



DANCING OPACITY

Contemporary Dance, Transnationalism,
and Queer Possibility in Senegal

Amy E. Swanson

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Introduction



Three dancers battle on stage. They grab and shove one another, stumble, fall to the floor, get up, and do it again. The sound of an electric guitar grows louder and more abrasive as their movements appear increasingly aggressive. Superimposed video recordings shot in Dakar are projected on four dispersed strips of fabric, conjuring a chaotic, barely discernable urban scene. One dancer grabs a mic and commands in Wolof, “Waccal! Jógal! Feccal!” (Get down! Get up! Dance!). His orders punctuate the continuous swirl of movement without seeming to have a direct impact on the choreography. Then, for an instant, stillness. One dancer goes limp, resting his submissive body against another. The two men briefly hold one another in a moment of intimacy that dissolves as quickly as it emerged. Again: vigorous battling against dizzying mediated images.

Fatou Cissé’s *Performance D* is a fifty-five-minute improvisatory evocation of the visceral experience of Dakar and the interpersonal encounters that color daily life there. Multiple iterations of the work have appeared across Senegalese and international stages since 2018. When I saw the piece at the 2021 Biennale de la danse en Afrique in Marrakech, Morocco, the work was performed by Cissé herself accompanied by Antoine Danfa and Alexandre Garcia, with musician Yann Major Moni.

Immediately following the performance, I was congratulating Cissé in the lobby of the French Institute during a cocktail hour for artists and festival attendees when a journalist with Radio France Internationale approached. After briefly acknowledging the “exceptional dancing,” she dove into a prolonged lamentation about her inability to comprehend the performance. She was particularly put off by the blurry, superimposed projected images that she

could not make out and the use of the Wolof language without translation. “Ça m’a gêné” (It bothered me), she repeated, speaking in exceptionally slow and articulate French, possibly for Cissé’s or my unneeded benefit. In a reversal of roles, the French critic accused the Senegalese choreographer of creating a colonialist performance due to leaving an African language untranslated, thereby, in her opinion, rendering the language less important than European languages. Cissé was unfazed. She calmly explained her choice to evoke the city of Dakar as a confusing, chaotic, tense experience, one that is constantly changing and often feels incomprehensible, even to lifelong inhabitants such as herself. She did not want every member of the international audience to understand the text, but rather aimed for it to function as one among many layers that collectively capture the rhythm and feel of Dakar without creating a story. In other words, she wanted the performance to evade full comprehension. She intended for it to be opaque.

This confrontation crystallizes one of the overarching themes of this book: the intentionality with which African contemporary choreographers confound international audiences to, paradoxically, better arrive at the specificity of their subject matter. In this example, Cissé was forced to confront, as she certainly had many times before, the expectations and desires of a white audience member who holds power as a critic with a popular French media platform. Knowing full well that many audience members at this international festival would not grasp the specific references to Dakar throughout *Performance D*, she leaned into the performance’s illegibility, unconcerned with audience appetites for transparency. This book also illustrates artists’ evasion of the Senegalese state’s oppressive heterosexism through choreographic works that include overt or covert references to gender and sexual plurality. Sometimes brief, like the men who momentarily held one another’s limp bodies against each other in *Performance D*, sometimes more explicit as other examples throughout this book show, these moments demonstrate the capacity of contemporary dance to destabilize obligatory gender and sexual norms. *Dancing Opacity* identifies multifaceted strategies of evasion that contemporary choreographers primarily residing in Senegal deploy as they inhabit local and transnational performance contexts. These artists refuse to accommodate both universalized narratives of Black African performance and state-sanctioned regulations of Senegalese gender and sexuality.

Dancing Opacity brings together two defining features of contemporary dance in Senegal: the transnational movements, networks, and structures that subtend the art form, and choreographic experimentation with gender and sexuality. Both are linked to neoliberal reform in the 1980s. As Tobias Warner

argues, “although there is something arbitrary about any periodization, 1980 may be seen as the pivotal year” in Senegal.¹ Decades of economic and social turbulence were initiated by Senegal’s acceptance of its first loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in 1980, the same year that Senegal’s first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor, resigned. The economic restructuring required by these lending organizations, premised on deregulation and a free market economy, eviscerated government funding, abruptly ending an era of exceptional state patronage for the arts during the Senghor presidency. While transnationalism was vital to performance contexts in Senegal throughout the colonial and post-independence periods, artists began engaging with the global arts market in new ways when contemporary dance took off in the late 1990s, knowing “from the start that individual success would have to come from increased engagement with global artistic circuits.”² In the wake of structural adjustment, the genre of contemporary dance was consolidated in various locations across Africa in large part due to French foreign policy. It was a coproduction of France and Africa, a fraught entanglement that underlies the genre even today, though artists continually debate and recalibrate its terms and conditions.

Three decades after the implementation of structural adjustment, the rippling effects of neoliberalism contributed to changes in state regulations and societal perspectives of gender and sexuality. These changes included a heightened focus on women’s representation, most obviously through the adoption of a gender parity law in 2010 and a subsequent uptick in the election of female representatives.³ At the same time, intensified persecution and vigilantism targeting gender- and sexual-nonconforming individuals, particularly people assigned male at birth, engulfed the public sphere. As acceptance of women joining their male counterparts as policymakers increased, the boundaries separating men from women as discrete categories in alignment with compulsory heterosexuality became more fixed, the risks associated with transgressing these norms more severe. This shift was not unique to Senegal. A similar pattern played out in other African contexts, connected to “the vortex of neoliberalism” that swept the continent in the 1980s.⁴ Kwame Edwin Otu identifies a “politics of rescue” premised on saving women and a calcification of the “tenacity of heteropatriarchy” as two interrelated symptoms of neoliberalism. With the diminishment of social services from African governments came a proliferation of NGOs that, among other initiatives, aimed to liberate women and sexual minorities. These efforts helped consolidate the category woman as a privileged subject in need of saving and imposed preconceived identitarian classifications onto sexual and gender

minorities, contributing to a widespread response in Africa against what was largely considered an encroaching Western human rights agenda.

Working within and against this “neocolonial and neoliberal collusion,” contemporary dance artists in Senegal and elsewhere made a concerted effort to increase opportunities for women during the 2010s.⁵ At the same time, many countered the populist wave of homophobia and transphobia by offering glimpses of gender fluidity and dissident sexualities in their work. I argue that the artists’ transnational circulation and their choreographic experimentations with gender and sexuality are intrinsically tied. They leverage their access to transnational resources and the critical distance from the Senegalese state that this affords them to create performances that evade national disciplinary norms. Contemporary dance artists in Senegal are uniquely positioned to intervene in the increasingly strict management of gender and sexuality given their participation in the transnational arts market. Their work is funded predominantly by non-African organizations, their audiences are both local and international, and the contemporary dance community in Dakar is nationally diverse. Whereas legible gendered conventions have become increasingly imperative for belonging to the Senegalese national community, the artists whose work is highlighted in this book defy these standards in the transnational arena of contemporary dance.⁶ They create fissures in the seemingly fixed policies and practices that regulate gender and sexuality, evidencing these policies’ leakiness and untenability. Just as they evade state censorship, they also disallow their predominantly white audience members from full comprehensibility as globally touring artists who continually confront assumptions and expectations projected onto their racialized bodies. Performing for multiply situated audiences, they pursue opacity as a strategy both at home and abroad.

By highlighting queer possibility and transnationalism in contemporary dance, *Dancing Opacity* rebukes two widespread assumptions: first, that Senegal (or Africa broadly) is monolithically homophobic, and second, that “African contemporary dance,” a label that I unpack below, is derivative of European and American contemporary dance trends. This book builds on, yet departs from, studies that center Africanist retentions in North America as an intervention into narratives of Euro-American primacy in dance history.⁷ By focusing on contemporary dance on the African continent, I intend to expand conversations about African(ist) dance practices to include the avant-garde and insist on Africa as a “constitutive locus” of creation rather than solely an origin point for the dispersal of Africanist aesthetics.⁸ In doing so, this book builds on existing texts by H el ene Neveu Kringelbach, Sabine

Sörgel, Catherine M. Cole, and others that examine contemporary dance in Africa and its transnational circulations.⁹ *Dancing Opacity* addresses these issues through a queer analytic, bringing together the fields of dance studies and queer African studies in ways that, I hope, open up further avenues of questioning and interrogation. I take up April Sizemore-Barber's contention that "scholarship on queer Africa needs to reimagine oral and nonverbal repertoires," which have been subordinated to text-based fields such as literature and cinema.¹⁰ In-depth studies of embodied cultural forms are crucial to the field of queer African studies, just as queer analysis of dance practices in Africa is needed in the field of dance studies, which has largely excluded the African continent from examinations of queer dance.

Opacity

Drawing on Martinican philosopher, poet, and novelist Édouard Glissant, opacity here refers to the indeterminate multiplicities of meaning that contemporary dance artists incorporate into their pedagogies and performances. In opposition to colonial logics of grasping the other and extending beyond embracing difference (or cultural relativism), Glissant insists that minoritarian subjects do not owe transparency or self-explanation to the dominant gaze. Instead, they have a "right to opacity"—a right to not be legible or understood.¹¹ Opacity is a condition of "irreducible density," of multiplicity, in defiance of the colonial pursuit of knowing, classifying, and ultimately controlling the colonized.¹² Cross-cultural relationship—or the poetic of relation—is at the center of Glissant's theory of opacity. Cross-cultural relationship "takes over from the homogeneity of the single culture" as continuous migrations of indigenous and foreign populations move away from, move to, or pass through colonial and neocolonial societies.¹³ These movements result in the incorporation, reinterpretation, and negotiation of multiple cultural forms.¹⁴ Instead of striving for sameness or reducing expression so that it is legible across cultures, "the only possible strategy is to make them *opaque* to each other," Glissant writes.¹⁵ Opacity is a particularly useful paradigm through which to analyze contemporary dance in Senegal, shaped as it is by transnational movements of people, resources, and cultural forms in the after-life of colonialism. Wrought through networks of exchange across cultures and continents, these convergences contest the sacredness of roots or filiation, akin to Glissant's concept of relation. Artists draw from myriad forms and approaches, upending models of nationally or ethnically bound "single culture[s]" in the invention of an ever-expanding array of dance repertoires.

Although Glissant theorized opacity vis-à-vis postcolonial Martinique, the concept is increasingly applied to diverse geopolitical contexts and disciplinary fields. Opacity has been taken up and extended by thinkers across Caribbean studies, Black studies, Latinx studies, queer studies, trans studies, performance studies, media studies, and art criticism to describe the ways in which (queer) artists of color disturb visibility, obscure identity, invite alternative modes of seeing, and generate “something other than the pragmatism of the transparent and its visual economies of violence.”¹⁶ Motivated by these texts, I consider opacity a generative lens through which to think about Francophone African choreographers’ tactical modes of evading dominant gazes as they delve into the specificity of irreducibly dense subject matter.

In the introduction to the special issue of *Camera Obscura* titled “Opacities,” Zach Blas suggests that opacity both serves as a “tactical evasion” and “accounts for the specificities of subjects.”¹⁷ By rejecting categories of identifiable difference and moving beyond “schemas of visibility, representation, and identity,” opacity enables recognition of minoritarian subjects’ expansive diversity and specificity.¹⁸ Similarly, *Dancing Opacity* is invested in artists’ simultaneous pursuit of evasion and specificity. The framework of opacity captures the intentionality with which artists elide singular meaning-making in their work, instead creating performances that are rich in interpretative possibilities, including those that are disallowed transparent expression in the current anti-LGBTQ+ climate of Senegal. At the same time, it is a response to lingering colonialist narratives of Black African performance that the artists are likely to confront at global performance venues. As Ananya Chatterjea points out, modes of experimentation and innovation from non-white, non-Western contexts are often misread or altogether unrecognized in the global arts market.¹⁹ In confrontation with colonialist assumptions and expectations as they tour the transnational performance circuit, Black African performers might choose to confound others rather than to explain themselves, just as Cissé did with *Performance D*. In doing so, they delve into specificities that would be glossed over if they were to reduce their work so that it “made sense” to patrons, audiences, and critics.

Deploying opacity as this book’s overarching concept recognizes minoritarian subjects’ defiance of anthropologic attempts to scrutinize, organize, and classify racialized others. Authoring an ethnography about people whose identities differ from my own, claiming expertise about contemporary dance in Senegal as a white North American, to some extent contradicts an embrace of opacity. I am cognizant of the impossibility of fully knowing or understanding this book’s subjects. Centering opacity is an invitation—for

me as author and for you, the reader—to take seriously these artists’ ability to confound, to resist transparency, akin to Keguro Macharia’s respect for African subjects’ *waywardness*. Macharia admires Africans’ “stubborn refusal to come to the point,” their wayward, wandering responses to “earnest US-based scholars.”²⁰ I do not aim to spell everything out, an impossible pursuit that would negate these artists’ right to opacity. Instead, I highlight their tactical evasions in acknowledgment that elements of their work likely evade my own comprehension. My goal for this book is to underscore these artists’ astute navigations of power in the creation of meaningful artistic expression while encouraging readers to recognize and appreciate opacity as a skillful, intentional artistic choice. Later in this introduction and in this book’s epilogue, I offer further reflections of my subject position and motivation for pursuing this research.

While most of this book focuses on the mid- to late 2010s, the story starts much earlier. Queer aesthetics in contemporary dance are not merely a twenty-first century phenomenon but have roots in earlier dance institutions in Senegal and in indigenous cultural practices that are beyond the scope of this book. The following chapters are bookended on one end by the emergence of the French Institute—the primary patron of contemporary dance in Senegal—in 1959, and on the other end by the COVID-19 pandemic and the new modes of artmaking that arose in its wake, as described in the conclusion. Across the chapters, the book travels between local and international dance contexts from the 1970s to the late 2010s, indexing the ways in which artists deploy facets of opacity and charting its conditions of possibility.

(African) Contemporary Dance

Contemporary dance is a contested term. Dance scholars SanSan Kwan, Ananya Chatterjea, Ramsay Burt, and others debate the origins, trajectories, and valences of a label that tends to stick to avant-garde performances by white dancers.²¹ With lineages spanning twentieth century German *Ausdruckstanz* and *Tanztheater*, French and Belgian “minimal” or “conceptual” dance, and American modern and postmodern dance, it is a slippery term that evades a singular definition. Fatou Cissé views contemporary dance as a mode of philosophical inquiry that is theorized and translated through the body:

C'est pas seulement danser pour plaire. Tu peux aller dans les choses plus thématiques, aller dans un questionnement. Tu vas plus loin dans le développement du corps mais tu ne vas pas faire que des reproduc-

tions ou des imitations, tu vas aller vraiment dans une recherche. Le mouvement ne part pas forcément d'une danse déjà créée ou une base qui existe déjà, comme tu vois un peu dans la danse populaire, mais ça part d'une idée. Comment tu vas traduire cette idée par ton corps ? Et ce ne sera pas certainement pour danser et faire beaucoup de jolis mouvements, des très beaux mouvements, pour que les gens voient que tu es un bon danseur. C'est pas forcément pour danser mais c'est pour donner, montrer vraiment son idée, et vraiment transmettre aussi. C'est philosophique. Ça va très loin dans la recherche.

It's not only dancing to please. You can go into more thematic things, go into questioning. You go farther in the development of the body not to only do reproductions or imitations, but to really engage in research. The movement does not necessarily come from a dance that was already created or a preexisting base, like you see a little in popular dance, but it comes from an idea. How will you translate that idea through your body? And it will certainly not be by dancing to do pretty movements, really beautiful movements, so that the audience sees that you are a good dancer. It's not necessarily for the sake of dancing, but it's about giving, really showing your idea, and really transmitting it, too. It's philosophical. It goes very far into research.²²

While Cissé describes contemporary dance as a form of embodied research and transmission, Andréya Ouamba, a collaborator of Cissé's and artistic director of the award-winning *Compagnie 1er Temps*, views it as a sort of refractive lens. For him, it is an approach to dance-making that can take any movement—whether drawn from an existing dance form or a quotidian gesture—and transform it so that it makes sense otherwise. Contemporary dance can “montrer aux gens sous une forme esthétique ce qu'ils font tout le temps et les faire revoir, les faire entendre encore” (show people through an aesthetic form what they do all the time and make them re-see it, make them hear it again).²³ Others, too, characterize contemporary dance as an art form that foregrounds research and reflection over codified dance techniques and existing movement vocabularies. Imagination, expansion, and questioning are at the heart of contemporary dance for many of the artists I spoke with throughout my research.

These qualities are not exhaustive or unique to Senegalese contemporary dance, but rather took hold through the intersections of multiple genealogies that themselves developed over the course of a long history of cross-fertilizations of dance cultures. U.S. postmodern dance, for example, is reso-

nant with, but by no means definitive of, the experimental approaches that characterize contemporary dance in Senegal. Postmodern dance emerged in New York in the early 1960s as a departure from its predecessor, modern dance. Whereas modern dance privileged emotional expressivity and narrative arc, postmodern dance—particularly the experiments initiated by members of Judson Dance Theater—rejected those qualities and instead introduced anti-spectacle performances that foregrounded the medium of dance itself. Pioneers including Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti, Anna Halprin, and Steve Paxton contested and overthrew prevailing expectations about the conventions and meaning of dance in self-reflexive works that stripped the form of its normative conventions. In a similar vein, European contemporary dance took a defining turn in the 1990s, when artists launched a widespread critique of the institutionalization of concert dance (or dance performed for an audience, often in a theater), particularly in France and Belgium. Choreographers such as Jérôme Bel, Jonathan Burrows, and Xavier Le Roy minimized theatrical conventions including lighting, set, props, costume, and music in works that highlighted the materiality of the body. Rejecting representation, virtuosity, and scenic effects, these choreographers focused instead on the dancer's presence. Like American postmodern dance, performances in this vein were self-reflexive, preoccupied with dance itself and its primary instrument, the body.²⁴

While certainly influenced by dance lineages in the United States and Europe, the practices and performances that I investigate in this book are equally shaped by local and intra-African performance histories. The development of dance as a profession in Senegal stems back to the practice of colonial school theater at the *École normale* William-Ponty in Sébikotane, just east of Dakar. As Neveu Kringelbach documents, the integration of dance in colonial school theater beginning in the 1930s led directly to the consolidation of the genre of neotraditional dance, a term used to designate staged performances of regional dances. Fodéba Keita, a Guinean student at Ponty in the early 1940s, would go on to found the first globally touring African performance company, *Les Ballets Africains*, which, in 1960, became Guinea's national dance company. This was the first national dance company in Africa and became a model for others, including the National Ballet of Senegal.²⁵ The theatricalization of social, ritual, and ceremonial dances into works for the concert dance stage was integral to Senegalese nation-building projects of the 1960s and catapulted the new genre across urban centers, as numerous neotraditional companies formed with the National Ballet as their model. The popularity of neotraditional dance in

Senegal and President Senghor's ideological and financial support for the arts motivated the creation of dance techniques and choreographies that remained rooted in Africanist movement principles but expanded beyond ideas of the nation-state in the 1970s and 1980s. These internationalist idioms set the foundation for contemporary dance to take off in the 1990s, connected to an explosion of contemporary dance in various African countries at the turn of the century.

Contemporary dance in Senegal is part of a larger ecosystem of distinct but overlapping dance practices that include the neotraditional genre as well as popular dances such as hip hop, *sabar*, and *mbalax*. Contemporary dancers often have expertise in one or more of these forms, and choreographic works frequently reference them, especially *sabar*, what Francesca Castaldi describes as the “predominant expressive idiom of Dakarois.”²⁶ The term *sabar* denotes the dance, rhythm, type of drum, and event itself—effervescent affairs most often held in public spaces to celebrate weddings, baptisms, political rallies, sporting events, and more. Typically organized and danced by women (though accompanied by male drummers), *sabars* are “women’s affairs” that display an “erotic femininity” characterized by seductive movements of the pelvis and playful manipulation of one’s clothing to expose skin and undergarments.²⁷ As Castaldi, Neveu Kringelbach, Ayo A. Coly and others show, *sabars* enlist an alternative gendered corporeality distinct from the more modest, restrained comportment generally expected of Muslim Senegalese women.²⁸ Given the popularity of *sabar* and the liberatory gendered comportment it enables, it is an especially rich practice from which to draw in the creation of contemporary choreography. Works that take *sabar* as a point of departure do not merely replicate *sabar* steps on the proscenium stage, but rather engage performers and audiences in processes that necessitate critical thinking. Alicia Seybiya Gomis, a dancer in Fatou Cissé’s *Le bal du cercle* (*The Circle Ball*, 2015), discussed in chapter 5, expressed that working on this piece not only cultivated her range of movement possibilities but also enriched her understanding of social issues. She stressed that prior to working with Cissé, she did not think critically about the position of women in Senegal and never would have imagined that it would be possible to take the theme of the *tàn-nebéer*—a subset of *sabar* events—and transform it, creating an experimental performance based on the tensions it gives rise to.²⁹ Her comments elucidate the productive intersections of popular and contemporary genres while alluding to the particularity of contemporary choreography for its capacity to provoke, to defamiliarize the familiar.

Just as there is no consensus among choreographers about the meaning

of *contemporary*, the utility of the signifier *African*—as in African contemporary dance or contemporary African dance—is also widely debated. As Kwan notes, “contemporary work by dancers from outside the West must always be qualified with a geographic signifier.”³⁰ This qualification insidiously demarcates their work as differentiated from or derivative of the unmarked whiteness and Westernness implied by the language of contemporary dance. For some, adding the signifier *African* importantly signals the centrality of African-derived movements in their work, while others disidentify with the label, finding it limiting and overburdened with stereotypes and clichés. Ouamba, who moved to Dakar from his native Congo-Brazzaville as a refugee during the Congolese civil war in 2000, firmly positions himself in the latter category. A coherent narrative of African identity does not resonate with his personal experience. He had to learn a new language and new cultural customs upon his arrival while confronting marginalization and xenophobia. After living in Senegal for two decades, he is still considered an outsider. The dislocation he experienced within the African continent informs the incongruity of the label *African* as a qualifier for his choreography. At the same time, the label glosses over his individuality and puts him in a “pocket” defined by outsiders’ ideas of Africanness. He explains, “I don’t like to be invited somewhere because I’m African. For me, it’s like I do not exist. I do not exist in a pocket, you know? I want to exist because I am Andréya.”³¹ Many artists perceive the label *African* as vague, inaccurate, and injurious. For them, the label is overdetermined by a colonialist logic of racialized difference and post-independence renderings of African traditions that supersede individual specificity and that simply do not correlate with their work. Instead, they prefer to be understood as contemporary choreographers, just like their counterparts in Europe and elsewhere who are not defined by the continent on which they reside.

At the same time, the label can be a vital way to draw attention to the centrality of Africanist aesthetics and movement principles across the field of contemporary dance, to rebuke legacies of invisibilization of Africanist aesthetics in various dance practices, and to insist on the African continent as a viable location for the professional study of dance. As I discuss further in chapter 3, many instructors and students at Germaine Acogny’s international dance school École des Sables consider the African ethos of the school a source of pride, affirmation, and a mode of world-building. Raouf Tchakondo, an instructor of the Germaine Acogny Technique, which forms the curricular backbone of the school, explains, “c’est la seule technique que je trouve vraiment africaine” (it’s the only technique that I find to be really

African).³² Tchakondo and others emphasize the historical significance of a dance technique created in Africa by an African woman, one that encompasses wide-ranging movements with African origins and that is primarily transmitted on the continent. Some dancers who study at École des Sables consider the school itself to represent the continent. They value the intra-African networks forged through workshops and residencies there. “Pour moi, l’École des Sables représente l’Afrique, le continent” (for me, École des Sables represents Africa, the continent), one student from Madagascar said.³³ While many take pride in the central place of Africa in their studies, they might also subvert the label to undermine the colonialist assumptions that it evokes, particularly when performing for white audiences, as Sabine Sörgel shows.³⁴ I witnessed this duality of affirmation and purposeful subversion at École des Sables, where some instructors facilitated creative processes that demanded critical interrogation of the label *African* while others uncritically promoted the label as a modality of affirmative affiliation.³⁵

Aesthetic markers, temporal distinctions, and a vexed geographic signifier come into tension with one another in the construction of a performance genre that resists clear definition. Further complicating questions about terminology, some choreographers refer to themselves as *metteurs en scène*, or directors, more so than as choreographers, a reflection of the multidisciplinary nature of their work. This preference is congruent with indigenous modes of performance in West Africa in which there were no distinct boundaries between dance, theater, and music. Considering the polyvalent ways in which dancers and choreographers relate to and mobilize (*African*) *contemporary dance* and related terms, I attend to the multiplicity of perspectives from those at the center of creation on the continent. In doing so, I necessarily allow (*African*) contemporary dance to maintain a slipperiness throughout this book, refusing any singular definition and leaving unanswered some of the questions that the terminology affords.

Transnationalism and the Global Arts Market

As many of my research collaborators attest, newness is a priority in contemporary dance. Innovation is the form’s primary currency. But who decides what innovation looks like and what kinds of experiments are worthy of global circulation? Presenters, sponsors, and critics determine the ideological and aesthetic preoccupations of global contemporary dance through their decision-making power that determines whose work circulates and whose does not—and they primarily work for theaters, festivals, and other private

and public arts organizations in locations where capital has been historically consolidated, namely in Europe and North America.³⁶ By participating in a transnational art form whose gatekeepers are predominantly located in the Global North, Senegalese artists necessarily navigate regimes of power from economically marginalized locations. Not only do they work within an ideological and aesthetic terrain whose parameters are largely defined elsewhere, but they must also contend with a matrix of conflicting expectations that precede their racialized bodies on global stages. As they tour internationally, they momentarily occupy venues where multiple discourses and histories of racialization and objectification collude and collide. If, as Chatterjea suggests, “belonging is possible only under certain pre-approved conditions,” in what ways do Senegalese artists create and perform meaningful works that do not simply aim to appeal to an external gaze?³⁷ How do they navigate the colonality of power from colonized locations?

The complexities of the global arts market are not exclusive to contemporary dance, nor do they only show up when artists leave the continent. Each iteration of concert dance in Senegal was shaped by configurations of international presences, paving the way for the particular transnational entanglements that characterize contemporary dance in the twenty-first century. For example, neotraditional dance is distinct from the social or ritual dances termed *traditional dance* because it appropriates Western concert dance conventions including the proscenium stage and its prescriptive frontal orientation. Divorced from the ritual or ceremonial functions that they serve in specific social settings, dances were transformed into embodied representations of newly sovereign nation-states for the consumption of immobile audiences at domestic and international theaters.³⁸ Likewise, postmodern and contemporary dance in Europe and North America resulted from intercultural entanglements and the often invisibilized incorporation of aesthetics derived from communities of African, Asian, and Native American descent, as illustrated by authors Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Jacqueline Shea Murphy, and Priya Srinivasan.³⁹ These histories of cross-fertilization along uneven global power grids complicates any top-down narrative of European and/or American inventiveness followed by African assimilation of an already established dance genre. The multiplicity of intercultural movements and influences that shape differently situated dance practices cannot be fully parsed out but are certainly foundational to the genealogies that eventually led to contemporary dance in Senegal and Africa broadly. At the same time, the emergence of contemporary dance in the 1990s, following structural adjustment and the evisceration of internal funding for the arts, crystallized new forms of depen-

dencies and collaborations across South–North and South–South axes. From the beginning, contemporary dance in Senegal enlisted artists in a global arts market that valued individual expression over national representation and required new kinds of networks and solidarities.

Interwoven with France’s heavy hand in the institutionalization of contemporary dance, networks spanning various African contexts have been equally vital to the proliferation of companies, schools, and festivals in cities such as Ouagadougou, Abidjan, Lagos, and Maputo. France’s economic and institutional advantages must not overshadow African artists’ labor in the creation and evolution of contemporary dance. Their creativity, rigor, and collaborative ethos are tangible in workshops in Dakar and at *École des Sables* where dance techniques and choreographic approaches created on the continent are transmitted across generations of international African dancers. Regional festivals such as *Festival Duo Solo Danse* in Senegal, *Dialogues de Corps* and *In Out Dance Festival* in Burkina Faso, *Kinani Festival* in Mozambique, and *On Marche* in Morocco evince the vitality of networks forged within and across (colonially imposed) national and linguistic borders. During the pandemic, artists enlisted virtual spaces as alternative sites for transnational gatherings, including a series of curated discussions on Zoom titled *Réseau international des chorégraphes d’Afrique et diaspora* (International Network of African and Diaspora Choreographers). These intra-African networks are inseparable from Franco-African ones. For instance, the *Biennale de la danse en Afrique*, which is the most significant contemporary dance festival in Africa with a long history of French involvement, helps forge connections between African artists who gather from distant locations over the course of the weeklong festival. These connections enable diverse African artists’ collective, and still ongoing, reconfigurations of France’s stronghold. While France and other entities along the Euro–American continuum provide the material resources that enable the institutionalization of contemporary dance across Africa, it is African artists’ creative and intellectual labor that enables it to thrive.

Transnationalism is foregrounded throughout this book to draw attention to the material conditions that subtend contemporary dance in Senegal and beyond. In this study, transnationalism encompasses the asymmetrical entanglements of resources, institutions, and individuals that transcend Senegal’s borders. These include the role of France as primary sponsor and administrator, indicative of its desire to maintain a cultural presence in its former colonies, alongside the intra-African networks that sustain the art form, what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih refer to as “transcolonial solidari-

ties.”⁴⁰ I draw on Lionnet and Shih’s model of “minor transnationalism” or “the mode in which the traumas of colonial, imperial, and global hegemonies as well as the affective dimensions of transcolonial solidarities continue to work themselves out and produce new possibilities.”⁴¹ Beyond the limitations of rigid center-periphery models, minor transnationalism and the concept of entanglement invite sightings of cultural and political possibilities that emerge across minor, or South–South, locations, without neglecting ongoing colonial schemes.⁴²

As elaborated in chapter 1, entanglement is a useful concept to think through the complexities of the transnational underpinnings of contemporary dance because the term embraces the messiness of intercultural encounters, networks, and structures that do not break down along neat vertical or horizontal axes. For example, although the French Institute is arguably an extension of French colonialism, its support for contemporary dance is widely welcomed by individuals who might otherwise denounce legacies of colonialism. Far from a system of overt domination, the presence of France represents a form of soft power, often carried out through collegial exchanges between French civil servants and African artists. This relationship is premised on “cogenerating Franco-African culture” in opposition to a unidirectional imposition of an external, Eurocentric model.⁴³ France’s financial privilege, however, positions it as structurally dominant in the cogeneration of this cultural formation, replicating, to some extent, the systemic white supremacy at the heart of colonialism. The complexities of the relationships between the French Institute and its various African locations, alongside and interwoven with intra-African networks, require a framework that allows for nuance and tension, for things to be in a tangle.⁴⁴ My use of entanglement is indebted to Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe, and inspired by others who propose equally dynamic theorizations of the cross-fertilizations of cultural practices and identities across Africa and the diaspora.⁴⁵

In foregrounding transnationalism, this book devotes relatively little attention to identity categories and social hierarchies that are typically associated with the national context of Senegal. Islam, whose adherents make up approximately ninety-five percent of the population, as well as ethnicity and the social organization system known as caste, might readily come to mind for readers familiar with Senegal. Taking my cue from the artists whose work I analyze, religion, ethnicity, caste, and other aspects of individuals’ personal lives and identities appear throughout this book when they are brought up as salient facets of my interlocutors’ self-expressions. However, in-depth analysis of any one of these categories in relation to dance is beyond the scope of

this book. Despite the large percentage of Muslim Senegalese and despite the predominance of the Wolof language as Senegal's lingua franca, it is not uncommon for Islam and Wolof to take a backseat in contemporary dance settings, in part due to the international demographic of the dance community. Because dancers in any given contemporary dance setting rarely share a native language, French, which is a second or third language to all, is often the lingua franca within these spaces. And while many practitioners identify as Muslim, religion was only occasionally germane to the artists' dance practices, as I delve further into in chapter 4. Likewise, while some practitioners occasionally brought up their belonging or lack thereof to a *gëwël*, or *griot*, family, indicating the performing profession linked to their family heritage, contemporary dance spaces are open to practitioners beyond those from performing lineages.⁴⁶ Neveu Kringelbach and Elizabeth Harney attest to the diminished value placed on caste following its official abolition with independence and the emergence of modern art and neotraditional dance.⁴⁷ With increased efforts toward the modernization and internationalization of the visual and performing arts after independence, the traditional role of caste was considered a barrier that should be diluted in favor of professionalization and participation in the global arts market.⁴⁸ Contemporary dance practitioners in the twenty-first century are not bound by caste, just as they are not necessarily constrained by Muslim doctrine, and as such, these are not central themes in this text. Throughout this book, I situate artists within the entangled local and transnational contexts that shape their livelihoods, which to some extent entails sidelining facets of culture and society that are integral to other aspects of life in Senegal.

Highlighting transnationalism requires attending to the ways in which Senegalese—and non-Senegalese people residing in Senegal—co-construct circuits of information and cultural flows that expand beyond Senegal's borders and intertwine with centers of global power. I aim to center the resourcefulness and creativity of Senegalese and other African subjects without neglecting the ongoing deleterious effects of coloniality. I draw on Walter D. Mignolo's conceptualization of the coloniality of power as the consolidation of capital stemming from the fifteenth century and the subsequent universalization of European knowledges and histories.⁴⁹ Articulating from marginalized locations, African subjects navigate global regimes of power in various ways. They leverage their access to transnational resources, platforms, and partners to create and perform meaningful works that contain subversive layers that might otherwise be disallowed in a purely national context. At the same time, they rearrange the power asymmetries of these transnational

entanglements over time. By centering transnationalism, this study contributes to expanding initiatives to apply transnational models to the study of dance⁵⁰ while interweaving analyses of dance's representational possibilities with its often-neglected material underside.⁵¹

On Queer Theory in Senegal

This book's central argument builds from the premise that queerness is a vital lens through which to analyze artistic practice in contexts that disavow and actively suppress queer life. Queer possibility as a lens through which to think about contemporary dance emerged from the field itself, even though *queer* is not a widely used term in Senegal. Even when artists do not explicitly acknowledge the queer possibilities within their work, unpacking the submerged symbolics of intimate same-sex physical contact, cross-dressing, female masculinities, male effeminacy, and androgyny enables deeper understandings of how gender and sexuality are imagined in Senegal. As an embodied medium, dance has the capacity to transcend the realm of the utterable. It can move beyond the prescriptive, inflexible labels and categories of the Western-derived LGBTQ+ framework, gesturing toward expansive social and political possibilities. The transnational spaces of dance studios and stages, existing within the nation-state of Senegal yet exceeding its boundaries, present fundamental opportunities to uncover subjugated queer possibilities. The next few paragraphs offer a brief overview of the history of changing attitudes toward nonnormative gender and sexual identities, practices, and expressions in Senegal to ground this study in the social and political environment in which the artists live and work. Aspects of this history will be elaborated in the chapters that follow.

A culture of open gender variance and same-sex sexualities has been documented in Senegal since at least the early nineteenth century. People who identified as *góor-jigéen*—a Wolof term that translates to English as “man-woman” and refers to men who cross-dress, effeminate men, or transgender women—historically held significant social value. Babacar M'Baye analyzes colonial-era travel documentation and oral histories that describe *góor-jigéens* as the best conversationalists and best dancers. They held specialized roles as mediators between ancestors and the living during *ndëpp* (healing or therapeutic) rituals because of their unique attribution of both male and female characteristics.⁵² As recently as the 1990s, *góor-jigéens* were sought out by the social elite for their aptitude in fashion, cuisine, and social organizing. Their fashion shows were documented in the press without reper-

cussion, and some were celebrities.⁵³ In short, *góor-jigéens* held significant social capital, a phenomenon that several of my interlocutors born in the 1980s or earlier attested to in conversations and interviews. This was despite legislation that penalizes “acts against nature” with someone of the same sex, as Article 319 in the Senegalese Penal Code has stipulated since 1965, a legacy of French civil law. The legislation imposes a one- to five-year prison sentence and a fine of 100,000 to 1,500,000 CFA francs (US\$200–3,000) to anyone convicted of a homosexual act, but the policy was largely dormant for the first several decades following independence. However, homophobic sentiment began to circulate in the 1980s when the Islamic NGO Jamra used its monthly publication, *Jamra Magazine*, to speak against homosexuality, which they described as a “social ill associated with Westernization and secularism.”⁵⁴ While their ideas did not immediately sway public opinion, Jamra’s gradually increasing influence alongside Senegal’s plummeting economy led to a dramatic shift in 2008.

In February 2008, the tabloid magazine *Icone* published a series of photos of an alleged gay wedding between two Senegalese men, instigating an unprecedented level of homophobic vigilantism and a drastic uptick in the enforcement of Article 319. Days following the publication, ten people who appeared in the photos were arrested for “undermining decency and natural marriage.”⁵⁵ This was the first of an onslaught of ongoing incidents of arrests, torture, mob violence, exhumations, alarmist media reports, and attempts to intensify anti-homosexuality laws. As recently as 2022, a group of lawmakers drafted a new bill (which was ultimately rejected by the national assembly) that would increase the prison sentence for those convicted of homosexual activity to ten years, among other changes, and in 2023, appalling videos of an exhumation and public burning of the corpse of a man presumed to be homosexual in the city of Kaolack circulated widely.⁵⁶ Since 2008, the term *góor-jigéen* has taken on a decidedly pejorative connotation, and members of the LGBTQ+ community have had to go to great pains to hide their identities and sexual activities.

The suppression of gender and sexual minorities in Senegal, while instigated by the 2008 *Icone* article and the harsh response it elicited, is the result of multiple intersecting factors that are both internal to Senegal and part of a broader wave of homophobia sweeping the continent. The failures of political leaders in Senegal and elsewhere to manage the economy, create jobs, improve living conditions, and develop infrastructure in the context of neoliberalism contributed to a pattern of pursuing a politics of distraction. Moral crusades and sexual panics veer citizens’ attention away from the

political regime's failure to fulfill its responsibilities and toward vulnerable communities.⁵⁷ M'Baye suggests that former president Abdoulaye Wade's failure to fulfill his promise to drastically improve the country's economy led him to turn his attention toward sexual morality as a way to maintain populist support.⁵⁸ Ayo A. Coly attributes the upsurge in homophobic rhetoric in the 2010s to former president Macky Sall's perceived laxity toward sexual minorities. In response to this perception, fear of impending decriminalization of homosexuality became a buzzworthy topic on social media and in daily conversations.⁵⁹

Collectively, African homophobias "enunciate an African moral superiority against the political and economic dominance of the West."⁶⁰ These homophobias align the West with homosexuality in contrast to the idea of a pure, pristine African past where homosexuality had to be introduced from the outside.⁶¹ While populist rhetoric perpetuates the idea that homosexuality is un-African, activists and scholars promote the inverse, claiming that homophobia rather than homosexuality is a Western import, inherited from colonial-era sodomy laws and missionary texts. However, the origins of homosexuality and homophobia are less of a concern in this book than is the social reality of the ongoing crisis and the recognition that the LGBTQ+ community in Senegal demands: "les mêmes droits pour toutes et tous avec une justice équitable et impartiale" (the same rights for all with fair and impartial justice), as stated on the (now obsolete) website of the Senegalese activist organization Collectif Free Sénégal.⁶² While I do not propose that queer aesthetics in dance will have a direct impact on LGBTQ+ legislation, I insist on the significance of artistic works that enable glimpses of possible social worlds denied in the present. Queer aesthetic possibilities poke holes in homophobic policies and practices that appear fixed, gesturing toward their instability and the potentiality for transformation.

The utility of queer theory in Africa is debated due to its Western orientation, the Anglo-American origins of the term *queer*, and the limited use of queer as a self-descriptor in African contexts. While some scholars warn against applying queer theory to studies of Africa due to the limitations of mapping Western theory onto non-Western locations, others insist on its urgency.⁶³ In using the term queer, I take my cue from scholars who mobilize queerness as a generative analytic that holds value across African contexts despite its ambivalences.⁶⁴ Cognizant of the risks of adopting such terminology, I ultimately agree with Coly's assertion that the "elision of postcolonial Africa from queer theory, meaning the implicit imagination and construction of Africa or the postcolonial as not queer and almost abjectly hetero,

displaces, in colonialist fashion, postcolonial Africa onto anachronistic time-space.”⁶⁵ Indeed, studies of African queerness are necessary if we are to render a more complete and nuanced body of scholarship on the continent beyond colonialist regimes of knowledge production. Coly and other scholars across the growing interdisciplinary field of queer African studies are importantly diminishing the gap between the U.S.-centric field of queer studies and the unmarked heteronormativity of African studies.

