soient, n’en sont pas moins salutaires pour tous.”<sup>309</sup> If the human subject is defined by Wolof philosophy as an agent of self-sacrifice, possessor of honor, and reproducer of a social order that is both constraining and salutary, then the members of the new society in Fall’s novel have indeed succumbed to forces of dehumanization, deviating from the norms and ethical practices that produce the human. The commodified life-cycle ceremony (the naming ceremony, the funeral) orchestrated by Malob e, where human life itself appears to be reduced to a cash value, is the paradigmatic site of this dehumanization.

In Sylla’s account of the Wolof human, however, the entanglement of Wolof philosophy with the caste system and the order of slavery is obfuscated. If the human is produced by his indoctrination into an ethics of honor, and the lower castes and slaves

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<sup>308</sup>Gu ye, *Aminata Sow Fall, oralit  er soci t  dans l’ uvre romanesque*, 45.

<sup>309</sup>Sylla, *La philosophie morale des Wolof*, 26.

are, in *géer* supremacist discourse, always-already dishonored in relation to the *géer/gor*, then the normative human of whom Sylla speaks must be free and non-casted. One could argue that the lower castes can possess caste-specific forms of honor, and that they see themselves as playing a fundamental and honorable role in the reproduction of the social order. As evidenced by the hyena and hare tales Magel collected, *géwél* see their own verbal skills and commitment to family and noble patrons as the basis of *géwél* honor. The *géwél* is, after all, “free” and therefore able to consolidate his own sense of honor in opposition to the subjugated and natively alienated slave.<sup>310</sup> The slave’s only claim to honor is honor-in-submission, a total devotion to the enhancement of the master’s honor.<sup>311</sup> In spite of these caste- and status-specific forms of honor, it is the honor of the *géer/gor* that is privileged and normalized in most iterations of the Wolof human, and this honorable subject always has its foil.

In a telling example, Sylla, perhaps unwittingly, figures the normative Wolof man as both noble and not-griot in his discussion of the passage from childhood to adulthood as entry into a new form of honorable subjectivity:

À partir d’un certain âge (35 à 40 ans), le wolof se sent trop sérieux, trop digne pour se débattre au son du tam-tam au milieu d’un cercle de spectateurs. Il ne danse plus. C’est comme si il se détournait d’un certain libertinage incompatible avec sa dignité d’homme mur. Désormais, il ne jouit plus que de la musique de xalam (guitare africaine) que le griot, à l’occasion de visites à domicile, joue en chantant les louanges de ses bienfaiteurs ou en célébrant quelque glorieux évènement historique.<sup>312</sup>

The *géwél* is the obvious constitutive outside of the dignified older man who stops dancing and enjoying music. The *géwél*, because of his profession, cannot be expected to do the same. Kesteloot and Dieng take Sylla to task for romanticizing the hierarchical caste order, which Sylla claims is successfully naturalized and uncontested, and for failing to take into consideration the widespread exploitation of the peasant and slave classes.<sup>313</sup> Magel frames his thesis on *géwél* honor as a response to Boubakar Ly’s seminal work on honor in Wolof and Peul societies, which is also guilty of normativizing the honor of free, non-casted men.

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<sup>310</sup> One of Magel’s *géwél* informants, Bessi Njai, makes a clear distinction between the status of the *géwél*, who sees himself as possessing a caste-specific form of honor and therefore having a legitimate claim to human, and that of the slave, who is dishonored and therefore akin to a degraded animal: “From the time of our father and our grandfather, we have never been slaves. A man who is a slave is like a donkey. When he was captured in war he lost his honor. For him there is only farting and kicking his heels and rolling around in the dust. You know, before the English, there were many wars. Our father and his father’s father fought in them. They led the warriors to battle. They sang songs of war and praised them. They wanted them to fight bravely. Our relatives were also brave, for many of them died there. Our father has taught us that it is fear that kills a man. It kills him even before the battle begins. We would rather die in battle than be captured and sold as slaves” (Magel, *Hare and hyena*, 46).

<sup>311</sup> “Pas une fois, au cours de sa longue vie, Warèle n’avait programmé une action en faveur de sa personne. Son existence s’était diluée dans la quête perpétuelle du bien-être et de la réussite de ses maîtres” (Fall, *Jujubier*, 23).

<sup>312</sup> Sylla, *La philosophie morale des Wolof*, 65.

<sup>313</sup> Kesteloot, *Du Tieddo au Talibé contes et mythes wolof*, 9.

If the normative humanness abandoned in the novel is not only covertly *géer* honor, but also gendered honor, as Bakar argues, then gender is another covert but necessary property of the Wolof human. Nonconformity with the normative performance of gender and gendered honor would thus exclude the subject from the Wolof human. If we are to take Yama and Malobé's divergence from normative gender, and Mame Aïssa and Tante Ngoné's strict adherence to feminine *sutura*, as cautionary tales in the case of the former and exemplars in the case of the latter, then the logical conclusion is that women's human status is predicated on their performance of feminized submission to men—hence the Western feminist objection to the text. However, my analysis above reveals that the text's position on gendered *géer* honor is much more complex. Bakar's obsession with his own *jom* and fetishization of the *sutura* of Mame Aïssa, his mother and even Hélène leads to his imbalanced and irresponsible behavior; Tante Ngoné and Mame Aïssa's fanatical submission to authority allows for public abuse in the case of the former, and dissolution of marriage with the man she loves in the latter. Even Sada—Bakar's steadfast best friend whom Bakar sees as the incarnation of masculine honor and whom critic Médoune Gueye considers the positive exemplar of “reasonable, measured human conduct” in the text<sup>314</sup>—is guilty of an excessive attachment to the *géer*'s obligation to perform *teranga*, or hospitality. Men of all sorts gather at Sada's house on the weekend to play cards, forgetting their familial responsibilities and engaging in undignified conversations peppèred with vulgarity and insults. Out of an obligation to receive and take care of guests, Sada allows them to squat in his house, corrupting his children, and his wife Mouna is burdened with the task of serving meals for up to forty guests every weekend. Mouna says nothing for fear of being branded as a selfish, unwelcoming wife. It is Bakar who attempts to impose a melodramatic order by elevating the virtuous characters and condemning the alienated villains, but the text cannot be reduced to Bakar's subjectivity.

By isolating and privileging the husband-wife hierarchy, and by subscribing to the tradition versus modernity binary, both Bakar and the feminist critics misrepresent the political terrain mapped out in *Le Revenant*. When the lens is widened to bring into view the multiple, overlapping hierarchies that characterize Wolof society, a more complicated picture of the relationship between gendered honor and power emerges. Yama's power is not only a “modern” power conferred by the new bourgeois order, but a “traditional” one vested in her by the age hierarchy and the system that grants control over marriage transactions to women.<sup>315</sup> The *diriyaanke* could be seen as contemporary incarnations of the *lingéer* and *aawo*, titled royal women who had land, wealth, and large groups of clients at their disposal, and who were known for their lavish parties which served to consolidate their royal honor in centuries past.<sup>316</sup> The senior women in Mame Aïssa's family use their traditional authority over her to direct her actions in ways they deem appropriate for a given situation. They have the power to make or break her marriage, as they have the power to ascribe or deny honorable manhood to Bakar. Malobé functions as

<sup>314</sup>Guèye, *Aminata Sow Fall, oralité et société dans l'œuvre romanesque*, 45.

<sup>315</sup> Bakar's inability to understand why Yama doesn't use *xeesal* is evidence of his thwarted desire to represent her as wholly alienated, of his attempt to simplify what is in reality a complex positionality.

<sup>316</sup>Rousseau, *Le Senegal*, 40-42.

a sign of the queering of the gendered order, but he does so as a low-status client practically interchangeable with *gével*, and his queerness is strikingly mirrored in his reverse image, the figure of the powerful *bàjjan* (Mame Aïssa's "masculine" paternal aunt). Indeed, the text seems to intimate that there is something queer about a traditional order in which certain women were vested with a sovereign power that Bakar, in his limited understanding of gendered power, would perceive as "masculine." While there may be some degree of nostalgia in Fall's text for noble *sutura*, it cannot be easily equated with a nostalgia for a generalized female powerlessness as the terms of inclusion into the human. This latter nostalgia is Bakar's own.