The term queer enables a capacious understanding of “dynamic, multifarious and resilient” sexualities and genders, ones that are always changing and “fundamentally under construction.”⁶⁶ I follow Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas, who, in their edited collection *Queer African Reader*, define queer as a “political frame rather than a gender identity or sexual behavior . . . a perspective that embraces gender and sexual plurality and seeks to transform, overhaul and revolutionise African order rather than seek to assimilate into oppressive hetero-patriarchal-capitalist frameworks.”⁶⁷ Queer functions not only as a noun or adjective indicating non-heteronormative sexualities and non-binary people, but also as a verb, a “destabilizing tool, creating not only uncertainty but also possibilities,” writes Stella Nyanzi.⁶⁸ By analyzing queer possibilities in dance practice and performance, I am not making claims about the gender or sexual identities or behaviors of any person discussed in this book. Instead, I aim to reveal how contemporary dance can be a “destabilizing tool” in strictly heterosexist social contexts. Contemporary dance offers glimpses of gender and sexual plurality, containing potential for transformation of the current gender and sexual order. Building on José Esteban Muñoz, contemporary dance, and the realm of the aesthetic more broadly, allows us to “glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness.”⁶⁹ Whereas Muñoz focuses on the possible futures afforded by queer aesthetics in the United States, I posit that in Senegal, queerness is as much a nostalgic refashioning of the past as it is a promise of an alternative future. Queer aesthetics bring the past and the future into the present, charting alternative constellations of time, identity, and being in the world.

My analyses consider dance alongside the ways in which gender and sexual logics play out in the specific context of twenty-first century Senegal and its history of open gender variance and same-sex sexualities. Following Nyanzi, Gibson Ncube, and other scholars of queer African studies, I intend to “think beyond the authority of the West and forge new ways of conceptualising non-conforming gender and sexual identities” that are specific to the African contexts in which they are lived.⁷⁰ Highlighting the particularities of Senegal inherently entails sidelining discourses that are less relevant there, including the

growing field of Black queer theory, which has certainly expanded beyond U.S. borders but remains rooted in African American experiences.⁷¹ As Macharia notes, “the work of thinking through queer Africa will be mostly illegible to US and European ears trained by and embedded in LGBTI studies,” particularly if we are to center African voices and experiences as “modes of theory” rather than absorbing them as “data’ or ‘evidence.’”⁷² Indeed, this book does not aim to offer sweeping revelations that will apply to queer theory beyond Senegal. I am committed to focusing on the specific ways in which ideas about gender and sexuality—and how these are policed—shape Senegal’s social organization, and how contemporary dance artists are uniquely positioned to push back against these disciplinary norms.

This book builds on a small but growing body of scholarship on queerness in Senegal. In the edited collection *Gender and Sexuality in Senegalese Societies: Critical Perspectives and Methods*, Babacar M’Baye and Besi Muhonja suggest that the dearth of scholarship on Senegalese gender and sexuality is largely due to Senegalese scholars’ “fear of being associated with the lifestyles that the research on homosexuality or transgenderism examines.”⁷³ My positionality as a North American researcher, based at an academic institution in the United States, affords me safety to document queer possibilities in contemporary dance in Senegal. Without having to confront the fear that M’Baye and Brillian Muhonja identify, I recognize my responsibility to accurately and ethically represent the artists I discuss. In the following section, I describe my research methods and elaborate the ethics of applying a queer analytic to a Senegalese context.

Methods and Organization

The following chapters present the pedagogies, performances, and perspectives of a relatively small sampling of contemporary dance artists, mainly those based in Dakar and those who have passed through École des Sables, contextualized by specific moments in the history leading up to the time of my ethnographic research. This study combines ethnographic and historical research methods conducted over multiple trips to Senegal as well as Burkina Faso for the 2016 Danse l’Afrique danse ! festival, Morocco for the 2021 Biennale de la danse en Afrique, and France where I attended my research collaborators’ performances and consulted the French cultural diplomacy archives. Following several years of involvement in the contemporary dance community in Dakar as an independent artist, I completed research for this project between 2014 and 2022. My longest single stay in Senegal lasted for

nine months in 2016, while most trips lasted for a few weeks to a few months over summer breaks. During extended periods away from my research sites, particularly during the pandemic, I stayed in touch with several of the artists discussed in this book via WhatsApp and Facebook and by attending their events on digital platforms.

As an ethnographer, I took up various roles that often shifted within and between sites. When it was appropriate, I participated fully in dance workshops, dancing alongside and under the direction of my research collaborators. At times I took up the role of French–English translator for invited choreographers (when asked), as observer (with permission), or audience member. I conducted more than eighty interviews with choreographers, dancers, and administrators. Most of the people I interviewed are emerging or established artists or hold public roles in other capacities and they gave me permission to use their full names in my writing. For those who wish to remain anonymous and for those whose permission I was unable to confirm, pseudonyms are used. Interactions with dancers outside the formal parameters of my research were instrumental to my understanding of the contemporary dance scene, the dancers’ goals and desires, and their day-to-day lives. Many became friends over the course of my research. Our friendships positioned me to be a resource when asked to assist in various capacities. I reviewed their artistic proposals and résumés; helped with grant applications; translated French-language documents into English; loaned money, or my laptop, or any number of requested items; and served as photographer or videographer for performances, among other tasks. These experiences recall Margaret Drewal’s suggestion that researchers take up any role that their research collaborators may need as coeval participants in the production of knowledge.⁷⁴ Additionally, getting to know members of the LGBTQ+ community, particularly through my involvement with Collectif Free since its founding in 2020, importantly informed my understanding of the stakes and urgency of writing about queerness in Senegal.⁷⁵ Bearing witness to the precarity of lives violently suppressed by the state and estranged from families, as well as their admirable resilience and world-making practices, deepened my desire to shed light on queer possibilities in Senegal without taking the risk of exposing LGBTQ+-identifying persons. The friendships and communities I engaged outside the formal parameters of my research at times blurred the line between data gathering and what D. Soyini Madison calls “deep hanging out.”⁷⁶

Ethnography is a fraught methodology, burdened with the history of anthropologists’ role in elaborating ideas of Africa as the antithesis of West-

ern achievement, a place comprising “traditional” or “simple” societies that exist outside of history.⁷⁷ As a white North American researcher, I am imbricated in the ongoing genealogy of white researchers traveling to Africa to extract data and write about “the natives.” While I do not suggest that my research somehow elides the persistent neocolonial world order, my methods follow scholars who, since the 1980s, have reframed ethnography to align with struggles against racial, gender, and class oppression.⁷⁸ The field of performance studies in particular offers tools and approaches that uproot the power dynamics ingrained in traditional ethnographic methods. D. Soyini Madison elaborates critical ethnography following the work of Dwight Conquergood, whose conceptualizations of dialogic performance and coperformative witnessing emphasize the intimate involvement and engagement of the researcher in the field.⁷⁹ Madison and Conquergood center dialogue and call on ethnographers to self-reflexively attend to one’s own subject position in relation to others. In that vein, the following few paragraphs reflect on my history of involvement in the dance community in Senegal, my subject position, and the ethics of my project. For readers interested in learning more, I address these areas in more depth in the epilogue.

My analyses throughout this book are informed—and limited—by my subject position as a white North American pansexual woman with an extensive history of dance training in the United States and Senegal. I danced in Dakar for several years prior to pursuing research on the topic or even considering an academic career. My embodied knowledge and intimate involvement in the dance community deeply shape the analyses in the following chapters. Participating as a dancer first and researcher later also helped forge relationships with artists who likely trusted me to document their work in part due to my demonstrated seriousness as a dancer. Many were my teachers before they were my “research subjects.” They hold authority in our dance exchanges, a dynamic that complicates the perception of unidirectional ethnographic authority. At the same time, our relationships are shaped by global power hierarchies that allow me to travel to Senegal with ease while they confront obstacles to obtaining visas to the U.S. and Europe, among numerous other inequities. Aware of both the privileges and pitfalls that my racial and national identities afford me in relation to my interlocutors, I listen to them attentively, and listen again and again as I replay recorded interviews and return to Senegal to continue ongoing conversations. I foreground their voices throughout this book without losing sight of my role in meaning-making processes. I have limited my presence in this text in favor of highlighting the artists, but I show up from time to time in acknowledgment of

my role in knowledge production. I strive to elucidate my research collaborators' lived experiences and elaborate their theorizations that undergird their dance practices, recognizing that their performances theorize on multiple levels.

Centering the voices of my interlocutors is especially crucial when writing about a topic that is "très délicat" (very delicate) in Senegal, as I was recently reminded by the artist pictured on this book's cover. I did not begin the initial stages of this project with the goal of seeking out queerness in contemporary dance but was led there by the artists engaged in this work. In the context of a concerted effort to increase women's visibility in contemporary dance and the coterminous backlash against homosexual and effeminate Senegalese men, multiple choreographic inquiries into gender and sexuality emerged during my time in Senegal. Witnessing these works and participating in dance workshops amounted to what I experienced viscerally as a differentiated contemporary dance space due to its greater sense of openness and liberation in terms of dress, comportment, gesture, and movement in relation to Senegalese public space. Writing about queer embodiment in a nation where homosexuality is criminalized, I recognize my doubled responsibility to the safety of the artists I discuss and to the urgency of illuminating queer aesthetics in a country portrayed by international media in ways that focus overwhelmingly on spectacular acts of homophobic and transphobic violence, overshadowing the circulation of other perspectives. It is worth repeating that this book is not about the gender or sexual identities or behaviors of any person I discuss, nor is it about my own queerness. Instead, I aim to shed light on submerged imaginaries that offer transformative possibility. These imaginaries are inevitably elusive, fleeting, and opaque.

As my writing and theoretical lens came into focus over the years of working on this project, I followed up with artists about their comfortability with my analyses. Rather than taking one's word at the time of a 2016 interview, for example, I checked in via Zoom, email, WhatsApp, or in person while completing the final drafts of this manuscript. I offered to send excerpts for the artists to review, many of whom took me up on that offer, leading to some in-depth exchanges about the most recent version of my writing about their work. Others were quick to confirm their permission without reviewing my writing. Germaine Acogny, for example, has a print copy of my doctoral dissertation, available to anyone studying at École des Sables. She trusted that this book, as an extension of my dissertation, would not portray her in a way that she was uncomfortable with. A minority of artists expressed reservations due to changes in their work or personal lives since the time of my research

and requested that I use a pseudonym in place of their names. In all cases, I honored and respected their requests.

The ethnographic research that informs most of this study is supplemented by written and digital materials including performance reviews, programs, French Institute reports, photographs, and video recordings that I collected from public and private archives in Senegal and France. The archives of the Senegalese daily newspaper *Le Soleil*, France's cultural diplomacy archives in Nantes, and documents shared with me by French scholar Annie Bourdié from a 1990 conference in Paris that launched the organization *Afrique en créations*—crucial to the early administration of contemporary dance in Africa—were particularly vital to the historical research I present in chapters 1 and 2. Certainly, these historical documents largely portray the perspectives and activities of those in positions of power. Documentation of the history of the French Institute, for example, overwhelmingly reflects the French civil servants who established and directed these centers rather than the local artists and audiences who frequented them in the African cities in which they were located. Indeed, the archive is inescapably limited. Recognizing that there are gaps in the historical information I present, I aim to provide context to ground the ethnographic research that follows and to situate contemporary dance as part of a lineage of entwined local and transnational dance practices.

Each of the following chapters is organized around a key word that elucidates a precondition or a facet of dancing opacity. Although the chapters may suggest rigid boundaries, there is significant overlap between these categories, just as there are practices and performances that do not fit neatly into the structure I propose here. While this book's organization cannot perfectly map onto dance practices on the ground, it attempts to illustrate broad patterns in dance studios and on dance stages.

The first two chapters primarily present historical research, setting the groundwork for the ethnography and performance analyses that make up the final three chapters. Chapter 1, "Entanglement," delves into the history of the consolidation and institutionalization of contemporary dance in the 1990s as a coproduction of France and Africa. By focusing on the history of the French Institute and the contemporary dance festival known today as the *Biennale de la danse en Afrique*, the chapter explores the entwined local, intra-African, and intercontinental networks and institutions that collectively shape the performance circuits that contemporary dance artists inhabit. The second half of the chapter connects this history to more recent manifestations of transnational entanglements through ethnographic research at the 2016 and 2021 editions of the *Biennale*. The next chapter, "Openness,"

travels back in time to explore modernist dance institutions in 1970s and 1980s Dakar. Openness, or *ouverture*, was a key tenet of President Senghor's Negritude philosophy, and it permeated the dance studios, techniques, and choreographies that took shape in Dakar during his presidency. Germaine Acogny's *Mudra Afrique* and Ousmane Noël Cissé's various dance schools deployed curricula premised on African dance as a foundation for syncretic dance techniques that were intentionally inclusive of non-African dance aesthetics and open to non-African dancers. The chapter illustrates how the idea of openness expanded beyond the international makeup of the schools and the aesthetics they transmitted to encompass an open attitude toward performances of gender.

Chapter 3, "Otherwise," turns to contemporary dance training in Dakar and at *École des Sables*. The chapter describes how dance training offered by *Andréya Ouamba* and by instructors at *École des Sables* pivots on the idea of *danser autrement* (dancing otherwise) and how this generates queer praxis. Otherwise entails an embrace of the unfamiliar and a practice of imagining possibilities outside of known movement repertoires through methods including deconstruction and improvisation. I argue that the pedagogies deployed in these sites facilitate imagining and inhabiting queer possibilities outside the state's obligatory choreography of heteropatriarchy. The artists' pedagogical methods feed directly into their creative processes; dancing otherwise manifests in different ways in their choreography, which the following two chapters elucidate.

Turning from the dance studio to the stage, chapters 4 and 5 center performance analysis. Chapter 4, "Ambiguity," examines works-in-progress by male choreographers following a 2016 public scandal that reinforced ideas of male belonging to the Senegalese nation as contingent on hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity. The choreographers—*Hardo Kâ*, *Mamadou Dieng*, *Thierno Diédhiou*, and *Amadou Diop* (pseudonym)—included glimpses of effeminacy and homoeroticism in their choreography, yet they were disallowed from openly discussing these transgressive dimensions. They strategically employed ambiguity both at the level of performance and in their public utterances about their work. The final chapter, "Unfolding," analyzes the multiple iterations of womanhood that unfold within and across performances during a widespread effort to increase women's visibility in the African contemporary dance scene. I argue that at the moment of being summoned to visibility on global stages, choreographers confound this identity category, refusing to accommodate universally legible narratives of African womanhood. Germaine Acogny's *À un endroit du début* (*Somewhere at the*

Beginning, 2015), Andréya Ouamba's *Espace commun 100 % (100% Common Space)*, 2016), and Fatou Cissé's *Regarde-moi encore (Look at Me Again)*, 2012) and *Le bal du cercle (The Circle Ball)*, 2015) collectively illustrate the irreducibility of African womanhood while delving into the nuanced specificities of their subject matter. Although these final two chapters' organization according to a male-female binary may appear to counter this book's advocacy for queer possibility, my decision to organize them in this way reflects realities on the ground. Ideas, regulations, and the surveillance of gender- and sexual-nonconformity land on Senegalese females and males differently, and this is reflected in contemporary choreography.

In the conclusion, I revisit the contemporary dance scene in Senegal following the COVID-19 pandemic, which came after years of diminishing arts budgets of the international organizations that artists long relied on. In the context of heightened economic precarity, I draw attention to emergent modes of artmaking that reconfigure institutional support while continuing to evolve queer aesthetic possibilities, particularly the third edition of Fatou Cissé's annual street performance program *La ville en mouvement: Les arts dans la rue (The City in Movement: Art in the Street)* in 2022. The conclusion highlights the inventiveness and improvisational craft of Dakarois artists as they work toward potentially sustainable decolonial pathways for artmaking four decades after the implementation of neoliberal reform.

While by no means comprehensive of contemporary dance in Senegal, the tactics, perspectives, and creative approaches described throughout this book are meant to illustrate the dexterity of those who participated in this study. I aim to shed light on their ingenuity and strategic choreographies of subtle dissent that make space for subjectivities excluded from full citizenship. The artists, many of whom I got to know years before deciding to pursue an academic career, inspired this project. They welcomed me into their rehearsals, workshops, and homes year after year for more than a decade; they trusted me to document their artistry—a responsibility that I do not take lightly. *Dancing Opacity* attempts to honor their lived realities and amplify their creative theorizations. All the ideas expressed in this text are mine and I take full responsibility for any missteps, limitations, or gaps.

One

Entanglement

France, Africa, and la Biennale de la danse en Afrique



Structural adjustment in Senegal and across Africa throughout the 1980s and 1990s thrust the continent into “a Western capitalist project that claimed to resolve the developmental woes of and dire conditions in which Africans lived their lives.”¹ Instead of bolstering economic growth as promised, the neoliberal policies and practices required by U.S.-based international lending agencies led to extremely low rates of economic growth alongside increasing inequality and marginalization. As African governments were swept up in the neoliberal world order, a proliferation of international NGOs and donors took the place of the state in providing social services.² New forms of dependence on the Global North were introduced across numerous domains, and the arts were no exception. The sudden loss of state support and scarce opportunities for local private sponsorship left artists little alternative but to seek funding from outside the nation-state and outside the continent. Among the most significant of these outside funders was France, which launched a robust initiative to institutionalize contemporary dance across Africa in the mid-1990s. This French initiative was widely welcomed, though certainly not free from contestations.

This chapter charts the emergence, consolidation, and evolution of the genre known as *African contemporary dance* as a coproduction of France and Africa. The French Republic has valued cultural diplomacy since at least the nineteenth century. Dissemination of the French language and culture was fundamental to its universalizing mission carried out through colonial conquest and, since the 1960s, through forms of soft power. The proliferation of

French Cultural Centers—now called the French Institute—across Africa was crucial to this endeavor. While the aspirations of these centers have shifted over time from cultural influence to cultural exchange, their presence remains strong in the twenty-first century, an undeniable legacy of French imperialism. These centers are at the heart of the consolidation and administration of African contemporary dance.

African contemporary dance, like other forms of African cultural production, is embedded within the macrostructures of geopolitical inequities in the afterlife of colonialism. Resources including funding, theatrical spaces, and technology are disproportionately located in centers of global capital, all but necessitating that artists maintain strong ties to European and North American organizations and collaborators. Indeed, the power that France maintains in the patronage, curation, and distribution of contemporary dance creates the impression that it is a European invention that takes shape in Africa through processes of appropriation and assimilation, an impression that I strongly rebuke throughout this book. Instead, African artists leverage their access to the transnational circuit of contemporary dance to create meaningful work that is as integral to cultural flows within Africa as it is engaged with the global arts world. They co-construct and navigate the entangled local, intra-African, and intercontinental networks and resources that give shape to the performance genre that they activate, reconfiguring these arrangements of power over time.

The concept of entanglement foregrounds the interwoven, twisted, palimpsestic, porous, and asymmetrical encounters and networks among individuals, cultures, and political economies that shape contemporary dance. Entanglement constitutes a framework that resists the simplicity and rigidity of the center/periphery binary, insisting instead on the circuitous, multidirectional, and oftentimes tense ways in which cultural texts and identities travel and take shape. Forged through encounters and collaborations that span South–South and South–North axes, African contemporary dance encompasses intra-African solidarities as much as it relies on Franco–African interconnections. I draw on Ananya Chatterjea’s conceptualization of the South–South paradigm as a “political and material formation” that recognizes a shared history of systemic distancing from centralized global power among communities affected by “interlocking oppressive hierarchies,” without collapsing their differences.³ The intra-African networks that fuel contemporary dance on the continent comprise South–South solidarities that are intimately entangled with France’s persistent presence. Forms of major and minor transnationalism, as conceptualized by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih,

intersect as the omnipresence of France is to some extent mitigated by the “creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national boundaries.”⁴

My use of entanglement is informed by scholars of African and African diasporic cultural production. Sarah Nuttall proposes a rubric of entanglement in relation to post-apartheid South African literature that “gesture[s] towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness.”⁵ Nuttall extends Achille Mbembe’s conceptualization of entanglement as a temporal descriptor of the age of the postcolony, a time that “encloses multiple durées made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another.”⁶ More recently, in his 2021 English translation and expansion of *Sortir de la grande nuit* (2010), published as *Out of the Dark Night*, Mbembe develops the concept of Afropolitanism to indicate the aesthetic sensibilities that arose from new forms of global entanglements at the end of the twentieth century. No longer preoccupied with questions of origins as the nationalist arts of the post-independence period were, contemporary African arts are informed by processes of dispersion characterized by “the intensification of migrations and the establishment of new African diasporas in the world,” as well as immersion, the histories of communities from elsewhere residing on the continent.⁷ Similar to Glissant’s poetic of relation, Afropolitanism is the result of the “imbrication of worlds.”⁸ To analyze African contemporary dance through the lens of entanglement is to embrace the messiness of cultural flows, the instability of ideas of origins or roots, and the contradictions resulting from the uneven geopolitical landscape through which it is wrought while situating contemporary dance within a pattern of emerging aesthetics that, Mbembe argues, appear across contemporary African arts.

The first half of this chapter provides a brief overview of the history of French presence in contemporary dance in Senegal and in Africa broadly. I chart the development of the genre of African contemporary dance as a coproduction of France and Africa, largely established by the French foundation *Afrique en créations*. In partnership with Ivoirian artist and scholar Alphonse Tiérou, *Afrique en créations* established the pan-African festival and former competition *Rencontres chorégraphiques de l’Afrique et de l’Océan Indien* (today the *Biennale de la danse en Afrique*, which I refer to hereafter as the *Biennale*), which was and continues to be a major catalyst of the art form.⁹ The second half of this chapter is devoted to ethnographic research carried out at the tenth (2016) and eleventh (2021) editions of the

Biennale, in Burkina Faso and Morocco, respectively. I demonstrate the ways in which artists leverage the Biennale as a platform where they take ownership of contemporary dance while interrogating the ongoing role of France and reconfiguring the arrangements of culture and power that underlie their art form. These reconfigurations may be considered decolonial acts that, though not premised on complete disconnection or separation as discourses of decolonization often imply, illustrate the possibilities for change within the “continuous, entangled folds of the whole.”¹⁰

This chapter articulates a framework of transnational entanglements that is sustained throughout this book. While this chapter focuses almost exclusively on transnationalism rather than on gender and sexuality, it sets the stage for my analyses of queer aesthetics in the subsequent chapters. The transnational spaces in which contemporary dance is forged exist both within and outside the nation-state, allowing for aesthetic possibilities that may be disallowed in a primarily national context.

The French Institute: 1959 to 2016

The power of the French Institute in the contemporary dance world in Senegal is undeniable. Nearly every artist I spoke with over the years of my research considers the French Institute a necessary partner and vehicle for their success due to the material and financial support that it singularly provides. Dancers regularly meet with French Institute staff to discuss their work, submit dossiers, and request funds for new projects. Formerly the French Cultural Center (Centre culturel français, or CCF) and restructured as the French Institute (Institut français) in 2011, the center has two locations in Senegal, in Dakar and Saint-Louis. It is connected to the network of *Alliances françaises*, a separate French state agency with locations in Kaolack, Ziguinchor, and Banjul, the capital city of The Gambia. The reach of the French Institute in the contemporary dance world is extensive, given its hand in the curation, distribution, and patronage of the art form. However, the French Institute was not a principal site for dance until it actively participated in the development of African contemporary dance as an emerging genre in the 1990s. Understanding its current role requires a brief look back at French cultural diplomacy policies and ideologies since the mid-twentieth century.

While France’s record of cultural diplomacy can be traced back several centuries, its involvement in its colonial territories intensified following World War II. Given the large numbers of African *tirailleurs*, or infantrymen, who fought and died for France, the period after the war necessitated renegotiating the

colonial order.¹¹ In 1946, the French Empire was replaced by the French Union. All residents of French territories became legal citizens of this newly conceptualized “single France” with the abolition of the status of colonial “subjects.” New initiatives were needed to reimagine the terms of unity and cohesion in the reconfigured French Union, which incorporated Africans across French West Africa into a new type of citizenship, one whose terms were far from certain. At the same time, France took a renewed interest in its cultural politics abroad in hopes of restoring its global image in the postwar era.¹² New state agencies and positions were created to implement its foreign cultural politics, including the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, which was established by President Charles de Gaulle in 1959, and *conseillers culturels* (cultural advisors), who were based in France’s embassies and responsible for implementing France’s cultural politics in their respective locations.¹³ As Altaïr Despres notes, an ideology premised on French universalism undergirded early French cultural initiatives in the colonial territories. This ideology was largely carried out under the leadership of André Malraux, France’s first minister of culture, and Émile Biasini, a colonial administrator who directed Malraux’s cultural campaign in Africa.¹⁴

This was the context in which the French government established its cultural centers across French West Africa and across the continent. After a failed attempt to create a center in Chad, the first CCF was established in 1959 in Dakar—the capital city of French West Africa—followed by a proliferation of centers during the 1960s.¹⁵ For Malraux and Biasini, the CCFs would secure France’s cultural presence in Africa as an extension of Malraux’s *action culturelle* (cultural action) policy at home while strengthening African culture through contact with France. As a service of the embassy and under the authority of cultural advisors, the CCF aimed to disseminate the French language and culture and to model “a certain image of Frenchness” while also promoting African talent, premised on ideas of cultural cooperation and reciprocity with France.¹⁶ Certainly, the reciprocity that France envisaged was not divorced from the ongoing colonialist hierarchy that likely informed the kinds of African talent that the centers found worthy of supporting. The duality of promoting “Frenchness” and reciprocity with Africans would continue to inform the ideology and activities of the centers throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

Over the next several decades, CCF directors, cultural advisors, and other French state agents debated and recalibrated the objectives and underlying ideologies of the centers. Quarterly activity reports and letters from the Dakar and Saint-Louis CCFs show that they began to lean more heavily

into a rhetoric of friendship, exchange, dialogue, and reciprocity as it became increasingly clear that the idea of universal French culture was no longer widely accepted. In the 1980s, under the new French minister of culture, Jack Lang, a revised rhetoric of cultural diplomacy was firmly established. This is evident in a 1980 report from the CCF in Dakar that cites various local institutions and artists who consulted with the center in preparation for their independent activities. The report concludes with the following statement:

Le dialogue qui s'est établi entre nos partenaires africains et nous est un dialogue sans démagogie : il est cordial et franc mais sans concession. Une coopération authentique n'est pas faite de dons ou d'assistance. Elle passe obligatoirement par une étroite et exigeante collaboration et par une formation. Nos amis sénégalais le savent et notre attitude qui a pu, au début surprendre, récolte aujourd'hui les fruits de cette rigueur une amitié sincère et un travail en commun bien fait.

The dialogue that has been established between our African partners and us is a dialogue without demagoguery: it is cordial and frank but without concession. Authentic cooperation is not built on donations or assistance. It necessarily involves close and demanding collaboration and training. Our Senegalese friends know this and our attitude, which may have been surprising at first, is today reaping the fruits of this rigor: sincere friendship and collaborative, well-done work.¹⁷

That same year, a report from the CCF of Saint-Louis described the increasing vulnerability of French cultural prestige and the need to renew France's image. This report asserts that:

La réussite d'une coopération culturelle en Afrique face à la progression des idéaux musulmans, réside dans notre capacité à présenter notre culture, comme ouverte et dynamique, véritable outil d'émancipation, et aussi à poursuivre notre politique de collaboration avec nos partenaires européens.

The success of cultural cooperation in Africa in the face of the progression of Muslim ideals lies in our ability to present our culture as open and dynamic, a true tool of emancipation, and also to pursue our policy of collaboration with our European partners.¹⁸

Side by side, these reports illustrate a duality in French cultural policy: collaboration with Africans on the one hand, and the continued promotion of French culture as a benevolent force—a “tool of emancipation” vis-à-vis rising Islam—on the other. While the directors imagined the centers as an egalitarian meeting point between depoliticized Africans and French civil servants, divorced from legacies of colonialism and its contingent racial hierarchies, anxiety seemed to creep in when French culture was decentered.

Existing scholarship on the early years of the CCFs in Africa predominantly focuses on French presence; there is little documentation of how African cultural workers and other locals responded to the implementation of the centers. Certainly, a cohort of French-educated African elites benefited. In the book *Senegalese Stagecraft: Decolonizing Theater-Making in Francophone Africa*, Brian Valente-Quinn analyzes the ways in which African theater-makers, particularly graduates of the École normale William Ponty, used the centers’ stage spaces to “participate in ongoing debates on the political and social implications of the French Union.”¹⁹ Theater performances and competitions organized and hosted by the centers became platforms in which terms of citizenship and Franco-African theatrical innovations were formulated and debated. At the same time, the centers were also met with hostility from locals, most obviously carried forth when the CCF in Dakar was set on fire in 1971. The CCF was targeted alongside at least two other French-operated sites in Dakar, all of which went up in flames in the middle of the night on January 15 in protest of ongoing French presence in Senegal. The arson was timed just prior to a scheduled visit by President Georges Pompidou and was prefigured by the appearance across the city of graffiti denouncing the Senghorian government and its continued dependence on French assistance.²⁰ Although the arson appears to have been an isolated event (and it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which this act represented a widespread attitude toward the center, given the scarcity of documentation of the fire and its aftermath), it is an important and understudied indicator that for some, the center represented a problematic reiteration of the French imperial scheme. I am regularly reminded of this moment in the French Institute’s history when I come across graffiti in Dakar bearing messages such as *France dégage!* (Get out France!). Faded and partially covered over by more recent graffiti markings, these messages are palimpsestic signs of the past that continue to hold meaning in the present.

In the mid-2010s, at the time I was beginning my research, the newly renamed French Institute of Dakar continued to balance its dual goals of French cultural diffusion and the promotion of African talent.²¹ In an inter-



Figure 1. Graffiti in Dakar that translates to “Get out France!” Photo by the author.

view in 2016, the director of cultural activities at the time, Pierre Chevalier, whose role included programming for the performing arts sector, described the institute’s objectives as threefold: French cultural diffusion, promotion of Senegalese culture, and promotion of contemporary arts. In the domain of contemporary dance specifically, the institute programs approximately five to ten performances each year in its Théâtre de Verdure, loans its technical equipment for performances at other venues including the state-funded Blaise Senghor Cultural Center, and provides funding for select projects, including pedagogical and creative initiatives. Prioritizing contemporary arts over other genres is deemed necessary as, according to Chevalier, the contemporary arts do not receive funding elsewhere, whereas the traditional performing arts are more likely to garner state support.²²

However, it is too simplistic to suggest that the French Institute simply fills a gap by sponsoring a genre that is marginalized by the Senegalese state. The French Institute was in fact central to the formulation of contemporary dance in Africa. From the outset, the French Institute was a gatekeeper of the *Rencontres chorégraphiques*, considered the springboard for African

contemporary dance, as discussed in the next section. The Institute played a central role in the application, selection, and distribution processes for the Rencontres and remains the primary sponsor of the festival today. Its long-standing grip on contemporary dance across the continent, while considerably appreciated by the artists who benefit from its support, has created the impression that contemporary dance is a European invention that is already sufficiently funded by international organizations and therefore not a priority for local sponsors. This dynamic, in turn, contributes to the absence of a robust local market for contemporary dance in some African cities, where audiences are composed mainly of other artists and expatriates. Artists have taken important steps to change this narrative and create the conditions for a more locally sustainable structure bolstered by local sponsors and audiences, as I discuss later in this chapter and in the book's conclusion.

Until a new structure exists, however, contemporary artists continue to struggle to obtain local funding. Interviews with employees of the Senegalese Ministry of Culture and Communication in 2016, including the then *directeur des arts* (director of arts), Abdoulaye Koundoul, and one of his staff members who was previously a freelance dance administrator, Mamadou Ciré Cissé, clarified the perspective of the state. They were transparent that the ministry's primary objective is the preservation and promotion of the state's cultural heritage with a department devoted entirely to this end: the Direction du Patrimoine Culturel (Cultural Heritage Department). Here, Senegal's cultural heritage refers to art forms stemming from indigenous practices of the nation's diverse ethnic groups. This is not to say that the contemporary arts are ignored. The Direction des Arts (Arts Department), another department of the ministry, is purportedly committed to supporting all art forms. As Cissé explained, "La mission du Ministère, c'est de prendre en charge *toutes* les préoccupations, *toutes* les expressions culturelles. . . . Et il va sans dire que la danse contemporaine fait partie des secteurs également qui sont pris en compte" (The mission of the ministry is to take charge of *all* concerns, *all* cultural expressions. . . . And it goes without saying that contemporary dance is among the sectors taken into account).²³ However, he later said that its support for an institution like the renowned École des Sables is minimal because École des Sables receives international funding. When I asked Koundoul about the ministry's support for contemporary dance broadly, he only commented on Germaine Acogny, seemingly unaware of the breadth of contemporary dance artists and institutions beyond École des Sables. He was transparent about the ministry's limited budget, which decreased significantly in the aftermath of the 2008 economic recession, and admitted that "les soutiens sont pour la plupart symboliques" (the support is mostly symbolic).²⁴

Contemporary dance artists necessarily navigate an uneven terrain shaped by legacies of colonialism and neoliberalism. The French Institute has always been integral to contemporary dance and is all but forced to live up to its reputation as the sole sponsor for the art form while the Senegalese state deprioritizes contemporary dance when allocating its limited arts funding, counting instead on continued international support. A perpetual cycle of dependence on the French Institute—as the Senegalese state’s disinterest in an art form that receives funding elsewhere is reason for the French Institute to reaffirm its support, thereby reinforcing the state’s perspective—is all too familiar to local artists. Many understandably resent their local governments for not supporting their livelihoods in any meaningful way.

Rencontres chorégraphiques and the Consolidation of African Contemporary Dance

The French Institute was directly connected to another French organization that played an equally powerful role in the consolidation of African contemporary dance: *Afrique en créations*, the foundation behind the establishment of the Biennale de la danse en Afrique, formerly known as the *Rencontres chorégraphiques de l’Afrique et de l’Océan Indien* (Choreographic Encounters of Africa and the Indian Ocean). In 1990, Jacques Pelletier, the French minister of cooperation, established *Afrique en créations*. The foundation was based on the idea that French and African artists should work together in the development of African arts, which would serve as a vehicle of economic development on the continent while reaching international (read: non-African) audiences. *Afrique en créations* was launched after a conference in Paris in January 1990 attended by over three hundred French cultural diplomats, directors of CCFs in Africa, and French and African artists, including Germaine Acogny as the sole representative of dance. Transcripts of opening speeches illustrate the philosophy of the foundation, particularly its goal of French and African cultural cooperation and the idea of promoting culture to combat the economic crisis in Africa. Pelletier affirmed that the well-being of the arts is not merely a luxury in the South; it is a “composante essentielle du progrès” (essential component of progress) and integral to development. He insisted that by working together, African and French artists “ouvre les perspectives les plus riches” (open up the richest perspectives) and that “des œuvres artistiques nées de l’Afrique peuvent affronter les publics internationaux” (artistic works born in Africa can confront international audiences).²⁵ *Afrique en créations* expanded beyond the mission of the CCFs by insisting on the “cogeneration of a Franco-African culture”²⁶ while aligning with

an emerging development paradigm that considers “culture as a resource.”²⁷ In large part, this paradigm promotes the establishment and professionalization of cultural institutions in Africa as a means of discouraging artists from immigrating to Europe. In the words of H  l  ne Neveu Kringelbach, these dual objectives were “a combination of political alliance and migration ‘containment.’”²⁸

Afrique en cr  ations officially began operations in 1991. They promoted what Pelletier referred to as France’s *priorit   africaine*, or France’s role as the largest sponsor of sub-Saharan Africa, with nine percent of its public aid budget allocated to the continent. Afrique en cr  ations was the first organization of its kind, funded solely by public aid and geared toward enriching African artistic creation. The Biennale de l’art Africain contemporain (Biennial of Contemporary African Art), also known as Dak’art or the Dakar Biennale, was one of the first manifestations of Afrique en cr  ations and one of the most successful, having held its fifteenth edition in November 2024.²⁹

Until the establishment of Afrique en cr  ations, dance was marginalized by French cultural diplomacy initiatives, which focused their attention and resources on developing the visual arts, music, and theater.³⁰ However, this changed when Afrique en cr  ations partnered with Ivoirian choreographer and dance scholar Alphonse Ti  rou in 1992 to launch a program titled *Pour une danse africaine contemporaine* (For an African Contemporary Dance). Ti  rou’s mission was to:

Passer du clich   des Africains qui ont la danse dans le sang . . . de sortir les formes chor  graphiques africaines de leur “ghetto folklorique traditionnel” afin de les rendre visibles sur la sc  ne internationale.

Move on from the clich   of Africans who have dance in their blood . . . to remove African choreographic forms from their “traditional folkloric ghetto” to make them visible on the international stage.³¹

A 1994 letter from Afrique en cr  ations published in *Revue noire* reiterates the desire to move away from the confines of neotraditional dance, lamenting national ballets’ construction of a fixed, atemporal image of African dance based on ancestral culture—an image that, according to the writer, forecloses artistic creativity and dynamism. A resounding sense of benevolence on the part of France in its support for a renewed African creative force that would transcend existing African performing arts genres and take part in a globalized contemporary arts world can be found across documentation of early Afrique en cr  ations initiatives.

However, it is important not to lose sight of Tiérou's role in the establishment of *Pour une danse africaine contemporaine*. In the wake of structural adjustment, without meaningful access to state funds, he strategically partnered with the new French organization whose primary objective was to fund African artistic creation. While France certainly played a heavy hand in the institutionalization of African contemporary dance—both as an iteration of its colonial preoccupation with African arts and as a way to maintain its cultural presence in Africa—African creators and intellectuals such as Tiérou have always been at the forefront of the art form. Contemporary dance in Africa did not develop in a vacuum of French support. It was a coproduction of Africa and France, in which Africans occupied the role of creators while France provided financial and organizational support. France institutionalized and helped evolve existing dance practices across African urban centers, lending administrative support in contexts where local material conditions were vastly inadequate to sustain a professional contemporary dance industry.

With the support of *Afrique en créations* and by partnering with Mathilde Monnier—a French choreographer who had recently achieved enormous success for her piece *Pour Antigone* (*For Antigone*, 1993), a collaboration with Burkinabé and Malian dancers and musicians—Tiérou's program was launched. *Pour une danse africaine contemporaine* comprised two components: an awareness-raising campaign including training workshops, meetings, talks, and a traveling photography exhibition; and the launch of the first edition of *Rencontres chorégraphiques* in Luanda, Angola, in 1995, with Tiérou as artistic director. As Despres documents, the campaigns, which relied heavily on the network of CCFs and *Alliances françaises* throughout the continent, incited interest in the *Rencontres*. Dancers from anywhere on the African continent could apply to participate by performing a choreographic work at their local CCF. These performances were recorded and sent to France, where a jury of European and African artists selected ten finalists to perform at the festival, which was also a competition. Submissions were judged for innovation and originality, the elaboration of a choreographic language, and imaginative use of music, specifically by “sortir des rythmes habituels des danses de village, souvent limités aux seules percussions” (breaking away from the commonplace rhythms of village dances, often limited to percussion alone).³² Winners of the *Rencontres* were awarded money to produce a new piece and an international tour (first prize), the opportunity to work with a “confirmed African artist” (second prize), and an artistic residency at a prestigious theater in France (third prize).³³ This first edition was followed by subsequent editions in Angola (1998), Madagascar (1999, 2001, and 2003), Paris (2006), Tunisia (2008), Mali (2010), South Africa (2012), Burkina Faso

(2016), Morocco (2021), and Mozambique (2023). At the time of writing, the thirteenth edition is planned for Senegal in 2026.

The first edition of the *Rencontres* stimulated a great deal of interest in contemporary dance across the continent, evidenced by the rapid uptick in applications to perform in subsequent editions. Over time, the festival grew to include more than forty performances, dropping the competition element in 2012 in favor of showcasing more artists. While the French continued to hold positions of authority in the organization, curation, and patronage of the festival, efforts were increasingly put in place to expand beyond the primacy of France. This was particularly the case with the 2001 arrival of Sophie Renaud as head of the Dance Department of Cultures France, which became the main public institution that organizes the festival.³⁴ Renaud composed a jury of international figures from Europe, Africa, Asia, and North America, including Senegalese sculptor Ousmane Sow and Mauritanian-born Malian filmmaker Abderrahmane Sissako. She also invited the National Office of Artistic Diffusion (ONDA), whose mission was to “facilitate the dissemination of dance creation within the international market.”³⁵ ONDA established a delegation of international festival curators to attend the festival each year and took responsibility for touring the winning pieces, thereby further integrating African choreographers into the transnational contemporary dance circuit.

Several scholars identify the first edition of the *Rencontres* as the moment that inaugurated African contemporary dance.³⁶ Indeed, the festival marked an important turning point in the lineage of African performing arts. For perhaps the first time, choreographic works composed by Africans were considered as part of the international contemporary dance circuit rather than as staged representations of national or regional traditions or syncretic modernist experiments (see chapter 2). Importantly, the festival cultivated the formation and expansion of South–South networks between African artists from across the continent alongside new types of Franco-African networks, leading to a plethora of new artistic projects initiated by Africans and subsidized by France and other European countries at the turn of the century.³⁷ In Senegal, these included *École des Sables* (Acogny’s second dance school), which held its first workshop in 1998, and the school’s resident company, *Jant-bi*; the biennial Festival *Kaay Fecc* beginning in 2001; *Andréya Ouamba’s Compagnie 1er Temps*, established in 2001, as well as his training workshops and choreographic residencies, *Ateliers Expérience et Corps (AEx-Corps)*, beginning in 2008; and Alioune Diagne’s Festival *Duo Solo Danse*, also established in 2008, in Saint-Louis. Each of these initiatives relied on structures that exceeded the nation-

state and the continent not only by securing European sponsorship but also by putting into motion the vital intra-African networks that the *Rencontres* helped forge. African artists worked across national boundaries to solicit participants and instructors for festivals and workshops, further cultivating artistic networks on the continent. The expansion of intra-African networks, entangled with Franco-African ones, shaped the genre of African contemporary dance from its earliest iterations. However, these developments were not divorced from the ways in which the imperial state continues to rear its head, explicitly and implicitly. As much as African agents were at the forefront of the development of African contemporary dance, the genre's establishment and growth were interwoven with a desire for Black African bodies as a marker of difference on French stages and the French state's persistent exploitation of raw materials on the African continent.

The *Rencontres*' Insidious Colonial Underpinnings

The emergence of *Afrique en créations* and the *Rencontres* cannot be separated from a pattern among European, particularly French, choreographers of seeking choreographic renewal by turning to non-white, particularly Black African, dancers and aesthetics.³⁸ Following the rise of French conceptual dance in the 1980s, French choreographers found themselves uninspired by the early 1990s, at risk of "choreographic conformism."³⁹ To distinguish themselves and create new codes of avant-gardism, many culled visibly non-white forms, aesthetics, and bodies. Their specific interest in Black African dancers and aesthetics was likely inspired by the African dance classes offered in Europe at the time by choreographers including Acogny, Elsa Wollaston, and Koffi Kôkô. Having taken their classes or having been exposed to their work in other ways, French choreographers including Claude Brumachon, Jean-François Duroure, Heddy Maalem (who is part Algerian), Mathilde Monnier, and Sylvain Prunenec, as well as German choreographer Susanne Linke, traveled to Africa and utilized the network of CCFs across the continent to cast African dancers in their new works. These were often highly successful pieces that enjoyed extensive international tours, sometimes resulting in invitations offered to the African performers for additional work in Europe. Ultimately, this pattern and the opportunities it generated for African dancers contributed to the institutionalization of contemporary dance across Africa and African contemporary dancers' visibility on international stages.⁴⁰

For example, Burkinabé artists Salia Sanou and Seydou Boro were both

cast in Monnier's *Pour Antigone* and were subsequently invited to join Monnier's Montpellier-based company as permanent members. This led to their integration in an elite French artistic network, eventually enabling them to obtain French resources to found their own company, Salia Ni Seydou, and establish the Centre de Developpement Chorégraphique (CDC) La Termitière in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.⁴¹ To this day, Ouagadougou is a central hub of contemporary dance, in no small part due to Sanou and Boro's initiatives.⁴² Yet, their pioneering work is entangled with Europe's desire for African otherness on its contemporary dance stages in the early 1990s to reinvigorate an impasse in European performance. The insidious repetition of the colonial desire to consume the "exotic" African body—in which African dancers would likely be understood as representatives of a vague, differentiated culture rather than as creative individuals (despite their creative contributions to the choreography)—played a role in the conditions of possibility for the Rencontres to emerge and gain traction. This pattern is not limited to dance, but persists across artistic genres, constituting what art historian Olu Guibe refers to as the "economy of Otherness."⁴³

France's decision to sponsor the Rencontres not only was a response to the European desire for African bodies on its contemporary dance stages but also figured into "France's political playground in Africa."⁴⁴ The political-economic incentives of this itinerant festival come into focus through a consideration of its changing location, determined in part by France's desire to expand its cultural influence and correlated to its oil interests on the continent. Leading up to the first edition in Angola, Patrick Peteuil, the general secretary of *Afrique en créations* at the time, explained that the choice of Angola was an opportunity to expand French influence beyond its former colonies and decenter West Africa as the only site of artistic activity. By the mid-1990s, West Africa was a privileged region for artistic representation, with *Dak'art* in Senegal, the film festival FESPACO in Burkina Faso, a biannual photography festival in Mali, and the arts festival MASA in Côte d'Ivoire.⁴⁵ At the same time, France held oil interests in Angola, and the major French oil companies Elf and TotalEnergies were private partners with *Afrique en créations*.⁴⁶ Neveu Kringelbach attests to a similar scenario for the selection of Johannesburg in 2012, where France wanted to invest in the region's oil and mineral wealth. When I attended the tenth edition in Ouagadougou in 2016, the seemingly incongruent presence of Total was ubiquitous. Its logo stood out on billboards advertising the festival throughout the city, and the director of *Fondation Total*, the petroleum company's charitable organization, was a

featured opening night speaker. The specter of racial capitalism and France's (still ongoing) exploitation of Africa's natural resources haunt the festival. While African artists benefit from the exposure of performing there, multinational petroleum companies also gain exposure through the dissemination of their self-image as benevolent philanthropists. By funding the festival, they effectively rebrand themselves in ways that distract attention away from their ongoing environmentally and socially harmful fossil fuel extraction practices.

The history of French choreographers regenerating their art through the incorporation of African dancers and the influence of France's oil interests in determining the festival's location constitute a pattern of appropriation and exploitation in continuity with the colonial era. France's virtual monopoly over the production and distribution of African contemporary dance affords questions about who this dance form is for. Perhaps this is easily answered, given that elevating African performing arts for "international audiences" was written into the original mission of *Afrique en créations* and reiterated in Tiérou's justification for *Pour une danse africaine contemporaine*. The international arts market is dominated by the white West, where disproportionate resources and gatekeepers who, in the words of Oguibe, "must keep a firm grip on the entry and flow of this art," reside.⁴⁷ To what end were African choreographers thrust into participation in this asymmetrical playing field? To what extent did the exclusive focus on international audiences prohibit the development of sustainable markets for contemporary dance in African localities? Interwoven with the prospect of opportunity and access promised by the transnational contemporary dance circuit is a "Western obsession with and insistence on difference," as contemporary African dancers were appreciated from the beginning for their capacity for aesthetic renewal in reference to whiteness.⁴⁸ As Ananya Chatterjea powerfully argues, the "management of contemporary dance by decision-makers in the global North in fact undercuts its global reach, not by excluding others totally, but by including them in circumscribed ways that carefully retain the cultural hegemony of the North."⁴⁹ Chatterjea describes the limitations to belonging, misreadings of risk-taking and experimentation from non-Western contexts, and the insidious ways in which whiteness gets recentered in the global contemporary dance circuit. *Afrique en créations'* mission to reach international audiences deepened the already entangled local and global performance contexts that African artists had participated in since the advent of colonial school theater, creating a revised constellation of opportunity, visibility, Western domination, and circumscribed inclusion. As much as the networks forged through

the festival generated a multiplicity of African-initiated projects and opportunities for growth on the continent, they also enlisted African performers into a Eurocentric performance circuit in which they are likely to be seen first and foremost through the lens of difference.

However, the powerful role of France in the consolidation and institutionalization of African contemporary dance in the 1990s and its continued presence in the field today do not preclude the artists' creative agency or diminish the value and vitality of contemporary dance in African localities. Africans are not merely pawns that French cultural brokers move at their will. Instead, they have always been at the forefront of aesthetic innovation and creative leadership while strategically navigating conditions of coloniality. Paralleling Graham Huggan's analysis of the commodification of post-colonial African literature in a global economy regulated largely by Western metropolitan demand, the foreign stranglehold on the market of African cultural production does not impede African cultural producers' "power to exercise agency over their work."⁵⁰ Instead, they might develop strategies from within the "exoticist codes of representation" that frame the circulation of their work, manipulating the conventions expected of them "to their own political ends."⁵¹ The nonverbal medium of contemporary dance enables artists to take this one step further as they lean into the possibilities afforded by evading narrativization, creating performances that are purposefully opaque. By refusing transparency for their international audiences, choreographers manipulate the codes of representation thrust onto their bodies.

At the same time as I recognize these efforts, I share Hershini Bhana Young's concern with the language of agency, particularly in reference to Black African diasporic subjects. Following Walter Johnson, Young warns against the prescription of agency, contingent on liberal notions of self-determination, independence, and choice—conditions that are not universally available to all subjects. Agency, often conflated with resistance, operates in a false binary opposition to submission or complicity, leading us to "ignore acts of submission as forms of agency."⁵² Indeed, the transnational entanglements undergirding the contemporary dance landscape across Africa make it difficult to parse out acts of submission or complicity from independence, choice, and agency. France's power in the contemporary dance landscape is the result of entangled histories, the continuities of empire, and persistent global inequities in late capitalism—structural circumstances that create an overwhelming discrepancy in material conditions of production and consumption between former colonial powers and the formerly colonized. Although artists are gradually shifting these configurations of power, France

cannot be completely excised in favor of purely “local ownership of and control over the means of cultural production,” a notion that depends on a “binary ‘us/them’ rhetoric,” reducing ideas of autonomy, ownership, and agency to a nativist conception.⁵³ Creative decision-making and innovation are necessarily entangled with complicity and accommodation. Sarah Nuttall suggests that entanglement encompasses what Mark Sanders refers to as a “human foldedness,” or the interrelationships of resistance and collaboration, affirmation and disavowal.⁵⁴ The framework of entanglement embraces complexity, simultaneity, and contradiction in place of binaries that inherently reduce actors as either assimilationist or innovative, complicit or independent.

For the remainder of this chapter, I turn to ethnographic research conducted at the tenth and eleventh editions of the Biennale to highlight the ways in which artists navigate these entanglements, debate and recalibrate their terms and conditions, and pursue choreography that exceeds the duality of France versus Africa. Their efforts may be considered decolonial acts in Mbembe’s conceptualization of decolonization not as “disconnection and separation” (as decolonial acts are often presumed) but as “a particular fold or twist in the undulating fabric of the universe—or in a set of continuous, entangled folds of the whole.”⁵⁵ Mbembe argues that current discourses of decolonization reduce the term to “a matter of origins and identity, race and location” while invoking Africa “as if there were unanimity within Africa itself about what is ‘African’ and what is not.”⁵⁶ The ways in which contemporary African artists navigate their interconnectedness with the former colonizer through the Biennale complicate the facile understandings of decolonization that Mbembe corrects. Artists shift, fold, and twist the transnational entanglements that undergird their art form as they create multidimensional performances that destabilize any presumed homogeneity of the idea of Africa and of the genre African contemporary dance.

Danse l’Afrique danse ! / La Biennale de la danse en Afrique

In late November 2016, I arrived at the CDC La Termitière in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, to meet a friend the day before the opening of the tenth edition of Danse l’Afrique danse ! (as the Biennale was known from 2006 to 2016). Taking in the environment, including a group rehearsing in the open-air amphitheater that was originally part of public policies supporting the revolutionary period of the 1980s, not far from the newer black box theater funded by the French embassy, I was quickly drawn to a conversation between a small group of choreographers.⁵⁷ I spotted Andréya Ouamba, who intro-

duced me to his friends, all male, spanning Francophone and Anglophone African countries, many with ties to European or North American cities. One choreographer lamented the incomprehensibility of contemporary dance for African audiences, comparing African contemporary dance to the French education system imposed in Francophone Africa. With codes and conventions delinked from indigenous forms and structures, local audiences do not understand and cannot relate to the art form, he claimed. Significant changes are needed, he declared, to move away from the French system and create work for African audiences on their own terms. Ouamba, always ready for a debate, argued that including African traditions or any explicit markers of Africa would not necessarily make contemporary dance more comprehensible. Furthermore, he suggested, incomprehension is a characteristic of any new art form. For him, the dearth of local audiences and the frequency with which people complain about not understanding are not a result of French imposition but rather part of any inventive process, which entails moving beyond what is comprehensible. Citing historical examples of audiences struggling to comprehend, including the new choreographies staged by directors of the first national dance companies in the 1960s, he concluded that incomprehensibility is not so much a problem as it is a marker of innovation.

Five years later, after delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I sat down with Moroccan choreographer and artistic director of the eleventh Biennale, Taoufiq Izzediou, in the lobby of the Es Saadi Marrakech Resort. Outside the lobby and beyond the resort's pristine pools and lush gardens was a makeshift theater in a conference room, the carpeted floor covered over with strips of Marley and portable bleachers and chairs, the fluorescent lights obscured by a theatrical lighting grid. This was one of a handful of venues for the festival, including the French Institute and the *École supérieure des arts visuels de Marrakech* (College of Visual Arts of Marrakech). Izzediou and I discussed the decidedly new direction that this edition of the Biennale represented: for the first time, the French Institute was merely a sponsoring partner and played no role in the curation or administration of the festival. Instead, a committee of five "confirmed" African artists representing the continent's different regions made recommendations to Izzediou.⁵⁸ Their programming included established artists but prioritized emerging choreographers whose work had not yet circulated widely. Izzediou strategically combined the Biennale with his annual dance festival, *On Marche*, which already had a structure in place. The Biennale was thus entirely organized and administered by a local team in Marrakech. The move away from French artistic control was accompanied by the name change to the Biennale de



Figure 2. Biennale logo, designed by Idalio Manuel Marcos Gimo (Mozambique).

la danse en Afrique and a continent-wide search for a new logo. With the new name, logo, and administrative structure, they essentially rebranded the festival. “Il faut qu’on se libère” (We must free ourselves), Izeddiou repeated multiple times in reference to the long-standing stranglehold of France. At the same time, he is cognizant that the festival remains financially dependent on France, with the French Institute continuing to provide vital sponsorship as the festival’s primary patron.

The Biennale generates a multiplicity of encounters through which transnational African artists exchange creative projects and debate the issues that are most germane to their livelihoods. It is a platform for intercultural and intergenerational conversations, an incubator of choreographic innovations, and a contact zone where diverse individuals congregate. Stemming from Sophie Renaud’s initiative in the early 2000s, the Biennale is attended by presenters representing theaters and festivals throughout Europe at the same

time that it brings together artists from across the African continent together with international journalists and local spectators. Even as France maintains a strong grip on the festival, my ethnographic research at the tenth and eleventh editions reveals how African artists debate and rearrange France's role over time while claiming ownership of their art form. Aware of the Biennale's strong ties to French cultural diplomacy and the connections this bears with the assimilationist policies implemented during colonialism, artists continually rethink the terms of the festival and take vital steps toward increased autonomy. The Biennale illuminates how African artists negotiate creative agency and complicity, how they take ownership of an event and an artistic genre partially consolidated by the former colonizer, and how they give shape to and evolve their art form through encounters spanning South–South and South–North axes. In many ways, the Biennale—widely considered the most significant platform for African contemporary dance—is a synecdoche of the art form broadly, illustrative of the necessary navigations that artists take up in their localities as they seek creative residencies, facilitate workshops, and establish their own national and regional festivals.

Debating French Partnership

Throughout the 2016 festival, artists of multiple generations expressed frustration with contemporary dance's economic dependence on Europe. During a roundtable discussion with some of the form's most notable elders, including Germaine Acogny and two former Mudra Afrique students and pioneers of dance in Burkina Faso, Irène Tassembédo and Lassann Congo, the conversation quickly turned into a heated dialogue with audience members about this longstanding issue. Acogny described her disappointment with African countries' lack of volition to contribute and spoke of how this leaves artists in a state of dependence on the Global North ever since the period of structural adjustment and the 1982 closure of Mudra Afrique. Tassembédo explained that since opening her school, *École de Danse Irène Tassembédo* or *EDIT*, in 2009, she has relied on small, private contributions that leave her in a perpetual state of precarity. She fervently called on the Burkinabé government to support the school:

Pourquoi on est obligé à chaque fois, dès qu'on veut monter un projet, "ah je dois postuler pour un Visa pour la création, ah il faut que je demande à Africalia." Mais pourquoi . . . On a de l'argent ! On a de l'or, mais où est cet or là ? Qui le vend ? On a plein de choses. Mais on

est obligé pour la culture d'aller demander ailleurs. Alors le problème d'aller d'ailleurs c'est que quand tu demandes ailleurs, si ailleurs te donne, ailleurs a des conditions.

Every time we want to start a project, why do we have to say, “ah I have to apply for a *Visa pour la création*, ah I need to ask Africalia.” But why . . . we have money! We have gold, but where is this gold? Who sells it? We have so many things. But when it comes to culture, we have to ask elsewhere. The problem with going elsewhere is that when you ask elsewhere and elsewhere provides, elsewhere has its conditions.⁵⁹

The entities Tassebédó named—*Visa pour la création* (Visa for Creation) and Africalia—are both European-based resources: a residency program of the French Institute that supports new works by emerging artists and a Belgian platform dedicated to culture as a resource for development, respectively. As Tassebédó pointed out, these external resources always come with “conditions.” Her statement implies that creativity is skewed in some way to appeal to European juries. Dissatisfied with the panelists’ lack of articulation of a viable solution, young dancers in the audience spoke up about the consistent impasses they confront when seeking funds for their own projects, probing their elders to advise them on how to secure the resources they need. The back-and-forth and sense of irritability in the room by the end of this two-hour conversation made tangible the intergenerational frustration with this enduring structure.

Similar sentiments were expressed on bus rides between performance venues, over meals at the CDC, or over drinks at the French Institute. Frustration with African governments’ ignorance about their livelihoods resurfaced again and again with a tone of resentment and anxiety. Artists shared a sense of regret that the genre has for all its existence depended on non-African resources and a concomitant sense of dread of what this might mean for the future. This tension was palpable from the opening of the festival, when the director of Fondation Total spoke at length, together with the French ambassador and the director of the French Institute occupying more time than speakers from Burkina Faso. Watching these opening remarks play out, I could not help but notice that the first few rows of padded chairs were reserved for the French speakers and other unidentified white people—perhaps presenters or critics—who arrived just before the start of the program, while the rest of the large audience waited crammed and sweating on hard wood benches for nearly an hour before the opening program began.

In 2021, in spite of Izzediou and his team's commendable actions to liberate the Biennale from France, a similar optics of white privilege played out, whereby the first few rows of seats for some of the major performances were reserved for European presenters and journalists. Additionally, due to a limited budget and precautions during the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the performing artists were brought in the day before their performance and scheduled to leave the day after. This unintentionally resulted in an uneven playing field in which many self-sponsored white attendees stayed for the whole week while most of the African artists circulated in and out of the festival with just enough time for a technical rehearsal and a performance, perhaps with the opportunity to catch one or two additional performances, but unable to stay and watch the majority of their peers' work or actively participate in conversations. Those selected for a special initiative, the "Generation 2020" program, were an exception: these nine young artists were invited to Marrakech to participate in workshops and receive guidance on their work for several days leading up to the festival and were provided accommodations until the end. However, at any given moment, a significant percentage of spectators were white, and they tended to occupy the best seats.

Despite the crucial move away from French curation and organization, this edition largely operated akin to a marketplace of African performance for European presenters. Groups of programmers representing festivals and theaters in Germany, France, Sweden, and Norway congregated before and after performances and sat together during shared meals at restaurants that festivalgoers and performers were bused to in the evenings. Their conspicuous presence served as a stark reminder that material dominance of contemporary dance continues to reside in Europe, where "presenters, funders, and other cultural influencers act as tastemakers and play a significant role in the ability of artists to continue making and sharing their work."⁶⁰ Taking the shape of a marketplace for dance, the Biennale to some extent transforms the dances into commodities. Choreographers are put in a position of having to vie for validation from European attendees so that they might be offered a second life in the form of a booking that would generate economic profit not only for them, but also for the European theater or festival. This phenomenon was nothing new. It certainly underpinned the 2016 edition and others before that, but the reduced numbers of African attendees at any given moment during the eleventh edition made the overrepresentation of white constituents especially visible.

Despite the overbearing presence of whiteness, new technologies that became pervasive during the pandemic were mobilized to maintain some

degree of breadth, debate, and critical discussion—elements that were so central to prior editions—with a broader African and diasporic community. An online component hosted by Nigerian choreographer Qudus Onikeku's platform, Afropolis, enabled robust panel discussions via Zoom and a series of screened performances accessible to anyone with a strong-enough internet connection. Among the online discussions was a panel moderated by Onikeku with Michel Kouakou (Côte d'Ivoire/United States), Luyanda Sidiya (South Africa/United Kingdom), and Edna Jaime (Mozambique). They focused on their unique positionality as members of what they termed the "turning point generation" who emerged as professionals in the early 2000s, in the footsteps of contemporary dance pioneers like Acogny. Among other topics, they discussed their responsibility to support the next generation by creating alternative platforms that are locally sustainable and, to the extent possible, disentangled from Europe. Another panel, titled "African Dance and the Imagined Future," moderated by Funmi Adewole (Nigeria/United Kingdom) and featuring Patrick Acogny (Senegal/France), Onye Ozuzu (United States), and Nora Amin (Egypt), generated a thoughtful discussion about the theoretical and practical possibilities of decolonizing African dance and the complexities of the label *contemporary African dance*. Digitally, then, the festival maintained its role as a platform and incubator of critical exchange through its online panel discussions that brought together artists and scholars from throughout the continent and the diaspora. Screened performances specifically for the online component were available to viewers for several days at a time, and most of the live performances in Marrakech were live streamed. By fostering an online community of African and diasporic artists and thinkers, the digital component to some extent attenuated the hypervisible power of the white West in Marrakech.

Blurring the France/Africa Binary

While frustration about European patronage was openly discussed during the tenth and eleventh editions of the Biennale, critique, or even acknowledgment, of France's early role in shaping the *aesthetics* of African contemporary dance was notably absent. The Biennale administrators put in place efforts to formulate a canon of African contemporary dance works and to demarcate distinct generations of practitioners (exemplified by the Generation 2020 initiative in Marrakech), thereby signaling African ownership of the art form. By excluding allusions to France's historically heavy hand in the

curation of the Rencontres and the selection of competition laureates, the artists effectively claim the genre as their own. In this formulation, France's role is deemed unremarkable, unworthy of attention.

Artistic directors of the 2016 edition, Salia Sanou and Seydou Boro, with general coordinator Irène Tassembédo, celebrated the twenty-year anniversary of the festival with the overarching theme "Mémoire et Transmission" (Memory and Transmission). They commissioned reconstructions of five previous laureates of the Rencontres from 1995 to 2003, when it was first and foremost a competition. These included *Ti chèlèbè (Elegance, 2003)* by Kettly Noël (Haiti/Mali), *Sans repères (Without Landmarks, 2000)* by Béatrice Kombé (Côte d'Ivoire), *Figuinto (L'Œil troié) (The Pierced Eye, 1997)* by Salia Sanou and Seydou Boro (Burkina Faso), *Gula "Bird" (1995)* by Vincent Mantsoe (South Africa), and *Um solo para cinco (A Solo for Five, 2003)* by Augusto Cuvilas (Mozambique). Choreographers or previous cast members selected young dancers to perform in roles created up to two decades prior and engaged them in intensive rehearsal processes to transmit the choreography. In the middle of the weeklong festival, the five works were performed back-to-back in a program titled "Pieces from the Repertory" at the CDC La Termitière. A packed audience filled the black box theater beyond capacity.

The festival program and reviews described these works as emblematic. They were presented as reference points—or testimony of a "true contemporary African choreographic heritage," as one newspaper article articulated it—that collectively symbolized the preceding generation of African contemporary dance.⁶¹ They became markers of historical origins and works par excellence of the category *African contemporary dance*. Through their reperformance, they obtained the status of canonical works, what Mark Franko describes as those "deemed the cultural objects most worthy of sustained and repeated attention, and thus best positioned to merit rearticulation across time."⁶² The transmission and reperformance of past works substantiate a veritable history of the art form through processes of memorialization at the same time that they gesture toward a new generation of performers, inscribing African contemporary dance with a past, present, and future. With these past works positioned as intertexts with the thirty-seven new works curated for the festival, the genre of African contemporary dance came into focus as thematic and aesthetic approaches reverberated across generations. Resonances between old and new choreographies and the clear demarcation of different generations of artists helped create a temporal organization for the still relatively recent art form, making visible its continuities over time and reinforcing its discernibility as a discrete genre.

For example, the men of Sanou and Boro's *Figninto* move with an internal focus, their heads tilting and bouncing in response to their buoyant lower bodies. The dancers' looseness through the upper body and their elastic movement quality could also be seen in the opening and closing performances by current students of the CDC La Termitière, illustrating the tenacity of a particular movement quality developed and transmitted by the choreographers over time. Likewise, aspects of *Sans repères* and *Um solo para cinco*, which feature exclusively female casts, resonated with the festival's broader focus on elevating female artists. Originally choreographed in 2000 for the late Kombé's all-female Compagnie Tché-Tché, *Sans repères* showcases the unceasing power and versatility of the dancers while the late Cuvilas's *Um solo para cinco* offers an entirely different feminine aesthetic and perspective. A playful, childlike space transforms halfway through the performance when the dancers reenter the stage in full nudity as the dim-lit stage fills with fog. The piece showcases tender female intimacy and ambiguously plays with the borders of friendship and eroticism. The diversity of representations of womanhood within this evening of reconstructions resonated with the multiplicity of new solos by women presented during the weeklong festival, including *Nitt 100 Limites* (*Human Without Limits*) by Oumäïma Manai (Tunisia), *Métamorphose* (*Metamorphosis*) by Judith Olivia Manantenaso (Madagascar), and *XXL* by Kaisha Essiane (Gabon), to name a few. These reperformances echoed a resounding focus on women's visibility in African contemporary dance throughout the 2016 festival, a pattern that I return to in chapter 5.

On the morning of the reperformances, a roundtable discussion took place with the artists who spearheaded the transmission processes: Seydou Boro, Kettly Noël, Nina Kipré and Nadia Beugré (both part of the original cast of *Sans repères*), and Sheila Massungue (rehearsal director for *Um solo para cinco*). The panelists discussed how the works might be mined for their creative possibilities. Rather than treating pieces from the repertory as unchanging entities, fixed in time, reperformance offers new directions while providing young artists with a glimpse of their art form's history. The conversation seemed primarily directed at young African dancers in attendance, and the reconstructions were discussed in terms of the past and future of the art form for its practitioners. There was no mention of the role of the French Institute in the original curation of these works. Apart from a note in the festival program that acknowledged "the foundational work of the Afrique en créations program," Afrique en créations, too, was absent from the discussion.⁶³ By avoiding any allusion to the historically heavy-handed role of France in these celebratory events marking the Biennale's twenty-year anniversary, the genre

of African contemporary dance was articulated as discernably African—that is, created and performed by African artists, and transmitted from one generation of African artists to another.

However, this iteration of “African” resists ideas of a homogenous Africa rooted in indigenous traditions and untouched by Western influence. In claiming ownership of the genre, the panelists blur the line between France and Africa. Their rhetoric suggests that France and Africa cannot be neatly parsed as distinct, homogeneous, oppositional entities; rather, processes of appropriation, reappropriation, and vernacularization play out in the field of contemporary dance. Mbembe discusses the vernacularization of the French language in Africa, insisting that rather than expelling imposed European languages, as pan-African nationalists espoused, we must acknowledge that “French has become a *full-fledged African language*.”⁶⁴ Similarly, in the domain of dance, it is no longer possible, nor very useful, to parse out and expel French, or European, aesthetic influence. Instead, as modeled by the repertory project, African artists are taking ownership of the artistic outcomes of the entangled histories of France and Africa, affirming that contemporary dance, too, is a *full-fledged African dance form*. If panel discussions, informal conversations, and the optics of audiences illuminate concerns with the ongoing presence of France, then the repertory project and the discourse surrounding it celebrate the artistry of multiple generations of African choreographers, delinked from European involvement. The difference in rhetoric about the material underside of the festival versus the dance pieces themselves, despite France’s historically powerful role in curating works that would become canonical, reveals some of the ways through which artists contend with and navigate the transnational entanglements at the foundation of the art form. Any strict binary opposition between France and Africa dissolves when the performance and discursive elements of the festival are considered side by side.

Hors du Monde (Beyond this World) Performances

A proliferation of aesthetic possibilities and social urgencies that cannot be easily parsed according to an Africa-France binary came to the fore in transformative works across the 2016 and 2021 festivals. These works compel performers and audiences into worlds beyond the known. Drawing from the title of Izeddiou’s *Hmadcha—Hors du monde (Beyond this World)*, which premiered at the 2021 Biennale, I suggest that several performances gestured toward an otherwise space—a space beyond the tangible, the discursive, and

the logical. Such works “question the status of what can be called ‘reality’”—a marker of Afropolitanism—staging not only “what exists and can be represented” but also that which “exceeds what exists.”⁶⁵ Just like Fatou Cissé’s *Performance D* in Marrakech, as described at the opening of this book’s introduction, the choreographers deploy opacity to various extents in works that are not meant to be fully understood. They exemplify how practices of minor transnationalism occur in “spaces which are nonetheless infinitely expansive and full of possibilities,” including queer possibilities.⁶⁶ Working within the South–South and South–North entanglements of contemporary dance, artists offer glimpses of physical and social possibilities that gesture toward otherwise spaces where the disruptive force of queerness can be felt.

To wrap up this chapter, I provide a snapshot of three works that epitomize the diverse choreographic approaches and aesthetics characteristic of African contemporary dance at the time of my research. From Serge Aimé Coulibaly’s gripping *Kalakuta Republik* and Hafiz Dhaou and Aïcha M’Barek’s minimalist *Toi et moi (You and Me)* in 2016, to Taoufiq Izeddou’s spellbinding *Hmadcha—Hors du monde* in 2021, the Biennale provides a glimpse of the heterogeneity of the art form. These works demonstrate the capacity of contemporary dance to summon audiences into affective worlds existing just beyond the perceptible in everyday life while dismantling any preconceived idea of a homogenous Africa.

According to Burkinabé choreographer Serge Aimé Coulibaly, artists are integral to social change. Linking his pedagogy, creative process, and choreographic output to contemporaneous social and political issues, he insists that “la politique elle est avec moi, elle est en moi. Ça ne peut pas m’échapper” (politics are with me, they are in me. It cannot escape me).⁶⁷ *Kalakuta Republik*, a work inspired by two years of research on the Nigerian Afrobeat pioneer Fela Kuti, is no exception to Coulibaly’s dedication to art as politics. *Kalakuta Republik* premiered at the 2016 festival, followed by multiple tours in Europe over the next several years. For approximately ninety minutes, the cast of seven performers embody the explosive energy of Kuti’s music, his subversive spirit, and the corrupt political context that enveloped his professional and personal life. Not meant to narrate Kuti’s life story, *Kalakuta Republik* instead takes it as a starting point and moves in other directions based on the performers’ responses to the famed musician’s story, developed through the creative process.⁶⁸ A subtle pulse through the shoulders accompanied by a gentle rocking from foot to foot with a focused facial expression develops into an impressive display of solo and group choreography set to a mix of Kuti’s propulsive, highly danceable tracks. Approximating a chaotic night-

club, a frenzy of activity unfolds onstage as dancers throw themselves to the floor, convulse their bodies through rapid, jerky choreography, or drunkenly perform sensual solos in scantily clad dresses. The flurry of corporeal action accelerates, appearing increasingly disorganized, yet enthralling. By the end of the performance, the stage is littered with upside-down chairs, and the dancers are in various states of undress, their bodies splashed with paint. The men carry the women on their shoulders, slowly processing through the aisles toward the back of the audience as the lights fade.

Toi et moi by Hafiz Dhaou and Aïcha M'Barek (France/Tunisia), performed by Stéphanie Pignon and Amala Dianor the day before the premiere of *Kalakuta Republik*, is surprisingly minimalist yet equally as captivating as Coulibaly's work. Dianor wears loose khaki pants and a white T-shirt, Pignon wears khaki pants and a long-sleeved green turtleneck. Loose undulations develop into a full-bodied flow of spiraling, accelerating, and contorting movements. Premised on the gestural capacities and elasticity of the body, as noted in the program, the piece is a stripped-down exploration of physical extremities divorced from any explicit social or political narrative. Simple gestures repeat and evolve to a point of excess, gently building the emotional intensity onstage and shifting one's perception of the dancers and the relationship between them. As Pignon repetitively ripples through her torso, her arms reach out in front of her, extending further with each ripple while her head hangs back toward her spine, the front of her long neck accentuated. Dianor is next to her, his knees bent as he twists his torso and tosses an arm as if throwing something at the audience over and over again. Movement motifs like these evolve to extremes. The repetition shifts how one sees and understands these bodies; their physicality appears increasingly nonnormative. The abstract aesthetic divorced from any contextual anchor allows for a multiplicity of possible interpretations among the international, intergenerational festival audience. And this is perhaps the point: Dhaou expressed in a roundtable discussion the following morning that "être vrai sur scène" (to be true onstage) is already political, that artists no longer need to concern themselves with creating politically charged works. In contrast to Coulibaly's emphasis on performance as explicit social or political action, for Dhaou, simply occupying the space of the proscenium stage is inherently political.⁶⁹

Taoufiq Izeddou's *Hmadcha—Hors du Monde*, which premiered on the penultimate day of the 2021 edition, epitomizes choreography's capacity to transcend the real and put forth queer alternatives. "Hmadcha" is the name of a Sufi brotherhood in Meknès, Morocco, whose spiritual practice involves music and dance. The term also describes Sufi practitioners' state of trance

during spiritual practice. Izeddou's *Hmadcha* links this spiritual trance to the "trance" that shrouded the world during the extensive period of confinement and isolation of the pandemic, during which he created the piece. He explains that the pandemic demonstrated how much we do not know, how the world is replete with contradictions and incomprehensibilities. By entering a state of trance, we move beyond these instabilities and into an alternative state that reveals *une vérité* (a truth).⁷⁰ The program notes, "trance . . . constitutes an energetic threshold that opens space for a redistribution of social charges. In its popular usage, trance authorizes the manifestation of the taboo."⁷¹ As the "energetic threshold" beyond one's tangible reality is accessed, social norms are ruptured and a plethora of alternative ways of being become accessible, including those considered taboo. In *Hmadcha*, queer possibility manifests through the all-male cast's joyful, liberatory movements in partial nudity.

On a stage bordered by curtains—black across the back and right side of the stage, white across the left side—*Hmadcha* begins with a single dancer in loose black pants slowly making his way across the back of the stage toward the backlit white curtain as his bare torso ripples in succeeding waves. This sets the tone for the choreography as a whole, as the eight dancers, who gradually enter the stage from surprising locations through invisible openings in the curtains, join the soloist and perform gestures that repeat to a point of exhaustion: spinning with arms outstretched, hands clasped; tossing upper bodies forward and back; moving toward and away from the white curtain with a rapid paddle step, arms held down at their sides palms open. The choreography develops as a series of repetitions, invoking a meditative, or indeed a trancelike, state. The dancers move collectively yet entirely individually: one dancer smiles eerily and grips the air with tense fingers, his movements consistently sharp and precise, while another moves with light energy and downcast eyes. About halfway through the performance, the dancers remove their pants and reveal their different colored boxer briefs. They wiggle, shimmy, and shake their exposed bodies without attempting to hide the pleasure they take in this act of collective bodily exploration. The dancers' joy is palpable as they dance with abandon in near nudity. Without clothes, the diversity of body sizes and shapes onstage is particularly noticeable. The performers' individuality perhaps serves as a metaphor for the wide-ranging corporeal and social possibilities accessible through trance. The performance concludes as the cast, accompanied by Izeddou, who joins them for the last section of the piece, sing and dance their way off the stage and around the audience to the back of the house.

Each of these performances—like many others across these two editions—

evidences the transcendent capacity of choreographic works that rigorously explore a concept, both physical and theoretical. Vulnerable performers showcase the outcome of months or years of investment into concepts, theories, and ideas that matter. The depth of their artistic exploration is palpable, the opacity of the performances intentional. Audience members are not met with an easily digestible biography of Kuti in *Kalakuta Republic*. Nor can they discern an identifiable relationship between the male-female duet in *Toi et moi* or predict the transformation that takes place halfway through *Hmachda*. The choreographers bring performers and audiences into worlds beyond the known and representable, worlds in which “the existent and what exceeds it” are entangled.⁷² Importantly, these three works, like so many others presented across the Biennale, are radically different from one another. They show that there is no singular approach to African contemporary dance. Rather, there is a shared embrace of heterogeneity.

Conclusion

From the first French Cultural Center in Africa in 1959 to the present-day reliance on the French Institute as the primary sponsor of the Biennale, France’s persistent presence in the world of African contemporary dance is undeniable. That its vigorous support for the artistic genre is connected to imperial aspirations for French universalism is clear. However, it would be too simplistic to consider African contemporary dance as merely a neocolonial scheme, a mechanism whereby France inserts its power and maintains a stranglehold on cultural production across Africa. African agents have always been at the forefront, navigating the limitations wrought from post-structural adjustment economies and actively shifting the configurations of power that underlie their artistic field. As Patrick Acogny articulated during a panel discussion at the 2021 Biennale, “We’re at a point where it’s very difficult for me to think, is this colonization, or is this African; is it what we want? It seems to me that it’s more important to understand, how do we want to make it our own?”⁷³ Decolonization in the twenty-first century cannot be understood merely as a “successionist gesture” of disconnection or separation, premised on a binary of a purportedly unanimous Africa versus European colonial imposition.⁷⁴ Instead, as Acogny and his co-panelists illustrated, decolonization is an ongoing process of questioning, of taking ownership, of rearranging configurations of power. In the field of African contemporary dance, complete separation from France is not a viable option, at least not yet, but artists have taken important steps toward diminishing France’s power

while asserting their own approaches to artmaking. They are folding, twisting, and rearranging the entanglements that undergird their art form as they make contemporary dance their own.

The Biennale is not the only platform through which artists exchange, debate, and refine the terms and aesthetics of contemporary dance in Africa, but it is a major event that has rippling effects across the continent. My focus on the history and present of the Biennale in this chapter provides the groundwork for the queer aesthetic possibilities across pedagogies and performances in Senegal that I explore across the later chapters of this book. The *hors du monde* performances that artists create within the entangled folds of France, Africa writ-large, and specific African localities hold space for queer experimentations that transgress heteronormative social realities outside of contemporary dance studios and stages. Before I develop this line of inquiry in chapters 3, 4, and 5, however, I travel back in time in chapter 2 to explore local precedents in Senegal just prior to neoliberal reform. As economic crises in the 1970s led President Senghor to refocus his cultural agenda on new forms of internationalism, dance institutions in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Dakar paved the way for present-day queer aesthetics intertwined with transnationalism.

Two

Openness

Internationalism and Gender in 1970s–1980s Dance Studios



On a particularly balmy day in late September 2016, Ousmane Noël Cissé's air-conditioned office in the Grand Théâtre National and the cold water he offered as I entered provided much appreciated relief. For the next hour and a half, I hardly glanced at my list of prepared questions, listening intently as Cissé enthusiastically reminisced about his long and illustrious career as a dancer, choreographer, teacher, and director. He stood up from his chair to demonstrate the undulating movements of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater that he witnessed as an audience member during the 1966 World Festival of Black Arts (FESMAN) as he realized the similitudes the choreography bore with African dances. His eyes sparkled as he recounted working with Katherine Dunham's assistant, Oliver Johnson, to create a new dance school in Dakar that offered courses in their combined expertise in modern and African dance. He recalled training at Maurice Béjart's Mudra school in Brussels, where he offered classes in his syncretic dance technique for which he coined the word *répédé*. He enthusiastically asserted that he helped revolutionize dance in Senegal by integrating modern dance, classical ballet, and jazz dance into Senegal's dance landscape while retaining African dance at the center of his practice. Throughout the conversation, he pulled photos, newspaper clippings, and performance programs dating back to the mid-1970s from his desk drawers and spread them out on the surface of his desk.¹

Just before ending our interview to take a phone call, Cissé recounted being accused of being *pédé*, a French slur for gay or queer, early in his career,

given his proficiency in classical ballet and modern dance. When I had the chance to ask him to elaborate during a follow-up interview, he explained that the introduction of modern dance and classical ballet in Senegal brought with it speculation about male dancers' sexuality, that ballet demands "soft" gestures considered feminine that depart from the strong and percussive qualities of traditional African dances. He clarified that at the time, being called gay "n'était pas forcément mauvais" (was not necessarily bad). However, the appellation marked a notable shift in the gendered and sexual connotations attached to male dancers, who, until that time, were largely considered in line with normative assumptions about heterosexual masculinity.²

I was immediately struck by the resonance his testimony bore with the entwinement of transnationalism and queer possibility in twenty-first century contemporary dance. In contrast to his prior career as a soloist for the National Ballet of Senegal, his new dance technique—a deliberate synthesis of global dance forms—and the choreography that drew from it constructed male dancing bodies in ways that made their sexuality suspect. His transition from neotraditional dance, rooted in ideas of ethnicity and nationality, to a syncretic approach that was global in breadth coincided with a shift in assumptions of heteronormativity to speculations of queerness. As Cissé helped usher modern dance and classical ballet into Senegal's dance landscape, he simultaneously helped to usher in the gendered and sexual connotations already attached to these dance forms. In doing so, he contributed to a shift in the gendered politics of dance training in Dakar.