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If the elder sister and *bàjjan* are men-women of sorts by virtue of their authority, then the complex articulation of power to gendered honor in the old order—left unexplored by ethnophilosophers like Sylla and Ly who are concerned to present a tidy and monolithic account of Wolof honor—may provide yet another clue as to why the *góor-jigéen* was not perceived to be as problematic in the past as he is today. The system of overlapping hierarchies allowed both for an inclusion of transgendered performance (and perhaps non-normative sexual practices) when enacted by already dishonored and ungendered low-caste subjects, and for the command of certain women over certain men, provided the former were superior to the latter in the age, kinship, or caste hierarchies. Gendered honor could not be fully isolated and disarticulated from these hierarchies, for they were overlapping and mutually constituting. In the eyes of a postcolonial masculinist subject like Bakar, however, both transgendered performance and women's wielding of power are part of the same queer formation that threatens his own will to power, and he therefore has to figure them as a deviation from a so-called traditional patriarchal order.

The context of Bakar's isolation of the performance of normative gender and gendered honor as marker of humanness is the ascendancy of a new order that challenges the ethics of the old order. As the caste system is dismantled and blood and noble behavior cease to serve as stable timocratic indicators, the old foils for noble honor cease to serve a consistent symbolic function, and the *géer* man can no longer rely on his caste location as the basis for his superior social standing. In the wake of this breakdown, the gender hierarchy becomes enshrined as the sole anchor for the distribution of Wolof honor and humanness, thus stabilizing the superiority of the *géer* man in relation to the inferiority of "women." This shift is enabled not only by the emergence of the postcolonial bourgeois order, but by the increasing dominance of Muslim, Christian, and secular humanist ethics that challenge the racial logic of caste segregation.

Fall's text marks an earlier phase in a set of transformations that are more fully realized today. Old moral boundaries between castes have, to a great extent, collapsed, and while Fall sees the bourgeois order as dehumanizing, it is nevertheless democratizing—wealth and fame are (theoretically) accessible to anyone. Members of the lower castes are no longer bound to their inherited occupations, but can enter into politics, work for international aid organizations, and become religious leaders or famous soccer players, among a host of other possibilities. This is not to say caste no longer matters; indeed, many *géer* families will not let their children marry members of the lower castes

(sometimes under threat of disownment), regardless of the *ñeeño*'s level of education or wealth. The discourse of *gévél* indecency endures, but it holds less power in a climate in which indecency increasingly appears to be a norm rather than a deviation. Moreover, a caste-specific form of honor that the *gévél* have always claimed for themselves—derived from their crucial roles as conflict mediators, historians, genealogists, storytellers, and truth-tellers—is recognized in the public sphere, and their new moniker “communicateurs traditionnels” is evidence of their resignification as valorized subjects, as living embodiments of a precious tradition.<sup>317</sup> Further, discourses that assert the equality of all Muslims in the *umma* and those that condemn the caste system as archaic, anti-modern, and racist have rendered overt caste-prejudiced comments and practices politically incorrect. *gévél* corpses are no longer strung up in baobab trees, but are instead given proper burials in Muslim cemeteries.

If it is now possible for everyone to aspire to elite honor, then it is also possible for everyone to participate in behavior formerly classified as the purview of low-caste subjects. If the privileging of wealth and fame is perceived as a kind of *gévélization* of society, then the polluting dishonor that was previously contained in the *ñeeño* seeps out into the rest of the population. The loosening of state control on the media in the 1980s and 1990s resulted in a proliferation of newspapers, radio stations, and new cultural forms like hip-hop which became the site of the elaboration of popular discourses calling for democracy, regime change, an end to corruption, and a dismantling of entrenched gerontocratic power structures.<sup>318</sup> This revolution in the public sphere involved the transgression of the *sutura* contract that had prevented the people from publicly shaming politicians by exposing their flaws and misdeeds. This break opened up a Pandora's box of disclosure, making it possible for new subjects to use the media as the stage for insults and the revelation of private lives previously protected by *sutura*—to the point that sensationalist exposure became the very *raison d'être* of the media.<sup>319</sup> The spread of new social media in the aughts has intensified and further democratized access to technologies of disclosure, making everyone a potential *gévél* who has a stage for hurling insults, circulating private information (about both oneself and others), and parading around in the hope of being seen and celebrated.<sup>320</sup>

This pervasive break with the norms of *sutura* has impacted the perception of ideal feminine behavior. This shift is evident in a recent adultery scandal involving a divorced, professional woman from the Dakar elite and a married man. The man had taken nude pictures of his lover on his cell-phone, which his wife discovered and circulated publicly in order to destroy the reputation of her rival—photos that reached the e-mail inboxes of the Senegalese diaspora in the U.S. and France. The three concerned

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<sup>317</sup> The article entitled “Ne dites plus griot” argues for the abandonment of the very category of griot or *gévél*, but not the skills and knowledge associated with the former caste. Instead, those who choose to keep the oral tradition alive are called “traditional communicators.” “Ne dites plus « griot », dites « communicateur traditionnel » | Griots”, n.d., <http://griots.blog.pelerin.info/ne-dites-plus-griot-dites-communicateur-traditionnel/>.

<sup>318</sup> Diouf, “Urban youth and Senegalese politics.”

<sup>319</sup> Taureg and Wittmann, *Entre tradition orale et nouvelles technologies*.

<sup>320</sup> See, for example, the website [facedakar.com](http://facedakar.com).

parties, all the modern equivalent of *géer*, violated the *géer* code that sees the possession and enactment of *sutura* as central to the performance of honor. The exposed woman dishonored herself by consciously posing nude for a cell phone photo (that would serve as proof of adultery, no less); the man dishonored both himself and his girlfriend by taking the picture and allowing his cell phone to be snatched and perused by his wife; and the wife, by violating not only the girlfriend's *sutura* but that of her husband, dishonors herself. All three lack *sutura*, but it is the wife who, in the idealized order of the caste system, would have been seen as the guilty party.<sup>321</sup> Although she did not commit adultery, she was the one who chose to circulate the photos publicly. It is she who ought to be condemned for violating what is not only a generalized *géer* obligation to be discreet (regardless of what one knows about others), but a specifically feminine obligation to cover her husband with *sutura*. A wife who exposes her husband's dirty laundry has committed the ultimate violation, for she has not only publicly flouted her husband's authority, thereby subverting the husband-wife hierarchy, but transgressed the boundary between *géwél* behavior and *géer* behavior, and therefore brought the death of ignominy into the living community of nobles.

These days, however, it is no longer clear that the wife is the most culpable party. The new regime of exposure has made the *géer* wife's exposure of her husband to the death of shame thinkable, doable and defensible. If, as Agamben argues, what distinguishes modern biopower from older forms of biopower is not the distribution of different kinds of life, but rather the increasing indistinction between bare life and political life, then the regime of exposure in Senegal can be seen as part of a uniquely modern biopolitical formation that dramatically reconfigures the biopolitical caste system. In this new formation, anyone can possess and enact *sutura* (and honor more generally), and anyone can violate it, thus generating an indistinction between the right to protected life and the capacity to be killed with impunity. On the one hand, this indistinction allows for the constitution of a Senegalese national citizenry that is not internally differentiated by caste, is comprised of members who have equal rights and responsibilities, and possesses a collective life that should be enhanced and protected. On the other, it generates anxiety about the spreading of pollution, the blurring of boundaries through which identities had previously cohered, and the loss (for some subjects) of the superior status previously afforded them in the caste hierarchy. One effect of this anxiety is the reactionary retrenching in a hierarchy that can still be legitimated through a recourse to biological difference and religious tradition: that of gender.