Cissé was one of two pioneering figures in the internationalization of concert dance in Senegal in the 1970s and 1980s, the other being the more widely known Germaine Acogny. Both were influenced and supported by President Senghor's cultural reorientation away from an ethnocentric model and toward "modernization" and internationalization of the arts in conjunction with claims to universalism. A poet, professor, and pioneer of the Negritude movement prior to being elected the first president of independent Senegal, Senghor institutionalized Negritude as the philosophical and ideological backbone of Senegalese cultural politics. The national discourse about the arts and the kinds of cultural projects that received subsidization were deeply informed by this pan-Africanist philosophy that embraced a rubric of *enracinement* (rootedness) and *ouverture* (openness). Projects rooted in African aesthetics yet open to artistic influences from elsewhere, those that strove toward the "civilization of the universal"—a major ambition of Senghor's—best aligned with his objectives.

Cissé and Acogny separately created syncretic dance techniques that

drew from their extensive research and training in African dances, classical ballet, modern dance, and jazz dance. They consolidated and transmitted their techniques through classes and performances offered at their respective institutions: Acogny's *Mudra Afrique* and Cissé's various schools and companies, including the Afro-American Dance Center, Sirabadral, and the Manhattan Dance Center. Scarce existing scholarship on these institutions focuses on how they were impacted by shifting forms of arts patronage and their positioning in colonial and decolonial projects.³ This chapter builds on this literature to situate these institutions within the rubric of rootedness and openness, or particularism and universalism, championed by Senghor's Negritude. Acogny and Cissé's dual attempts to center African dance while claiming universalism were continuous with the history of Negritude and the social positioning of its authors. I show how embodying the dualities of Negritude led to the consolidation of the dance studio as a social space in which gender and sexuality could be experimented with.

This chapter argues that openness extended beyond its discursive signification as internationalism to characterize the kinds of gendered and sexual corporeal expressions cultivated within dance studios. By incorporating the abstract aesthetics of American modern dance and the already firm association between male ballet dancers and homosexuality, dance institutions of the 1970s–1980s constructed gender as fluid and malleable while introducing speculation about male dancers' sexuality. As students practiced syncretic dance techniques and pursued curricula comprised of a variety of dance forms, they enacted the malleability and instability of gender as they went from class to class, taking on and off the various gender roles that each dance form stipulated. Gender's instability was an implicit, yet defining, feature of the new choreographies that Acogny and Cissé helped forge. Their choreographic works were highly praised, but published reviews indicate that they were sometimes difficult to understand given their new modes of abstraction. While these works were not necessarily opaque to the extent that future contemporary dance works would become, concert dance began to incorporate ambiguity as an asset of modernist experimentations, prefiguring contemporary dance's strategic opacity in later decades.

This book's broader inquiry into twenty-first century contemporary dance must be contextualized as part of a lineage that includes this critical, if short-lived, moment just before the implementation of neoliberalism in the 1980s. Economic privatization led to the premature closure of *Mudra Afrique*, the termination of Sirabadral, and the eventual closure of the Afro-American Dance Center and the Manhattan Dance Center. Despite their brief lifes-

pans, these modernist institutions cultivated openness as a central tenet of dance training—an important precursor to the kinds of queer possibilities pursued in contemporary dance studios and stages in the twenty-first century. Given the extensive role of France in the consolidation of African contemporary dance as elaborated in the previous chapter, the form is easily misunderstood as an imposition of an already established Eurocentric dance genre or as a rejection of the confines of neotraditional dance. These narratives sideline both the role of local modernist institutions that drew heavily on neotraditional dance and the legacy of nationalist ideologies such as Negritude. Dance institutions in the 1970s and early 1980s foregrounded an ideology of openness, which may be considered a precondition to today's contemporary dance experimentations. The entwinement of internationalism and gender malleability in 1970s–1980s dance studios is a crucial part of the context within which contemporary dance was able to take off in Senegal at the turn of the century.

Focusing on dance pedagogy highlights these connections, as transmission and the instillation of values through bodily training crosses temporal boundaries, providing insights into continuity and discontinuity over time. Several students who studied at *Mudra Afrique* (including Irène Tassembédo and Laurent Longofo, who later established major dance schools and companies in Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of Congo, respectively) and those who studied with Cissé (including Fatou Cissé of *Compagnie Fatou Cissé*, and Jean Tamba, director of *Compagnie 5eme Dimension* and founder of the *Académie de Moustapha Gueye* in Dakar) went on to pioneer contemporary dance in Senegal and elsewhere in West and Central Africa. Despite the rupture entailed by the premature closures of Acogny and Cissé's institutions, the dancers who trained with them embodied the values undergirding the dance styles they acquired, carrying these with them over time and making decisions about preserving or rejecting them as they trained later generations of dancers. The ethos of openness in Cissé and Acogny's dance techniques helped to establish the dance studio as a site in which gender and sexuality are entities to be explored, challenged, and recalibrated.

Negritude and Post-Independence Concert Dance

The dance companies and institutions established during Senghor's presidency cannot be separated from his Negritude philosophy. Acogny and Cissé received state support largely due to the alignment of their artistic ambitions and philosophies with those of the “poet-president.” Equally, the contradic-

tions embedded within Negritude as it took shape in interwar Paris and evolved over subsequent decades reappeared in different ways in Acogny and Cissé's dance studios. To better understand the principles undergirding Acogny and Cissé's innovations, I turn my attention to the history, premises, and contradictions of Negritude and how it shaped Senegalese cultural expression during Senghor's administration. Following Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Gary Wilder, Donna Jones, and Achille Mbembe, I insist on a "reacquaintance with Senghor" that contests the pervasive essentialist reading of Negritude.⁴

African and Antillean intellectuals living in Paris during the interwar period, including Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, Paulette Nardal, and Jane Nardal, formulated Negritude through the social network they cultivated as African descendants with shared experiences in imperial France. They were students living on small scholarships, only a fraction of those of their white counterparts, that just barely covered rent while dealing with the social and psychological consequences of racial marginalization in the metropole. Without citizenship rights, they created "an alternative black public sphere" through which they "claimed membership in Greater France by trying, in various ways, to articulate citizenship with a distinct Negro-African (national) culture."⁵ Paris between the world wars was home to a dynamic cultural milieu of African descendants, akin to 1920s Harlem. It was a privileged space where Black internationalism was formulated through conversations and collaborations among Black intellectuals and artists from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States.⁶ As part of this milieu, the Negritude pioneers had access to the institutions that were elaborating colonial governmentality. Interwar imperial France championed universalism, republicanism, and rationality on the one hand, and racism, colonialism, and domination on the other. African and Antillean subjects in France could not disavow racial particularity in affirmation of republican universalism because that very universalism promoted racialization. On the other hand, they could not simply reject universalism from the standpoint of cultural difference, as this would alienate them from the French nation, diminishing their capacity to make legitimate political claims.⁷

Negritude mirrored the contradictory conditions within which its pioneers lived and articulated from. It was a politically moderate project that rejected cultural assimilation without explicitly calling for political independence of colonized people. It championed the specificity of Black African arts and philosophies and in doing so, replicated the racial essentialism that colonialism relied upon. At the same time, it claimed universalism from the

standpoint of Africa, insisting that African worldviews might conceptualize “universal humanism” characterized by cultural *métissage*, or mixing.⁸

The term *Négritude* first appeared in print in Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (1939) and, soon after, Senghor fully developed it into an ideology. For Senghor, *Négritude* defined art as philosophy and promoted African arts and culture as the most valuable contribution of the Black African world to humanity at large. He would eventually offer the canonical definition of *Négritude* as “the ensemble of cultural values of the black world expressed in the lives, the institutions and the works of blacks.”⁹ *Négritude* embraced a rubric of *enracinement* (rootedness) and *ouverture* (openness). While firmly rooted in Black African art, culture, and philosophy, it simultaneously endeavored to open up to outside cultural and philosophical influences, striving toward what Senghor termed the *civilization of the universal*, a phrase he borrowed from the French philosopher, paleontologist, and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955). Senghor posited that educated Africans would lead a revival of humanism in the civilization of the universal, countering modern European individualism, materialism, and utilitarianism. As an extension of ideas articulated by his peer group in the interwar period, Senghor’s *Négritude* promoted the concept of global Blackness and overlapped with the tenets of Black internationalism.¹⁰ The solidarities between international Black artists and thinkers would continue to give shape to Senegalese cultural expression after independence.

From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, Senghor’s striving for universalism appears remarkably idealized, ignoring the devastating global inequities wrought by transatlantic slavery and colonialism. But as Wilder shows, Senghor’s vision for decolonization may be considered a radical world-making project focused on the unknown postcolonial era.¹¹ Senghor envisioned a future in which decolonization did not necessarily lead to state sovereignty and national independence, but rather encapsulated a process of global restructuring in which former imperial powers and former colonized peoples worked together, given that their worlds would remain entangled.¹² Decolonization for Senghor meant deprovincializing Africa rather than provincializing Europe. It involved rejecting the assumption that universalism was the property of Europe and asserting that Africa, too, might offer universal humanistic ideas. Within the double bind of French republicanism with its normative categories of Western modernity and the urgent necessity for a pan-African nationalism to counter oppressive colonial rule, Senghor and his peers articulated a contradictory vision for the future. They relied upon the post-Enlightenment epistemological and ethical frameworks that rational-

ized colonialism while refuting the racism entrenched within such a system and calling for cultural independence. The existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who's influential 1948 essay *Orphée noir* (Black Orpheus) shifted the terms through which Negritude was discussed, captured its incongruities by calling it an “anti-racist racism.”¹³

As president of Senegal from 1960 to 1980, Senghor institutionalized Negritude as the cultural ideology of the newly sovereign nation-state. He allocated twenty-five percent of the national budget to the Ministry of Culture, enabling the arts to flourish. This was particularly true in the capital city of Dakar, where he established the *École des Arts*, the National Ballet, the National Drama Troupe, and the Traditional Instrumental Ensemble. Except for the *École des Arts* (a visual art school), these were housed in the Daniel Sorano Theatre, built in 1965 with French funds—an early iteration of the transnational entanglements in the Senegalese dance landscape, in which France holds the role of essential patron.¹⁴ Francesca Castaldi shows how the ideology of Negritude inspired the creation of the National Ballet of Senegal.¹⁵ The company theatricalized indigenous dances from Senegal's diverse regions and ethnic groups and choreographed them according to Western concert dance conventions. The dancers embodied the dual aim at the moment of independence of recuperating precolonial traditions and asserting one's place in the global order. In conjunction with emergent national dance companies elsewhere in Africa, the genre of neotraditional dance took hold. (Neotraditional dance is distinct from “traditional” dances practiced in social settings through the transformations required by the process of choreographing for the proscenium stage.)

Numerous neotraditional companies formed in Dakar and other regions of Senegal in the following years with the national company as their model. H el ene Neveu Kringelbach describes 1960s Dakar as:

Pulsat[ing] with an effervescent choreographic scene of dozens of dance troupes, all galvanized by Senegal's generous cultural policy, in which the performing arts were celebrated as cornerstones of nation-building. . . . This was a highly cosmopolitan environment, in which young men and women without much formal education could travel around the world and earn a decent income.¹⁶

Stemming from colonial school theater and its amalgamations of indigenous and French performance traditions, neotraditional dance further congealed the entwinement of the local and global at the heart of the performing arts

scene in Senegal. Not only did the National Ballet merge local dances with European performance conventions, but company members toured the world and international audiences gained access to Senegalese dances for the first time.

Crucial to his promotion of Negritude, Senghor hosted the first World Festival of Black Arts (Festival mondial des arts nègres, or FESMAN) in Dakar in 1966. FESMAN brought together artists from throughout Africa and the diaspora, including a sensational performance by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater that was praised for its “modern dance forms” and “excellent, but westernized, choreography.”¹⁷ African American choreographer and anthropologist Katherine Dunham was also present. Appointed by Senghor as *conseil technique culturel* (technical cultural advisor), a position she held while living in Senegal from 1965 to 1967, Dunham helped train members of the National Ballet through daily classes in her technique and acted as a cultural liaison with the United States in preparation for FESMAN.¹⁸ Dunham’s address at the opening colloquium encapsulated the festival’s promotion of global Black solidarity. Tsitsi Ella Jaji suggests that Dunham “allowed her listeners to participate in networks she had already woven” by tracing the lineage of African descendant thinkers and artists who were integral to her own development.¹⁹ Ailey and Dunham’s contributions helped instill a Black internationalist dimension into Senegal’s dance scene that continued beyond the festival itself. FESMAN firmly established Senegal’s global image as a robust site of Black international artistic activity just as it exposed Senegalese audiences to diasporic artists and performances.

However, the effusion of artistic output under Senghor was far from equitable. Once he assumed power, Senghor ruled authoritatively, silencing and imprisoning dissenting voices including his prime minister, Mamadou Dia, and the celebrated historian and anthropologist, Cheikh Anta Diop. Although the image of a cohesive nation consolidated through the arts distracted attention away from Senghor’s repressive politics, his authoritarianism seeped into the art world as well. The institutionalization of Negritude in the newly sovereign state, where a private arts market was essentially nonexistent, created a narrow, exclusive arena of artistic production and diffusion. As Elizabeth Harney notes, the art world in Senegal was “highly centralized. Symbolic and economic power was concentrated in the state apparatus, which acted as primary consumer, patron, collector, dealer, curator, and historian/critic.”²⁰ With a monopoly over the arts, Senghor rewarded certain artists—his *chers enfants* (dear children)—who embraced the Negritude aesthetic by reproducing his idea of an African sensibility,

emotion, and rhythm in their work. He excluded and silenced others from the field of production altogether, particularly those who were critical of his regime and his promotion of Francophonie, including the prolific writer and filmmaker Ousmane Sembène. A narrow rendering of a particular aesthetic deemed worthy of state support proliferated throughout the arts institutions that Senghor established.

In the mid-1970s, as state finances suffered following years of drought in the Sahel and the 1973 oil crisis, Senghor no longer considered neotraditional dance sufficient for his cultural philosophy and for the ideals of Negritude broadly. By this time, Negritude had come under widespread critique and was soon deemed irrelevant as an undergirding philosophy of Senegalese arts. Wole Soyinka, one of Negritude's most vocal critics, had expressed his reservations since the early 1960s, but the 1969 Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers marked the beginning of explicit public dissent from intellectuals, politicians, and artists including Ahmed Sekou Touré of Guinea and Stanislas Adotevi of Dahomey (present-day Benin). They denounced the utility of Negritude for its essentialist claims, reproduction of colonialist discourse, binary opposition between European and African thought and sensibilities, and incapacity to respond to the urgent needs of decolonization.²¹ The outpouring of opposition to Negritude, combined with Senegalese artists' increasing desire for innovation and renewal over "celebrations of African essence," likely influenced Senghor's reorientation of his cultural policy.²² Without abandoning Negritude, he shifted his attention away from national culture and toward a broader sense of African arts. In the dance world, he envisioned a new African dance that would synthesize dances from across the continent, combined with a renewed interest in international modernist projects. Without negating rootedness, Senghor prioritized openness. He aimed to establish the place of African arts in the "modern" world through increased professionalization and integration with non-African art forms.²³

The creation of *Mudra Afrique* and a second national dance company, *Sirabadral*, directed by Germaine Acogny and Ousmane Noël Cissé, respectively, helped concretize Senghor's intensified openness toward non-African dance forms. Senghor found in Acogny and Cissé allies in his cultural modernization project. Both were interested in local and global dance forms. Their pedagogies and choreographies were premised on the creation of a "universal" dance in which African aesthetics would be centered. Cissé and Acogny never worked together apart from occasional shared performances at the French Cultural Center, but their contemporaneous projects, occurring in the same city, are remarkably similar. Their commonalities speak to the

overwhelming nationalist cultural agenda of the time. The virtues of Negritude were deeply entrenched in the arts world, signaling Senghor's exclusive support for artists whose visions corresponded to his own.

Germaine Acogny, Maurice Béjart, and Mudra Afrique

Germaine Acogny was born in 1944 in Dahomey. At the age of five, after her mother passed away, she moved to Senegal with her father, Togoun Servais Acogny, a colonial administrator.²⁴ In 1962, she left Senegal for Paris to study to become a physical education teacher with a concentration in dance at the École Simon Siegel. Her early years in Paris were critical to her politicization and prompted the creation of her dance technique. Following confrontations with her ballet teacher, who made clear to Acogny—the only Black African woman at the school—that her body was not ideal for ballet given her “large bottom” and “flat feet,” Acogny decided that she would create her own technique in which her body and its attributes would be valued rather than considered flawed. When teaching her technique, she often recounts the moment that she began integrating her own style rather than continuing to attempt to excel within ballet's exclusionary framework. As she instructs students to perform the “Acogny plié,” she describes her Parisian ballet teacher telling her to tuck her pelvis forward to hide her bottom while keeping her back straight as her knees deeply bend. Instead, Acogny demonstrates her own version of the *grand plié*: she deeply bends her knees as her chest and bottom pulse forward and back, her elbows bent, arms moving with the rhythm of her pulsations.²⁵ She imbues the classical grand plié with spinal fluidity and torso pulsations—movements that would become central to her technique—in her incipient version of cultural métissage.

In 1965, Acogny returned to Senegal and began an intensive study of traditional dances in the tropical Casamance region in the south and in the savanna of Dakar. The variety of dances in these ecologically diverse regions led her to begin creating *une symbiose* (a symbiosis) to “arrive à une danse africaine” (arrive at an African dance) that would be recognizable to Africans from diverse locations.²⁶ She opened her first dance school in her family's courtyard in 1968 and taught at a local high school before being appointed head of the Department of Dance at the National Arts Institute in 1972. This was the time that she began to gain recognition. She traveled to Haute Volta (present-day Burkina Faso) as a guest of the French Cultural Center, and later went to New York where she was exposed to other African dances, modern dance, and jazz dance. Encountering companies including that of

Ailey in New York and witnessing the innovations in dance taking place in Burkina Faso convinced her that she was on the right track.²⁷

Roger Garaudy, a French philosopher and friend of Acogny's family, took interest in her work and told President Senghor about her. Senghor had already heard of Acogny because of the work she did "Africanizing" the choreography of Senegal's drum majorettes, for which she had become somewhat of a celebrity. He had his nephew, who was also the director of the Daniel Sorano Theatre, Maurice Sonar Senghor, invite Acogny and her students to perform there in May 1974. Acogny introduced the performance with an explanation of her desire to "retour aux sources négro-africaines pour se hisser aux sommets de l'art tout court" (return to Negro-African sources to rise to the heights of art itself), as quoted in a review in the local newspaper, *Le Soleil*.²⁸ The reviewer went on to say:

Germaine nous l'a surtout fait entrevoir en brisant les carcans d'une prétendue frontière hermétique entre la danse classique européenne et la danse africaine. Tant par la chorégraphie que par la musique et les danseurs, elle a pu illustrer, en réalisant la synthèse de toutes les nuances, que la danse tout comme chaque art doit tendre vers l'universel, si elle ne veut pas rester au simple stage d'un folklore banal.

Germaine gave us a glimpse of this specifically by breaking the shackles of an alleged hermetic border between European classical dance and African dance. As much through the choreography as through the music and the dancers, she was able to illustrate, by achieving the synthesis of all its nuances, that dance, just like every art, must tend toward the universal if it does not want to remain in the simple stage of banal folklore.²⁹

These comments illustrate that, three years before opening *Mudra Afrique*, on the brink of her personal acquaintance with Senghor, Acogny shared his vision of simultaneously centering Black African forms while dissolving boundaries between African and Western dance in pursuit of the "universal." Senghor was impressed by Acogny's syncretic dance style but wanted an expert opinion. In 1975, he invited her to accompany him on a trip to Brussels, where she would teach at Maurice Béjart's *Mudra* school.³⁰

Maurice Béjart (1927–2007), born Maurice Berger, was the son of Gaston Berger, a well-known French philosopher of Creole Senegalese descent and

close friend of Senghor's.³¹ In 1960, Béjart founded his Brussels-based company Ballet du XXe siècle (Ballet of the Twentieth Century) and ten years later, created the Centre de recherche et de perfectionnement de l'interprète et du spectacle, also known as Mudra, a school connected to his company. Mudra was premised on the valorization of a wide variety of dance forms and students were intentionally international, including several African Americans.³² With non-profit status and funding from UNESCO, Mudra was free of charge so that all promising dancers regardless of their socioeconomic background could participate. In accordance with his international focus, Béjart desired to establish branches of Mudra outside Belgium. Senegal rose to the top of the various locations considered for a second Mudra school in part due to Béjart and Senghor's friendship and a 1975 performance in Dakar that was based on Senghor's poetry and performed by Mudra students.³³ Acogny's master class in Brussels was well received and led Béjart to invite her back regularly to teach *danse ethnico-contemporaine africaine* (ethnic-contemporary African dance), further strengthening the relationship between Mudra and Senegal.³⁴ In October 1976, Acogny performed a duet with Fatou N'Diongue, the only Black African dancer studying at Mudra at the time, at the nineteenth UNESCO conference in Nairobi. That is where it was decided that the second Mudra school would be located in Senegal and that Acogny would be the director.

Mudra Afrique, officially the Centre africain de recherche et de perfectionnement de l'interprète, opened in November 1977 in the former Musée Dynamique, an art museum flanked by Greek-style columns that was built for FESMAN on the coast in the fishing neighborhood of Soubédioune. The building's architecture reflected Senghor's controversial vision to make Senegal the "Greece of Africa." Grants from the Fonds international pour la promotion de la culture (or FIPC, a branch of UNESCO) and the Portuguese Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation enabled the school's inauguration while funding from the Senegalese government sustained its operation. Replicating the structure and philosophy of the Brussels school, Mudra Afrique was free of charge, but students' respective governments were expected to contribute 500,000 CFA francs (€760) for each student who trained there. Unfortunately, other than Congo-Brazzaville, who sent a one-time fee, none of the participating governments held up this agreement, contributing to the school's eventual bankruptcy.

Following a recruitment tour throughout Africa, young dancers from Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, Senegal, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad,

Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Central African Republic, as well as from countries outside of Africa including Martinique and Switzerland, enrolled. Most students were recruited from local and national dance troupes. They came to Mudra with varying levels of performance experience in their respective traditional dances.³⁵ As former student Aïssatou Bangoura ascertains, the majority of students likely hailed from middle class families.³⁶ In the footsteps of Béjart's Mudra school in Brussels, Mudra Afrique reduced potential barriers by covering tuition, accommodations, food, and transportation—a model that would reappear in twenty-first century contemporary dance training. At the same time, the curriculum prepared students for professional careers in concert dance performance, which holds a long tradition of elitism. Mudra Afrique, to some extent, catered to educated young adults from relatively well-off families for whom an international, modernist performing profession was desirable and for whom Negritude was still considered viable.

In her 1980 book, *Danse africaine*, Acogny explains that Mudra Afrique and the dance technique that she developed there aimed to engender an “indigenous modern dance” in pursuit of taking development into her own hands rather than allowing Western culture to degenerate African traditions.³⁷ Under Acogny's leadership, the school was premised on the idea of synthesizing African dances as a starting point (rootedness) and proceeding toward the integration of dances from outside the continent (openness) in pursuit of “une nouvelle chorégraphie africaine” (a new African choreography).³⁸ In an interview, Bangoura elaborated the school's overarching objective to create “une nouvelle chorégraphie africaine”:

Nous avons essayé à partir de nos danses traditionnelles de créer une nouvelle gestuelle, nouvelle écriture, nouvelle chorégraphie africaine et soutenues par nos contes, par notre histoire, par notre culture pour vraiment essayer de changer avec le monde, sans pour autant être loin de nos racines . . . Béjart et Senghor avait demandé à Germaine de creuser dans la source pour voir vraiment éclore ce que nous avons à nous africains.

Stemming from our traditional dances, we tried to create a new gesture, new [choreographic] writing, new African choreography supported by our folk stories, our history, and our culture to really try to change with the world without being far from our roots . . . Béjart and Senghor asked Germaine to excavate the source to really see come to light what we Africans have.³⁹

Bangoura articulates the duality of rootedness and openness at Mudra Afrique as a desire to create a new choreographic approach and aesthetic that aspired to “change with the world” while retaining traditional African dances, histories, and stories. Her words resonate with Senghor, who, at the inauguration of Mudra Afrique, stated:

Il s’agit, quel que soit le domaine considéré—art, littérature, philosophie, médecine, voire science—de s’enraciner dans les valeurs de la Négritude pour s’ouvrir aux valeurs des autres cultures . . . Il est question, ici, de commencer par recenser les danses, mais surtout les pas, je dis tous les mouvements des danses négro-africaines . . . Il nous faut . . . intégrer, avec les pas, les valeurs des autres danses pour en faire une danse nouvelle : négro-africaine, mais sentie, goûtée par tous les hommes de toutes les civilisations différentes, parce que participant de l’Universel. C’est ce que Madame Acogny a commencé de faire.

In whatever domain considered—art, literature, philosophy, medicine, even science—it is about rootedness in the values of Negritude in order to open to the values of other cultures. . . . Here, it is about starting with an inventory of the dances, but especially the steps, I insist all the movements of Negro-African dances. . . . We must . . . integrate the values of other dances with the steps in order to create a new dance: Negro-African, but felt, tasted by all men of all different civilizations, as a participant in the Universal. This is what Madame Acogny has started to do.⁴⁰

With instructors from Senegal, France, Cuba, and Trinidad, students took daily classes in classical ballet, Martha Graham technique, and Acogny’s burgeoning technique, as well as drumming, theater, singing, music theory, and martial arts.⁴¹ As Senghor indicates, the primary purpose was to take stock of and center African dances while developing a new dance that would be African in essence but encompass a multiplicity of influences, accessible to diverse audiences, thereby “universal.” Quoted in an article for *Le Soleil*, Acogny echoed Senghor’s objective: “Il nous faut une ouverture vers les autres pour assimiler ce qu’ils ont de bon et aussi nous tendons vers la civilisation de l’Universel” (We need an openness toward others to assimilate their positive aspects as we tend toward the civilization of the universal).⁴²

Senghor and Acogny’s comments testify to the alliance of dance and Negritude at this critical juncture in the development of concert dance in

Senegal. Following the National Ballet, FESMAN, and other cultural initiatives of the 1960s, *Mudra Afrique* was, in the words of Annie Bourdié, “l’un des derniers grands chantiers de la Négritude entrepris par Senghor avant son départ du pouvoir” (one of the last big works of Négritude started by Senghor before his departure from power).⁴³ Dance training at *Mudra Afrique* was to embody African aesthetics as instrumental to Senghor’s conceptualization of the universal. This was largely accomplished through the development of Acogny’s dance technique, known as “Technique Acogny.” Stemming from her confrontation with her Parisian ballet teacher in the 1960s, Acogny’s dance technique centers African dances while selectively borrowing from European forms. *Mudra Afrique*, with the Acogny Technique as its pedagogical backbone, would serve as a cornerstone of Senghor’s ambition for cultural métissage, demonstrating for students and audiences the value of universal humanism in which African aesthetics were at the forefront. This was not a reproduction of France’s discourse of universalism propagated through their civilizing mission, but instead, claimed universalism from an African standpoint, attesting to the utility and widespread value of African dance for artists and audiences everywhere.⁴⁴

At the same time, the school replicated the contradictions of Négritude. By characterizing her technique and the curriculum broadly as “Negro-African,” Acogny collapsed the multiplicity of dance forms and aesthetics from across the immense and ethnically diverse continent into a single dance technique, thereby reiterating the racial essentialism that colonialism and Négritude both relied upon. This was accomplished by borrowing from the European invention of codifying dance steps and sequences into a technique, a practice with roots in Louis XIV’s Academy of Dance and connected to colonialist taxonomic projects of extraction. Yet, just as Négritude reiterated the racial essentialism embedded in colonialism as a rejection of French colonial assimilationist ideology, Acogny “refashioned ballet’s classificatory framework into an anti-colonial project.”⁴⁵ As Susan Leigh Foster writes, Acogny’s appropriation of the Europeanist taxonomic project of classifying, naming, and sequencing dance steps defied Western conceptions of African dance as “lascivious” and “chaotic.”⁴⁶ Acogny’s strategic and selective borrowing of European forms, paradigms, and aesthetics in combination with her excavation of Africanist movement principles articulated, through the dancing body, the type of modernity envisaged by Senghor in his final push for Négritude. A similar phenomenon played out across the companies and dance schools that Ousmane Noël Cissé directed in the 1970s and 1980s.

Pour une danse africaine participant de l'universel

Le chef de l'Etat a présidé lundi à 10 heures, au Musée dynamique, l'inauguration de l'école de danse, Mudra-Afrique, devant le tout-Dakar des arts, des lettres et des spectacles, et en présence des membres du corps diplomatique.

C'est le ministre de l'Enseignement Supérieur, qui a, le premier, pris la parole pour saluer la présence de représentants de pays étrangers, tels le Venezuela, la Guinée-Bissau, l'Iran, avant de donner les significations de l'événement.

Il s'agit, estime M. Ousmane Caura, d'une consécration de Mudra-Afrique, le but essentiel est d'unir les hommes et les cultures par le dialogue chorégraphique. Pour le ministre, Mudra a rencontré deux fois l'Afrique : la première fois en 1973 lors de la tournée du Ballet du XX^e

siècle de Maurice Béjart, découverte réciproque entre Mudra et l'Afrique; la seconde rencontre a eu lieu en 1976, lors de la 19^e conférence de l'UNESCO à Nairobi, «ou ce fut le dialogue».

Le secrétaire général du Fonds international pour la Promotion de la Culture, représentant le directeur général de l'UNESCO, a noté que c'est la première opération du genre approuvée par son organisme.

Après M. Langlois, M. Van Eslande, le ministre belge de la Justice, président du Conseil d'Administration de Mudra, a les yeux fermés cherché à retrouver ces fonds expressifs total de l'être humain, qui était en train de se réaliser, a exprimé le vœu que s'intensifie l'entente entre les deux Mudra, une coopération jamais atteinte jusqu'à pré-

sent dans le domaine de la danse et du rythme.

Pour le chef de l'Etat, Mudra-Afrique est une antenne de Mudra-Bruxelles, mais elle ne saurait être une école pour le Sénégal uniquement. Elle est appelée à devenir une école pour toute l'Afrique, noire, et pourrait même être élargie à tout le continent africain, «car, ajoute-t-il, la Négritude n'est qu'une face de l'Africanité, l'autre face, complémentaire, étant la culture arabo-berbère».

Le Président de la République a, ensuite, fait l'historique de la danse classique européenne en partant du ballet «danse figurée, exécutée par plusieurs personnes».

(Lire ci-après le discours intégral du Président Senghor).

S. 23 Novembre 1977



Le Président Senghor discutant avec Germaine Acogny et Maurice Béjart. C'était à l'inauguration de Mudra-Afrique.

Figure 3. Article published in *Le Soleil* (November 23, 1977). Headline reads: "Mudra-Afrique: For an African dance participant of the Universal." Pictured: President Senghor, Germaine Acogny, and Maurice Béjart.

Ousmane Noël Cissé, Sirabadral, and the Manhattan Dance Center

Ousmane Noël Cissé was born in 1945 in Dakar to a Senegalese mother and Nigerian father. He started dancing on the streets of urban Senegal in the heyday of a Cuban-inspired social dance craze during his youth. He describes first being inspired to pursue dance professionally upon viewing the film *West Side Story*. His decision to become a professional dancer was reaffirmed when he saw the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater perform *Revelations* at FESMAN in 1966. Struck by what he recognized as elements of African dance in the American choreography, he was inspired by the idea that all dances carry commonalities and that African dances are an especially rich resource that choreography everywhere could—and most likely already did—draw from. By this time, he was performing neotraditional dance in several companies, including Ballet d’Afrique noire directed by Lamine Conté, a former member of Fodéba Keita’s Les Ballets Africains.⁴⁷ He used his expertise in neotraditional dance as a base from which he began to improvise to American jazz music, a practice that led to the development of his own syncretic style. Eventually, he formalized his practice as a dance technique that he called *danse répédé*, a Wolof term he coined to reflect physical and mental strength and rigor.⁴⁸

Impressed by his unique dancing, Katherine Dunham recruited Cissé to the National Ballet in 1966, where he performed as a soloist for six years. He toured extensively with the National Ballet. While on tour in the United States, he met Ailey company members and the renowned African American dancer and choreographer Chuck Davis. Later, he would invite these and other artists to teach at his schools in Dakar. While a member of the National Ballet, he worked intensely with Dunham’s assistant, Oliver Johnson, who stayed in Senegal for several years. Cissé explains that daily classes in the Dunham Technique introduced him to “Afro-modern” dance while Johnson was his primary modern and jazz dance instructor. Together, Cissé and Johnson established the Afro-American Dance Center, a private dance school located near the French embassy that primarily served children of French diplomats. Through the school, they transmitted their combined expertise premised on the recognition that American jazz and modern dance have African roots while Cissé further developed *danse répédé*.

Influenced by the African American dance techniques and choreography of Ailey, Dunham, and Johnson, Cissé was motivated early in his career by recognizing the ubiquity of African dance. The globalization of African dance including its influence on American modern dance—which, he implied, sug-

les Stages

13.14.15 novembre
 20.21.22 novembre
 27.28.29 novembre
 4.5.6 décembre
 11.12.13 décembre 81.

Horaires

le vendredi de 14 à 17 heures
 le samedi et le dimanche
 de 10 à 12 heures et de 14 à 17 heures

Tarif

pour un stage de 6h
 repas du dimanche ca.
 300^f

Synthèse de DANSE
 AFRICAINE
 ET
 MODERNE
 danse Répédé
 OUSMANE NOËL
 Cissé

Cultural de NOËL
 Cissé
 PARIS 20

Figure 4. Flyer for danse répédé courses in France, 1981. Photo courtesy of Cissé.

gests that it impacted other dance forms as well—inspired him to create a style in which African dance was at the center of a capacious approach. Cissé explains, “le répédé c’est la synthèse de toutes les danses. Pour moi, c’est la danse contemporaine. Toute contemporaine à l’époque. . . . c’est une danse universelle parce que toutes les danses se ressemblent” (répédé is a synthesis of all dances. For me, it is contemporary dance. Completely contemporary at that time . . . it is a universal dance because all dances are alike).⁴⁹ For Cissé, contemporary dance is characterized by its syncretic movement vocabulary, which transcends any singular dance technique. By categorizing danse répédé as contemporary dance, he reverses narratives that depict the flow of contemporary dance from the white West to the Global South. He states, “Les gens disent c’est que les européens qui dansent la danse contemporaine. J’ai

dit non, *on l'avait déjà !*" (People say that it is only Europeans who dance contemporary dance. I said no, *we had it already!*).⁵⁰ Articulating not only a geographical revision of the history of contemporary dance, he revises its temporality as well, insisting that contemporary dance was already practiced in Africa before it became known as a European genre. His characterization of danse répédé as universal shares Senghor's positioning of Africa as a viable location from which to theorize universal humanism. Like Acogny, Cissé maps Senghor's rhetoric of openness and universalism onto dance, positing the dancing body as a conduit for the philosophical tenets of Negritude. However, Cissé's interest in diasporic dance forms as a starting point for his technique marks a significant difference between his project and that of Acogny, who was compelled by the tensions she experienced in ballet classes.

In 1973, President Senghor created a second national dance company and appointed Cissé director. Named "Sirabadral" after a fourteenth century Serer princess from Senghor's region of birth, this company would distinguish itself from the first national company, which took the name La Linguère. Sirabadral would still center neotraditional dances but would incorporate other dance forms based on Cissé's developing syncretic style. It would "modernize" traditional dance by integrating movements culled from American modern and jazz dance with those of Wolof, Diola, Soninké, and other local ethnic dances. Cissé explains, "C'était la danse traditionnelle mais stylisée, il y avait beaucoup plus de technique. On faisait des pas de bourrée mais dans les rythmes africains, avec des tenues africaines" (It was traditional dance but styled, it was a lot more technical. We did *pas de bourrée* but to African rhythms, with African outfits).⁵¹ Senghor encouraged Cissé and company members to "rediscover' the region's dances and rhythms and codify them before integrating elements from other cultures."⁵² Cissé's work with Sirabadral led Senghor to award him the Ordre du Mérite, an honor in recognition of his service to the state.⁵³

In 1975, Béjart invited Sirabadral to perform in Brussels and subsequently invited Cissé to train at Mudra. From 1978 to 1981, Cissé completed the Mudra curriculum and performed with the Ballet du XXe siècle. While studying classical ballet, modern dance, music, and theater, he also offered workshops in African dance and danse répédé. After returning to Senegal, he opened the Manhattan Dance Center near the Sorano Theatre in 1982. Whereas the Afro-American Dance Center was primarily geared toward French expatriates, the Manhattan Dance Center welcomed a mix of middle- and upper-class Senegalese and foreign students. Cissé took advantage of the connections he had made as a member of the National Ballet and invited

international choreographers to teach master classes and workshops. Chuck Davis's workshop was among the most memorable for former student Jean Tamba. Tamba would go on to study at the National School of Arts and upon graduating, create what is recognized as Senegal's first contemporary dance company, *Compagnie 5ème Dimension*, in 1995. However, Tamba is uncomfortable with the label "contemporary dance" and prefers to call his work "métisse danse," drawing directly from Senghor's discourse of cultural métissage.⁵⁴ Like Cissé's danse répédé, Tamba's métisse danse retains rootedness in African dance forms while incorporating influences from wide-ranging global dance forms, premised on their commonalities. Tamba's métisse dance with its emphasis on openness and universality may be considered a bridge between the modernist projects of the 1970s–1980s and the advent of contemporary dance, which took off in Senegal soon after the establishment of *Compagnie 5ème Dimension*.

Cissé's daughter, Fatou Cissé, began training at the Manhattan Dance Center as an adolescent. She describes her father's new dance style as

Une manière de bouger, un style qui n'était pas là avant. . . . Il a amené des danseurs de hip hop, des danseurs d'un peu partout avec qui il a créé ce mélange. Il a essayé de professionnaliser, de moderniser ces styles de danse et de les amener vers la danse traditionnelle.

A way of moving, a style that was not there before. . . . He brought in hip hop dancers, dancers from everywhere, with whom he created this mix. He tried to professionalize, to modernize these styles of dance and bring them toward traditional dance.⁵⁵

She confirms the novelty of her father's syncretic approach at the time. Several private dance schools existed in Dakar but they focused on the transmission of already established dance styles and techniques. Cissé's project was more akin to what Acogny started at *Mudra Afrique* but rather than training highly selective cohorts of dancers, his center operated as an open studio for tuition-paying students.

Among those who trained at the Manhattan Dance Center were a handful of former *Mudra Afrique* students who stayed in Senegal following the school's sudden closure in 1982, the same year that the Manhattan Dance Center opened. Cissé explains that *Mudra* students found in his training a rare opportunity to continue developing their work premised on openness: "Ils ne savaient pas où aller. Ils ne pouvaient pas aller au Sorano. Sorano



Figure 5. Ousmane Noël Cissé teaching in Dakar, early 1980s. Photo courtesy of Cissé.

c'était typiquement traditionnel, il n'y avait pas assez d'ouverture. Tous les artistes qui sont sortis de Mudra, c'est moi qui les ai récupérés" (They did not know where to go. They could not go to Sorano. Sorano was typically traditional, there was not enough openness. I took on all the artists who left Mudra).⁵⁶ Cissé elaborated that for him, openness is the opposite of fixity. It means moving beyond the preservation and reproduction of known movement repertoires, which, he implies, was the project of the national company, *La Linguère*, housed at the Daniel Sorano Theatre. Openness favors incorporating influences from diverse dance forms and prioritizes invention. This is what singularly connected his approach to that of *Mudra Afrique*, making his school a logical next step for *Mudra* students.

Postcolonial Modernism, African Universalism

The dance techniques that Cissé and Acogny separately created must be understood not only as part of Senghor's *Négritude* project, but also within a broader rubric of postcolonial modernism. Acogny and Cissé's techniques are distinct from the neotraditional genre that they draw upon through a heightened focus on the incorporation of elements from elsewhere. Processes of selective borrowing, modifying, and reassembling artistic fundamentals of

multiple cultures in attempts at self-definition characterized what art historian Chika Okeke-Agulu describes as *postcolonial modernism*. Working within the underlying context of postcoloniality, mid-twentieth century artists across Africa shared “the impulse to rethink their work . . . catalyzed by their identification with a rhetoric of decolonization and attainment of national political independence.”⁵⁷ In Nigeria, for example, visual artists inaugurated postcolonial modernism through their practice of “natural synthesis,” or the selective use of resources and forms from Nigerian, African, and European traditions.⁵⁸ Their modernisms, like those of Cissé and Acogny, are deeply connected to local traditions without being bound by them.

The idea of modernizing dance and other art forms in postcolonial nations risks implying that art forms prior to this shift were outside the purview of the modern world. In African contexts especially, modernity is often pitted against tradition. Felwine Sarr writes that traditions are often thought to be characterized by “an immobile temporality resistant to the march of history and progress.”⁵⁹ In contrast, African modernity is conceived as “a negation of the old . . . the fashionable attire of present times, a clothing fabricated elsewhere and which we must bring ourselves to wear to be in tune with the world—even if it means having to shorten an arm or a leg in order for the clothes to fit.”⁶⁰ If the “traditional” binds space and time to construct indigenous cultural forms as allegedly ancient, local, and unchanging, then the “modern” indicates that which is progressive, innovative, and from an “elsewhere.” In the dance world, the language of modernization, with roots in post-Enlightenment conceptions of the modern, suggests that traditional dances are static and discrete rather than changing and interconnected, and that modernization hinges on the incorporation of Euro-American forms and values. Such a paradigm reiterates a narrative premised on European primacy that denies people of color the possibility to “emerge as active subjects of modernity,” erasing not only the possibility of African modernism, but also the ways in which African expressive culture has always informed European modernism.⁶¹ In other words, cultural modernization implies and often subscribes to processes of refining, eliticizing, and whitening local art forms.⁶²

Cissé and Acogny’s projects do not fully escape this logic. Their integration of classical ballet and Graham technique, and their connections to Bějart—who, despite his creole Senegalese descent, represented European modern ballet—suggest that their visions of modernization pivot on the incorporation of elite Euro-American dance forms. However, they simultaneously engage in processes of recuperation or “reindigenization” that forefront Africanist aesthetics as foundational to their iterations of modern dance. I borrow

the term “reindigenization” from Elizabeth Harney, who demonstrates how 1970s visual and performance arts collectives in Dakar rejected government-sponsored arts institutions because of their reliance on European criteria. The legendary Laboratoire Agit’Art, spearheaded by Issa Ramangelissa Samb (also known by his pseudonym Joe Ouakam), and the Village des Arts, founded by El Hadji Moussa Babacar Sy, created avant-garde performances and multidisciplinary works that encouraged the use of indigenous materials, structures, and artistic conventions.⁶³ Although Acogny and Cissé benefited from state patronage and directly borrowed from Euro-American artistic conventions, both of which the avant-gardists vehemently rejected, they similarly recuperated indigenous aesthetics. Their syncretic dance techniques place Africanist aesthetics at the center of the so-called “modern” while borrowing from a variety of forms, akin to the visual artists that Okeke-Agulu discusses. Cissé’s collaborations with and inspiration from Ailey, Dunham, Johnson, and Davis suggest that the “modern” was forged through South–South solidarities, mobilizing the African diaspora more so than appropriating white Euro-American forms. Although the Senghorian rhetoric of participation in the “civilization of the universal” through modernization may be interpreted as eliticizing and whitening local forms to attain universalism, Acogny and Cissé nuance this logic. They excavate and deploy Africanist aesthetics and values (which are always already present in Euro-American modern dance) while privileging the work of Afro-diasporic artists even as they selectively appropriate elements from Eurocentric forms. They implicitly insist on a redefinition of the terms “modern” and “modernization” so that they do not rely on whiteness.

The intention to create a dance that is at once African and universal is a decolonial gesture. It disrupts a genealogy of knowledge production that privileges local histories of metropolitan countries as those that become universalized.⁶⁴ The universal is most often conceived as a Western project of generalizing, or standardizing, one set of ideas that get exported and imposed as a model in non-Western elsewhere.⁶⁵ In contrast, the discursive and performative melding of “African” and “universal” insists on an epistemology in which Westernness, or whiteness, is not a condition of possibility for the universalization of knowledge. Articulating universal humanity from a distinctly African lifeworld attests to the multiplicity of locations where people have always engaged in conceptualizing ideas of humanity beyond the culturally specific European societies that have been taken up as producing purportedly universal knowledge systems.⁶⁶ As Jean and John Comaroff argue, “the place of Africa in the received narrative of Universal History is fundamen-

tally flawed.”⁶⁷ Rather than “tracking behind the curve of Universal History,” the South *prefigures* world-historical forces that will shape the future of the Global North, they suggest.⁶⁸ Similarly, through dance, Acogny and Cissé reposition Africa as prescient and incipient in the universalization of embodied knowledge and culture.

Dancing Openness at Mudra Afrique and the Manhattan Dance Center

Stating that he took on several Mudra Afrique students following its premature closure, that they chose to study with him for the continuity his school would offer in terms of pedagogical openness, Cissé suggests that openness was the linchpin connecting Mudra Africa and the Manhattan Dance Center. Openness was a defining feature of Cissé and Acogny’s approaches. Discursively, openness referred to the syncretic, internationalist philosophies of their institutions: moving beyond the neotraditional paradigm by incorporating elements from non-African styles as well as the intentionally international student and instructor bodies. Openness gestures toward a utopian universal in which all dances and aesthetics—and the diverse ethnicities, nationalities, and racial identities of the dancers performing them—are equally valued. The idea of openness not only manifested in the international reach of these institutions but also shaped the gender politics within them. Whereas the neotraditional model is fueled by the ideology of anti-colonial nationalism and its associated heteronormativity with gender as a meaningful category of social differentiation, Cissé and Acogny’s modernist dance institutions offered pedagogical models in which the performance of gender fluctuated.⁶⁹

Openness captures the ways in which technically versatile dancers took on and off a multiplicity of gender performances. By practicing different dance styles within a single curriculum, students were implicitly asked to enact various gendered corporealities ranging from the strictly heteronormative to abstract bodies devoid of social meaning as they went from class to class, rehearsal to rehearsal. As students took on and off the gender roles that the different dance styles stipulated, the dance studio consolidated a social space in which gender was enacted as unstable and malleable. At the same time, a quality of softness was introduced to the Senegalese dance landscape, bringing with it connotations of effeminacy ascribed to male dancers. The new constellations of dance aesthetics established and disseminated in the 1970s–1980s destabilized the normative assumptions that colonialism concret-

ized and nationalism reiterated, signaling the inherent (if unstated) possibility for gender and sexual openness within Senghor's internationalist paradigm.

Though not explicitly engaged in the women's liberation movements of the 1970s in Senegal and internationally, Cissé and Acogny's destabilizing gender practices in dance studios were likely inflected by the increasingly influential debates about women's rights in the public sphere. Their dance institutions opened just a few years after the 1973 enactment of the Family Law Act, which redistributed men's overwhelming power in the domestic sphere, and the watershed 1975 World Conference on Women.⁷⁰ Connected to the globalization of women's rights movements, several women's rights associations formed in Senegal in the mid- to late 1970s. These included the *Amicale des juristes sénégalaises* (Association of Senegalese Women Lawyers), the *Association des pharmaciennes* (Association of Women Pharmacists), and the *Association des femmes africaines pour la recherche et de développement* (Association of African Women for Research and Development) with memberships consisting of some of the first generations of female university students.⁷¹ Cissé and Acogny's unprecedented curricula that stripped gender away from dance vocabularies and offered equal opportunities for professionalization to men and women bear similarities with these groups' promotion of equal rights between genders. Their artistic approaches were rather conservative, not unlike these early groups that primarily fought for material improvements to women's lives rather than dismantling the underlying patriarchal system. It was not until the mid-1980s that a progressive feminist group, *Yewwu-Yewwi*, emerged and took a more radical approach to identifying and restructuring systemic issues in Senegalese society.⁷²

It must be noted that access to the novel performances of gender constructed and embodied within these dance studios was limited. Newspaper articles from the period indicate that cohorts of *Mudra Afrique* students were composed of approximately twelve students, while Cissé's institutions catered to middle- and upper-class families with the means to pay tuition. Most performances took place at elite venues, including the Daniel Sorano Theatre, the French Cultural Center, and similar types of venues in other African countries when they toured. However, Acogny made a concerted effort to also engage popular audiences, to "attirer non seulement les habitués du théâtre, mais aussi tous ceux qui assistent rarement aux spectacles culturels" (attract not only theater regulars, but also all those who rarely attend cultural performances).⁷³ For example, a performance in 1979 at the Iba Mar Diop stadium in the popular Dakar neighborhood of Médina was attended by 1,200–1,500 people according to an article published in *Le Soleil*.

The author describes the audience as very enthusiastic and “très mélangé de condition sociale” ([of] very mixed social backgrounds).⁷⁴ Another example of Mudra students engaging a popular audience is captured in Gudie Lawaetz’s 1980 documentary film *Mudra-Afrique*. During their first tour in the Casamance region in the south of Senegal, students performed outdoors in rural Enampore, the home village of a Mudra student. The film shows a large crowd of residents—some of whom precede the Mudra performance with a procession of Diola dancing and music—watching attentively. Aware of the elitism associated with the modernist project that she was a part of, Acogny organized free or very cheap performances in unconventional locations away from the proscenium stage to welcome broader swaths of the Senegalese population.

For the remainder of this chapter, I describe the dancers’ transitions between performing heteronormativity and nonsexualized, nongendered abstraction, and the soft quality that Cissé describes as novel to Senegalese dance at the time. My analyses rely on Lawaetz’s film supplemented by archival research and interviews. The data I draw from disproportionately represents Mudra Afrique, a reflection of the relative abundance of available documentation of Mudra Afrique in comparison to a paucity of resources on the Manhattan Dance Center. However, the shared goals and similar curricula offered at the two institutions, as well as former Mudra students’ decision to continue their studies at Cissé’s school, indicate that there was significant overlap in the ways in which dancers embodied gender at both institutions.

Performing Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity seems to be the exception rather than the rule at Mudra Afrique. There are only a handful of moments in the film, *Mudra-Afrique*, in which dancers are organized according to conventional gender roles. These include excerpts from *La cuillère sale* (*The Dirty Spoon*), one of the school’s most widely performed works.⁷⁵ The story—a ninety-minute adaptation of the Senegalese folktale of the same name by Birago Diop—follows Coumba, a maltreated orphan, who is sent by her stepmother to wash a dirty spoon in a faraway sea. The Mudra Afrique version uses a movement vocabulary that draws from neotraditional dances and the Acogny Technique. The lead dancer’s movements are light and joyful as she traverses the stage in a series of jumps and turns, swaying her hips from side to side in a way that recalls Acogny’s *baobab fou* (crazy baobab) sequence.⁷⁶ She wears a colorful *boubou*, conventional West African women’s formal attire. As the narrative devel-

ops, a group of men wearing loose white pants, their torsos bare, performs a percussive dance that shows off their physical strength and rhythmic aptitude through jumps and rapid footwork. They thrust their pelvises forward with fists held at their hips while Coumba shudders in the corner. The story resolves when Coumba finds a male partner, referred to by the documentary narrator as her “Prince Charming,” as her lighthearted, joyful dancing returns to celebrate the happy ending.

The documentary also shows Acogny in rehearsal with a Black man and a white woman for a classical ballet pas de deux. They practice outside on the concrete patio between the side of the building and its thick, white columns. Acogny shows the young man how to offer a strong arm to his female partner so that she can use it to balance *en pointe* with one leg lifted up in front of her body, her bent knee and pointed foot in an *attitude devant* position. Throughout the brief clip, the man is positioned behind the woman, presenting her to an imagined audience and supporting her balances and turns on the tips of her toes. While she stands out against the off-white concrete of the building’s exterior in a sage-green leotard and bright-purple tights, he wears beige tights and a black leotard, nearly blending in with the landscape behind him. She appears light and ethereal while he offers a strong and sturdy base. Although the excerpts of ballet classes captured in the documentary show all students, male and female, learning and performing the same movements and dispersed equally throughout the studio, this rehearsal for their upcoming end-of-year performance illustrates that students also stepped into the gendered division of labor that classical ballet demands in which the woman is spectacularized while the man remains in control.⁷⁷ Further, this particular rehearsal conforms to the ways in which heteronormativity intersects with racial hierarchies as the Black male dancer diminishes himself in the act of bolstering the visibility of his white female partner. Their differentiated movements, dress, and spatial positioning adhere to the choreographic conventions of the Romantic ballet with its Eurocentric, heteronormative framework and patriarchal leanings.

In these two examples, the men appear strong and in control while the women appear small, emotional, and dependent on men. Performances that drew heavily on neotraditional dance or classical ballet reiterated the heteropatriarchy already embedded within these styles. Students were to occasionally step into these roles and replicate their heteronormativity. However, the majority of Mudra Afrique classes and performances appeared to do away with gendered conventions altogether. By foregrounding abstraction and egalitarianism, much of the training and choreography appeared nonsexualized and nongendered.

Nonsexualized and Nongendered Choreography

Embedded within daily Graham technique classes, infiltrating the modern choreography at the institutions, and incorporated into the Acogny Technique and danse répédé was the ostensible absence of gender and sexuality. Acogny acknowledged in an interview that a disregard for gendered conventions was widespread in the Mudra Afrique curriculum.⁷⁸ Footage of classes there show that the dancers' spatial organization delinks from gendered groupings and movement vocabularies that often structure dance technique classes. Whether they face the mirror in ballet and Graham classes, or dance in a continuously moving circle in Acogny Technique classes, men and women are evenly dispersed throughout the space as they learn and perform the same movements. They wear unitards or leotards and tights that homogenize and desexualize their bodies. The solid colors and lack of embellishment appears to reduce the image of dancers to abstract bodies devoid of social meaning. The nongendered ethos of the school equally applied to their singing and drumming classes. Whereas drumming in Senegal is typically reserved for men, all students regardless of gender learned drumming at Mudra Afrique, which, Acogny claims, was the first time in Senegal that drumming was open to women.⁷⁹

The syncretic movement vocabularies at Mudra Afrique and the Manhattan Dance Center to some extent paralleled the codes and conventions of twentieth century American modern dance. Turning away from the representational devices of classical ballet, American modern dance at the turn of the twentieth century insisted on alternatives to the idealized femininity performed on ballet stages. Pioneers including Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan, and Ruth St. Denis presented the female dancing body in ways that escaped the gender binary and its associated heterosexuality, going to "enormous lengths to elaborate in and for dance a nonsexualized corporeality."⁸⁰ The staging of nonsexualized female dancing bodies was strategic. As women engaging in new types of bodily expression, modern dance pioneers' experimental work could easily result in presumptions of immorality and illicitness. To avoid this and gain credibility, they created a "chaste dancing."⁸¹ Subsequent generations of modern and postmodern choreographers maintained the idea of the body as a desexualized "musculoskeletal system."⁸² It is likely that Acogny and Cissé were influenced by this principle that had already taken hold in the modern dance forms that they drew from.

Reviews of their performances suggest that their modernist choreography also did away with social norms. According to *Le Soleil* reviewer Djib Diedhiou, *La cuillère sale* promotes the maintenance of the *ordre social*

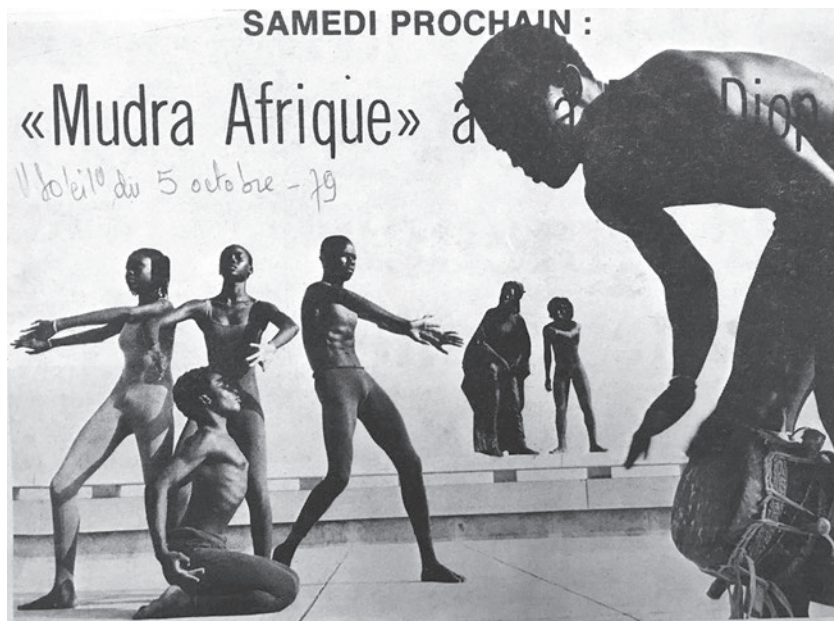


Figure 6. Headline reads: “Next Saturday: ‘Mudra Afrique’ at Stadium Iba Mar Diop.” *Le Soleil* (1979).

(social order). Diedhiou writes that *La cuillère sale* is easier to understand than *Aloopho* (also spelled *Alofo* in some articles), another popular work performed by Mudra students.⁸³ Critic Yves Alavo describes *Aloopho* as a *style nouveau* (new style) inaugurated by Mudra Afrique.⁸⁴ Acogny’s *esthétique négro-africaine* (Negro-African aesthetic) epitomized in *Aloopho* was a new form of communication that Alavo characterized as *une transformation radicale* (a radical transformation).⁸⁵ Indeed, *La cuillère sale*, with its neotraditional foundation, upholds a recognizable social order in contrast to more abstract works, like *Aloopho*, that students also performed, sometimes back-to-back in the same concert. Similarly, a review of a shared performance by Acogny and Cissé’s students describes Cissé’s choreographic structure as “ambiguous” and “ambivalent.”⁸⁶ Collectively, these critics ascertain the legibility of neotraditional dance (and its heteronormative leanings) in opposition to the rupture carried out through modernist abstraction. Although they did not always understand these new works, they welcomed their novelty. They praised Acogny’s sense of rhythm, spirituality, and connection to nature. They lauded Cissé’s masterful movement vocabulary and his skillful students.⁸⁷ While the new performances of gender enabled by Acogny and

Cissé's syncretic techniques were not explicitly discussed, critics' appreciation for their transformative and ambiguous approaches implicitly validated the novel gender performances within them.

Embodying Softness

When Cissé recalled being labeled *pédé* in light of his proficiency in modern dance and classical ballet, he slowly extended an arm up as if moving through water, gently molding it into a curved position above his head, his fingers delicately rounding out the curve in the classical ballet fifth position *en haut*. He described positions like this as signifying homosexuality in contrast to the powerful, athletic movements that characterize most neotraditional dances. Compared to neotraditional dance, ballet is “plus doux dans le regard, dans le torse” (softer in the gaze, in the torso), he explains.⁸⁸

The ballet stage, marked by softness and emotional expressivity, has carried a persistent association between the male dancer and homosexuality that disseminated globally since the early twentieth century. Although male dancers consolidated political and economic power in the aristocratic courts of seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Europe where ballet began to take shape, they all but disappeared from ballet stages in the Victorian era as bourgeois gender norms took hold, redefining men's roles as bearers rather than objects of the gaze. Since the nineteenth century, conventional male appearance increasingly signified power and success while softness and emotional expressivity became disallowed.⁸⁹ Vaslav Nijinsky's rapid rise to star status as a performer and choreographer with Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* just prior to World War I was, according to Penny Farfan, “crucial to the revitalization of the role of the male dancer in early twentieth-century ballet.”⁹⁰ Lynn Garafola describes Nijinsky's dancing as openly flouting heterosexuality and homosexuality simultaneously. She writes, “Masculine in the power of his leaps, feminine in the curving delicacy of his arms, he emitted a perfume of sexual strangeness.”⁹¹ Nijinsky's performances with *Ballets Russes* in Paris and London implied nonnormative sexuality for some spectators and, by the late 1920s, anticipated a “visibly gay circle of viewers” at *Ballets Russes* performances.⁹² Ramsay Burt explains that the male dancer became a site of prejudice and anxiety about masculine identity in Western Europe as homosexuality was taking shape as a social identity. The novelty of “the spectacle of the male body” and lack of distinction between ballet as aesthetic experience versus erotic spectacle meant that male ballet dancers blurred the line between acceptable homosocial male bonding and forbidden homosexual sexuality.⁹³

While male dancers in Senegal already held prestige on dance stages at the time that ballet and modern dance were introduced there, the association between male dancers and homosexuality was new. This already established connotation traveled with the dance form to Senegal, as it did to other geographic locations. Prior to Mudra Afrique and the Manhattan Dance Center, ballet classes were sparse in Dakar, primarily serving the children of foreign diplomats and upper-class Senegalese at downtown private studios such as Andrée Lorenzetti's Centre de Danse. The increase in ballet, modern, and jazz dance offerings with Acogny and Cissé's institutions more thoroughly integrated a quality of softness into dance vocabularies in Dakar. This is not to imply that ballet is purely soft. In fact, male ballet dancers perform extraordinarily powerful jumps and lifts that require significant strength. Yet, just as Garafola describes Nijinsky as "masculine in the power of his leaps, feminine in the curving delicacy of his arms," a soft gestural quality was layered on top of powerful movements, overriding what might otherwise be perceived as normatively masculine. In turn, male dancers' sexuality became suspect.

The softer physicality demanded in these forms appears in photographs that Cissé shared with me as well as in footage of Mudra Afrique performances. In Enampore, the dancers perform a work that melds the abstraction of modern dance with classical ballet positions. The women in unitards and the men in tights, they perform on a sandy clearing surrounded by their audience. A young man walks toward three other dancers, one arm extended in front of his body, the other out to his side. His legs are slightly rotated outwards, his chest held upright as if floating over his even, deliberate steps, his pelvis steady. He joins the others, they grasp hands and run with a long, even stride, their bodies open to the space above and in front of them. After a few steps, they drop hands and slowly curve their arms into a rounded *en bas* position as they bring their legs into a turned out fifth position, their heads angled slightly down and to the side. Softness is embodied by the male and female dancers alike, visible in their verticality, the appearance of lightness and defiance of gravity, perceived effortlessness, and rounded arm positions. Even as male dancers continued to perform in roles that unquestionably staged their bodies as masculine and strong, they were also frequently asked to embody softer qualities in their various classes, rehearsals, and performances. Alongside the newly nongendered and nonsexualized corporealities that dancers embodied, softness further inflected the ways in which dancers reframed relationships between dance, gender, and sexuality while impelling audiences to view dance differently.



Figure 7. Mudra Afrique students performing in Enampore. Still from Lawaetz's 1980 documentary *Mudra-Afrique*.

Conclusion

The implementation of structural adjustment in Senegal coincided with Senghor's resignation in 1980. The newly appointed president, Abdou Diouf, abandoned Senghor's Negritude agenda and replaced it with a technocratic ideology that left little room for culture. Artists across many sectors found themselves reeling from sudden cuts in state funding, which to this day have scarcely improved. When Mudra Afrique closed in 1982, Acogny moved to Europe, where she taught extensively throughout the 1980s and 1990s. She was an instructor at Béjart's Mudra school in Brussels and opened her own studio, the Studio-École Ballet-Théâtre du 3e Monde, in Toulouse. She also organized month-long workshops each summer in the village of Fanghoulé in the Casamance region of Senegal with her European dance students. Ousmane Noël Cissé continued teaching at the Manhattan Dance Center, which, funded by tuition-paying students, did not immediately succumb to the newly privatized economy. He also created the Sotiba Boys, an all-male company that promoted the state-owned textile company, Sotiba. Both the Manhattan Dance Center and Sotiba Boys dissolved when Cissé relocated

to Cape Verde for the second half of the 1990s, where he helped establish the Cape Verdean national dance company. He later returned to Senegal and eventually became the artistic director of the Grand Théâtre National Dou-dou Ndiaye Rose, a second national theater constructed during Abdoulaye Wade's presidency (and named after the deceased legendary percussionist who previously taught at Mudra Afrique).

Despite the premature closures of Mudra Afrique and the Manhattan Dance Center, and despite the limited accessibility to the innovations taking place there, Acogny and Cissé garnered sufficient attention for their impact to endure. Records from the French Cultural Diplomacy archives and reviews published in the Senegalese newspaper *Le Soleil* indicate that performances by Mudra Afrique and Manhattan Dance Center were received by large, enthusiastic audiences. They were often sold out and reviewers extolled the students and choreographers.⁹⁴ The success of Mudra Afrique was cited as evidence in support of developing the dance sector of the French Cultural Center in Dakar in a 1982 report.⁹⁵ Not only students but audiences and supporting organizations recognized and validated the new codes and conventions of concert dance, premised on openness, disseminated by these institutions.

The open social space of the dance studio consolidated in the late 1970s and 1980s paved the way for the kinds of queer experimentations pursued by dance artists in later decades. Future generations of contemporary choreographers would to various extents abandon the identity politics and universalist aspirations embedded within the Negritude discourse, but take up and expand upon the earlier generation's consolidation of gender fluidity in dance training. Opacity would replace universality as artists began to engage in rigorous improvisations and deconstructionist methodologies geared toward the upheaval of familiar movement repertoires. In twenty-first century Senegal, a more radical approach to contemporary dance training took hold, pivoting on the idea of dancing otherwise—the topic of the next chapter.

Three

Otherwise

Contemporary Dance Training as Queer Praxis



Danser autrement. Telle pourrait être ma définition, simple, de la danse contemporaine.

[Dancing otherwise. Such could be my simple definition of contemporary dance.]

—Salia Sanou¹

Otherwise is a word that names plurality as its core operation, otherwise bespeaks the ongoingness of possibility, of things existing other than what is given, what is known, what is grasped.

—Ashon T. Crawley²

Cultivating the capacity to imagine otherwise is at the heart of any queer project.

—Clare Croft³

I am seated with Andréya Ouamba and a group of seven creative residency participants from four African countries when Ouamba jumps to his feet to emphasize his point: “[La danse contemporaine doit] aller à des endroits pour montrer le truc à la personne d’une autre façon. [. . .] [Par contre] le premier degré c’est ce qu’on voit dans des ballets ou folklore.” (Contemporary dance must go places to show something to a person in another way. . . . On the other hand, first degree is what we see in ballets or folklore.) Everyone bursts into laughter as Ouamba performs a widely reproduced dance step, bouncing from foot to foot with a syncopated rhythm as his arms circle overhead, an exaggerated smile plastered to his face. He mimes an enthusiastic greeting with an invisible partner, then returns to dance steps recognizable within the

national frame of neotraditional dance (often termed “ballet” locally, as in the National Ballet of Senegal) and identifiable globally as “African dance.” His impersonation elicits loud laughter interspersed with the proclamation, “Oui, c’est vrai!” (Yes, that’s true!) Several dancers in the room, Ouamba included, have in-depth experience training and performing in the model of neotraditional dance that he conjures. His parody is all the more humorous given the collective familiarity with this dance form that he positions as distinct from contemporary dance.

This moment is part of a group discussion following run throughs of the dancers’ works-in-progress early in the six-week Ateliers expérience et corps (AEx-Corps) workshop in spring 2016. Ouamba has invited each of these artists to Dakar to work independently on a new piece under his guidance in collaboration with Brooklyn-based choreographer Reggie Wilson. Ouamba is responding to one particular piece that he considers too representational and mimetic. He launches into a lengthy explanation of what he considers the crux of contemporary dance: its capacity for difference, to imagine alternatives, to relay a message or theme in an unfamiliar way. “Tu peux le faire autrement, tu peux le faire autrement” (You can do it otherwise, you can do it otherwise), Ouamba repeats, encouraging everyone to think more critically about the ways in which their work can surpass the realm of the familiar, elicit affective resonance over direct narration, and provoke critical thought.

Across dance studios in Dakar and Toubab Dialaw, *autrement* (otherwise) is used interchangeably with similar French-language words (including *bouleversement* [upheaval] and *travestir* [distortion or drag]) to indicate a radical departure from the known. *Otherwise* names the method, process, and outcome of contemporary dance, whereby leaning into uncertainty throughout dance practice enables performances that imagine expansive social and political possibilities. Dancing otherwise demands durational and dialogical processes that uncover new terrain: new ways of moving and embodiments that evade national, gendered, and sexual norms. Through learning and unlearning, improvisation and dialogue, dancing otherwise encourages opacity as a political stance. It stakes a claim to models of being and moving in the world other than those rendered legible by dominant ideologies, whether that of the Senegalese state or of the global contemporary dance circuit that, while embracing and welcoming African artists into its fold, continues to reproduce inequities that force them to always explain themselves.

Foregrounding otherwise in this chapter extends Burkinabé choreographer Salia Sanou’s working definition of contemporary dance as *danser autrement* (dancing otherwise) in his 2008 book *Afrique danse contemporaine*. For

Sanou, dancing otherwise captures the necessity of embracing difference among African choreographers, whose diverse cultural contexts lead them to “*penser autrement, à danser autrement*” (think differently, to dance differently) in relation to one another.⁴ Intersecting with conceptualizations of otherwise across Black, Native, and Asian American studies, the term also encompasses “what might be enabled differently”⁵ by unraveling categorical distinctions between “naturalized racial, sexual, gender, and national identities.”⁶ Existing scholarly pursuits of otherwise as a conceptual frame overlap with its deployment in the dance studio as a practice of dismantling learned corporeal habits and uncovering dormant physical possibilities. As dance scholar Victoria Fortuna asserts, “moving otherwise . . . offers alternatives to, and sometimes critiques, the patterns of movement and bodily comportment that shape everyday life in contexts marked by violence.”⁷ Dancing otherwise counters attempts to restrain corporeality as a mechanism of power, putting forth novel embodiments that enable alternative perspectives to take root.

I argue that dancing otherwise enlists antinormative corporealities that inherently rearrange gender and sexual expressions. Dancing otherwise may be considered queer praxis, what I define in this context as the purposeful disruption of learned movement patterns and the pursuit of unknown alternatives, which offer glimpses of gender and sexual expressions other than those calcified by hegemonic ideologies. Here, queerness describes the “postcolonial modality of power relations” embodied within dance studios rather than operating solely as an identity category.⁸ Drawing on the work of Ayo A. Coly, I situate contemporary dance pedagogy in a context that resists the label queer and simultaneously foments disrupting disciplinary norms and ideologies, an everyday dynamic in postcolonies that Coly identifies as organically queer. Through practices ranging from structured reconfigurations of patrimonial dances to durational improvisations, dancers learn to embody and embrace ways of moving otherwise to learned habits and choreographies, otherwise to normative gendered and sexual comportments, and otherwise to the state’s choreography of heteropatriarchy. Dancing otherwise not only reorganizes corporeality, which inherently shifts gender and sexual expression, but, to echo Clare Croft, comprises “a path toward imagining expansive social possibilities, moving toward horizons of queer potential and revolution.”⁹

The differentiated space of contemporary dance training documented in this chapter bears similarities to the ways in which certain social dance spaces generate a sense of liberation that contrasts with the more tightly regulated public domain outside the queer dance club. Scholars of queer nightlife including Ramón H. Rivera-Servera, Kareem Khubchandani, Kemi Adeyemi, and Xavier

Livermon, among others, have shown how social dance settings from the United States to India to South Africa enable new modes of inhabiting one's body, engender utopian potential, destabilize hierarchies, and foster political practice.¹⁰ These possibilities are contingent on the creation of "a different kind of space" that Livermon describes as "instrumental to the performance cultures of Afro-diasporic peoples."¹¹ At the same time, queer nightlife is not altogether without constraint; social dance spaces are not exempt from the operations of power that pervade queer life. Although contemporary dance differs significantly from social dance, and while this study does not focus on queer-identifying individuals as does much of the scholarship on queer nightlife, they share an ethos of fostering ways of moving and being in one's body that may be deemed unacceptable in everyday life, even as regulatory power structures still manage to seep in and limit dancers' obtainment of freedom. My analyses in this chapter are indebted to the body of scholarship on queer nightlife that has undoubtedly informed how I see and interpret queer praxis—and its limitations—in contemporary dance spaces.

This chapter focuses on dance pedagogy at *École des Sables*—the international dance school established in 1998 by Germaine Acogny and her husband, Helmut Vogt—and Ouamba's AEx-Corps workshops and rehearsals for new works. *École des Sables* and AEx-Corps are embedded in transnational structures that situate them as both within and apart from the Senegalese nation. The histories of these institutions, the landscapes in which they reside, and the border-crossing movements of their instructors and students underlie the queer possibilities embraced within. This chapter draws connections between these institutions' pedagogical ethos, their political economic undersides, and their ecological contexts.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, 1970s and 1980s dance studios in Dakar not only brought a variety of dance techniques, students, and instructors from all over the world to Senegal, but at the same time, established curricula in which students took on and off various performances of gender as they moved between classes and rehearsals. Gender malleability was normalized within Senegalese dance studios. Despite their premature closures, *Mudra Afrique* and Ousmane Noël Cissé's various institutions are forebears to twenty-first century contemporary dance pedagogy. New modes of experimentation proliferated as contemporary dance institutions were established in Senegal, connected to the art form's emergence across the continent at the turn of the twenty-first century. Two decades after the demise of the Negritude project, the goal of universality was abandoned in favor of a multiplicity of individualized approaches to dance-making. Openness turns to otherwise as present-day instructors teach dancers to engage in investigative creative

processes and to think critically about bodies in motion and their representational possibilities.

École des Sables

École des Sables is one of the most significant dance institutions on the African continent. Located near the fishing village of Toubab Dialaw fifty kilometers south of Dakar, it serves hundreds of Senegalese, African, Afro-diasporic, and global dancers every year. Its secluded location and the transnational ties that sustain it enable the school to occupy an otherwise space, within yet exceeding the Senegalese state. Its setting is integral to instructors' transformational pedagogy, which implores students to move, think, and dance otherwise. As one student described, "the people, the teachers, the environment is conducive for you to work, you're just free. You can explore anything you see, your mind gets open . . . so it's really transformed my capacity for thinking, my ways of dancing. I've become a different person."¹²

Following the swift closure of *Mudra Afrique* in 1982 and the professional and personal rupture this entailed for Acogny, she eventually recommitted to opening a dance school in Senegal after teaching in Europe for several years. While living in France, she maintained ties to Senegal and brought dancers to the Casamance region each summer for month-long workshops. When escalating conflict in the Casamance forced her to terminate her annual workshops there, she was not discouraged. She remained intent on establishing a new school in Senegal rather than continuing to reside and teach primarily in France. In the early 1990s, at the suggestion of their friend Gerard Chenet—a Haitian artist, writer, and former cultural consultant to Senghor who retired in Toubab Dialaw—Acogny and Vogt ran a handful of workshops in this small fishing village. They purchased land one kilometer away from the village where the "new *Mudra Afrique*," École des Sables, would be constructed. Vogt describes the location at the time as "nothing, it was just nature, just rocks and sand, no other houses, nothing. And it felt like a really quiet place, close to nature."¹³ Although the surrounding area has been built up in the decades since its founding, École des Sables maintains a sense of tranquility and seclusion thirty years later. Constructed on the savanna landscape near fields of ancient baobab trees, the school overlooks a lagoon off the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, visible from the open-air studios. Apart from the occasional sound of bleating goats, there are few interruptions while studying at École des Sables.

Since its founding, École des Sables has relied on grants and donations



Figure 8. Aloopho studio at École des Sables during the lush, rainy season. Photo by the author.

from entities and individuals outside of Senegal. Resolute on not making the same mistakes that led to Mudra Afrique's closure, Acogny decided from the start that she would not even ask for financial support from African governments.¹⁴ Instead, she sold her studio apartment in France, Vogt contributed most of his personal savings, a friend made a substantial donation, and they eventually acquired a grant from the U.S.-based Arts International. This allowed them to construct the first of two dance studios, named Aloopho after Acogny's grandmother. But it was not until 2004 that École des Sables was completed and officially inaugurated after donations from the French, Swiss, and German embassies and the Communauté européenne allowed for the construction of a second studio, a conference room, bungalows to house students and instructors, and water and electricity. Even without water, electricity, or shade, they ran their first workshop in 1998 and have held annual workshops for dancers from throughout Africa ever since.

École des Sables differs from Mudra Afrique and other conservatory models by offering dance workshops on an intermittent basis to serve the greatest number of dancers possible. Instead of staying at the school for years of study, dancers apply to participate in workshops that last anywhere from a few weeks to a few months. Most workshops include daily classes in the Acogny Technique, specific African dances, contemporary dance, choreography, and more. In order to offer training to African dancers free of charge, each workshop requires that the school procure grants to sponsor the dancers' airfare, lodging, food, and instructor salaries. In the early years, Vogt, who was the sole administrator of the school, made numerous requests to individuals and organizations, mostly based in Europe, to piece together their operating costs for

each workshop. After a few years, in acknowledgment of the school's success, organizations including the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development and the Fondation DOEN, both Dutch organizations, started to provide more substantial grants.¹⁵ However, even with these larger sums and longer commitments, the school continued to necessitate small grants and donations while setting aside profits from performance tours of their resident company, Jant-bi, and from Acogny's solo tours for the school's functioning.

In 2006, *École des Sables* expanded its student body beyond the African continent with the addition of "international" biennial workshops open to dancers from anywhere.¹⁶ This inaugurated a new income model, whereby non-African students and their supporting organizations were responsible for paying tuition, offsetting the costs for African students who studied for free at the same workshop. Still, *École des Sables*' funding structure has always been precarious. In the late 2010s, they neared bankruptcy when the Fondation DOEN did not renew their three-year grant and the French Institute of Paris underwent massive budget cuts that deeply affected them.¹⁷ Despite their situation, Vogt, with his usual calm collectedness, noted, "Donc c'est une chose très difficile, qui devient de plus en plus difficile. Et comme je dis, pour moi c'est un miracle. Ça montre que l'école devrait exister et qu'on a toujours trouvé une solution jusqu'à présent mais on ne sait pas jusqu'à quand. Voilà." (So it is very difficult, and is becoming more and more difficult. And as I say, for me it is a miracle. It shows that the school should exist and that we have always found a solution, but we do not know until when. Voilà.)¹⁸

In 2015, Acogny's son, Patrick Acogny—whom I refer to hereafter as Patrick as to not confuse him with his mother—took over the direction of *École des Sables*.¹⁹ Over the next several years, he revised and expanded the school's offerings. Patrick initiated new types of collaborations with non-African institutions and organizations. He created short-term workshops geared toward various groups of dancers: amateurs or professionals, Senegalese or international, young adults or elders, etc. While these new workshops brought greater numbers of non-African dancers to *École des Sables*, he also expanded the annual workshops for exclusively African dancers, making them more robust, thereby intensifying his mother's objective of serving African dancers first. These became a three-year diploma-granting program in which a smaller group of no more than twenty-five artists returns to *École des Sables* from April to June each year. Recognized as the most intensive and selective of the various workshops offered by the school, the program affirms the central place of African dancers in the *École des Sables* curriculum.

École des Sables' exclusive focus on African dancers in this workshop

and the instruction of the Acogny Technique as the school's pedagogical foundation puts forth an idea of "Africa" as an entity that can somehow be represented within a single institution. Yet, this iteration of "Africa" is not uncritical. Aware of the reductive potentialities of the term, Patrick affirms that in spite of the enormous cultural diversity on the continent, the label is meaningful. It signifies a shared history of colonial and racial subjugation of which culture is no small part. A guiding objective at *École des Sables* is to encourage dancers and choreographers to better understand their strengths—the values of their cultures, histories, philosophies, morals, and aesthetics—while staying open to outside values. Like the rubric of rootedness and openness that undergirded the curriculum at *Mudra Afrique*, Patrick describes *École des Sables* as an open circle that houses and protects the Africanist core of the pedagogy while embracing supplemental forms and encouraging outsiders to enter the circle and study African dances. *École des Sables* provides exceptional opportunities for African and overseas dancers to train professionally on the continent, reversing the enduring pattern of traveling from Africa to the European metropole for professional study. Their commitment to covering costs for African dancers, despite the administrative challenges this entails, ensures that Africans from various socioeconomic backgrounds may pursue studies there in contrast to the limited access of studying at equally prestigious schools in Europe or North America. This is widely appreciated by students. Many spoke of their pride for studying dance in Africa as opposed to traveling to Europe, affirming that *École des Sables* "représente l'Afrique, le continent" (represents Africa, the continent).²⁰ Others spoke of the value of dance training that foregrounds the "richesses des danses ici" (richness of dances here) that would be deemphasized or excluded from Eurocentric dance studies.²¹ As Patrick explains, African dancers are afforded the opportunity to meet one another, study together, and thereby reappropriate what is theirs, having suffered from the past four hundred years of slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism.²²

The school's arguably decolonial pedagogical model, premised on African worldviews and cultural forms, paradoxically relies on non-African sponsorship. As elaborated in chapter 1, contemporary dance emerged in Senegal and elsewhere as a coproduction of France and Africa in the post-structural adjustment period when state budgets for the arts were virtually nonexistent. Initiatives established in the 1990s and 2000s including *École des Sables* required the financial support of organizations and individuals from the Euro-American continuum as a mechanism of promoting African epistemologies and aesthetics. Tejumola Olaniyan and Evan Mwangi elucidate the antinomies of postcolonial African cultural production—the ways

in which African artists position themselves as cosmopolitan, anchored in the transnational and global, while firmly committed to championing Africanist worldviews.²³ Olaniyan's analysis of the coexistence of "unyielding nativism" and "relentless cosmopolitanism" in the music of Nigerian Afrobeat founder Fela Kuti provides a particularly useful model for understanding cultural production in postcolonial contexts.²⁴ Embedded within the geopolitical inequities of the afterlife of colonialism, nativism and cosmopolitanism are intertwined in artists' self-fashioning. As Mwangi writes, African cultural producers have for a long time "borrow[ed] tools from wherever in defense of African ways of knowing."²⁵ Centering and disseminating "African ways of knowing" does not entail a radical rejection of non-African influences. Instead, artists coexist with and strategically employ the inevitability of Western presence.