It is in this context that I would like to read the acute abjection of the *góor-jigéen* of the last few years. While in Fall's 1976 text the *góor-jigéen* could secure a protected location as a pseudo-*géwél*, this location is no longer possible; the *góor-jigéen* is now clearly the hyena to the *géwél*'s hare, an indisputable figure of bare life who can be killed with impunity. While in the universe of Fall's novel the *góor-jigéen* could serve as a sign of everyone's degradation in the new order, he is now the figure in which that generalized degradation can be concentrated, externalized and purged. It is through the production of an inhuman, ungendered *góor-jigéen* subject that the Senegalese subject can now be both

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<sup>321</sup> I thank Mariame Sy for bringing this recent scandal to my attention.

*gével* and *géer*, or, rather, neither *gével* nor *géer*, but Senegalese *tout court*. The values that define the Senegalese human are under attack from forces that can only be figured as outside, a move that produces a national inside of honorable citizens concerned to protect “society” and a *góor-jigéen* folk devil who is the enemy within.

The visibility that surprised Crowder in the 1950s and that Fall depicts in the 1970s is not of the same order as the morbid visibility of the *góor-jigéen* today. The *góor-jigéen* may have occupied public space then, but now he is *out*, identified, named, and therefore available for claims to a legible identity and enforceable rights, as well as extreme calls for extermination. On the one hand, this novel visibility may have been informed by the broader transnational conversation about LGBTI rights and same-sex marriage, increased activism among Senegalese LGBTI in local support groups, and the targeting and study of the MSM community by the public health sector. These factors have all contributed to the crystallization of a *góor-jigéen* subject who is also legible as a “gay” or “homosexual” subject, and who can be perceived as having a fixed identity and belonging to a minority community. On the other hand, the *góor-jigéen* in this incarnation would not be visible as such if the sensationalist media had not exposed him.

The *sutura* pact, whereby the *góor-jigéen* shrouds his activities in discretion and the honorable community avoids acknowledging his existence, was eroded slightly by the media coverage of the exploits of Maniang Kassé in the 1990s and the publication of Cheikh Niang’s study in the early 2000s.<sup>322</sup> It was definitively broken when, in February 2008, *Icône* magazine published photos of an alleged same-sex wedding ceremony attended by several *góor-jigéen* of the young, fashionable set. *Icône* obtained the photos via one of the party photographers, who sold the pictures to the magazine without the attendees’ knowledge or consent.<sup>323</sup> Mansour Dieng, editor-in-chief of the magazine, decided to publish the photos in order to denounce the increasing degradation of Senegalese values among the youth; his editorial for the issue is titled “Kaddu gor,” or “a man of honor’s word.” A dramatic sequence of events ensued, including the arrest of several *góor-jigéen*; the alleged leveling of death threats against Mansour Dieng by party attendees; the release of the aforementioned *góor-jigéen* from prison after a few days; an anti-gay protest at the Grande Mosquée de Dakar that turned into a violent clash between protesters and police;<sup>324</sup> the exile of the *góor-jigéen* involved to neighboring countries; the subsequent declaration of the Gambian president Yahya Jammeh that he would behead all homosexuals, resulting in a reverse exodus for those who had sought refuge there; multiple acts of violence against known *góor-jigéen* and those suspected of being

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<sup>322</sup> In 2002, the now-defunct popular rag *Frasques* relayed the findings of Niang’s study in a special issue on the homosexuality in Senegal.

<sup>323</sup> Doug Ireland, “Senegal Gay Marriage Panic,” Accessed 2/28/08 [http://gaycitynews.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=19297042&BRD=2729&PAG=461&dept\\_id=568864&rfi=6](http://gaycitynews.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=19297042&BRD=2729&PAG=461&dept_id=568864&rfi=6)

<sup>324</sup> “MANIF’ CONTRE LES HOMOSEXUELS / REPRESSION - Plusieurs blessés et interpellations enregistrés : Des grenades lacrymogènes pour disperser les manifestants,” *TRANSPORTS A AMAR*, n.d., [http://www.transportsamar.com/MANIF-CONTRE-LES-HOMOSEXUELS-REPRESSION-Plusieurs-blesses-et-interpellations-enregistres-Des-grenades-lacrymogenes-pour\\_a2637.html](http://www.transportsamar.com/MANIF-CONTRE-LES-HOMOSEXUELS-REPRESSION-Plusieurs-blesses-et-interpellations-enregistres-Des-grenades-lacrymogenes-pour_a2637.html).



*góor-jigéen*; and the granting of U.S. refugee status to Pape Mbaye, deemed the leader of the group in the photos, now living in New York City.<sup>325</sup>

These events were extensively covered by the international press, including major outlets like The New York Times, and Mansour Dieng and Pape Mbaye alike became solicited celebrities. In Senegal, the events sparked an unprecedented public dialogue which effectively codified the outsidership of the *góor-jigéen* from the Senegalese human. In this crystallized set of discourses, dominant interpretations of Islam and Christianity place the *góor-jigéen* outside of God's protection, outside the community of believers, and, according to a tendentious reading of the story of Lot to which pundits inevitably refer, subject to extermination. The *góor-jigéen* is also symbolically outside the family, as he is easily disowned and figured as non-reproducing. Finally, the *góor-jigéen* is outside the gender order which gives the human subject its legibility and enables its placement within a kinship hierarchy. While the hyphenated Wolof term could be seen to gesture toward a dialectic between male and female that would produce a third category, the emphasis in dominant discourse is on the illegible, ungendered nature of the *góor-jigéen*: “ni homme, ni femme” rather than “mi-homme, mi-femme.” The Wolof term has become synonymous with “homosexuel” (or “homo”), “gay,” and “pédé,” all terms that do not have the sublative potential of the Wolof term, and that ascribe a foreign, easily abjected identity to the *góor-jigéen*. Wholly outside the human, then, the *góor-jigéen* cannot access the forms of honor that define the person as a bearer of rights and as a subject deserving of communal protection. Even though it is obvious that the media made the first move in this spiral of exposure—the wedding took place in a private home, after all, and the attendees did not authorize the publication of the photos—Icône's violation of the *sutura* of Pape Mbaye et al is figured as no violation after all, because, as always-already dishonored, hyena-like subjects, they have no *sutura* that can be violated, no claim to the protection that *sutura* can confer.

Through its *sutura*-mediated abjection of the *góor-jigéen*, the media manages to reconcile its seemingly contradictory roles as agent of exposure and defender of traditional Senegalese values. Indeed, *sutura* plays a prominent role in the homophobic discourse generated during the thick of the marriage scandal: one editorial entitled “Homosexualité: Halte à la dérive” asks

La société sénégalaise, jadis cimentée par les valeurs cardinales qui sont le kersa (pudeur), le jom (dignité) et la soutoura (retenue), léguées par nos aïeux, serait-elle en train d'aller à vau-l'eau? Ces substrats séculaires, garde-fous sociaux par excellence, seraient-ils en passe de se diluer, pour donner libre cours à des contre-valeurs venues d'on ne sait quels cieux?<sup>326</sup>

In the declaration “Mariage des homosexuels: Agir avant qu'il ne soit trop tard!” the Collectif des Associations Islamiques du Senegal (CAIS) makes a similar argument,

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<sup>325</sup> After being attacked in Dakar, Pape Mbaye fled to Ghana, where he was attacked again by a group of Senegalese ex-patriates who had learned of his presence. Alioune Tine, the director of the Dakar-based human rights group Raddho, petitioned for refugee status on Mbaye's behalf.