Rather than rejecting the multiplicity of tools that participation in the transnational allows for, *École des Sables* uses these in support of dance training that affirms African aesthetics, worldviews, and lives. *École des Sables* claims the transnational as integral to Africa and Africa as integral to the transnational, mirroring the often-ignored North-South collaborations that have always characterized modernity.²⁶ *École des Sables*, with the Acogny Technique as a foundation, makes African dance legible, even as the school and technique incorporate wide-ranging tools, aesthetics, and conventions. The Acogny Technique codifies Africanist movement aesthetics in "generative pollution" with those derived from Western dance techniques, in the construction of a widely accessible movement vocabulary that dancers and audiences across the world read as African.²⁷ With its Africanist foundation firmly in place and the legibility of African dance apparent to students, audiences, and funders, *École des Sables* places equal emphasis on the bouleversement of African dance. Instructors guide dancers' disruption of prescribed systems, movement vocabularies, and norms through practices including deconstruction and improvisation.

Precision and Bouleversement

A sign inside Patrick's office delineates his objectives for the school:

Que fait-on ici à EDS? La formation du danseur. Pourquoi? Nous voulons les inspirer, leur donner de l'espoir, leur montrer que par la danse tout est possible; changer leur vie pour le meilleur, bouleverser l'autre dans son être profond, rapprocher les peuples, et VIVRE !

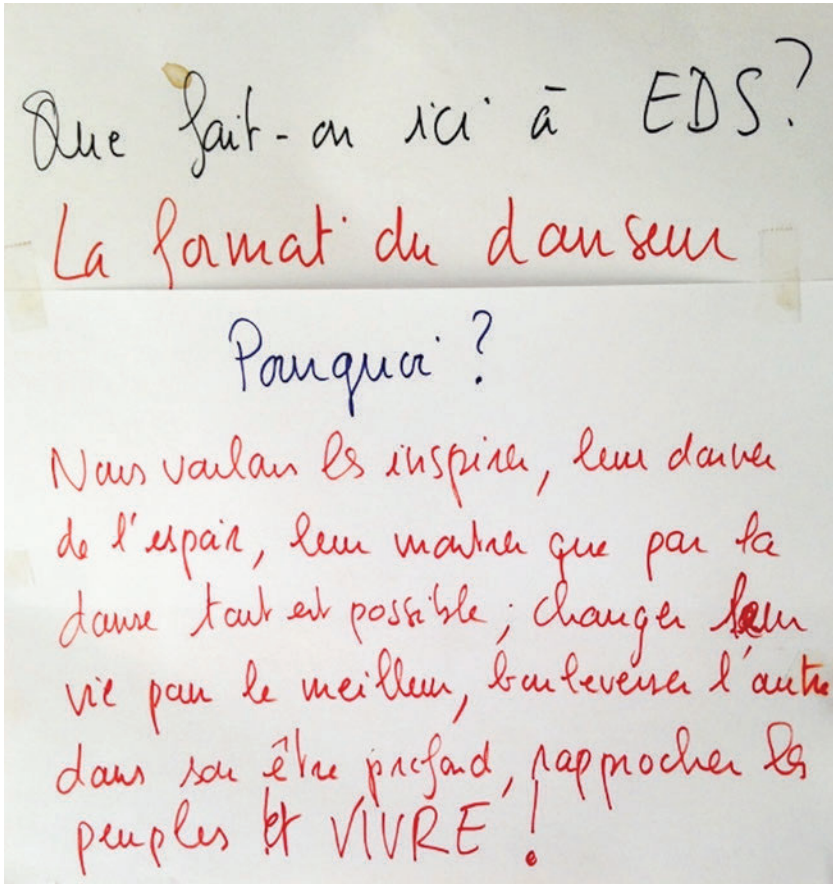


Figure 9. Sign inside Patrick Acogny's office, 2016. Photo by the author, with Acogny's permission.

What do we do here at EDS? Train dancers. Why? We want to inspire, give them hope, show them that through dance anything is possible; change their lives for the better, disrupt the other in their deepest being, bring people together, and LIVE!

For Patrick, the purpose of *École des Sables* is not limited to training professional dancers. It is an expansive pedagogy that aims to improve dancers' lives, inspire hope, and bring people together. Embedded within this list of optimistic intentions is the goal to *bouleverser* (to upset, disrupt, or shake) the other deeply. It is unclear who "the other" is in this phrase; possibly it

refers to the students themselves or to their audiences. In either sense, this phrase hints at an important tenet of the school's pedagogy, premised on deconstruction and the necessary upheaval of learned habits, viewing patterns, behaviors, and social norms that this entails for artists *and* their audiences. Focusing on the 2016 edition of the exclusively African workshop, this section illustrates how instructors at École des Sables transmit mechanisms for subverting cultural norms, disrupting expectations, and choreographing otherwise in the dance studio alongside the study of dance technique and its demand for precision.

As in any workshop offered at École des Sables, the curriculum for the 2016 workshop consisted of daily classes with a rotating body of instructors. For this particular workshop—the second edition of the three-year program—pairs of instructors taught for three weeks at a time. These included Patrick Acogny and Alesandra Seutin (Zimbabwe/UK) for the first three weeks, Raouf Tchakondo (Togo) and Karin Vyncke (Belgium) for the middle three weeks, and Nora Chipaumire (Zimbabwe/U.S.) and Sophiatou Kossoko (Benin/France) for the final three weeks. The instructors taught dance technique, including the Acogny Technique (Tchakondo and Seutin are certified Acogny Technique instructors) and different approaches to contemporary dance, as well as courses in choreography, which was the primary focus of this edition.²⁸ Twenty students from twelve African countries participated, eighteen of whom successfully completed the program and received a diploma the following year. As a minimum requirement for acceptance into the program, all dancers had completed school through *troisième secondaire*, which roughly corresponds to ninth grade in the United States, though many had gone further in their education, as far as earning a master's degree. While every part of the curriculum is significant, my discussion highlights Patrick and Kossoko's mechanisms for facilitating dancing otherwise through deconstruction, improvisation, and dialogue.

Students begin every day at École des Sables by slowing down and tuning into the inner landscape of their bodies. The instructor leads a ritual, established by Germaine Acogny, in which dancers and musicians greet each other with a physical embrace, form a circle, and move through a meditative sequence. Then, dancers scatter throughout the studio as the musicians take their seats. The dancers stand tall and close their eyes as Patrick instructs them to “awaken the spine” with miniscule undulations, connecting the breath to movement while relaxing the shoulders, neck, and jaw. He breaks down the undulation, explaining while demonstrating the mechanics of the movement initiation and how it travels fluidly through the body. I watch as

Hawa (pseudonym) gently tilts her head up and ripples through her sternum, lower back, and belly until the wave-like movement dissipates as it reaches her pelvis, only to start again at the top of her head. Her focused attention, flexible spine, and clear articulation of the movement trajectory evinces her meticulous control over her moving body, appearing to understand precisely where to start the rippling motion and how much energetic effort is needed. For another dancer, the undulation appears more challenging, the fluidity of the movement difficult to master on his body, bound with tight, strong musculature. Little by little, through the repetitive practice that Patrick demands, his back begins to loosen up, adjusting to the flexibility needed for this undulating movement.

Very gradually, dancers are instructed to pick up the pace and size of their undulations, reverse its direction, and shift their attention from their inner landscape to the space around them. As their undulations reach maximum speed and range of motion, the group of six resident drummers seated on the wood bleachers in the corner of the studio begin to play a soft rhythm that gradually crescendos and accelerates. Patrick seamlessly transitions into the next part of class. Without pausing for an hour or more, he leads the group through a rigorous sequence of movements culled from various dances of Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, and Burkina Faso.²⁹ Undulations and spinal fluidity remain foundational as bouncing, isolated movements of the limbs, syncopated rhythms, and energetic shifts are layered on top. The sequence intensifies. Every part of the body is in motion and the tempo accelerates until dancers seem to enter a state of euphoria, whooping and cheering each other on. From the soft, meditative beginning of class to the fast-paced, dynamic dancing an hour and a half later, a complete transformation has ensued.³⁰

For Patrick, it is imperative that students understand the specificity of African dance aesthetics and principles. The precision that he demands of his students continues into the next section of class as he teaches a sequence that draws from movements practiced during the warm-up. He then guides them through a process that he refers to as “deconstruction.” This entails breaking down the components that form the choreography, altering them, and putting them back together into versions of the dance that bear little or no resemblance to the original. In groups of four or five, dancers dissect, modify, and reassemble the components of the dance. One group minimizes the movements, performing them with a blank expression and little energetic effort. A jump with a full arm swing turns into a small bounce and slight circle of the wrist. While each component of a dance—its rhythm,

structure, movement composition, etc.—give a dance meaning, changing any one of those components alters its signification. “Ça fait sens autrement” (It makes sense otherwise), Patrick explains.³¹ In this example, the blank expression and diminished dynamic critically transform the movement from a celebratory rendition of African dance to an unfulfilled one. While the original choreography reaffirms the legibility of African dance, the deconstruction process results in opacity, inviting audiences to question expectations attached to African dance.

Discussing his focus on deconstruction, Patrick explains, “J’invite les danseurs par ce travail à revisiter autrement à la fois son corps et aussi sa danse” (Through this work, I invite dancers to revisit, at the same time, one’s body and one’s dance otherwise).³² The ethos of revisiting one’s body and dance otherwise extends beyond the makeup of the danced components and informs choreography, which Patrick taught immediately following his technique classes each morning. He had recently returned to Senegal from Minneapolis, where he was commissioned to create a piece for Marciano Silva dos Santos’ company Contempo Physical Dance. The work he created, *Cool Play* (2016), explored the universal tendency to hide our truths in public presentations of ourselves in ways compatible with social expectations. He was particularly inspired by the popular Senegalese *sabar* dance. Sabar gatherings are marked by both a strict social script that determines who can participate and how while consistently exceeding the bounds of gendered norms in Senegal. They are a privileged space in which an “explicitly sexualized feminine identity” is celebrated and where “erotic allegiances are constantly in flux.”³³ In *Cool Play*, Patrick did not work with the movement repertoire of *sabar* but rather drew inspiration from what happens *outside* the *sabar* circle, namely the labor that goes into upholding the image one presents publicly and the slippage between this desired image and one’s authentic self. Through deconstruction of West African dances and character development to the point of absurdity, the piece disintegrates the multiple acts, rituals, and behaviors employed daily to perform socially acceptable versions of ourselves.

For three weeks, Patrick implemented a condensed version of his approach to creating *Cool Play* with the cohort of twenty African dancers. Having deconstructed the learned dance sequence in small groups, the next step involved imbuing their new versions of the dance with transgression. Cycling between physical practice and lengthy discussions of the meaning and purpose of transgression, each group added a layer of transgressive meaning to their group work. For one group, this meant pushing the boundaries of conventional performance by sitting informally onstage until the audience

decided the performance was finished. For another group—all women—this entailed dancing in an explicitly homoerotic way, spooning one another and transposing the rhythm of the combination by slapping each other's behinds on the beat. In addition to the group work, each dancer constructed their own character whose movements, vocalizations, and attire were meant to exceed recognizability. Dressed in mismatched clothing, the dancers walked, stumbled, or crawled from upstage to downstage while wailing, squealing, or humming, creating a visual and aural cacophony. Stripped of normative social identity markers, their gender and sexual expressions were inherently modified. They illustrated the performativity of conventional ways of being and interacting in the world by performing unrecognizable alternatives.

When I asked Patrick about his decision to focus on transgression, he described transgression as central to a “contemporary spirit,” which led him to name sexuality and gender as critical areas of questioning within contemporary dance. Whereas patrimonial dances—the term he uses to describe traditional, neotraditional, and popular dances from a specific cultural context—are contemporary in a temporal sense, contemporary dance *as a genre* is distinct due to its spirit of questioning, provoking, and transgressing:

[Le danseur] contemporain demande pourquoi. Pourquoi je fais ça? Il va questionner la sexualité, il va questionner pourquoi la femme a fait ça, pourquoi l'homme a fait ça, pourquoi je me prends comme ça. [. . .] L'esprit contemporain c'est quand même de la transgression. Donc la transgression [. . .] amène les gens à réfléchir, « où sont des limites pour moi ? » Cette transgression c'est de repousser des limites mais ces limites ne sont pas fixes.

[The] contemporary [dancer] asks why. Why am I doing this? He will question sexuality, he will question why the woman did that, why the man did that, why I think of myself like this [. . .] The contemporary spirit is really about transgression. So, transgression [. . .] leads people to reflect, “where are the limits for me?” Transgression is about pushing limits but these limits are not fixed.³⁴

Studying African dance under Patrick's guidance involves precision and repetition to instill specific movement fundamentals as a prerequisite for deconstructing these and imbuing the dance form with new meaning. This is reiterated in his choreography courses, in which dancers gain awareness of the repetition inherent to everyday performances of the self that can be

disassembled and rearranged in the construction of opaque alternatives. The adaptation of *Cool Play*, which the dancers performed for live audiences twice at École des Sables and once in Dakar, illustrates how choreographic alterations impel slippages between the transparency and opacity of African dance, entwined with opaque constructions of the gendered and sexual self.

“Attack the Space!”

Several weeks following the culmination of Patrick’s classes, an early morning rain interrupts the long dry season, filling the atmosphere with a sense of renewal and possibility. Despite the physically taxing reality of having danced nearly every day, all day, for the past two and a half months, everyone appears energized and refreshed, ready for another day of work. For these final weeks, in addition to preparing their *restitution* (presentation), Sophiatou Kossoko and Nora Chipaumire alternate teaching in the morning and afternoon, often sitting in on one another’s classes. Through their complementary teaching styles, they emphasize moving with complete attention, awareness, and presence while thinking critically about choreographic decisions and performers’ relationships to the space and to their audience. They work collaboratively with the aim of, in Kossoko’s words, “ouvrir l’espace pour un éveil qui amène des jeunes chorégraphes ou des jeunes danseurs, ou la jeune personne tout simplement, à se dire, ‘qu’est-ce que je peux inventer, moi?’” (opening the space for an awakening that brings young choreographers or young dancers, or simply young people, to ask themselves, “what can I invent?”).³⁵

This morning with the first rain of the season stands out in my mind, as it also seemed to coincide with dancers’ visible internalization of the past weeks and months of study. Whereas many of the previous classes I witnessed throughout the three-month workshop were interspersed with moments of resistance and skepticism as students confronted the physically and mentally challenging tasks that their instructors demanded of them, today, they are fully present, engaged, and ready. Kossoko guides the group through a series of improvisational exercises that build on previous classes and cultivate dancers’ abilities to explore and commit to unfamiliar ways of moving. After a quiet warm-up that invites dancers to tune into their bodies, not unlike Patrick’s start to class, Kossoko instructs students to form two lines facing each other. Watching each other and listening to the musicians’ improvised drumming, they are to enter the space between the lines and improvise as they feel compelled. While they dance, Kossoko offers open-ended provocations and directions: is it possible to move fast when the music is slow, to move slow

when the music is fast? Is it possible to move against the music? Listen to and answer each other with your own energy. “Attack the space! Attaquez l’espace!” She repeats in English and French for the multilingual group.

Agnes (pseudonym) enters the space first. Her hip hop sensibility lends a quickness and sharpness to her movements that she blends seamlessly with sustained extensions of her arms. Her facial expression radiates confidence as she moves swiftly to the floor, crouching low and rebounding back to standing with equal ferocity. Nathalie and Karina (pseudonyms) join her, mimicking her dips and rebounds before evolving the up and down motion into a spiraling turn, arms reaching overhead and pulling their bodies around. Soon Nathalie is alone. She is all smiles, exuding contagious joy as she struts to the front of the studio and poses, a hip jutting out. She moves to her own rhythm as she bounces and spins her way back to the two lines of participants, the musicians following her lead. Nathalie is followed by her peers who enter the space individually or in pairs, feeding off one another’s energy and that of the musicians. New things are happening, their dancing is evolving before our eyes. One dancer’s confidence feeds that of another as they all seem to take their improvisations to another level, owning their instantaneous decisions and supporting each other through their shared, active engagement.

Kossoko too seems inspired by their level of commitment. Building on the intergroup attentiveness that this practice cultivates, she begins a new exercise. She asks them to form a circle and enter in pairs, challenging each other in a playful, but rigorous, competition. She offers little instruction regarding the kinds of movements expected, but tells them that they may use the word “yes” as they battle each other. Two dancers face each other and engage in confrontational dancing, tossing limbs and sharp looks toward their partner, punctuating their movements with exclamations of “yes!” Their level of engagement noticeably amplifies as they stick to and own every decision that they make on the spot, moving seamlessly from one idea to the next without hesitation. The others shriek, laugh, and cheer each other on until Kossoko declares a winner, grabbing hold of the dancer’s wrist and raising it into the air with a celebratory pump. The winner is determined not by one’s level of virtuosity or mastery of technique, but rather by owning one’s dancing and pushing their movements beyond what is familiar or comfortable. It is a competition of physical commitment, presence, and vulnerability. It demands that they try “*de sortir des formes de lutte différentes. Est-ce qu’on peut lutter avec de la douceur ? Est-ce qu’on peut trouver des nuances ? Est-ce qu’on peut trouver des stratégies pour amener l’autre ailleurs ?*” (to excavate different forms of fighting. Can we fight with softness? Can we find

nuances? Can we find strategies to bring the other somewhere else?).³⁶ “We are playing, but we’re trying to find something, find different ways,” Kossoko reminds them, encouraging the dancers to submit to an attitude of playfulness, discovery, and uncertainty. They are to relinquish control and embrace the alternative ways of moving that surface in the place of preplanned choreography. This builds on an exercise from the previous week in which dancers formed a circle that they entered individually while others made a clicking sound when they noticed the dancer performing movements that were common for that particular dancer. Each time the mover heard the clicking, they were to instantly change what they were doing, moving away from familiarity and toward an un-planned alternative.

The phrase, “attack the space,” commands dancers to occupy the space with the same drive and desire as they would devour a meal when hungry, akin to the French language expression “j’attaque” (I attack). But it is much more than that. Kossoko explains:

C’est aussi une manière de réfléchir autrement à l’espace. . . . Il y a un rapport à l’environnement et un rapport à la manière de traiter l’espace qui peut être envisagé autrement, spécifiquement à l’École des Sables. Parce que à l’École des Sables, on se sent tellement petit dans ce paysage qui prend un espace qui est immense . . . Je ne parle pas seulement de l’espace externe à l’humain. Je parle de la présence qui habite dans l’espace corps. Et pour moi, attaquer la présence qui habite dans l’espace corps c’est déclencher un éveil ou surprendre la perception. Tout est éveillé, tout en alerte.

It is also a way of thinking of space otherwise. . . . There is a relation to the environment and a relation to the way of treating space, which can be envisioned otherwise, specifically at École des Sables. Because at École des Sables, we feel very small in the immense space of this landscape . . . I am not only speaking of space external to the human. I’m speaking of the presence that lives in body space. And for me, attacking the presence that lives in the body space is to trigger an awakening or to surprise perception. Everything is awake, everything on alert.³⁷

Kossoko speaks to the possibilities inherent to the location of École des Sables, far from the hustle and bustle of urban environments. Its seclusion permits a temporary release, a letting go of the social prescriptions that choreograph lives and compartments in more highly surveilled areas. The immensity of

the surrounding countryside provides inspiration for rethinking how one occupies space while the calm, quiet atmosphere facilitates attending to the minutiae of internal “body space.” Improvised dancing awakens one’s presence and awareness, leading dancers toward otherwise possibilities.

Improvisational exercises like those that Kossoko puts forth spontaneously—her pedagogy mirroring the attention to the present moment and embrace of possibility that she asks of her students—pushes dancers to uncover new terrain. Students are guided toward new physical possibilities, a challenging task for any trained dancer with years of learned movement patterns and gestures inscribed in their musculature. This practice entails the bouleversement of the self: the upheaval of one’s habitual ways of moving and dancing in a constant expansion toward unknown alternatives. Their improvisations reveal dormant movement possibilities that have been subdued by various constellations of state surveillance and dance training. This is queer praxis at work, illuminating how intensive training at *École des Sables* facilitates exploration of bodily comportments beyond the heteropatriarchal choreography of the state. Indeed, several dancers ascertain that their studies at *École des Sables* are distinct in that there is no separation between men and women, there is no obligation to adhere to the gendered configurations that choreograph their lives outside of the school. As one student put it, “quand on fait cours, il n’y a pas l’homme, il n’y a pas la femme” (when we are in class, there is no man, there is no woman).³⁸ Gendered roles and comportments give way to endless possibilities for embodying the self.

Kossoko’s improvisational approach complements Patrick’s deconstruction methodology, as both instructors facilitate dancers’ physical and intellectual expansion. Whereas Patrick emphasizes precision as a prerequisite to moving otherwise through deliberate decision-making, Kossoko facilitates recognition of learned movement patterns and improvisation of alternatives on the spot. Patrick and Kossoko, alongside the other instructors, mobilize *École des Sables* as a “world of possibility.”³⁹ Paralleling Livermon’s research on South African kwaito, the dance studio becomes a “field of self-making and self-writing by which [contemporary dance] practitioners harness a political presence not usually or readily available to them in the public domains of social life external to [contemporary dance] realms.”⁴⁰ Students may then transmit the physical and intellectual possibilities garnered at *École des Sables* in their dispersed localities, broadening the school’s impact. As Robert Ssempijja from Uganda explained, “When I went back to my county, I was not the same person, physically and the way I see things. I went in the dance studio and met these guys doing a piece and was like, what are these

guys doing? I was questioning them, seeing that they need to understand something about contemporary dance that they don't. My understanding was better."⁴¹ The differentiated space of École des Sables facilitates transformative thinking and being in the world that may ripple out and into studios across the continent.

Fifty kilometers north in Dakar, occurring at the same time, Andréya Ouamba's creative residency workshop, AEx-Corps, similarly pushed participants to embrace antinormative bodily expressions. Operating through a less established infrastructure without a stable dance studio, Ouamba and his collaborators guide participants to challenge mechanisms of power in overt and covert ways. In and outside the dance studio, Ouamba is committed to moving otherwise to hegemonic social scripts and to institutionalized dance techniques. These imperatives shape and are shaped by his work with dancers selected for AEx-Corps and for his choreographic projects.

Andréya Ouamba / Compagnie 1er Temps / AEx-Corps

Ouamba's trajectory as an artist whose career was shaped by geographic displacement sheds light on his decision to move otherwise, both in and outside the dance studio. Born in 1975 in Pointe-Noire, Congo-Brazzaville, Ouamba ended up in Dakar in 2000 by way of École des Sables. It was not his intention to stay in Senegal. Rather, he initially traveled there to participate in École des Sables' annual workshop in 1999 in the footsteps of his mentor, Chrysogone Diangouaya, and while he was there, the civil war back home escalated to the point that returning was not a safe option. Ouamba moved to Dakar instead and did not return to Brazzaville for nine years. By then, he was making waves in the emerging contemporary dance scene in Dakar with his Association / Compagnie 1er Temps and only visited Brazzaville periodically to teach.

Ouamba founded Compagnie 1er Temps in 2001. His first piece for the company, *Pluriel (Plural)*, was one of only ten pieces selected to compete in the Rencontres chorégraphiques in Madagascar in 2001. In 2006, Ouamba's duet with Fatou Cissé (then the only female company member), *Impro-Visé_2 (Impro-Vised_2)*, won first place at the Rencontres in Paris, launching his work to the status of international acclaim. Since then, Ouamba continues to create works that regularly circulate on European and African touring circuits.⁴²

In 2008, Ouamba launched Ateliers expériences et corps (AEx-Corps) after securing funding from the French Institute and the French embassy. Over the years, he would also receive support from New York Live Arts, the

Africa Consortium of MAPP International Productions, and the Spanish and United States embassies. Like *École des Sables*, these external funding sources allowed Ouamba to offer workshops free of charge with travel and accommodations covered, enabling participation from a diverse group of dancers from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Early on, Ouamba and Cissé were the only instructors at these short-term, intensive workshops. Later, with the support of New York Live Arts and the Spanish embassy, Ouamba began inviting international choreographers—often a condition of funding from these outside organizations—including Reggie Wilson, whose teaching was pivotal for participants of the 2016 edition.⁴³ Despite repeated requests for funding from the Senegalese Ministry of Culture, Ouamba never obtained state support for AEx-Corps. However, he never felt pressure to conform his choreography or teaching to meet the demands of the external sources that support his work. “Jamais. Jamais. Je fais tout ce que je veux” (Never. Never. I do everything that I want), he said in response to my questions about adhering to the demands of his funding sources.⁴⁴ To the contrary, when he received support from the city of Dakar for the first time for a new piece in 2022, he expressed concern that he may not be able to fully experiment with gender as he wished. For Ouamba, external support has afforded him the possibility to implement a queer praxis in the dance studio, whereas he views local support as a potential constraint.

Lasting from two to six weeks, AEx-Corps workshops introduced groups of local and international dancers to the artistic approaches of various choreographers, each of whom taught for several hours per day. The workshops centered dance training, but eventually Ouamba realized that the dearth of choreographers in Senegal was an issue of greater significance than dancers’ need for training. “Il faut que des gens inventent. Et les gens qui inventent, il faut les accompagner. Il faut les conduire. C’est de là que vient l’idée de l’atelier résidence de création.” (People must invent. And for those who invent, we must accompany them. We must drive them. That’s where the idea for the creative residency workshop came.)⁴⁵ In 2012, AEx-Corps became a creative residency workshop, supporting the creation of new works by a select group of emerging choreographers from throughout the continent. Less established than workshops at *École des Sables* with their widely disseminated calls for applications through their website, newsletters, and social media, AEx-Corps becomes known primarily by word-of-mouth through friends, collaborators, and acquaintances in diverse locations across the continent.

A brief consideration of one artist’s trajectory from her local dance company in Brazzaville to her participation in the 2016 AEx-Corps workshop

illustrates how the transnational entanglements at the foundation of contemporary dance inflect individual pathways. Having studied and performed with the same neotraditional dance and drum group for most of her artistic career, Nkala (pseudonym) believed for a long time that this group was her best, and only, opportunity as a performer. Her belief was compounded when she was the victim of sexual assault by the director of the group, deepening her sense of dependence and powerlessness. However, she eventually began to participate in local contemporary dance workshops and later started creating a solo inspired by her experience as a survivor. She was soon asked to perform an early version of the work in the annual festival Rue Dance Congo, in 2014, which proved to be a turning point in Nkala's career. Being exposed to successful female artists who also performed at the festival motivated her. Soon, she was invited to perform in Germany, which was followed by an invitation to perform at Festival Souar Souar in Chad, an event that she describes as the start of her professional career. There, she attracted the attention of a French producer who later programmed her piece in Paris and she met a choreographer who told her about a workshop for female artists in Yaoundé, Cameroon, which she later participated in. These events expanded her professional network and bolstered her confidence. She soon reached out to Ouamba, whose work interested her but whom she had not yet met. Ouamba invited her to submit a dossier in application for AEx-Corps and her application was successful.⁴⁶

Nkala's trajectory from her local company to international festivals and performances at home, in Chad, Germany, France, Cameroon, and Senegal, epitomizes the ways in which contemporary dance is upheld by transnational networks both within Africa and between Africa and Europe. AEx-Corps is part of a larger constellation of international platforms that bring dancers together and shape their border-crossing movements. Contemporary dance has developed less as a multitude of differentiated local subsets than as a translocal complex made up of agents who activate the art form through various pathways and interconnections, resembling what Nadine George-Graves refers to as "diasporic spidering." Rather than unidirectional evolution from fixed roots, spidering attends to the continuously active, "overwhelming, messy, and intangible" routes, influences, and encounters that give shape to Afro-diasporic identities and cultural formations.⁴⁷ Even for the AEx-Corps participants from Dakar, the workshop is a juncture on their interconnected spidering pathways, providing an opportunity to work with artists from elsewhere, sometimes leading to future collaborations or invitations for residencies and performances in or outside Senegal.

Reggie Wilson's courses, taught in English and translated to French, further epitomize the transnational nature of AEx-Corps. After Ouamba's instruction for the first three weeks, Wilson took over for the second three weeks, teaching technique and choreography courses each morning and working one-on-one with artists on their choreographic works each afternoon. His guidance—highly appreciated by all participants as they recounted in individual interviews—played a major role in the artists' choreographic decisions. Wilson's choreography courses focused on basic compositional tools, including the use of time, space, and movement. Whereas Ouamba tended to push the artists to articulate the conceptual aim of their work alongside his direction to dance otherwise, Wilson provided guidance on choreographic structure. He described his objective at AEx-Corps, and at other contemporary dance spaces on the continent where he has taught, as facilitating the choreographers to:

Figure out how to make the work that they want to make because it's the work that they want to do, not because it'll sell to a foreign audience. So, what's the largest number of skillsets that I can facilitate growth in so they can have the agency to say, "Okay, this is relevant to me if I change it this way," or "this is absolutely not relevant to me, my country, my culture, my interests, my person."⁴⁸

Even if Wilson's goals were centered on transmitting tools for artistic autonomy divorced from global reception, his powerful role at AEx-Corps inevitably contributes to the asymmetrical power relations at play. For the brief time that these dancers train with him, he represents concert dance in the United States, an enticing site for several young African dancers who idolize what they perceive to be a mecca of dance production. Wilson's facilitation of individual decision-making cannot be fully separated from the necessity of appealing to the international contemporary dance marketplace, which he simultaneously represents and disavows.

My discussion of Ouamba's pedagogy begins by situating his improvisatory practice within the structural conditions of neoliberal Dakar. In a city "understood as a perpetual construction site" undergoing "permanent transition," Ouamba's performance of self in public space and the tactics needed for moving through Dakar are inextricably entwined with his practice of moving otherwise in the dance studio.⁴⁹ I then traverse various moments and locations that collectively evoke his dance pedagogy. From the durational improvisation exercises that he describes as foundational to the development of his

choreographic voice in the early aughts to his dialogic approach to teaching choreographers-in-residence during the 2016 AEx-Corps workshop to early work on a new piece in 2022, my discussion constellates various moments that shed light on his impactful teaching.

Mobility and Stagnation in Dakar

Dressed in a wrap skirt and fitted orange cardigan with a scarf wrapped around his head, Ouamba parks his motor bike and we enter a bar off a side road in the Lébou neighborhood of Ouakam. With a grin, he whispers to watch for the response to his intentionally transgressive attire. A man at the bar laughingly remarks that he looks like the Taj Mahal, and the other men seated with him laugh in agreement. In spite of their playful greeting, their eyes dwell on us throughout our conversation. Ouamba's resonant voice, his Congolese-accented French, and unconventional clothing, and me, the conspicuous *toubaab* (white person), make us inevitably otherwise in this local bar, away from Dakar's gentrified neighborhoods that are more regularly frequented by the expatriate community. In the middle of our conversation, Ouamba explains that he aims to "travestir la danse," taking out his phone and checking the definition of *travestir* to confirm his word choice. He uses the French verb that signifies the act of cross-dressing to describe what he aims to do to and through dance. The term encompasses his goal of using contemporary dance to subvert norms ranging from prescribed movement vocabularies to state-sanctioned performances of gender.

As a Congolese citizen living in Senegal and an internationally renowned artist in a locally marginal art form, Ouamba uses his outsider status and the reduced social expectations this affords him to provoke social norms in and outside the dance studio. He describes his early years in Senegal as marked by xenophobic epithets, rejected artistic proposals, and ignored requests for funding. Although he has since been embraced as a highly respected figure in the Dakarois dance community, those early experiences of discrimination shaped his understanding of what makes a person acceptable within the Senegalese national community and what sets a person apart. In response, rather than attempting to conform or reverse the gaze, Ouamba dwells in the otherness already inscribed onto his body. He amplifies the extent to which his body is already rendered other, using his differentiated positionality to provoke, to see what comes of his refusal to adhere to the codes and conventions of hegemonic masculinity. He enacts a queer praxis in public space in Dakar that informs and is informed by his artistic practice in the dance studio. The

conditions of the neoliberal, postcolonial city both prohibit and enable his queer disruption of public space.

In contrast to the isolated, spacious haven of École des Sables, Dakar is a bustling, vibrant, and congested city of nearly four million inhabitants (including the city's outskirts). With infrastructural projects that appear to be incessantly in progress, Dakarais vehemently valorize mobility, yet their experiences are equally marked by periods of stagnation. Following the elimination of agricultural subsidies and severe cuts to public-sector jobs as neoliberalism took hold in the 1980s, rapid urbanization created population density and high rates of unemployment in Dakar by the early 1990s. City dwellers were already navigating diminished public-sector employment and social safety nets, and new arrivals found themselves with few opportunities and little room for growth.⁵⁰ To this day, Senegal remains crippled by high unemployment, stagnant private-sector growth, and skyrocketing prices put in place by the enduring state of debt and dependence imposed by structural adjustment programs. In her examination of stalled projects in Dakar, Caroline Melly conceptualizes *embouteillage*, the French word that translates to "bottleneck," as an index of the "complex patterns of suspension, exclusion, uncertainty, and opportunity" in "structurally adjusted" Dakar.⁵¹ Urbanization and growing consumption patterns in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century alongside economic privatization mounted pressure on the city's infrastructure, resulting in traffic jams, flooding, water shortages, blackouts, unemployment, and further restrictions on transnational migration. These are particularly pervasive occurrences in Dakar's working-class *banlieue* (outskirts), including Guédiawaye and Pikine, home to many young dancers who participate in contemporary dance workshops in Dakar and at École des Sables. The rapidly expanding banlieue houses much of Dakar's population yet are the areas least likely to benefit from infrastructural investments.⁵² For Dakarais, periods of stagnation due to dysfunctional social services and a lack of jobs are complemented by mobility: the increasing desire to emigrate in search of opportunities elsewhere as well as the ingenious ways in which people weave their way through the city, finding alternative routes to move through and beyond myriad obstacles.

Mobility and stagnation are inherently embodied experiences. As Dakarais forge pathways through the city and create tactics for getting by, their movements are regularly interspersed with obstacles, impasses, and prolonged periods of immobility. Forging one's path requires improvisation and strategic navigation of unfulfilled infrastructural promises, of the informal economy that resists fixity, and of the ecology of Dakar's savanna landscape.

Residents improvise ways of getting by without stable access to water or electricity and with unpredictable swings in the prices of staple commodities and the value of the local currency, the CFA franc. In the next few paragraphs, following SanSan Kwan's "kinesthetic methodology" I draw connections between my own kinesthetic experience of moving through Dakar and the improvisational approaches that Ouamba puts forth in and out of the dance studio without suggesting that my experience represents those of others.⁵³

I sense Dakar as marked by fluidity, juxtaposition, and unpredictability. The land itself seems to resist containment and rules, always exceeding imposed boundaries. During the Harmattan from November to March, sand from the Sahara Desert blows onto newly paved roads, sidewalks, into homes and dance studios. A thin layer of sand on pavement transforms my experience of walking from one of ease to caution as traction diminishes. These same roads quickly fill with standing water in the hot, humid rainy season from July to September. I tiptoe through large puddles, using the balls of my feet to locate sturdy surfaces that will support my weight. Shaking, I hop from one strategically placed rock or concrete slab to another to avoid wading through standing water in areas especially prone to flooding. Dakar's ecology creates conditions for categorical permeability, mirroring the close proximity of residents of various socioeconomic classes. Rather than discrete neighborhoods that separate the rich from the poor, families dwell in unfinished houses next door to immaculate three-story homes. In new neighborhoods, luxurious apartment complexes might overlook temporary compounds of corrugated metal and plastic tarp. Upscale homes decorated with mosaics and potted plants line unpaved sandy roads that drivers struggle to traverse. Paralleling the ways in which the environmental and socioeconomic contexts resist containment, Dakar's informal economy adheres to a logic of negotiation. Shopping at any of Dakar's markets involves long processes of haggling before purchases are finalized. Taxi drivers negotiate prices with customers just as they navigate streets blocked by traffic jams or standing water, often taking winding routes through narrow unpaved roads to avoid the central thoroughfares.

The boundarylessness, proximity of juxtaposing features, and resistance to fixity that characterize city space and informal exchange in Dakar requires a sense of perpetual readiness. With a sense of humor, I let go of the controlled structure that shapes my life in the United States and embrace the improvisatory state of being that life in Dakar calls for. For example, after several last-minute changes leading up to the AEx-Corps workshop, it was hardly surprising when Ouamba called me on a Sunday night at eleven o'clock to ask if

I would meet him and Reggie Wilson, who had just arrived from Brooklyn, at the restaurant on the corner to discuss being Wilson's French–English translator beginning the following morning at 9 a.m. I did not hesitate to slip on a pair of sandals, go out to meet them, and happily agree to spend the next three weeks with Wilson.

For Ouamba, improvisation is as much a desired choreographic method as it is a strategy for survival in a city where there is no stable structure for contemporary dance. Without any state support despite repeated requests, contemporary choreographers in Dakar rely on funding from European organizations and must adapt as these organizations are subject to budget changes determined overseas. When international funding comes through, workshops are swiftly organized and dancers suspend jobs and other activities in order to participate in the demanding schedule of up to eight hours a day, six days a week. Ironically, high rates of unemployment exacerbated by neoliberalism enable dancers to participate in these workshops at short notice. The dancers who train with Ouamba hail from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Unlike *École des Sables*, there is no education requirement. While some have earned their *baccalauréat* or *license* (the equivalent of a high school diploma or bachelor's degree, respectively), many dancers left school at a young age. They typically work low-paying, informal sector jobs that they can arrange to put on hold at a moment's notice, or they teach dance and fitness classes to expatriates in Dakar's gentrified neighborhoods and are able to find temporary substitutes. In the aftermath of structural adjustment, dancers engage in creative strategies for getting by, making do with the limited resources at hand—a set of strategies termed *góor-góorlu* or *lijjanti* in Wolof.⁵⁴ Dakarois' creative navigations of the neoliberal city include changing one's schedule on the fly to participate in swiftly organized, intensive dance workshops.

AEx-Corps rehearsals and performances take place across a handful of cultural centers, most frequently the Foyer des jeunes et de la culture de Ouakam (Youth and Cultural Center of Ouakam) and the Blaise Senghor Cultural Center. With concrete or tiled floors, these spaces do not naturally welcome the bodily demands of contemporary dance. Parties, concerts, or weddings the night before sometimes leave the spaces littered with trash. Choreographers and dancers negotiate daily with the subpar conditions and with other individuals and groups that also rely on these shared spaces. Ouamba and dancers often start the day by cleaning the floor before reassembling the company's transportable, interlocking squares of heavy, bright blue foam flooring that provides their joints with protection from the hard



Figure 10. Foyer des jeunes et de la culture de Ouakam. Photo by the author.

surfaces underneath. This is not an easy task. Given the expansive size of the rooms and insufficient cleaning supplies at hand, dancers often spend more than an hour and spill significant sweat only in preparation to begin the long and arduous rehearsal, just as they may stay after to disassemble and put away the protective flooring. When the performance at the end of AEx-Corps must take place in one of the cultural centers because the only theater that regularly presents contemporary dance in Dakar—the Théâtre de Verdure of the French Institute—is occupied that evening, they are equally prepared to stay up until dawn the night before a performance to help Ouamba cover the foam flooring with rolls of black Marley, install theatrical lighting borrowed from the French Institute, mount heavy black fabric to cover the windows, and collect plastic chairs from a nearby vendor. They improvise alternative rehearsal spaces when the Foyer des jeunes is occupied by forty children in a martial arts class despite their reservation for the space. They improvise alternative housing for the international dancers arriving the next day when their usual landlord will not accept the lowered offering reflective of the decreased company budget.

There is logic to Dakar's unpredictability. As Achille Mbembe describes



Figure 11. Rosette Lemba, a participant in AEx-Corps (2016), rehearsing at the Foyer des jeunes. Photo by the author.

postcolonies, the city is “chaotically pluralistic” but has “an internal coherence.”⁵⁵ Mbembe’s conceptualization of power relations in the postcolony focuses on its logic of contingency and impermanence, of proliferation and multiplicity. Postcolonial subjects manage several changing identities in contexts where “it is impossible to create a single, permanent stable system of signs, images, and markers.”⁵⁶ Coly extends Mbembe’s theory to posit the postcolony as a queer assemblage. Contradicting the surveillance and violence against the LGBTQ+ community in Senegal, Coly draws on Senegalese filmmaker Joseph Gaï Ramaka’s 2001 film *Karmen Geï* to assert that queerness is organic to the postcolony given its grammar of conviviality, improvisation, and provisionality, which, in her words, “foment a constant poaching of disciplinary norms, ideological normativities, and power relations.”⁵⁷ In a time-space marked by porosity, negotiation, and juxtaposition, where binaries constantly break down and categories are permeable, Coly suggests that the ability to evade power, constantly refigure meaning, and interfere with hegemonic regimes of signification is “queerness at work.”⁵⁸

In her conceptualization, queerness is less an identity location than it is a modality of postcolonial power relations that enables non-heteronormative subjectivities to emerge organically in surrealist works like *Karmen Geï*. Interestingly, it is through sabar dance that the protagonist in *Karmen Geï* seduces her female prison warden, thereby provoking an eruption of “a new feminist and queer cartography” as rulers and ruled dance together in the power-laden site of a prison.⁵⁹

The postcolony is both strictly heterosexist and provisionally queer, heavily policed yet generative of queer evasions of power. Within these contradictions, Ouamba enacts the slippage between categories that the postcolony both prohibits and enables by donning feminine attire at a bar primarily frequented by men. Our meeting at the bar described above was not an isolated incident. Not that he cross-dresses every day, but he frequently wears feminine attire or clothing and accessories with rainbow print, fully aware of the potential risks. His choices often spark conversations about gender and homophobia in rehearsal. One day, as rehearsal was wrapping up, a dancer cautioned him not to go outside in his gray sweatpants with a rainbow emblem on the upper thigh and rainbow-print elastic cuffs. He responded that he would absolutely go outside as is, that he was willing to take the associated risk. By disrupting socially acceptable performances of gender and donning the rainbow symbol, he evinces the performativity of hegemonic masculinity in Dakar just as he embodies previous eras of greater sexual and gender liberation. He does this with the understanding that his outsider status and artistic renown to some extent shield him from the physical abuse, social ostracism, and structural violence that queer-identifying Senegalese regularly face.

The multiple ways by which Dakar residents improvise routes through the city, as infrastructural impasses threaten to block them and gendered scripts threaten to derail their authentic presentations of self, illustrate their strategies for achieving mobility despite periods of unavoidable stagnation. Improvisation is an everyday practice in Dakar, a mode of knowledge production that overlaps with creative practice. Ouamba’s approach to moving through the city infiltrates his artistry, just as his artistry informs his public performance of self. Through creative processes and training workshops, he engages young artists in improvisational practices while fostering communities within the studio in which queer slippages are allowed and encouraged, in opposition to the nation-state’s surveillance tactics.

Improvisation, or Inventing What One Needs

When Ouamba created *Compagnie 1er Temps* in 2001, there were few contemporary dance references in Dakar.⁶⁰ He was invested in creating his own movement language that did not replicate known dance repertoires, an approach that distinguished his work from that of other dance artists at the time. He went about this by practicing improvisation for several hours every day, largely in collaboration with Fatou Cissé. While Ouamba held the role of company director and choreographer, he recalls a working relationship of mutual exchange, citing Cissé—who would also become his wife (they since divorced but continue to collaborate artistically)—as a major influence on the development of his choreographic approach and movement style. He would lead her through long improvisatory exercises, often with a specific image to guide her movement, demanding that she move through significant discomfort. Eventually, Cissé would “commencer à faire ça de sa façon” (start to do it in her own way), and then Ouamba would transform what she proposed.⁶¹

Cissé describes their daily improvisational practice at the turn of the twenty-first century as all but required given the novelty of contemporary dance and lack of guidance. She explains:

C’était à nous de trouver la voix. Comment tu peux développer des choses parce qu’il n’y a pas d’université, de méthodes d’écritures? Donc c’est à chacun de créer sa méthode d’écriture selon sa manière de penser. [. . .] C’est comme si tu fais des études et que tu n’as pas de professeur.

It was up to us to find a voice. How can you develop things when there is no university, no method of [choreographic] writing? So, it’s up to each person to create one’s method of writing according to one’s way of thinking [. . .] It’s like studying without a teacher.⁶²

Cissé’s comments importantly reveal the creativity and perseverance necessary for the evolution of contemporary dance in the early aughts. The day-to-day practice of developing their work occurred essentially in isolation. She stresses the autonomy required given the lack of institutional training or guidance. More recent generations of contemporary dancers benefit from Ouamba and Cissé’s dedication to helping the contemporary dance community in Dakar flourish.

Ouamba guides AEx-Corps participants and dancers in his choreo-

graphic works through similar cyclical processes as that which he practiced with Cissé to facilitate their development of new ways of moving. He began work on a new piece in the summer of 2022 (and allowed me to participate in the early weeks of the choreographic process) with a group of four dancers—two women and two men. Daily rehearsals consisted of improvisational exercises that fostered individual and group experimentation interspersed with conversations about gender and sexuality. Titled *Complices: il pleuvait et nous nous sommes rencontrés* (*Accomplices: It Was Raining and We Met*), the piece interrogates gender relations in Senegal vis-à-vis the globalizing discourse of unraveling binary gender. Long hours of rehearsals each day consisted of improvisational exercises that Ouamba created based on what he saw emerge from the group, one idea leading to the next. While these did not always directly connect to the theme of gender, the improvisations were consistently geared toward finding new ways of moving as a means of generating a movement vocabulary from which to choreograph for the stage.

For example, Ouamba instructs us to move through the space by initiating with our arms. Curving, tossing, and reaching our arms, each dancer explores how the body spirals, glides, folds, and unfolds in response to different kinds of impulses from the arms. We explore individually but are influenced by one another, trying on a movement glimpsed on another dancer, picking up another's dynamic. Ouamba watches intently and points out our movement patterns: "tu n'as plus le droit de faire ça!" (you no longer have the right to do that!) he tells one dancer in reference to his repeated way of reaching behind his back with one hand followed by a swift rotation of his body. We continue exploring for several minutes, pushing ourselves to let go of our movement patterns and seek out new physical possibilities. Following two hours of improvised exercises like this one, we are ready to add a layer of gendered characterization. We take on the corporeality of the *femme coquette* (vain or self-absorbed woman), as Ouamba instructs us to explore for the last hour of rehearsal one day.

Ouamba supplements dance improvisation with group discussions that adhere to a similar ethos of leaning into the unknown. One rehearsal in summer 2022 was replaced with an hours-long conversation about the dancers' personal experiences with and understandings of gender. As an ethnically and nationally diverse group that included first-generation Senegalese citizens with families from Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau and one dancer from Gabon, the conversation revealed the role of social and cultural context over essential characteristics tied to one's gender assigned at birth. During the 2016 AEx-Corps workshop, animated discussions with the group of artists

often took up entire afternoons as Ouamba urged dancers to speak about their work and respond to each other's showings of works-in-progress. Rarely satisfied, he shared observations, questions, and ideas for further exploration, urging them to take up a similar attitude of questioning. Although dancers were ultimately grateful for this aspect of the workshop, it did not come easily. Early group discussions were replete with silences as participants struggled to articulate their choreographic objectives, lines of questioning, and reasons for making particular choreographic choices. Ouamba's insistence that everyone converse in French—a demand he makes in most, if not all, group settings to help prepare them for the Francophone contemporary dance circuit that many strive to participate in—alienated some who expressed feeling more comfortable speaking in Wolof. The combination of being pushed to communicate in a non-native language and to engage in embodied and dialogic processes of questioning—of constantly doing and undoing, making and remaking what they came up with in their rehearsals—was at times frustrating. As one participant said in an interview, “tu vas changer tout ce que tu faisais. . . . La façon qu’il dit, ‘il faut changer ça, il faut refaire ça,’ tu t’embrouilles. Et finalement tu fais autre chose. Donc c’était difficile pour moi.” (You will change everything you were doing. . . . The way he says, “you must change this, you must redo that,” you get confused. And ultimately, you do something else. So it was difficult for me.)⁶³

In the end, most participants considered Ouamba's method of choreographic and dialogic undoing challenging but productive. Mamadou Dieng came into the workshop with significant embodied knowledge, but “parler des détails, de dire ce que je fais, ça je l’ai eu sur l’AEx-Corps et je suis très content pour ça” (speaking of details, saying what it is I do, that I got from AEx-Corps and I’m very happy for that).⁶⁴ Similarly, another dancer described Ouamba's manner of asking questions, encouraging them to rethink their work, and pushing them to continue developing the choreography even when they felt satisfied as one of the most valuable aspects of AEx-Corps. Ouamba engages participants in a dialogic practice that coheres with dance improvisation's refusal of fixity. Improvising and constantly questioning one's choreographic choices are two axes of Ouamba's pedagogy that together form a creative praxis of renewal, constant change, and otherwise possibility.

Improvised dance is more than a mechanism of generating choreography. It is not simply moving in unpredictable and spontaneous ways, but rather a rigorous practice cultivated over long hours, days, and years that bleeds into everyday life. By practicing improvisational dancing, Ouamba and collaborators essentially practice the instantaneous decision-making and creativity in

the studio that their work demands of them at the level of administration. They navigate the shifting world around them and make decisions on the fly about how to move and how to proceed, both in the studio and in public space. Improvisation is a required methodology for getting by and keeping in motion, a *modus operandi* for life in the postcolonial city. On the streets and in the dance studio, improvisation is a method of inventing what one needs.

Improvisation has always been vital to African and Afro-diasporic dance forms. Alphonse Tiérou describes improvisation as that which has given rise to “a skillfulness that explains the vitality, the richness and the incredible creativity shown by the African artists.”⁶⁵ Improvised dancing is “to invent endlessly,” to pose questions permanently, a method of “research for unrestricted liberty.”⁶⁶ Improvisation equally constitutes a central place in African American social and vernacular dancing, as Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Marshall and Jean Stearns, Jaqui Malone, Katrina Hazzard-Donald, Naomi Macalalad Bragin, and others have shown.⁶⁷ Ouamba’s dance background is rooted in the Afro-diasporic form of hip hop and the artists who work with him most often have expertise in hip hop or neotraditional dance forms, all of which require improvisational aptitude. While he pushes dancers not to replicate steps from these forms, he affirms the grounded and percussive qualities that they share. He takes up an Africanist sensibility for innovation while validating each participant’s existing bodily knowledge and ignoring Eurocentric technique, so often a prerequisite for legitimacy in the transnational concert dance circuit.

As a disruptor, as a vehicle of expansion, as a practice of moving beyond the known, improvisation entwines Africanist dance practices with queer possibilities. Thomas F. DeFrantz writes, “To consider the queer proclivities of improvisation, we can refer to African American aesthetic structures that orient towards a multiplicity of possibility. To be engaged in a multiple possibility might be to turn towards expansiveness, towards a queer allowance that exceeds the expected terms of social encounter.”⁶⁸ For DeFrantz, queer possibility emerges in dance improvisation as a claiming of presence and an embodiment of multiple possibilities in contexts that disavow Black life. Less of an identity location and more of a constant movement away from racialized, gendered, and sexual social prescription, queerness arrives in improvisers’ refusal of stasis, in their embodiments of otherwise possibilities. Ashon T. Crawley elaborates “otherwise possibility” as queerness, as alternative ways of life that already exist but that are “violently acted upon in order to produce the coherence of the state.”⁶⁹ His conceptualization of otherwise as plurality, as “the ongoingness of possibility, of things existing other than what is given,

what is known, what is grasped” resonates with Senegalese scholar Felwine Sarr’s conceptualization of Afrotopos, a “space of the possible that has not yet been realized.”⁷⁰ Sarr describes a continuity between the real and the possible and credits African artists for already doing the work of imagining the possible. He writes, “The first step is to imagine that the world upon which we act contains a larger number of possibles than the real allows us to glimpse.”⁷¹

Seeking out possibility beyond the known and the real, uncovering existing yet dormant possibilities through the moving body—these are priorities of Ouamba’s dance pedagogy. Through dialectical processes of improvising and questioning, moving and dialoguing, he facilitates queer praxis oriented toward multiplicity, presence, and otherwise possibility. He guides dancers’ cultivation of the capacity to imagine otherwise, what Croft places at the heart of queer dance practice.⁷² Dancing otherwise is a modality of queer praxis in sites that take shape through the intersections of intra-African and intercontinental choreographic networks. Within these spaces that exist within yet transcend the nation-state, dancers momentarily embody new political possibilities that queer state-sanctioned corporealities.

Conclusion

In the sites examined in this chapter, contemporary dance is conceived and transmitted as a mechanism of creation that transcends prescribed categories, identities, and movement lexicons. It is an embodied practice of constant self-disruption, of recognizing learned movement patterns and obligatory performances of citizenship and choosing to move toward unknown alternatives. Classes at École des Sables and Ouamba’s rehearsals and workshops in Dakar consolidate spaces in which state and body politics are recalibrated through dialectical processes of deconstruction, improvisation, and dialogue. Dancers who train at these sites enlist Africanist approaches to dancing otherwise, improvising “potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.”⁷³ Dancing otherwise enables and embraces greater corporeal possibilities than those permissible and recognizable in the here and now, striving “to think and feel a *then and there*.”⁷⁴ Within the postcolony, a “theatrical metaparody where all disciplinary norms and signifying practices are eventually fair game for poaching,” contemporary dance training cultivates embodied acts of breaking down binaries and categorical boundaries.⁷⁵ As Coly asserts “this is queerness at work.”⁷⁶ Regardless of the dancers’ gender and sexual identities, queerness abides as a pedagogical imperative.

Some dancers who train at École des Sables or with Ouamba go on to create works that explicitly put pressure on heterosexist ideologies. Performances that challenge Senegalese conceptions of hegemonic masculinity, including two works developed during the 2016 edition of AEx-Corps, are the topic of the following chapter. Moving from the studio to the stage, chapters 4 and 5 illustrate how the queer praxis of dancing otherwise in the studio cultivates choreography that claims a right to opacity in relation to narratives of Senegalese gender and sexuality.

Four

Ambiguity

Assemblages of Senegalese Masculinities



I would like to remain a writer, someone who assumes those moments of tension created by literary language, which is subtle, ambiguous, made of misunderstandings. This ambiguity, though disturbing for some, interests me.

—Mohamed Mbougar Sarr¹

In January 2016, a photo of the Senegalese pop star, Wally Ballago Seck, adorned in red skinny jeans, a black pea coat, and holding a pink designer handbag circulated the Internet.² A seemingly innocent photo of the young star sparked a widespread and severe outcry in the context of an ongoing crisis of masculinity. Suturing a Senegalese male celebrity and an accessory perceived as feminine—the handbag—the photo unleashed rampant fear that the widely admired Seck was promoting homosexuality, or worse, that he was homosexual. Public figures including Seck’s friend, the musician Baba Hamdy, participated in the outcry, claiming in an open letter, “Il ne s’agit nullement de défendre l’indéfendable . . . à mon humble avis, on devait recadrer Waly” (It’s not a matter of defending the indefensible . . . in my humble opinion, we needed to straighten out Waly).³ Eliciting still greater disdain and even a public response from President Macky Sall, the magazine *Jeune Afrique* ran a satiric sketch of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, the founder of the Muridiyya Sufi order to which Seck belongs, sketched in a boubou, next to a white man who asks, “Tiens, pourquoi il porte une robe lui?” (Hold on, why is he wearing a dress?).⁴ The photo was taken off their website the following day and replaced with a statement of apology.

On January 30, Seck publicly reaffirmed his mutually constitutive heterosexuality, masculinity, Muslim identity, and national belonging in an act meant to assuage concerned fans. During a concert for a packed house at Dakar's Grand Théâtre National, wearing a blue boubou with gold embroidery—an indication of his Muslim identity—Seck destroyed the pink handbag with a pair of scissors to resounding cheers and applause.⁵ Following a heartfelt apology and declaration of his love for Senegal, un-coincidentally staged at the national theater, his action performatively undid the unacceptable yoking of Muslim Senegalese identity and homosexuality invoked by the photo.

In interviews with local and foreign press following the event, Seck reiterated his heterosexuality as inseparable from his Muslim Senegalese identity, just as he increasingly berated homosexuality. When asked why he destroyed the bag, Seck responded, “Mon guide spirituel, mon très cher marabout Cheikh Amadou Bamba, c'est ce qui m'a poussé à déchirer le sac” (My spiritual guide, my very dear marabout Cheikh Amadou Bamba, that's what pushed me to destroy the bag).⁶ He declared more than once, “J'aime mon pays” (I love my country), lauding the concept of *teraanga*, a Wolof word meaning hospitality and reciprocity, and praising the lack of violence in Senegal. He at first claimed ignorance when pressed by a French reporter on the conditions of homosexuals in Senegal, stating simply “c'est interdit ici” (it's forbidden here).⁷ Later, Seck clarified, “j'aime pas les homosexuels” (I don't like homosexuals).⁸ These events illustrate not only the prevalence of anxiety around threats to masculinity as it aligns with Senegalese citizenship, Muslim piety, and heterosexuality, but also, and perhaps more so, the ways in which public discourse is regulated to the extent that the only appropriate response to the photo that warrants publication is one of alarm, disgust, and fear. As *Jeune Afrique's* rejected attempt to satirize the event illustrates, within the textual and verbal realm of newspapers, social media, and televised interviews, it was widely understood that any other viewpoint was unspeakable.

L'affaire sac-à-main, or the handbag case, as it came to be known, took part in a series of instances since 2008 in which gender and/or sexual transgressions by Senegalese males are forced into public discourse, catalyzing a widespread oppositional response in protection of Senegaleseness, masculinity, and Muslim faith. However, l'affaire sac-à-main is not the full story. A few months following this event, a handful of Senegalese male choreographers, all of whom identify as Muslim, created performances that present the Muslim Senegalese male body in ways that allow for effeminacy and homoerotic intimacy. Hardo Kâ's *Dieu, le diable et moi* (*God, the Devil and Me*), Mamadou

Dieng and Thierno Diédhiou's *Laabu Ball* (*Pure Spring*) and Amadou Diop's *L'autre côté* (*The Other Side*) put forth ambiguous assemblages of masculinities that afford a multiplicity of interpretations, disrupting the coherency of the response to the handbag case. At the same time, they denied (Kâ), omitted (Dieng and Diédhiou), or obscured (Diop) any perspective sympathetic to minoritarian gender and sexual subject positions in their verbal articulations about their work in rehearsals and public discussions.

In this chapter, I analyze these three performances alongside the artists' verbal framing of their work in rehearsals, post-show discussions, and formal interviews. Their performances took place at transnational sites for contemporary dance in Senegal where the entanglements of international funding partners, local and foreign audiences, and the border-crossing movements of the artists themselves are constitutive elements of their ambiguity. Dieng, Diédhiou, and Diop were emerging choreographers at the time who were selected for the AEx-Corps workshop discussed in the previous chapter. Their performances, which were presented as works-in-progress, were the outcome of the six-week creative residency facilitated by Andréya Ouamba and Reggie Wilson. Kâ, a more established choreographer, premiered his solo at the annual international contemporary dance festival, Festival Duo Solo Danse, in Saint-Louis, Senegal, though the work was commissioned by French choreographer Olivier Dubois. Although the artists' comments (in public settings) disavowed or omitted any concrete reference to nonconforming gender and sexual identities, each performance afforded multiple possible interpretations, including sympathetic gestures toward queer subjectivities. This discrepancy signals the potentiality of contemporary dance to serve as a platform where nonconforming sexualities and gender expressions may be constructed and performed outside the public domain where Wally Seck's photo circulated and where logocentric discourse generated by journalists, politicians, and religious leaders is unequivocally heterosexist. These performances purposefully elide unequivocal interpretation in favor of ambiguity. The choreographers imbue their performances with opacity as a tactic of evasion vis-à-vis the overwhelming heterosexism of contemporary Senegal.

The contradictions between the artists' embodied performances and their verbal statements index how they both uphold and challenge the Senegalese ethic of *sutura*. Defined by "discretion, modesty, privacy, or protection," upholding *sutura* "secures both moral legitimacy and a claim to Senegalese national belonging."⁹ Though historically tied to honor associated with social caste, today, *sutura* is predominantly linked to the virtues of gendered and sexual legibility.¹⁰ Upholding *sutura* means presenting oneself publicly in

ways that align with conventional gender norms while shielding one's private life from public view. Although women are considered especially responsible for upholding *sutura*, the concept extends to males who are charged with maintaining public performances of heterosexuality and normative masculinity regardless of their private lives.¹¹ The artists examined in this chapter uphold *sutura* through their discrete public statements that omit or obscure sympathetic perspectives toward sexual or gender nonconforming subjects, but their performances illustrate the untenability of this social order in the realm of the aesthetic, particularly in sites that exceed the nation-state. The transnational entanglements at the heart of contemporary dance allow artists to poke holes in *sutura*, pushing the boundaries of this national social order in ambiguous choreographies of assemblages of masculinities.

I take up Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of assemblage as it has been developed by thinkers of queer theory and Black studies to counter the territorializing tendencies of identity, identification, and intersectionality. Assemblages are collections of multiplicities, affective conglomerations, or, in Jasbir K. Puar's words, "interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency."¹² Whereas intersectional identities are premised upon stable and separable categories, assemblages encapsulate constant movement, processes of becoming that precede "the stillness of position," rendering them unstable and opaque.¹³ Assemblages are unfolding forces that produce lines of flight, or "movements of deterritorialization and destratification."¹⁴ If territorialization works to stabilize as an operation of power, lines of flight disrupt the tendency toward stability, "designat[ing] an infinitesimal possibility of escape."¹⁵

The concept of assemblage parallels Africanist conceptions of gender as fluid and flexible, including Ifi Amadiume's examination of male daughters and female husbands in Igbo society and Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí's pivotal work on the history of gender discourses in a Yoruba context.¹⁶ These authors powerfully illustrate the porosity of gender and its shifting meanings across bodies, space, and time in precolonial cultures in contrast to the stability and rigidity of the inherited Western gender and sexual lexicon. In alignment with Africanist gender theories, I find assemblage to be a useful framework to consider the novel and fleeting enactments of unconventional masculinities and their affective resonances staged by the choreographers examined in this chapter. Generated by the practice of dancing otherwise with its pursuit of expansiveness and multiplicity over fixity, these performances do not easily map onto stable gender and sexual categories, particularly those calcified by the globally circulating Western LGBTQ+ lexicon. Instead, they create space

for ambiguous embodiments that leak with lines of flight, gesturing toward unnamable alternatives to rigid gender and sexual categories.

The Figure of the *Góor-jigéen*

The moral panic that ensued in response to Wally Seck's donning of a designer handbag reflects the collective anxiety attached to the figure of the *góor-jigéen* in contemporary Senegalese society, a figure that haunts each of the choreographic works discussed below. Authors including Babacar M'Baye, Ayo A. Coly, and Christophe Broqua have documented the historical tolerance of *góor-jigéens* and how the meaning of the term has changed over time.¹⁷ *Góor-jigéen*, which translates to English as "man-woman," historically referred to gender variance and fluidity, most often in reference to cross-dressing men and trans women. *Góor-jigéens* were once valued members of society who occupied specialized roles in ceremonies include the *ndëpp* (an indigenous psychotherapeutic ritual), and the *simb* (*faux lion*, or mock lion), and who legitimized elite women's prestige as their companions at *tannebéers* (a subset of the *sabar*). However, a drastic shift took place in the immediate aftermath of the publication of photos from an alleged gay wedding in the tabloid magazine, *Îcône*, in February 2008. Antigay vitriol was not altogether new, but the *Îcône* publication was a watershed event that prompted what Coly describes as "the invention of the Senegalese homosexual."¹⁸ Coly shows how the magazine's editor, Mansour Dieng, used the language of the *góor-jigéen* interchangeably with homosexuality, a "semantic displacement" that sparked an uproar against homosexuality—conflated with the *góor-jigéen*—as an undesired and destructive Western import.¹⁹

The alarmist response to the *Îcône* publication, including pervasive media attention, religious rallies, and a drastic uptick in vigilantism and state policing of nonconforming Senegalese men, cemented a shift in the meaning of *góor-jigéen* from gender fluidity to a Western conception of homosexuality.²⁰ This shift simultaneously fomented the "construction of the homosexual as disposable life."²¹ As Aminata Cécile Mbaye and Ivy Mills argue, the *Îcône* publication and other media coverage of same-sex sexuality definitively break the sutura pact by rendering private, purportedly immoral acts public.²² The *góor-jigéen*, an "improperly gendered subject," is presumed to be without sutura and his expulsion is thought to enhance the reproduction of the Senegalese national community.²³ The consolidation in public discourse of the *góor-jigéen* as homosexual and of the homosexual as without sutura and abjectly undesirable ignited an "unprecedented homophobic wave," particu-

larly targeting people assigned male at birth, that continues to the present day at the time of writing.²⁴ This antagonism relies upon collective forgetting of the social roles that *góor-jigéens* once held, replacing the country's history of open gender variance with what amounts to their social death.

The shift in 2008 coincided with the growing influence of Islamic fundamentalist associations and their circulation of rhetoric describing same-sex sexuality as deviant behavior, a sign of Westernization, and antithetical to Senegalese belonging. One of the best-known organizations, Jamra, founded in 1981 by Senegalese politician Latif Gueye, perpetuated the idea of homosexuality as symptomatic of “acculturation” and the “moral decay” of Senegalese society through their newspaper of the same name.²⁵ Mbaye writes that groups like Jamra challenge the authority of *marabouts* (religious leaders) of the two main Senegalese Sufi brotherhoods, the Muridiyya and the Tijaniyya. They use newspapers, television, and other media to reach a broad Muslim Senegalese audience outside of traditional avenues of religious discourse. While their ideas did not significantly sway public opinion early on, by 2008, these associations had “contribute[d] to the reconstruction of the Senegalese Islamic identity,” newly centered on conservative values with homophobia a fundamental feature.²⁶ Codou Bop suggests that the growing influence of fundamentalist groups is strongly linked to increasing poverty since the structural adjustment era. The Senegalese population is inclined to seek refuge in religion, including fundamentalism, as a solution to economic and social issues, just as religious leaders take advantage of pervasive poverty by scapegoating the most financially vulnerable and isolated communities.²⁷ Bop importantly notes that not all Muslims are influenced by these groups' conservative ideas. There are also groups of Senegalese Muslims working toward a progressive Islam premised on social justice.²⁸

Anti-gay panic in Senegal is intertwined with what some authors have called a crisis of masculinity in the context of failed neoliberal economic reform and men's decreasing access to social adulthood. Jordanna Matlon shows how the gendered division of labor imposed by the French colonial regime constructed normative masculinity as contingent on economic agency in French West Africa. If earning wages and providing for one's wife and children came to define male adulthood, then pervasive joblessness in the post-structural adjustment era led to what Matlon describes as a “crisis of masculinity in racial capitalism.”²⁹ In her writing on African youth, Alcinda M. Honwana documents the prolonged period of what she terms “waithood,” a liminal state between childhood and “full-fledged adulthood,” the latter of which entails undertaking social responsibilities such as founding a family

and taking care of one's parents.³⁰ A lack of stable jobs with livable wages across neoliberal Africa has made waithood more common than adulthood. Young men's state of waithood is somewhat offset by women taking on more economic responsibilities through formal and informal work, thereby further diminishing male authority. Donna L. Perry shows how, in rural Senegal, "male triumph" in the post-independence decades turned to a "crisis of masculinity" beginning in 1986 when neoliberal reform "removed men's edge."³¹ Due to the difficulties of achieving social adulthood and living up to expectations of founding and providing for a family, conventional models of masculinity established in large part through French colonialism are difficult, if not impossible, to uphold in the post-structural adjustment era. Senegalese men are dubbed "symbolically impotent" due to their prolonged bachelorhood. Signs of effeminacy or same-sex intimacy intensify the state of crisis already ignited by supposed deteriorating masculinity.³² The severe policing of Senegalese male sexuality that has taken hold since 2008 is inextricable from a broader perceived threat to the patriarchal social order of Senegal.

Despite pervasive anti-LGBTQ+ violence, the figure of the *góor-jigéen* and other constructions of nonnormative gender and sexuality have appeared in Senegalese cultural production spanning the pre- and post-2008 watershed moment. From Ousmane Sembène's 1973 film *Xala* to Mohamed Mbougar Sarr's 2018 novel *De purs hommes* (*Pure Men*), allusions to the *góor-jigéen* in literature, cinema, and television provide a counter-narrative to rampant homophobia and transphobia. Babacar M'Baye suggests that this pattern contests the widespread impression that the *góor-jigéen* is a "complete anathema in Senegalese society."³³ These works collectively evince the presence of gender and sexual variance in Senegal's history and present, even if they are not easily accepted in Senegal, particularly after 2008. For example, Sarr was widely critiqued on social media, accused of being influenced by LGBTQ+ lobbies, when *De purs hommes* won the Prix du Roman Gay (Gay Novel Award) in France.³⁴ Regardless of their reception, the existence of these works speaks to Senegalese cultural production as a site of greater gender and sexual liberation, a pattern that the choreographers I discuss in this chapter contribute to. Like the performances discussed below, the nonconforming characters in these works are often portrayed ambiguously. Rather than adhering to the globalized Western lexicon of gender and sexuality that homogenizes LGBTQ+ categories as discrete identities, they evince the diversity of gender and sexual assemblages that coexist with anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment in Senegal. Devin Bryson suggests that the male char-

acters in *De purs hommes* are never explicitly depicted as gay but implicitly characterized as queer, imbuing masculinity with “fluidity and illegibility.”³⁵ Similarly, the choreographers I discuss here imbue Senegalese masculinity with fluidity and illegibility. Their ambiguous performances and discursive framing of them evade capture, slipping beyond the grasp of stable schemas of representation and identity.

Sarr, quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, names ambiguity a communication device in both his literature and his discourse about his writing. When asked about the accusations he withstood after winning the Prix du Roman Gay, he affirmed that despite the negative outcome of being at the center of such a controversy, he accepts these “moments of tension” sparked by his writing. He insists on his right to refuse both to respond clearly to the accusations thrown at him and to write unambiguous texts that produce monolithic meaning. Instead, he allows for misunderstanding in his creative work and leans into the ambiguity that literary language allows for, accepting that “to write is to take the risk of being judged and misunderstood.”³⁶ Motivated by Sarr, I consider ambiguity a communication device that operates both choreographically and discursively as artists maneuver between staged performance and speaking about their work. Ambiguity is a particularly useful device in works that present the Senegalese male body in ways that invite speculation of gender identity and sexual orientation in a context of “fascist-like hatred” toward the figure of the *góor-jigéen*.³⁷

The reinvention of the *góor-jigéen* as the homosexual and the anxiety and vigilantism it has provoked since 2008, intertwined with an unresolved crisis of masculinity in neoliberal Senegal, forms part of the social context within which the choreographers I discuss below performed. Whereas Wally Seck unambiguously disavowed the haunting presence of the pathologized *góor-jigéen* in his public destruction of the handbag, Kâ, Dieng, Diédhiou, and Diop performed ambiguous assemblages of Senegalese masculinities that offer a wider set of possibilities of gender and sexual expressions. Their performances are not overt representations or celebrations of the *góor-jigéen*, nor do they make explicit demands for citizenship rights for those relegated to the conditions of disposable life. Instead, they gesture toward ambiguous alternatives to the state’s obligatory heterosexuality that violently obliterates queerness as a viable social or political subjectivity in contemporary Senegal. Their choreographies of queer possibility gesture back to the erased history of open gender variance in Senegal while positing alternative futures to the unlivable present.

Dance and Masculinity

Across several cultural contexts, dance is often associated with femininity, resulting in an abundance of stereotypes and prejudices against men who dance.³⁸ To some extent, this pertains to Senegal, where many social dances were historically the domain of women, and where ballet's soft quality created speculation about male dancers' sexuality when the form was introduced in the 1970s, as discussed in chapter 2. However, dancing men played a vital role in the professionalization and legitimization of contemporary dance in the early twenty-first century, and they continue to dominate the contemporary dance world at the time of writing.³⁹ Their overwhelming presence as contemporary dance was taking shape led to an aesthetic that was overtly masculine in character. Given their high level of social status relative to women and their dominating presence, men occupy a privileged position from which they may experiment with the form in potentially risky ways without major social repercussions. At the same time, they must navigate the prevalence of antigay vitriol directed at Senegalese males. This balancing act results in ambiguity.

Prior to delving into the three performances that this chapter focuses on, I offer a brief examination of the role of men in the Senegalese dance landscape and the production of an explicitly masculinist aesthetic in contemporary dance. The choreographers I discuss in this chapter interface not only with the sociocultural context of the pathologized *góor-jigéen*, but also with the normalization of hypermasculinity on contemporary dance stages. I expand Susan Manning's conceptualization of "masculinism" as "casting male performers as representatives of all humanity" to include the production of an aesthetic that demands extremely high levels of physical strength more accessible to male dancers.⁴⁰ Not only were male performers overwhelmingly cast in early contemporary dance works in Senegal, thereby purported representatives of all humanity, but their physical aptitude shaped movement vocabularies and contributed to a standard more difficult—both socially and physically—for women to achieve.

The professionalization and masculinization of contemporary dance in Senegal followed a broader shift in gendered participation in social dance settings. Whereas social dances, including *sabar*, were once reserved for women, men have infiltrated these spaces since the 1980s. Aïssatou Bangoura argues that increased male participation was due to a combination of social, cultural, and economic changes. These included a broad "decastification" process, or the diminishing importance of caste-based protocol that historically limited the acceptability of dance to those from *griot*, or *géwël*, families. Addition-

ally, the advent of popular televised dance competitions known as Oscars des vacances and the rising celebrity status of pop musicians who invited dancers to perform on stage during their concerts contributed to this change.⁴¹ No longer limited to specific social settings and elite proscenium stages where the National Ballet and other neotraditional companies performed, *sabar* was now a highly visible part of popular culture. With a wider array of settings where *sabar* was practiced, increased media attention, and decreased maintenance of the social caste system came greater permissibility in terms of who could dance *sabar*. Bangoura argues that men were eager to participate because these new dance phenomena were lucrative. Newly socially acceptable male *sabar* practitioners modified the dance; most notably, they danced with increased athleticism.⁴² As H el ene Neveu Kringelbach writes, participating in dance events in which women are in control caused male dancers to perform “the aesthetics of a statement of masculinity” by increasing the range of their movements and size of their jumps.⁴³ These changes were meant to fend off potential accusations of homosexuality, a phenomenon that men encounter across many global dance settings.

This same athleticism is choreographed and highlighted in early works by Germaine Acogny’s Compagnie Jant-bi. Meaning “The Sun” in Wolof, Jant-bi was the first contemporary dance company in Senegal to gain significant visibility.⁴⁴ While it is not solely representative of early contemporary dance in Senegal, I focus on Jant-bi as one example of how masculinism was integral to the consolidation of contemporary dance as the genre took shape. In part the decision of German choreographer Susanne Linke, the company (though founded by a female) was composed exclusively of male dancers. After teaching at the first workshop at  cole des Sables in 1998, Linke was so fascinated by what she called “male energy” that she proposed creating what would become the first work for Jant-bi, titled *Le coq est mort* (*The Rooster is Dead*, a collaboration with Avi Kaiser, 1999) with a cast of eight men.⁴⁵ Purposefully highlighting, in Acogny’s words, “la force masculine, l’ nergie masculine” (masculine strength, masculine energy) that Linke was drawn to as an instructor, not only did the cast feature exclusively male dancers but the work recycled recognizably masculine signifiers in the movement and costumes.⁴⁶ The dancers wore Western suits and ties, carried briefcases for a portion of the piece, and later danced bare-chested.⁴⁷ *Le coq est mort* toured North America and Europe in the late 1990s, provoking controversy for its colonialist images while disseminating tropes of masculinity as contemporary African dance was just starting to take off.⁴⁸

Following Linke, Acogny continued to choreograph for an exclusively

male company to show that contemporary dance is “un vrai métier” (a real career). “On ne considère pas ici en Afrique que la danse est un métier. Donc on a voulu prouver par les hommes que c’est un métier” (Here in Africa, we do not consider dance as a career. Therefore, we wanted to prove, through men, that it is a career).⁴⁹ Following the decline in performances by the National Ballet and the closure of Mudra Afrique in the 1980s, alongside the increased visibility of social dance in popular culture, dance had largely come to be perceived as a leisure activity and form of entertainment rather than a profession. The emergence of contemporary dance as distinct from both neotraditional and social dance required mechanisms to convince potential participants, programmers, sponsors, and audiences that it is a profession and potentially lucrative. Acogny chose to do this by working exclusively with men. As a highly successful internationally touring company for much of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Jant-bi dancers supported their families, achieving social adulthood through professional dance careers. Acogny leveraged the societal expectation placed upon men to provide for their families as a means of disseminating perceptions of contemporary dance as a viable professional career. Contemporary dance was thereby legitimized through the labor and visibility of cisgender men.

What Linke alludes to as “male energy” was repeated in subsequent Jant-bi works. These early works showcase the dancers’ speed, stamina, and strength. The second piece for the company, *Fagaala* (*Genocide*, 2004), stemmed from Acogny’s interest in the Rwandan genocide and Senegalese author Boubacar Boris Diop’s novel, *Murambi, le livre des ossements* (*Murambi, the book of bones*, 2000), on the topic. With available male dancers who had already trained with her and performed in *Le coq est mort*, Acogny replicated Linke’s exclusively male cast. She explained that the male cast would express that it was men who committed the crimes of genocide while exploring the male dancers’ feminine side.⁵⁰ *Fagaala* is a collaboration with Japanese choreographer Kota Yamazaki. The piece blends West African dances including Senegalese sabar and a variety of Manding dances, all performed at an astonishing speed, with slow, languid, rippling movements drawn from Japanese Butoh. Although the dancers’ bodies appear soft at times, their muscles released, these moments are overshadowed by the power of their jumps. An acrobatic flip rebounds into a series of jumps with legs kicking high into the air, arms circling overhead in vigorous renditions of the physically demanding sabar dance. Swaths of red and white fabric crisscross over bare torsos, exposing the men’s musculature and sweat, revealing the strenuous labor demanded by the choreography.⁵¹ Even though Acogny set out to criticize the masculinity

inherent to the crime of genocide while exploring the male dancers' feminine side, the work ultimately contributed to the canonization of an overtly masculine and exceptionally athletic contemporary dance aesthetic that excluded female bodies. A similar aesthetic was reiterated in Patrick Acogny's 2007 work for the company, *Waxtaan (Discussion)*, which parodies African politicians. In both works, Senegalese social dances, whose participants were once predominantly female, are elevated to the elite proscenium stage through choreographic choices that circumscribe participation to highly skilled, athletic, male-identifying dancers.

The hypermasculinity showcased in early works by Compagnie Jant-bi is part of a pattern across transnational concert dance settings in which terms of masculinity and sexuality have been debated and refined. For example, mid-twentieth century modern dancers in the United States, including Ted Shawn, José Limón, and Lester Horton, carefully choreographed works that displayed virile masculinity as a mechanism to legitimize male dancers and dispel the association between dancing men and effeminacy. At a time of severe anti-homosexual policy and rhetoric, they subliminally alluded to ideal male homosexuality for audience members positioned to understand this undercurrent, particularly other gay men.⁵² In the second half of the twentieth century, works by Alvin Ailey confirmed conventional portrayals of "masculine immutability" juxtaposed to "female emotivity."⁵³ Thomas F. DeFrantz argues that these depictions both acquiesced to "socially inscribed dictums to mask homosexuality" while providing a "veiled but safe performance space for the contemplation of (black) gay culture."⁵⁴ DeFrantz, Julia Foulkes, and Susan Leigh Foster's analyses of this homosexual undercurrent in American modern dance raises questions about the possibility that Jant-bi works similarly offered glimpses of homosexual meaning beneath the veneer of hypermasculinity, a precursor to more explicit references to homosexuality in the following decade. Whether overt or covert references to homosexuality can be gleaned, the concert dance stage, with its claim to "high art," to some extent acts as a barrier, shielding the artists from social ostracism that acts of gender and sexual transgression might elicit in public settings.⁵⁵ The performances I discuss below take part in a longstanding pattern of seemingly contradictory representations of sexuality and masculinity as concert dance interfaces with its immediate sociocultural milieu.