<sup>326</sup>“allAfrica.com: Sénégal: Homosexualité - halte à la dérive !”, n.d., <http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/200802111541.html>.

although the values under attack are understood to be Muslim, not secular. The authors call upon all believers and religious authorities to resist indifference

face aux assauts répétés de ses ennemis de la foi et de la morale, qui ne se gênent plus à agresser à visage découvert, les valeurs sacrées qui fondent notre foi religieuse, et qui constituent l'essence même des vertus de 'sutura' (réserve), de 'kersa' (pudeur), et de 'diom' (dignité) que nous ont léguées nos vaillants ancêtres, les Grandes figures de l'Islam qui reposent en terre sénégalaise.<sup>327</sup>

After citing Quranic verses condemning the people of Lot and a hadith commanding elimination for anyone caught in the act of the people of Lot—thus legitimizing calls for the liquidation of the gay community—the declaration then claims that the aforementioned values have always enabled Senegal to be a haven of peaceful coexistence among her sons. In a convergence of the logics of biopolitics, sovereignty and war, the agent of immorality and cultural death must be violently eliminated in order to ensure the continued peaceful life of the people. The idiom of *sutura* defines the field of the political, as the enemy only becomes truly visible when operating unveiled, “à visage découvert.” Since the *góor-jigéen*'s enemy status is predicated on his exposure, and that exposure is predicated on a violation of *sutura*, then the enemy of the nation is, by definition, the subject who transgresses *sutura*.<sup>328</sup>

By moving outside Senegalese culture, the *góor-jigéen* is seen to be the agent of his own dehumanization. As he has parted with his humanity, he can make no legitimate claim to the enjoyment of human rights. A comment following a news story on the web argues that human rights organizations that defend gay rights should take into account understandings of human rights derived from “African” ethical systems:

Les organisations de défense de droit de l'homme ne devraient-elles pas réfléchir aux principes fondamentaux des droits de l'homme inscrit dans nos valeurs culturelles et morales au lieu de recopier ce qui se passe en occident. Défendre les pd, est-ce défendre les droits de l'homme? Ca ne correspond nullement à nos valeurs ni culturelles, ni religieuses. Nos anc^tres ne nous ont pas enseigné à être des pd. Qu'on soit musulman, chrétiens ou animistes, nous sommes africains. Connaissez vous une communauté africaine pédé. L'histoire de notre continent est pleine de contradiction, mais jamais on ne fait cas de pd. Tout simplement parce que pd est une exception exceptionnelle. Maintenant, il y a des gens aux idées farfelues qui voudraient nous faire croire qu'accepter les pédé, accepter la

<sup>327</sup>“MARIAGE D'HOMOSEXUELS : Les Associations (...)”, n.d., <http://www.awa-net.net/spip.php?article1695>.

<sup>328</sup> The statement ends with an expression of complete support for the embattled, peace-loving journalists at *Icône* magazine who were only doing their job by exposing the gangrene threatening to consume the youth. This total support for the magazine is an interesting move on the part of the conservative collective, given *Icône*'s penchant for fashion shoots of scantily-clad models, as well as its celebration of a celebrity culture obsessed with wealth and artifice. Even more interesting is this notion that journalists were “just doing their job”; when journalists expose the private business of religious figures—as in the Serigne Bara-Sophie Ndiaye Cissokho scandal discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation—they are accused of transgressing cardinal religious and cultural values.

chute vertigineuse de toutes nos valeurs, c'est signe de progrès. Si ça continue, la prostitution contre laquelle il faut se battre sera plus forte, les crimes, les insultes, les pédophiles.<sup>329</sup>

Since, the author argues, “fags” have no human legibility in these systems, they cannot possess human rights. Mamadou Dia, the independence leader and politician who was Senghor’s right-hand man in the early sixties and is now in his nineties, argues that gays have actively dehumanized themselves, thus choosing bare, animal-like life over human life: “l’argument du respect des droits de l’homme ne tient pas la route, s’agissant d’individus qui se sont déshumanisés par leur acte en s’abaissant au rang de bêtes.”<sup>330</sup> In response to Alioune Tine’s public defense, in the name of human rights, of the *góor-jigéen* implicated in the marriage scandal, Mansour Dieng wonders how it is that they seem to have more rights than everyone else, seeing as they have renounced their humanity (and perhaps more specifically their “manhood,” depending on how you choose to translate “homme”): “peut-être que pour lui (Alioune Tine), les gays qui ont renié leur statut d’homme sont plus humains que nous au point qu’ils méritent d’avoir plus d’attention et de soins.”<sup>331</sup>

Abdou Latif Gueye, the now deceased politician and director of Jamra, a conservative NGO formed to expose and combat social ills, frames the repression of homosexuals as a struggle against dehumanizing forces:

‘Le combat contre l’homosexualité et toutes les déviances qui déshumanisent l’individu est un combat légitime, moral certes mais hautement civique et patriotique. Il ne s’agit point d’un problème de libertés individuelles. Car liberté, libertinage et outrage sont des réalités tout à fait différentes’, précise le patron de l’organisation Jamra. Selon lui, le combat contre l’homosexualité et les lobbies qui les protègent, est un ‘problème de développement parce qu’il est illusoire de construire un pays avec des désaxés, des détraqués, des déculturés et des lobbies aux desseins sordides. L’enjeu c’est la préservation de notre cellule familiale, la sauvegarde de la santé mentale, morale et physique de nos enfants, en somme le devenir de l’identité de notre peuple. Il ne s’agit nullement de faire preuve de compassion hypocrite ni de complaisance coupable envers une pratique abjecte condamnée irrémédiablement par la loi de Dieu et les lois des hommes.’<sup>332</sup>

Gueye articulates a biopolitical concern with the life of the population—its collective physical, mental and moral health, the future of its collective national identity. This biopolitical orientation approximates the formation whose ascendancy in the West in the nineteenth century is traced by Foucault in Society Must Be Defended. In this modern

<sup>329</sup>“Vendredi noir a Dakar,” 16 February 2008.

<sup>330</sup>“allAfrica.com: Sénégal: Contre l’homosexualité - Mamadou Dia appelle les croyants à poursuivre la lutte”, n.d., <http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/200802191631.html>.

<sup>331</sup>“Réponse à Souleymane Jules Diop qui avait défendu les homos: Le dirpub de 'Icône' ouvre la polémique” Accessed Feb. 19, 2008 on [www.penthionet.com](http://www.penthionet.com).

<sup>332</sup>“allAfrica.com: Sénégal: Affaire des homosexuels - Latif Guèye réclame une application sans complaisance de la loi”, n.d., <http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/200802210886.html>.

formation, the aim of politics is to protect and maximize the life of the people, where “the people” is perceived as mass/nation/race. Biopower can simultaneously protect the life of the population and call for the death of some of its members because it is through the expulsion of degenerate and dehumanizing forces that the population’s life will be improved: “The fact that the other dies does not mean simply that I live in the sense that his death guarantees my safety; the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer.”<sup>333</sup> At stake for Gueye is the development of Senegal, and this development is predicated on the purity and health of Senegalese humanity.

This discourse on the inhumanity of the *góor-jigéen* turned the public sphere into a veritable battlefield, where moral entrepreneurs like Mansour Dieng cast themselves as *ceddo* warriors<sup>334</sup> prepared to die in defense of society’s honor,<sup>335</sup> thus figuring Senegal as a *géer* subject whose pure life must be protected from the forces of death. When the *góor-jigéen* implicated in the marriage scandal were released after a brief incarceration, Imam Mbaye Niang and other politicians and religious leaders planned an anti-gay protest scheduled to depart from the Grande Mosquée de Dakar. They were initially granted state permission to march, but were informed the next day that the government had retracted that permission. The protest took place anyway, and the police made an attempt at violent suppression when the crowd refused to disperse, deploying tear gas grenades and clubbing protestors; the protestors riposted with stones and acted as human shields, some declaring they were prepared to be martyred in the name of Islam.<sup>336</sup> The media’s circulation of dramatic images of the mosque under siege made the state’s equivocation in regards to the *góor-jigéen*’s legal status even more scandalous, confirming to the Senegalese public that, in the final analysis, the state is more concerned

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<sup>333</sup>Foucault, *Society must be defended*, 255.

<sup>334</sup> The *ceddo* were slave warriors who were retained by royals of the Wolof monarchies. As slaves, they were technically dishonored in relation to the *gor* (free men), and could derive honor only through service to their masters. Wolof royals concerned to protect their position from the threat posed by other nobles relied heavily on the *ceddo* for protection, tax collection, and, in the period of intensified slave trading, for acquisition of wealth through slave raiding and pillage. The *ceddo* ended up constituting a powerful force and amassing significant wealth, at some points threatening the power of the monarchy. When the Wolof ruling class was decimated by internecine fighting and French colonial incursion in the nineteenth century, many *ceddo* joined the Sufi orders and became islamized. The *ceddo*—who had been associated with godlessness, drunkenness, rape, and pillage—were resignified as holy warriors and became incorporated into the *géer* community. Monteil, *Esquisses sénégalaises. Wálo. Kayor. Dyolof. Mourides. Un Visionnaire. [With illustrations and maps.]*, 87–88. It is thanks to this incorporation that Mansour Dieng can proudly claim to be a “pure blood” *ceddo*, a *gor* (free man of honor), and a righteous Muslim at the same time.

<sup>335</sup>“MANSOUR DIENG, EDITEUR DE ICONE MAGAZINE: L’homme qui a révélé le mariage des homosexuels « je n’ai pas peur... J’ai tenu tête à Me Wade et il a reconnu mon courage »,” *Xibar.net - Référence multimedia du Sénégal*, n.d., [http://www.xibar.net/MANSOUR-DIENG-EDITEUR-DE-ICONE-MAGAZINE-L-homme-qui-a-revele-le-mariage-des-homosexuels-je-n-ai-pas-peur-J-ai-tenu-tete\\_a7397.html](http://www.xibar.net/MANSOUR-DIENG-EDITEUR-DE-ICONE-MAGAZINE-L-homme-qui-a-revele-le-mariage-des-homosexuels-je-n-ai-pas-peur-J-ai-tenu-tete_a7397.html).

<sup>336</sup>“MANIF’ CONTRE LES HOMOSEXUELS / REPRESSION - Plusieurs blessés et interpellations enregistrés.”” op.cit.

to protect the rights of gays than the rights of “normal” citizens to march in peaceful protest; indeed, it was evidence that the state does not represent the citizens at all, but rather acts at the behest of foreign powers—thus relinquishing its sovereignty—and is composed of “des gens impropres, souillés.”<sup>337</sup>

Following their release, the *góor-jigéen* were obliged to curtail their public movements; according to one article, Pape Mbaye was almost “lynched” by a hostile mob at two different ceremonies he had attempted to attend.<sup>338</sup> The verb “lynch” became ubiquitous, appearing both in homophobic calls for extermination (“vous les gays vous méritez d’être lynchés à mort,” one web commentator says) and in calls for moderation and alternative methods for addressing the problem. At the same time as *góor-jigéen* were obliged to become invisible—to the point of physically leaving Senegalese territory—in order to protect themselves, the media busied itself with the proliferation of discourses on homosexuality (religious, psychoanalytic, sociological) and on the gay community in Senegal, turning the *góor-jigéen* into an irrevocably visible subject. While this media saturation could have resulted in popular fatigue, causing the homophobic swell to go the way of other faddish moral panics that are quickly forgotten .when a new panic comes along to take its place, it instead consolidated and intensified the panic, at least for the years immediately following the marriage scandal.

Indeed, the reiterated outsidersness of the *góor-jigéen* proved tenacious and enduring, increasingly represented as an explicitly death-like state. A series of articles published in *Weekend* magazine<sup>339</sup> seven months after the gay marriage scandal broke produce a subject who is not only dehumanized and outside culture, but clearly marked as multiply dead, setting the stage for the further consolidation of the *góor-jigéen*’s deadness through exhumation. In an interview bearing the title “On m’a appelé à 7 heures du matin pour m’annoncer ma mort”—a literal interpellation of the *góor-jigéen* as dead subject!—Serigne Mbaye Samb, identified as a *góor-jigéen* at the very top of the text, comes out from hiding to reassure his friends and family that he is, in fact, alive. He had been confused with another well-known *góor-jigéen* of an older generation of the same first name, Serigne Mbaye Gueye, who had recently passed away. This confusion was possible because he was forced into exile in Mali after being implicated in the Petit Mbao marriage scandal.

The magazine frames his return to visibility as a return from the dead; indeed, he is doubly resuscitated, as he was first “killed” by the gay marriage scandal—rendered socially dead and exiled—and again by media outlets that confused him with the other Serigne Mbaye. In an echo of both Bakar’s ghostlike drag and the *ñoole* corpse, Serigne Mbaye Samb is described as having a “visage boutonneux” and a “teint salement chahuté par les effets néfastes du xeesal”; “il arbore l’indéchiffrable sourire du ‘miraculé’ et la frousse palpable du ‘revenant.’” Repeated references to his feminine gestures, association with the feminized practices of *cuuraay* (perfumed incense) and *xeesal*, and connection to

<sup>337</sup> This is a web comment following the article “Les Associations islamiques interpellent les croyants,” op. Cit.

<sup>338</sup>“PAPE MBAYE EN GAMBIE, SERIGNE MBAYE A DUBAI, (...)”, n.d., <http://www.awa-net.net/spip.php?article1749>.

<sup>339</sup> *Weekend*, 58, 1-7 August 2008.

the *diriyaanke* of Senegal emphasize his non-conformity to masculine gender performance and his involvement in the production of degraded female power.

Since *Weekend Magazine* makes its money on the promise to “reveal all,” Serigne Mbaye is a “bad client”; he is scared and uncooperative, but nevertheless, in the metaphors of *sutura*, “il lève un coin de voile sur sa vie secrète.” The interviewer tries to make good on the magazine’s promise, repeatedly attempting to force him to admit he is a *góor-jigéen* and a homosexual; Serigne Mbaye is consistently evasive, claiming to be married to a woman, but refusing to reveal her name. The interviewer asks for proof of his marriage in the hopes of catching him in a lie; she also tries, unsuccessfully, to get him to narrate the “origin” of his homosexuality, and to detail his involvement in the Petit Mbao marriage. The interview aims to incite the *góor-jigéen* to discourse, a tactic that recalls regimes of confession and psychoanalysis that brought sexuality into discourse in the West and produced a homosexual subject that could be named, known, and criminalized.<sup>340</sup>

Mbaye tries to resist the dehumanized classification of the *góor-jigéen* by emphasizing his *gégél* identity, a move that, given the *gégél*’s changed status, would place him within the Senegalese human community: “je sais ce que je suis, un simple griot”; “je suis un griot hors pair, qui fait son travail correctement.” In a more risky move, he posits “du sang noble coule dans mes veines,” staking a claim to noble masculine bravery to counter Pape Mbaye’s alleged report that he cried like a sissy during his brief incarceration after the marriage incident. (The editor reinforces the dubiousness of this claim to noble blood by tagging a telling “[sic]” onto the end of the quote.) In a bid for personhood as signaled by the possession of *sutura*, he continuously asserts his right to privacy, refusing to go into details about his “vie privée,” a right he claims as an “honest citizen who works to provide for his family,” where providing for one’s family is the cornerstone of masculine *jom*. He criticizes the press for being a rumor machine and irresponsibly publishing unverified information “en sacrifiant les gens ou en les mettant en mal avec la population.” He then invokes (without naming it explicitly) the Islamic principle of *satr* from which *sutura* is derived, which cautions against the unnecessary prying into and exposure of people’s private business, especially in the absence of proof of wrongdoing. Serigne Mbaye posits that each person has a side of him that he hides, and therefore everyone should be covered with *sutura* by their neighbors, not just the select elite few. Each person is responsible for his own actions, and his own relationship with God; judgement, therefore, should be the purview of the individual and his God, not the media or the general population.

Serigne Mbaye does not emerge a perfectly virtuous subject victimized by the press, unfortunately—he is guilty of inconsistencies, hyperbole, and self-aggrandizement, undoubtedly overstating his connections to the important dignitaries of the country. However, the interviewer’s fixation on catching him in a lie is further proof of the *góor-jigéen*’s always-already degraded personhood; what would be seen as an honorable performance of discretion for other subjects is classified in advance as “lying” for the *góor-jigéen* subject. According to homophobic discourse, the *góor-jigéen*, like the *gégél*

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<sup>340</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 18.

in *gée*r supremacist discourse, is an innately dishonest subject. In his response to Pape Mbaye's claim in an October 2010 interview that Mansour Dieng is in fact gay and published the wedding photos to deflect attention from himself, Dieng cites the Wolof expression "mëna fen ni góor-jigéen" ("to have the capacity for lying of a *góor-jigéen*") to discredit Mbaye.<sup>341</sup> Homophobic discourse obfuscates the fact that the *góor-jigéen* has to lie in order to protect himself from violence and death; in the case of the Serigne Mbaye Samb interview, the "lies" are part of his strategy to resist his interpellation as dead subject.

The scandal that led the public to believe Serigne Mbaye Samb was dead was not simply the passing of another man of the same name, which would have been unremarkable beyond an obituary mention, but the rejection of Serigne Mbaye Gueye's body by the gatekeepers of the cemetery at Touba. The cemetery at Touba is the resting place for disciples of the Muridiyya; to be buried there is to be confirmed for eternity a member of the Murid community and, as it is sacred ground, to be guaranteed entry into paradise.<sup>342</sup> This desire to be buried in Touba's cemetery is an indication of a certain degree of piety, and the article "Itinéraire du góordjigéen décédé: La tragédie de Serigne Mbaye Gueye" in the same issue of *Weekend* toys with the possibility that Gueye might be classifiable as a subject who possesses honor. He was a "reconverted" *góor-jigéen*, married with several children, who had tried to distance himself from the *góor-jigéen* life in middle age. According to sources close to him, he was severely pained by the "humiliation" inflicted on the gay community by Pape Mbaye et al, a community that had been previously discreet and off the radar of the public sphere. He is reported to have expressed the preference for physical death over the shame of dishonor and exposure brought on by the young generation's visibility ("il se disait atteint dans son honneur et sa dignité par ce qui s'est passé dernièrement dans ce pays").

After the same-sex marriage affair, young people set fire to his house (also in Petit Mbao), and he was forced into exile in the Gambia in order to protect his family. This social death is figured by the article as more tragic than that of Serigne Mbaye Samb and Pape Mbaye, since Gueye was a discreet man who "a vécu son orientation sexuelle de manière réservé, ne dérangeant personne" and he had long left the life of an "homme de compagnie des grandes dames de Dakar." He had proven his commitment to the enhanced life of the Senegalese community by remaining faithful to the pre-existing *sutura* contract, and by renouncing his association with the queer, powerful womanhood embodied by the *diriyaanke*. In an attempt to ascribe normative masculine honor to the ex-*góor-jigéen*, one friend claims "he was a brave man who worked to feed his family."

The article nevertheless casts suspicion on these claims of reconversion by including details that remind the reader of Gueye's *góor-jigéen* life, some of which suggest he had not left it behind entirely. It quotes an old acquaintance of Gueye's, who says he was born with a "féminité" that manifested early in his childhood—a quality that

<sup>341</sup>"Depuis les Etats Unis, l'homosexuel Pape Mbaye fait de graves révélations," *Seneweb.com Senegal news*, n.d., [http://www.seneweb.com/news/Societe/depuis-les-etats-unis-l-rsquo-homosexuel-pape-mbaye-fait-de-grades-revelations\\_n\\_36396.html](http://www.seneweb.com/news/Societe/depuis-les-etats-unis-l-rsquo-homosexuel-pape-mbaye-fait-de-grades-revelations_n_36396.html).

<sup>342</sup> Eric Ross, "Touba: A Spiritual Metropolis in the Modern World," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 29:5 (1995): 222.

might not be alienable through purging or reform. The article lingers on one group of men “of dubious masculinity” at the deceased’s sparsely-attended funeral. “un groupe de six hommes... est installé à l’écart, loin des indiscretions qui vont bon train sous la tente. Ils sont d’une masculinité douteuse, parlent à la messe basse, lancent des coups d’œil furtifs de part et d’autre pour détecter de possibles oreilles indiscrettes.” The men are trying to come up with a plan B for the burial of Gueye’s corpse, and both their presence and their obviously central role in finding a burial site are additional clues that Gueye had not broken all ties with the *góor-jigéen* community prior to his death.

The article ends with a reminder of Gueye’s heyday as a renowned *sabar* dancer (a feminized *gévél* occupation) who challenged Ndeye Khady Niang, a famous female dancer who enjoyed Senghor’s patronage, at Doudou Ndiaye Rose’s drumming events. It also recalls his appearance in a video for singer Daro Mbaye, in which he performed a distinctive dance featuring skilled feminine hip movements. The article notes that Daro Mbaye did not come to his funeral, and “elle ne sera pas la seule à détourner le regard”—many prominent women who had previously acted as *góor-jigéen* patrons are now disavowing any association with them in order to stave off their own social death. This is not an unfounded fear; Ndeye Marie Gawlo, a well-known *gévél* singer whose attendance at the Petit Mbao wedding was captured on camera, was also arrested by police for her involvement in the affair;<sup>343</sup> in a media interview, she claims that if suicide were permitted by Islam, she would have killed herself in shame.<sup>344</sup>

In the cartoon embedded in the article, a *baay faal* (a subset of Murid disciple, one of whose functions is to act as cemetery guard) brandishing a club chases two *góor-jigéen* carrying a dead body out of the cemetery. We know that the fleeing men are *góor-jigéen*, as they embody the gender confusion attributed to them by popular representation: they have shaved heads, coarse stubble on their chins and shins, and are wearing the traditional male tunic-and-pants outfit; they are also wearing high-heels, and have painted red lips and long eye-lashes. The cemetery guard commands “Ni homme, ni femme! Pas question de l’enterrer ici!” One of the *góor-jigéen* attempts to correct him: “Mi homme mi femme on a dit!” The *baay faal* establishes the *góor-jigéen*’s body as undeserving of Murid burial because it is wholly ungendered: neither man, nor woman, and therefore devoid of any human intelligibility. The burial party’s response is to affirm that the *góor-jigéen* is half man, half woman, staking a claim to the possession of a composite form of gendered humanity and therefore to a right to burial.

This last move, while a seeming acknowledgement of the potential for an affirmative *góor-jigéen* identity, is itself a misrepresentation of how MSM see their own identities, at least as demonstrated in studies by Niang and Teunis. For these men, the *góor-jigéen* moniker necessarily signals a degraded subjectivity, and marks them as a

<sup>343</sup>“AFFAIRE DU MARIAGE DES gorjiguen: Ndèye Marie Ndiaye Gawlo passe sa 2e nuit au commissariat central,” *Xibar.net - Référence multimedia du Sénégal*, n.d., [http://www.xibar.net/AFFAIRE-DU-MARIAGE-DES-gorjiguen-Ndeye-Marie-Ndiaye-Gawlo-passe-sa-2e-nuit-au-commissariat-central\\_a7203.html](http://www.xibar.net/AFFAIRE-DU-MARIAGE-DES-gorjiguen-Ndeye-Marie-Ndiaye-Gawlo-passe-sa-2e-nuit-au-commissariat-central_a7203.html).

<sup>344</sup>“NDEYE MARIE NDIAYE GAWLO INVITEE DE WALF TV: « ...si le suicide était permis, j’allais me suicider »,” *Xibar.net - Référence multimedia du Sénégal*, n.d., [http://www.xibar.net/NDEYE-MARIE-NDIAYE-GAWLO-INVITEE-DE-WALF-TV-si-le-suicide-etait-permis-j-allais-me-suicider\\_a7851.html](http://www.xibar.net/NDEYE-MARIE-NDIAYE-GAWLO-INVITEE-DE-WALF-TV-si-le-suicide-etait-permis-j-allais-me-suicider_a7851.html).



bare subject exposed to violence and death. They instead identify as either “ibbi” or “yoos,” terms that function as gender designations within the gay community. *Ibbi* take on a feminized role, often acting as bottoms in the sexual relationship and performing feminine submission to the *yoos*. The *yoos*, in turn, are the equivalent of tops; they provide protection and maintain the *ibbi* with a steady flow of gifts. It is the *ibbi* that tend to be visible to the wider community because of their non-conformity to masculine gender performance; like good wives, they cover the *yoos* with *sutura* so that the latter’s inclusion in the MSM community will not be exposed.<sup>345</sup> Through this recreation of gender roles within the MSM community, MSM are able to access gendered honor and a human form of life. This honor, however, is not recognized by dominant discourse, which is invested in the continued representation of the gay male subject as ungendered. This ungendering is central to the production of the *góor-jigéen* as dead subject, for to possess a legible gender is to signify as human and therefore to lay claim to human rights.

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An Associated Press article picked up by several American news outlets (“Even after death, abuse against gays continues”; op. cit.) reports that Serigne Mbaye Gueye’s sons were ultimately unable to find a cemetery that would accept him, so they buried him on the side of the road, digging a shallow grave with their hands. (The men of dubious masculinity observed at the funeral by Weekend reporters do not figure in this account.) In an ironic twist, when the wind blew the sand off and exposed the corpse, his sons were arrested and charged with improperly burying their father.

This unburiability of the *góor-jigéen* corpse has been further reiterated in at least four subsequent cases of disinterment; that of Madièye Diallo, with which I opened this chapter, being the most prominent among them. While the call for the extermination of physically living *góor-jigéen* was articulated as a component of the conservative Muslim and Christian fight against the homosexual menace, it is slightly more difficult to make a theologically consistent argument in favor of exhumation, as the body ceases to contain the soul after death.<sup>346</sup> According to the logic of moral jihad, the moral corruption that homosexuals are allegedly guilty of spreading would be fully checked by their death.<sup>347</sup>

While couched in Abrahamic religion, the logic of exhumation has a particularly Wolof color. Indeed, the belief that *góor-jigéen* corpses possess a polluting agency that could somehow interfere with the proper circulation of prayers for the pious dead recalls the logic by which the *ñoole* and the *gégél* were cordoned off into a separate, impure race. According to the mechanics of this unique mode of abjection, the *góor-jigéen* becomes a racial outsider who is locked in his impure state forever. As in the biopolitical

<sup>345</sup>Teunis, “Same-Sex Sexuality in Africa”; Niang, “‘It’s raining stones’”; Population Council. and Niang, *Meeting the sexual health needs of men who have sex with men in Senegal*.

<sup>346</sup> Indeed, some prominent Senegalese Muslim scholars have publicly condemned these exhumations. See “Le phénomène de l’homosexualité : une ‘bombe sociale’ au Sénégal ? - Nettali | Le quotidien exclusivement sur le Net”, n.d., <http://www.nettali.net/Le-phenomene-de-homosexualite-une.html>.

<sup>347</sup> The oft-cited Quranic verse outlawing the murder of innocents nevertheless has a subclause: “We decreed to the children of Israel that if anyone kills a person—unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land—it is as if he kills all of mankind” (Quran 5:32). The debate within moral jihadism is therefore not about whether or not you can kill someone for corruption without that killing constituting a violation of God’s law, but rather about what acts can be classified as “spreading corruption.”

caste formation of the past, exhumation produces a boundary between the community of subjects who can cleanse their state of dishonor through death, thus reaccessing a pure form of human life, and those outside subjects who are perpetually morally dead. When viewed within the dynamics of social death explored in Fall's novel, this difference becomes clear: Bakar, the previously honorable subject who is shamed and socially dead during the post-lapsarian period of his physical life, can nevertheless be restored to personhood when everyone believes him to be dead—indeed, his funeral is the stage for Fall's satirical depiction of that restoration—but Malobé, in his current incarnation, cannot. The logic of caste abjection endures, although the “inside” community now includes those who were previously abjected.

In this new formation, the inalienable deadness of the *góor-jigéen* is not entirely self-evident, but rather must be reiterated through the public desecration of his corpse. If, at one level, the stringing up of *géwél* corpses in baobab trees served as a means of tangibly protecting the community, it was also a performative act that reiteratively exposed their racial difference and tipped the concentration of sovereign power in favor of the *géer*. Similarly, the recent exhumations are not only carried out, but staged and filmed for public consumption, which points to that performance's role in symbolically redistributing sovereign power. The ubiquity of the term “lynching” in post-marriage scandal discourse inevitably conjures up the white American vigilante performance of sovereignty over the black body which affirms the dishonored and ungendered status of the black subject (and therefore his enduring slaveness). As with the pictures taken by lynch mobs in the post-bellum U.S. of white vigilantes standing proudly in front of naked black bodies they had hanged and mutilated, or with the photos taken of Iraqi prisoners at the U.S.-run Abu Ghraib prison being tortured and forced to engage in various degrading sexual postures, the videotaping of exhumation is a staged performance in which the torturers enact their sovereign power to assign bare life to the *góor-jigéen* subject by disposing of his body as they will.

The public staging of disinterment is not only an arrogation of sovereignty by the exhumers themselves, but also an exhortation to the general population to actively reestablish the proper ordering of power that has been queered by corrupting forces. Indeed, the neighbor who participated in Diallo's exhumation wants his act to serve as a lesson to Diallo's parents (and by extension, via the circulation of the video, to all Senegalese parents), who did not properly exercise their parental sovereignty. Diallo's parents allowed the threat of death-in-life embodied by their son to flourish, unchecked, thus enabling the pollution to seep out and endanger the purity of the larger community. They should have exercised their parental authority to force him to submit to social norms regulating gender performance and sexuality, and, in the event of a refusal to comply, they should have exercised their sovereign right to kill their child by disowning him, rendering him kinless and socially dead.

Also at stake is the sovereign power of the Senegalese state. As the arrest of Gueye's sons reveals, the state detains the right to determine what constitutes the proper burial of corpses; the vigilante's arrogation of this power is therefore a critique of the state's inability to consistently punish and check homosexuality. While according to

Senegalese law homosexuality is punishable by a prison term of up to five years and a substantial fine,<sup>348</sup> enforcement of the law has been spotty. After the wedding photos were published, the police arrested the implicated parties, but they felt obliged to let them free after only a few days. Many saw this as confirmation that the state is not sovereign, but rather entirely controlled by foreign agents—to the extent that it is not free to enforce its own laws. Conspiracy theories claimed the government was forced to set the prisoners free by the all-powerful “gay lobby,” an amorphous entity comprised of foreign governments, human rights organizations, and the *yooos* who allegedly occupy positions of power throughout Senegalese state apparatuses. Indeed, many believe *góor-jigéen* are never adequately prosecuted by the law because they have friends in high places (a belief dramatized by Mambety’s *Touki Bouki* via the character of Charley).

Rather than marching forward in the vanguard of the moral battalion, the state is in fact immobilized by the competing the claims of its masters. On the one hand, the Senegalese state depends on foreign monies for its survival, and if its benefactors are exerting pressure to decriminalize homosexuality, then it cannot bite the hand that feeds it. The state’s other master is the Senegalese citizenry, whose interests it is supposed to serve and represent. The popular exhortation for the state to enforce punitive anti-gay laws, then, is actually a call for that state to be more democratic, more representative, and more committed to the enhancement of the collective life of the population. In this view, the homophobic swell is not orchestrated by the state in the interest of securing its dictatorial power, but is rather an effect of a popular, democratizing energy unleashed in the late 1980s and 1990s that seeks to redistribute sovereign power into the hands of the people. This democratizing energy is also fed by an anticolonial energy that desires full independence from neocolonial masters and the recognition of an uncontested national sovereign right to decide who may live and who must die.

If the Senegalese nation can be figured by Mansour Dieng as a kind of *géer* entity whose honor must be defended, then the state could be seen as a kind of *góor-jigéen* entity in homophobic discourse, not only because it is allegedly run by *góor-jigéen* politicians and corrupt liars, but because it has relinquished its right to command. Like the *góor-jigéen*, the state has relinquished its manhood, its masculine honor, and therefore ceases to lay claim to any legitimate authority over the people. Like the *góor-jigéen*, the state panders to powerful women in its support for *parité* laws and its

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<sup>348</sup>Homosexuality was not criminalized under French colonial rule. The independent Senegalese state passed the following law in 1965: Penal Code (LOI DE BASE N° 65-60 DU 21 JUILLET 1965 PORTANT CODE PENAL) Article 319.3: “Without prejudice to the more serious penalties provided for in the preceding paragraphs or by articles 320 and 321 of this Code, whoever will have committed an improper or unnatural act with a person of the same sex will be punished by imprisonment of between one and five years and by a fine of 100,000 to 1,500,000 francs. If the act was committed with a person below the age of 21, the maximum penalty will always be applied.” The French text is: “quiconque commet un acte indécent ou contre nature avec une personne de même sexe sera puni d'un emprisonnement d'un à cinq ans.” The criminalization of homosexuality in the Senegalese penal code violates human rights treaties that Senegal has signed and ratified: “L'arrestation et la détention de ces hommes violent l'article 9 du Pacte international relatif aux droits civils et politiques (ICCPR), qui garantit le droit à la liberté et à la sécurité d'une personne et les droits à ne pas être arbitrairement détenu. Le Sénégal a ratifié sans réserves l'ICCPR en 1978.” <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/01/09/s-n-gal-lib-rer-neuf-militants-du-sida>

acceptance of *diriyaanke* politicians, and it parades its glittering wealth around for everyone to see. In the new economic climate in which it is easier for women to find paid work than for men, and women are perceived as having unprecedented access to economic and social power, the crisis in masculinity experienced by the male citizenry involves a feeling of acutely gendered disempowerment,<sup>349</sup> as many young men no longer have the money to marry and maintain a household—like Bakar, they cease to fulfill any masculine, and therefore human, function. Their position is further threatened by the breakdown of feminine *sutura* which, like Bakar, they perceive as formerly guaranteeing women’s submission to them regardless of the vicissitudes of their financial or social fortunes. In this signification spiral, whose linking thread is *sutura*, the economic, social, and gendered crisis in which the Senegalese everyman finds himself—a barely living state extended to those previously fully alive—gets projected onto and concentrated in the most ungendered foil available: the *góor-jigéen*. The image that Diallo’s exhumation video leaves us with is that of a body that has been forcibly ejected from the protective shroud of the burial cloth and the layers of earth that cover the grave. It is a body *exposed*—a body that, having contributed to the war on masculine honor by its willful attachment to queerness, has no right to the protection of communal *sutura*.

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Given the *góor-jigéen*’s thoroughly abject state today, it is difficult to imagine a process whereby he could be rehumanized and brought back into the communal fold. It is, nevertheless, a political necessity if he is to be wrenched from the grips of death. The most obvious tack is to expand and intensify human rights activism, putting pressure on the state to adhere to the human rights treaties it has signed, decriminalize homosexuality, and commit to protecting LGBTI citizens from violence and discrimination. As we have seen, the potential effectiveness of this strategy is questionable, as human rights entities are represented as having neocolonial, culture-killing agendas. Further, the definition of the human that circulates in homophobic representation is fundamentally different from that of secular human rights, and to break with that honor-bound human is equated to breaking with all that is Wolof and all that is Senegalese.

Cheikh Niang, in his public discussion of his research and interviews granted to the media, has chosen an alternative path. Rather than preach conformity to an enlightened liberal-secular ethos, he has instead sought to recast the social inclusion of the *góor-jigéen* by emphasizing local historical precedence for tolerance, thereby challenging the heteronormative understanding of tradition. In one interview, he suggests that the *góor-jigéen* could actually be seen as an element that enhances the life of the community by bearing the burden of its queerness, even serving as an absorber and reflector of malevolent energies that might be directed at that community—much like the function of the insane in the past. In this lens, to tolerate and protect the queer individual would be to sustain Wolof tradition, whereas to exterminate him would be to break with it.<sup>350</sup>

<sup>349</sup>Perry, “Wolof Women, Economic Liberalization, and the Crisis of Masculinity in Rural Senegal.”

<sup>350</sup>“Cheikh Niang, sociologue : ‘ Nous avons besoin des homosexuels’ - Blog politique du Sénégal news et commentaires sur la vie politique sénégalaise.”

While this solution is intriguing, it recalls the common Senegalese practice of keeping a sheep tethered outside the house that will absorb curses directed at the family. The curse energy hits the sheep first, and if it dies suddenly, then it has served its function: it has absorbed a particularly powerful surge of evil, protecting the household. One then buys a new sheep to replace the dead one. The implications of Niang's suggestion is therefore problematic, as the queer subject takes on the function of the sacrificial sheep whose life is still not as valuable as that of the other members of the community.

Given the intensity of pious sentiment in contemporary Senegal, any plan to reverse the *góor-jigéen*'s abjection would have to engage with Islamic and Christian tradition, not just secular Wolof tradition. If the larger Muslim population is concerned to enhance its piety, and if it understands the exclusion and even extermination of LGBTI individuals as God's command, then to agree to the inclusion of the *góor-jigéen* would be to break with piety. As in the Muslim feminist projects elaborated earlier, sacred texts and interpretive traditions would have to be mined for an alternative reading of the place of the queer subject in the *umma*. This reading would then have to be popularized, thus enabling the resignification of the *góor-jigéen* as "doomu Aadama" (child of Adam) rather than as *nit*.

In Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims, Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle performs this alternative reading, reinterpreting the Quran and engaging multiple sites of the tradition of Islamic thought at different historical moments. For example, he argues that the inclusion in the Quran of "men who attend to them [women] who have no sexual desire" (Abdel-Haleem translation; 24:31) or "their followers among the men who have no wives with women" (Kugle's translation) as among those people with whom women can be less guarded opens up the possibility of a male subject who does not desire women and who serves as her attendant. While there is no confirmation that this subject is also allowed to desire men and to engage in same-sex erotic acts, the Quran does not explicitly foreclose that possibility, instead providing an intriguing model for the *góor-jigéen-diriyaanke* relationship.

Kugle also offers the persuasive argument that the story of Lot, which for the homophobic pundits is evidence that God favors the extermination of homosexuals, is not about consensual sex or loving relationships between men, but rather a cautionary tale about rape and inhospitality. The transgressions of the people of Lot are multiple, but the one that is commonly isolated is the rape of Lot's male guests by his fellow male villagers,<sup>351</sup> who prefer to engage in an act of sexual violence rather than sleep with their wives. The gross misinterpretation of the invocations of this story in the Quran is, according to Kugle, the outcome of an unattentive reading practice. Read closely, Lot's offer of his daughters in the stead of his male guests is not to be read as a literal statement, but rather an ironic one—it is a rhetorical strategy whose aim is to illuminate the gravity of the townsmen's acts. Lot's deployment of irony sets up an equivalence between the rape of his daughters and the rape of his guests, not a preference of the rape of women over the rape of men.

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<sup>351</sup>Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*, 55.

In their public statements in the media and elsewhere, *góor-jigéen* figure themselves as pious subjects by emphasizing their adherence to practices of piety and by staking a claim to an Islamic ethics of care and protection. Serigne Mbaye Samb's invocation of the principle of *satr*, which cautions against the unnecessary prying into and exposing of your neighbor's private affairs, is an argument for the extension of protective *sutura* to cover the *góor-jigéen* subject, thereby transforming him into a "doomu Aadama" like everyone else. In this iteration, no one is inherently *sutura*-less, as *sutura* is disarticulated from the biopolitical distribution of life and death inherited from the caste system. Viewing the *góor-jigéen* as a subject who can possess and be covered by *sutura* also necessarily disarticulates *sutura* from the gender hierarchy and the performance of gendered honor, thus allowing for the convergence of a pro-faith feminist politics with queer politics.

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