Although notable women contributed to—and continue to contribute to—the shaping of contemporary dance in Senegal, men still dominate contemporary dance settings, outnumbering women in dance workshops unless a concerted effort is made to include equal numbers of women and men. This

pattern is not merely the outcome of local conditions and the convenience of working with those with more availability and social mobility. It is a pattern in the globalized dance marketplace, in which men have long held a disproportionate number of positions of power as choreographers and managers despite their minority as dance practitioners and despite the paradoxical role of female pioneers.⁵⁶ Nadine Sieveking importantly points out that gender asymmetries in the field of African contemporary dance “are as much related to structural constraints particular to this globalized art world as to structures of local societies.”⁵⁷ The dearth of women’s participation should not be understood as merely due to the social demands they face in local African contexts, a perspective that risks perpetuating images of Africa as severely patriarchal in opposition to a liberal West. Gender asymmetries in African contexts are entangled with those across the globalized art world.

The prevalent masculinist aesthetic that congealed in early contemporary dance works in Senegal is disrupted by male dancers who decorate their bodies with adornments perceived as feminine, who dance together with intimate physical contact, and who assert the pleasure of gender and sexual liberation through their dancing bodies. These performances elucidate ways in which male dancers leverage their social status to unsettle dominant narratives of what it means to be a (Muslim Senegalese) man. They imbue masculinity with qualities—including tenderness, effeminacy, and same-sex intimacy—deemed antithetical to Senegalese belonging according to the heteropatriarchal social order. Whereas representations of male dancers on concert dance stages historically diminished effeminacy in favor of virile masculinity, these performances make space for effeminacy and homoeroticism even as the artists disavow or disregard sexual minoritarian subject positions in their public utterances about their work.

Hardo Kâ’s *Dieu, le diable et moi (God, the Devil and Me)*

After several years of dancing informally with a group of peers and eventually winning the national Oscars des vacances competitions, Hardo Kâ began studying contemporary dance at the same École des Sables workshop that brought Andréya Ouamba to Senegal in 1999. The following year, he joined French-Algerian Heddy Maalem’s company, with whom he performed multiple works, including Maalem’s widely toured adaptation of *Le Sacre du printemps (The Rite of Spring, 2004)*. In 2003, Kâ and his wife, Gnagna Gueye, created their company Yeel Art based out of their home in Diamniadio, a rapidly growing city east of Dakar. Since then, he has divided his time

between choreographing his own works and performing in works by others. He performed in French choreographer Olivier Dubois's *Souls* in 2013, which was followed by an invitation by Dubois to create his solo *Dieu, le diable et moi* during an artist residency at his Ballet du Nord in Roubaix. Following the residency, Kâ performed the solo at Festival Duo Solo Danse in Saint-Louis, Senegal, in June 2016.

Kâ begins by addressing the audience in Wolof, holding a flashlight beneath his chin on an otherwise dark stage. His head appears to float in darkness as he speaks quickly and emphatically, taking inspiration from someone he witnessed preaching on the streets of Dakar. Words gush out of his mouth in sharp, nearly indecipherable, staccato phrases. He speaks of heaven (*asamaan si*), Adam and Eve (*baay Adama, yaye Awa*), the space between the sky and the earth (*digganté asamaan ak suuf*). "Da nga feebar!" (You are sick!), he insists before the light flicks off and his speech ends as abruptly as it began.

After a brief pause, stage lighting reveals Kâ's fragmented reflection through mirrors of different shapes and sizes attached to the rear curtain. He wears a knee-length beige fur coat with a thick collar that exposes much of his long-limbed body donning only a pair of black briefs beneath the coat. With his back to the audience, he watches himself in the mirrors with a possessed expression on his face. He repetitively contracts and expands his torso, curving his upper back with an undulating motion and folding his arms into his chest, one hand reaching inside his jacket and extending back out. Inspired by the ubiquitous gesture of bowing in submission in various rituals of worship, this rocking motion sets the movement foundation for the piece. His feet and ankles maintain a released quality as one trembling arm reaches out again and again, pulling his body off balance. A pulsing beat underlying an original composition of Moroccan Gnawa trance music by Youness Aboulakoul heightens the tense atmosphere and propels his movement to accelerate and expand. Gradually, his gestures develop into more full-bodied folds and extensions, as he arches and circles his torso, displacing and shifting his weight, rotating his legs percussively in a manner that recalls sabar. Audience members groan audibly in admiration as his dancing appears increasingly risky and as he maintains incredible control over his moving body while expertly maneuvering his heavy fur coat.

Eventually, Kâ turns to face the audience. The music dissolves into a sustained tone layered on top of a faint, barely audible recording of an Arabic-language scripture. Breathing heavily, Kâ licks his lips and bends his knees deeply, squirming inside his jacket before beginning a series of sexually suggestive gestures. He gazes seductively at the audience as he plays with his



Figure 12. Hardo Kâ, *Dieu, le diable et moi* (2016). Photo by Antoine Tempé.

jacket—an adornment equally or more conventionally feminine than Wally Seck’s handbag. With legs spread, he undulates his torso and wiggles his fingers over his chest, down his sides, and around his groin. He holds the jacket open, exposing his nearly nude body, while gyrating and circling his hips. This series of movements begins uncomfortably slow and repeats multiple times, accelerating with each repetition. Eventually, he struts across the stage with one arm out, his hand bent down with a deliberately limp wrist. In continuity with the previous section in which his back was to the audience, covering his expressive front side yet revealing it in a disjointed manner through the use of mirrors, a dialectic of covering and revealing, closeting and exposing, plays out over the course of the solo.

I left this absorbing performance completely enthralled, delighted at what I interpreted to be putting pressure on enforced closeting in Senegal. I had known Kâ for several years and this solo seemed to be a departure from his conservative and religious values that he’d made known in conversations during choreography workshops, particularly around the topic of nudity onstage. The next morning, I joined Kâ, who was already surrounded by festival participants and audience members pressing him with questions about his piece over breakfast. My enthusiasm turned to bewilderment as I listened to him explain that everyone has a good and bad side, that we all face urges to behave

in immoral ways, and that we must do our best to resist such temptations. He spoke of a feminine side within himself that he must resist. More specifically, he explained how he portrayed femininity in the solo to denounce the universal urge to behave in contrast to nature. He described a Manichean world of good and bad, moral and immoral, or, as the title of his solo suggests, of God and the devil. By embodying the devil, he meant to couple femininity and promiscuity with immorality, thereby reaffirming his masculinity as it intersects with his Muslim faith and heterosexuality. Others at the breakfast table seemed as confused as I was, not quite sure how to respond.

When I had the opportunity to interview Kâ and discuss the work in depth, it quickly became apparent that his ideas for the piece were far more complex than he let on to this group of festival attendees. Sitting under a tree on the mosaic patio behind his house with only the sounds of his chickens, sheep, and the occasional interruption by his young children, he spoke at length about the piece and his perspectives about contemporary dance, Senegalese society, gender, and sexuality. *Dieu, le diable et moi* followed a previous piece, *Dieu et moi (God and Me)*, which was inspired by his frustration with terrorism in the name of Islam. He decided to create a second solo that not only portrays his relationship with God but includes the duality of God and the devil because “le diable aussi, il fait partie de moi et je sens sa force à l’intérieur de moi” (the devil is also a part of me and I feel his strength inside me). He described this interior “devil” as temptation, as negative energy, but also completely normal, even a necessary counterpart to the “positive” side of himself that he is obliged to show publicly. Again, he linked the devil to his feminine side, explaining that everyone has both a feminine and a masculine side. “Tu es un homme, mais à l’intérieur de toi il y a la femme. Tu es une femme, à l’intérieur de toi il y a un homme . . . Dans *Dieu, le diable et moi*, je voulais faire sentir le public que cette personne, c’est un homme mais aussi une femme. C’est dieu mais aussi c’est le diable.” (You are a man, but inside of you there is a woman. You are a woman, inside there is a man . . . In *God, the Devil and Me*, I wanted to make the audience feel that this person is a man but also a woman. It’s God but it’s also the devil). Rather than denouncing these interior selves as he did at the festival, he explains that by *not* showing these publicly, we are not being true to ourselves. Society expects us to perform the gender that we are assigned at birth, to only show *la belle face* (the beautiful face), but in doing so, we inevitably hide another side of ourselves that is equally constitutive of our humanity. In his solo, he wanted to show it all: “Pour moi il faut les laisser s’exprimer, ces parties, pas leur dire, ‘non non non c’est dangereux’” (For me you must let these parts express themselves,

not tell them, “no no no it’s dangerous”). He went on to say in English, “the beauty is masculine and feminine. This is beauty.”⁵⁸

Kâ touched on a critical aspect of his performance: the beauty of multiplicity, specifically the beauty of dissolving the gender binary and embracing this irreducible duality within a single subject. The power of Kâ’s performance lay in his staging of a complex assemblage that is both beautiful and multiple, breathtaking and promiscuous. He seamlessly wove together gestures, text, and music that reference religiosity with erotic movements on his unclothed body. Halfway through the performance when he crossed the stage with a limp wrist, this symbol of homosexual men appeared as natural as the luscious rippling through his spine that captivated the audience toward the beginning of the performance. He collapses disparate signs and symbols into the same stunning figure that, at certain moments, appears to be an explicit rendering of the *góor-jigéen*. The pathologized *góor-jigéen* is transformed into an otherworldly figure who demands attention and affirms belonging to the Muslim Senegalese community. If Kâ’s earlier solo, *Dieu et moi*, rebuked the association between Islam and terrorism, *Dieu, le diable et moi* ambiguously condemns Senegalese Islamic associations’ creation of a climate of fear around homosexuality.

When I told Kâ that I had interpreted the piece as valorizing sexual and gender minorities, he was pleased. This was not his intention, but, contradicting what he said at the festival, he lamented the decreased acceptance of *góor-jigéens* in contemporary Senegal. “Avant on voyait des femmes, des hommes qui se déguisaient en femmes, qui dansaient dans les sabars et ça ne dérangeait personne. Les gens rigolaient. Maintenant c’est beaucoup plus difficile parce qu’on sait que dans le monde, on sait qu’il y a des gens qui veulent promouvoir le mariage homosexuel” (Before we would see women, men who cross-dressed as women, who danced at sabars and it did not bother anyone. People laughed. Now it’s a lot more difficult because we know that in the world, we know that some people want to promote homosexual marriage). Kâ attributes the increasing difficulties that gender and sexual minorities face to the internationalization of Western human rights interventions with their emphasis on the legalization of gay marriage, something he deems anathema to Senegalese culture. Although this was not necessarily what he wished to convey in his piece, he considered my interpretation an indication of his success. He is uninterested in portraying a simplistic narrative or perspective that is easily and unequivocally understood and instead, considers the capacity for multiple interpretations a defining feature of contemporary dance.

Un spectacle, il faut avoir plusieurs sens . . . Et des idées après, ça discute ! Quand ça discute, il y a quelque chose que tu gardes. Il faut créer

des discussions. “C’est homosexuel, c’est pas homosexuel,” les gens disent, “ouais, c’est bien, c’est pas bien,” on discute ! On échange! Après tu pars avec quelque chose dans la tête.

A performance must have multiple meanings . . . And ideas afterwards, it creates discussion! When it creates discussion, there is something you keep. We must create discussions. “It’s homosexual, it’s not homosexual,” people say, “yeah, it’s good, it’s not good,” we discuss! We exchange! After you leave with something in your head.⁵⁹

In contrast to the rigidity of language, dance for Kâ is at its best when it enables multiple meanings. He describes being drawn to contemporary dance for its freedom and openness, its lack of strict rules or codes, and the possibilities it offers for expression beyond what is verbally permissible. For Kâ, artists carry the unique responsibility of expressing what cannot be uttered unequivocally, of going against the grain rather than upholding the status quo. He uses the contemporary dance stage to affect and be affected by what is too dangerous to say out loud, creating “disloyal and irreverent lines of flight,” what Puar describes as “partial, transient, momentary, and magical.”⁶⁰ In other words, his opaque performance gestures toward a multiplicity of fleeting, transient, deviant possibilities that disrupt the socially determined stability of legible gender and sexual categories.

As with each verbal articulation that accompanies the choreographic works I examine in this chapter, Kâ’s explanation for the work exists within available discourses. The differences between his statements directed to a public crowd versus a recorded one-on-one interview reveal the multiple social realities in which he is embedded. His public insistence on gender and sexual conformity as it aligns with his Muslim faith upholds the social contract of sutura, not unlike Wally Seck’s public affirmation of heteronormative masculinity as the only viable option for Muslim Senegalese men. Even if Festival Duo Solo Danse comprises a differentiated contact zone made up of local and international audience members, it cannot be fully separated from the pervasive moral structure that l’affaire sac-à-main rendered visible a few months earlier. On the other hand, during our interview, recorded in the privacy of his home with awareness of the primarily Anglophone academic audience that my project would reach, he articulated a significantly more sympathetic view of gender and sexual nonconformity.

His shift in discourse reflects his positionality as an artist working in a global art form that is also locally situated, and the multiple sets of expectations and limitations that collide in the making and framing of such a work.

Like many other performances presented at Festival Duo Solo Danse, his performance took place at the French Institute of Saint-Louis, an indicator of the ongoing presence of the former colonizer. The audience was composed of Saint-Louis locals, Dakarois artists, international African dancers studying at École des Sables, and a handful of expatriates. The work was commissioned by Oliver Dubois, a French choreographer known for pushing boundaries.⁶¹ Together, the performance and his statements crystallize Kâ's paradoxical positionality whereby he must simultaneously create palatable work for Senegalese publics—or at least frame them in compatible ways—while pushing the boundaries of global contemporary dance to secure opportunities for creation and production. While the demands of the international market for contemporary dance cannot be ignored, it would be reductive to assume that the provocative nature of Kâ's performance was directed primarily to this end. Instead, it is also for a local audience who might recall previous decades when gender fluidity was a viable option while intervening in the current hostile social landscape.

Regardless of how he articulates his work, Kâ staged a queer assemblage that enthralled local and international audiences. Whereas the purpose of Wally Seck's performative affirmation of his Muslim, heterosexual, Senegalese masculinity through the destruction of his bag was unmistakable, my (mis)interpretation of Kâ's performance indicates the potentiality of his ambiguous performance. For approximately twenty minutes, audiences viewed the coalescence of stunning movement, immaculate physical control, thoughtful set and lighting design, an original musical composition, and a sexually suggestive, effeminate male figure. The piece merges images of Muslim African men with queerness, subjectivities widely considered to be in polar opposition. These convergences depart from the monstrosity that is otherwise associated with sexual alterity in the Senegalese public sphere. For the duration of his performance, he makes an alternative momentarily permissible. By witnessing his enactment of non-normative corporeality, spectators have the opportunity to alter their perceptions of what makes a body masculine and another feminine, one "normal" and another queer, one pious and another sinful.⁶²

Mamadou Dieng and Thierno Diédhiou's *Laabu Ball* (*Pure Spring*)

Mamadou Dieng and Thierno Diédhiou, two emerging dancers and choreographers from the *banlieue*, or outskirts, of Dakar, each pursued contemporary dance out of a desire to expand their artistic proclivities beyond the

forms they grew up practicing. Dieng began his dance career as a skilled sabar dancer who won local competitions from a young age and eventually integrated the National Ballet of Senegal. After training at École des Sables and participating in local contemporary dance projects, he eventually quit the National Ballet to focus exclusively on contemporary dance.⁶³ Diédhiou started as a hip hop dancer but saw an opportunity to learn something different when he performed in the opening ceremony for the 2010 Festival mondial des arts nègres (FESMAN), choreographed by George Momboye of Côte d'Ivoire. Through FESMAN, Diédhiou began learning traditional dances, which inspired him to train with a local neotraditional group. His curiosity eventually led him to École des Sables where he was introduced to contemporary dance, paving the way for his participation in various contemporary dance projects and workshops ever since.⁶⁴

In 2014, Dieng and Diédhiou were paired in a provocative duet staged by the German choreographer Helge Letonja in his piece titled *BOXOM*. Letonja, of the Bremen-based Steptext Dance Project, choreographed *BOXOM* through residencies in Bremen and at École des Sables with an international cast.⁶⁵ Dieng and Diédhiou knew each other prior to Letonja's work but this was the first major production that they took part in together. Drawing from the postmodern dance practice of contact improvisation, their duet in *BOXOM* included significant physical contact. They performed topless and there was an overtly sexual overtone to the choreography. Letonja's creative process sparked their interest in working together in the creation of a new duet. In early 2016, they explained their idea to Ouamba and solicited his advice, resulting in an invitation to participate in AEx-Corps.

The two dancers, both of whom identify as Muslim, set out to question the concept of purity (*laab* in Wolof) as it is conceived and highly valued in Senegalese culture, inflected by Muslim doctrine. *Laabu Ball* is a Wolof phrase that roughly translates to "pure spring," or water that naturally seeps up from the earth. The phrase elicits the purification properties of water, an image that resonates in the Muslim context of Dakar, where the practice of ablution, or cleansing oneself with water before prayer, is highly visible. In Islam, purity has been interpreted to mean physical cleanliness, self-control, abstinence, and a "permanent, private quest for spirituality."⁶⁶ Purity can also refer to reclaiming traditional identities and practices in the face of perceived impositions "from the outside," a premise of fundamentalism.⁶⁷ Similarly, in the arena of Senegalese wrestling, Irene Peano argues that good wrestlers are imagined through discourses of masculine purity, which refers to control over the abstinent male body without disruption from outside the body or nation.

Peano writes that this idea of purity is not fully actualized in the wrestling arena, but rather exists alongside and through contaminations and blurrings. Auto-referentiality is disrupted in wrestling through “active incorporations of the ‘outside,’” including engagement with Euro- and African American models (for example, famous wrestlers have taken nicknames including Tyson and Mohammed Ali) and reliance on female griots who recite their names and genealogies during matches.⁶⁸

Like the discrepancy between Kâ’s public statements about his solo and the performance itself, Dieng and Diédhiou spoke about their work during AEx-Corps in ways that did not always align with the choreography. More specifically, they omitted any commentary on gender or sexuality throughout the rehearsal process and in interviews, despite this being an apparent theme to other AEx-Corps participants and facilitators who saw the work develop. Their creative process involved recorded conversations with male friends about their perspectives on purity, particularly an idea of mental purity. In rehearsals, they discussed purity of mind as a lack of judgment or comparison of oneself to others—a standard, they explained, that is difficult, even impossible, to maintain. They never quite landed on a clear perspective, claiming that Senegalese standards of purity are impossible to uphold but also asserting that their piece denounces impure thinking. Their note in the performance program was equally vague, noting that *Laabu Ball* speaks of “la propreté. La pureté spirituelle de l’individu tant intérieure qu’extérieure” (cleanliness. The spiritual purity of the individual, both inner and outer). Although they never mentioned sex or gender as a part of their examination of purity, heterosexuality and abstinence are integral to Muslim Senegalese conceptions of purity, particularly in light of Islamic leaders’ framing of homosexuality as a foreign import that threatens to contaminate “pure” Senegalese culture. However, their choreography paradoxically staged intimate physical contact between two men as an antidote to impurity. *Laabu Ball* incorporates moments in which a soft, tender quality offers glimpses of same-sex intimacy.

The dancers generated movement for *Laabu Ball* around the idea of “essayer d’être pur, de sortir ce qui est mal en toi” (trying to be pure, to get rid of what is bad in you).⁶⁹ This resulted in physical agitation that diminishes as they come into contact and take care of one another. The dancers begin on opposite corners of the stage, facing away from each other, seemingly overcome by a relentless urge to move as the lights come up. A sudden forward thrust of Dieng’s pelvis pulls him off-center as his back arches and he falls to his knees, his arms dangling. Meanwhile, Diédhiou twitches, shrugs, and wiggles without pause, moving uncomfortably close to audience members



Figure 13. Mamadou Dieng and Thierno Diédhiou, *Laabu Ball* (2016). Photo by Élise Fitte-Duval.

while Dieng stays as far upstage as possible. In individual styles that rarely align with one another, they each perform movement that appears to initiate from deep within their bodies and emanate outwards. Internal urges propel them into unstoppable, restless motion until they eventually come together.

A moment of quiet abruptly interrupts their agitation. Dieng lies prone on the floor and Diédhiou lies on top of him, straddling his pelvis, his torso covering Dieng's. The tension that accumulated for the first ten minutes collapses in a collective sigh of relief as they momentarily lie still. After a few breaths, Diédhiou slowly rises to standing, takes hold of Dieng's hips and pulls him up to stand in front of him, their pelvises touching. Diédhiou's hands linger around Dieng's hips as they stand in stillness for a few breaths. This moment, and others that come after in which the dancers carry one another or lean against each other, fully supporting the other's weight, are performed with visible care and connection. The final image contrasts with the opening of the piece: the dancers stand shoulder to shoulder, peacefully gazing outward toward the audience as the lights fade. Distance and agitation give way to proximity and peace through what registers as an intimate connection between the two male dancers.

Despite their neglect to comment on gender or sexuality throughout AEx-Corps, from the first time they showed their choreography to the group,

it prompted comments about erotic physical contact and a quality of softness deemed antithetical to normalized notions of masculinity. Following a run-through of their piece early in the creative process, one AEx-Corps participant expressed her discomfort with what she perceived as a lack of masculinity in the way that they affectionately carry one another. Another participant argued that portraying masculinity as it is stereotypically perceived is unnecessary and even damaging, that they are free to portray gender as they wish. Speaking more broadly to the group, Ouamba implored everyone to lean into discomfort and unfamiliarity, to choreograph *autrement* (otherwise) as elaborated in the previous chapter. His comments seemed to suggest that the participant's uneasiness with the piece was perhaps a sign that they were on the right track. A few weeks after this discussion, Reggie Wilson, aware of the climate of homophobia in Senegal, gently warned Dieng and Diédhiou that moments in their choreography were likely to be interpreted as sexual. He did not ask that they change anything about the choreography, but rather aimed to break the silence about what everyone seemed to perceive in their work but that they refused to address.

During the group discussion and in rehearsal, Dieng and Diédhiou practiced the Senegalese ethic of discretion and protection by denying any purposeful evocation of homosexuality, but they made small modifications to their choreography to diminish the especially sexually suggestive moments. When I interviewed them, neither artist admitted a sympathetic perspective toward *goor-jigéens* as the two other artists examined in this chapter did. Dieng and Diédhiou were both born in the late 1980s. They were the youngest participants of AEx-Corps and do not necessarily have prominent memories of *goor-jigéens* holding specialized roles in social events as Kâ, Diop, and many others do. However, Dieng discussed what differentiates speaking and dancing for him, emphasizing his ability to “speak” better with his body than with his words:

Il a y des gens qui ont beaucoup de langage dans le corps, comme moi. Moi, je ne sais pas parler, je me débrouille en français, je me débrouille en anglais. Quand je parle avec toi, tu vas comprendre, mais quand je danse, tu vas mieux comprendre. Je peux parler beaucoup de langages par le corps que je ne peux pas parler par la bouche. . . . La danse c'est communiquer mais dans un autre moyen.

There are people who have a lot of languages in the body, like me. I do not know how to speak. I get by with French, I get by with English.

When I speak with you, you will understand, but when I dance, you will understand better. I can speak many languages with the body that I cannot speak with my mouth. . . . Dance is communication but in another way.⁷⁰

Dieng's comment affirms dancing as a form of communication that he considers more effective than speaking. If words fall short, especially when asked to speak in a non-native language such as French or English, dancing, or speaking with the body, cuts across incomprehensions. While he did not acknowledge the same-sex intimacy in *Laabu Ball* as an intentional choice, he validates interpreting his choreography beyond what he says about it verbally. He thereby permits perspectives that become clear through the body but that cannot be stated clearly (or safely) in speech. Although not necessarily intentional, *Laabu Ball* creates space for critique of Islamic associations' dissemination of ideas of Senegalese masculine purity. In contrast to the strict anti-gay rhetoric espoused by these organizations and their assertion of homosexuality's Western—therefore impure—origins, the performance presents same-sex intimacy as viable to Muslim Senegalese belonging. The piece elicited glimpses of homoerotic intimacy between soft, tender male bodies, signaling the instability of sutura and the possible lines of flight generated by contemporary choreography with its transnational entanglements.

Just as purity in the wrestling arena is "contaminated" by the men's reliance on women and North American models, Dieng and Diédhiou's staging of purity is "contaminated" by their deployment of Euro-American dance forms and a postmodern ethos. Their choreography stems from their duet in Letonja's *BOXOM*, in which movement was largely generated from the U.S.-derived form of contact improvisation. Pioneered by Steve Paxton in early 1970s New York, contact improvisation relies on physical contact in the form of lifts, weight sharing, and rolling akin to wrestling. It is premised on a democratizing philosophy, the promises of which have been problematized in recent dance scholarship.⁷¹ Among its democratic and liberatory aspirations, an egalitarian principle of ungendered bodies whose movements are inspired by physical concepts such as momentum, breath, and weight "enables the perception of interaction as not sexual," according to Cynthia Novack.⁷² However, in *BOXOM*, contact improvisation was used for the creation of an overtly sexual duet, characterized by lustful gazes and passionate embraces that melted into gentle but powerful lifts, as I viewed on a recording that the dancers shared with me. Conversations with Dieng and Diédhiou revealed their complex thoughts about the work. They readily complied with Letonja's

vision for the piece but refused his initial request to perform nude, settling on performing topless instead. They were aware of the same-sex sexuality that their duet evoked and were unbothered by this until they performed in Dakar and were met by appellations of “góor-jigéen” afterwards. They seemed to fully accept performing the sexually evocative duet as long as their heterosexuality off the stage remained unquestioned in Senegal.

Despite the discomfort of performing *BOXOM* in Dakar, they paradoxically drew on the same movement vocabulary for *Laabu Ball* as choreographers with full decision-making authority. Though their duet was not as explicitly sexual as that in *BOXOM*, traces of the earlier work permeated their choreography, evincing the multiple cultures, forms, and ideologies that were folded into the creative process. It is possible that the soft, intimate quality of their duet simply mirrored what they learned from Letonja in compliance with what is marketable to Western audiences. The desire to please white gatekeepers cannot be fully unraveled from any of the works examined in this book, and it may be particularly at play for these young artists in their first choreographic pursuit. As discussed in chapter 1, artistic agency is enmeshed with complicity, given the power that centers of global capital hold and their stronghold on the distribution of African contemporary dance. Not only might Western legitimation lead to further artistic opportunities, but as Diédhiou elaborated, it is also a marker of acceptable social status for men at home. He described situations in which Senegalese youth might dance *en cachette* (in hiding) due to their family’s disavowal, yet as soon as a dancer is afforded the possibility to travel internationally, the family “va te laisser tranquille” (will leave you alone).⁷³ However, as with Kâ, it would be inaccurate to suggest that their choices were entirely shaped by the desire to appease international gatekeepers. Having witnessed their rigor and commitment throughout their rehearsal process, it was immediately clear that their choreographic choices were meaningful to them as emerging Senegalese choreographers, even if influenced by Western demand.

Regardless of their intention, *Laabu Ball* renders palpable queer possibility through the staging of soft, caring, intimate masculinities against a backdrop of regulatory heteronormativity outside the contemporary dance space. While they are careful not to make their heterosexuality suspect in verbal statements, Dieng and Diédhiou perform homoerotic encounter as a facet of Muslim Senegalese masculine purity. The audience collectively breathed a sigh of relief when we witnessed their distress dissipate as they carefully connected their bodies and held their pelvises close. We saw the tenderness and care with which they carried one another and how this momentarily dis-

rupted their duress. We witnessed them come together at the end of the piece, calmly and confidently facing the audience with shoulders and arms touching. Their bodies conveyed a narrative of a nurturing relationship between two men in which intimate physical contact and support brings them peace that they cannot obtain individually.

Amadou Diop's *L'autre côté* (*The Other Side*)

Amadou Diop began dancing at an early age with a group of friends who spent their free time teaching themselves hip-hop by watching American music videos. Soon, the group started winning the national Oscars des vacances competitions and Diop left school as a teenager to focus on dance, leading to a quiet life away from his family who rejected his dance career. When he discovered contemporary dance in the early 2000s as activities at École des Sables and Ouamba's Compagnie 1er Temps elicited attention, he became fascinated with the form and eventually decided to focus exclusively on contemporary dance. His regular participation in AEx-Corps since its first edition in 2008 has been instrumental to his growth as an artist.

Diop was one of five artists selected for the 2014 AEx-Corps creative residency workshop. This was his first major choreographic pursuit, and he chose to interrogate what he considers a restrictive moral ideology in Senegal. He choreographed a duet titled *La contrainte* (*The Constraint*) that addressed cultural taboos and societal restrictions linked to Islam. His aim for the piece, as the program indicates, was to denounce the intolerance that permeates Senegalese culture and forecloses the possibility to realize ambitions or dreams of alternatives. Wearing knee-length black dresses and stroking large rolled up plastic mats held against their groins, Diop and his collaborator audaciously called into question the pervasiveness of heteronormativity and conventional masculinity.⁷⁴ In 2016, Diop proposed continuing this line of inquiry through the creation of a solo within the framework of AEx-Corps once again.

The development of his solo, *L'autre côté*, illustrates the necessary ambiguity artists deploy when questioning gender and sexual norms in the creative process. However, whereas Dieng and Diédhiou neglected to speak about gender and sexuality altogether, Diop often hinted at this aspect of his line of inquiry, though he never discussed it openly. Early in the workshop, he spoke of his desire to question “ce qu'on vit ici” (what we experience here) in terms of cultural taboos, sexuality, and freedom. He emphasized the questioning aspect of his work, claiming “c'est vraiment pour questionner, est-ce que, est-ce que, est-ce que?” (it's really to question, is it, is it, is it?). His program note stated: “His-

toire de tabou, d'interdit . . . un manque de tolérance qui finalement empêche l'ouverture à d'autres possibilités. Une montée de l'extrémisme empêchant la liberté de choix, empêchant la singularité individuelle des décisions" (History of taboo, of the forbidden . . . a lack of tolerance that ultimately prohibits openness to other possibilities. A rise of extremism preventing freedom of choice, preventing the individuality of decision-making). While he was explicit in his critique of a lack of tolerance linked to rising religious extremism that disallows possibilities considered taboo or forbidden, he struggled to articulate more specifically what aspect(s) of lived experience and cultural taboos he desired to question. Throughout the workshop, Wilson and Ouamba pushed him to be more specific, as his inability to state exactly what he was denouncing and why led his choreography to be just as vague.

Diop's ambiguity, both vocally and choreographically, reveals the limitations of working within the very intolerant ideologies that he aims to critique in his work. Even if AEx-Corps provides some degree of safety from the anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, surveillance, and violence outside the studio, expressing any dissident viewpoint regarding gender or sexuality in explicit terms is still vulnerable and risky. I understand his ambiguity as an index of the measured prudence that artists necessarily employ in framing their work more so than indicating a lack of conceptual clarity. The tension between his desire to critique societal taboos and the ethic of *sutura*, or the modesty necessary to maintain "one's honor, Muslim piety, and national belonging," resulted in vague, underdefined statements about his work.⁷⁵ Diop's ambiguity mirrors what Obioma Nnaemeka calls the "nervous conditions" of African women writers who, as a result of their awareness of the "circumscribing male gaze" of their readers and critics, "distance themselves from certain implicitly feminist positions they might have adopted in their work."⁷⁶ Similarly, Diop and others are compelled to negotiate their performances of gender- and sexual-nonconforming figures and their verbal statements about their work as they navigate the heterosexist sociocultural milieu within which they work.

It wasn't until I conducted an interview with him that Diop spoke in more explicit terms of his perspective:

Dans chaque quartier tu vois des pédés, dans chaque quartiers tu vois des lesbiennes. On est dans une société musulmane mais tu vois beaucoup de choses. Il y a des pédés, beaucoup, mais une fois que c'est dehors tout le monde parle. Donc pour moi c'est pas intéressant de juger les gens. À travers ma pièce, à travers mon corps, j'ai vécu ce message. Les gens sont hypocrites.

In every neighborhood you see gays, in every neighborhood you see lesbians. We are in a Muslim society but you see a lot of things. There are gays, a lot, but once it's outside everyone talks. So, for me, it's not interesting to judge people. Through my piece, through my body, I put forth this message. People are hypocrites.⁷⁷

Like Kâ, Diop was more direct in articulating his perspective during the privacy of an interview in which he was no longer obliged to uphold sutura. He discussed the Wally Seck incident as one of several instances of public figures bearing the burden of moral scapegoating. He describes a troubling discrepancy between a silent tolerance of homosexuality at the level of the neighborhood and the occasional outcry when a transgression is carried out by a celebrity, particularly an artist. In other words, he is critical of the way in which the “status quo is maintained as long as the góor-jigéen community shrouds certain activities in secrecy,” as Mills describes as a key function of sutura.⁷⁸ Speaking with nostalgia about the public role of góor-jigéens at baptisms, marriages, and other events in his childhood, he revealed his frustration with the current intolerant social landscape that enforces closeting and discretion. *L'autre côté* offers glimpses of alternative possibilities that, he laments, are prohibited by present-day religious extremism and a worrisome culture of intolerance.

Diop begins quietly, tenderly. Dressed in drawstring white pants and a pastel green top, he timidly steps onto the upper left corner of the stage, his gaze down. Looking at the floor, he unhurriedly saunters back and forth, taking up very little space, before eventually looking up as if just noticing the presence of the audience. His gaze lingers on the audience for a moment, then he keeps walking. As he walks, he rotates his torso and arches his back to look at his body, peering at his hips, his butt, his feet, his lower back. Leaning over to the side, he lifts an elbow away from his body at a sharp angle and looks at the space between his bent arm and torso. He continues in this way, checking out different parts of his body as if confirming his physical presence, assuring himself that he exists, that his body is what he thinks it is.

Without urgency, his movements gradually become increasingly dynamic as he ripples through his torso and folds his joints, creating angles with his limbs. He is both soft and hard, moving fluidly between gentle curves and ripples, and sharp angles and heavy foot stomps. His dancing accelerates and his focus shifts from internal to external as he adorns his body one-by-one with five handbags that line the rear of the stage. As he methodically slings each bag over his shoulder, he stares down the audience, daring us to bear



Figure 14. Amadou Diop, *L'autre côté* (2016). Photo by Élise Fitte-Duval.

witness to this transgressive act of putting on a purportedly feminine adornment that was at the center of a recent controversy still lingering in the minds of many. His timidity gives way to audacity; his gaze breaks the fourth wall. Each bag seems a vehicle for personal pleasure. Little by little, he increasingly radiates joy and freedom, taking up more of the stage space, reaching his arms and legs beyond his kinesphere, gazing upward and outward with a slight smile on his face. Once all five bags are slung over his shoulders, Diop appears joyful and expansive, a complete transformation from the quiet, uncertain opening.

L'autre côté imagines an alternative outcome to the publicly dramatized Seck case. Whereas Seck destroyed his bag in affirmation of his heterosexuality, enabling him to recuperate his respectable national identity and Muslim

faith, Diop multiplies the bag and ties it to notions of pleasure and freedom imagined through the Muslim Senegalese male body. He deploys Ouamba's instruction to dance otherwise, using contemporary dance as a medium to perform a seemingly impossible possibility. This narrative is carried out through dancing that melds soft and hard movement qualities that, like in Kâ's *Dieu, le diable et moi*, signal the irreducibility of the human to the male/female binary. He embodies multiplicities that "constantly construct and dismantle themselves" in a performance of an unruly assemblage.⁷⁹

Diop's use of ambiguity helps make this transgressive performance possible in contemporary Senegal, but the specialized space of the contemporary dance stage with its niche audience is a major contributor as well. Diop considers the contemporary dance stage a liminal space existing somewhere between the public sphere where the photo of Wally Seck circulated and the privacy of the neighborhood where members of the LGBTQ+ community often live in relative peace. "C'est plus que la liberté" (It's more than freedom), he says of contemporary dance.

C'est la danse contemporaine qui arrive à exprimer des choses, beaucoup de choses. À travers la danse, à travers ton corps, tu peux exprimer beaucoup beaucoup beaucoup de choses . . . Je peux même porter des boucles d'oreilles, je peux, tu vois. C'est de l'art. J'ai le droit, j'ai la liberté de m'exprimer. Pour moi, c'est à travers l'art que je peux m'exprimer. Je suis un peu timide, tu vois.

It is contemporary dance that manages to express things, a lot of things. Through dance, through your body, you can express many, many, many things . . . I can even wear earrings, I can, you see. It's art. I have the right, I have the freedom to express myself. For me, it's through art that I am able to express myself. I'm a little shy, you see.⁸⁰

Like Dieng, Diop considers dance a more effective mode of expression than speech. He is adamant about the possibilities and freedoms that contemporary dance, the body, and art broadly allow for. He finds full expression on stage, where he considers cross-dressing and other transgressions possible, in contrast to his self-described timidity off the stage, where the performance of the self is necessarily highly regulated. *L'autre côté*, performed only a few months after the highly publicized Seck incident, evinces a liberatory narrative that salvages the purported disposability of the figure of the góor-jigéen.

Conclusion

The works examined in this chapter alongside the contemporaneous policing of Senegalese masculinity illustrate the coexistence of multiple masculinities and a paradigm of heteronormativity, of nonnormative gender and claims to Senegaleseness and Muslim faith. In contrast to Islamic reformist associations' "reconstruction of the Senegalese Islamic identity" premised in large part on the condemnation of homosexuality as a Western import, these works create space for convergences of Senegalese Islam and a multiplicity of gendered and sexual embodiments.⁸¹ In performance, the artists' Muslim Senegalese identities are inseparable from their choreographies of effeminacy and same-sex sexuality. In discussions, these attributes are necessarily ambiguous.

The regulatory heteronormative moral structure of contemporary Senegal as well as the cultural forgetting of indigenous gender and sexual subjectivities it requires is maintained by the artists' words but disrupted by their performances. They uphold the social contract of *sutura* through speech but transgress it in performance, elucidating the leakages in this social contract enabled by contemporary dance. Collectively, the artists demonstrate that plurality and heterogeneity are intrinsic to gender and sexual expression in Senegal, recalling previous eras when gender and sexual fluidity were widely accepted while rebuking more recent ideas that link Islam to heterosexual purity. Their performances of ambiguous assemblages of masculinities offer insights into local knowledges other than what is readily available, other than the reality of sexual policing. These assemblages offer glimpses of realities beyond the strict enforcement of gendered legibility. As intertexts with the other performances at AEx-Corps and Festival Duo Solo Danse, they disrupt the coherency of the response to the handbag case four months earlier, offering queer possibilities in place of Seck's heteronormative declarations. The choreographers exercise their right to opacity as they negotiate their positionality, where disparate expectations, ideologies, and values meet in asymmetrical relation.

Five

Unfolding

Iterations of African Womanhood



As elaborated in the last chapter, contemporary dance in Senegal defined itself at the turn of the century through a decidedly masculinist aesthetic, characterized by a predominance of male performers and a highly athletic movement style. Despite the pioneering efforts of Germaine Acogny and other impactful females—including Gacirah Diagne and Nganti Towo, who helped found Festival Kaay Fecc in 2001, and Marianne Niox, a French dancer who established the dance center, Artea, in Dakar in 1994—there was a systemic underrepresentation of female contemporary dancers in the early aughts. This was particularly true of the generation of dancers who followed in the footsteps of these early pioneers. In response, the 2010s saw a concerted effort, not only in Senegal but across the continent, to increase women’s access to contemporary dance; as Nadine Sieveking writes, a “specific ‘opportunity space’ for female choreographers” was created.¹ Women across the continent became more involved in contemporary dance, and African womanhood became a popular thematic inquiry in works by female and male choreographers alike. However, several of these works resist any reducible definition of what the category “African woman” means and who it includes. At the moment of being summoned to make the Black African female body visible on contemporary dance stages, choreographers queered essentialist portrayals of womanhood. Multiple iterations of Senegalese and African womanhood unfold within and across contemporary dance works, defying any attempt to reduce the category *African woman* to a static or stable identity.

This chapter examines solo and group works by Germaine Acogny, Andréya Ouamba, and Fatou Cissé that both make visible and confound ideas

of Senegalese and African womanhood. In Acogny's *À un endroit du début* (*Somewhere at the Beginning*, 2015), multiple temporalities and geographic locations are sutured together in a non-linear autobiographical rendering of her subjectivity as a border-crossing Black African woman. Ouamba's *Espace commun 100 %* (*100% Common Space*, 2016) imagines female masculinity at the center of African urban space while making subtle references to previous eras of greater gender and sexual liberation. Cissé's solo, *Regarde-moi encore* (*Look at Me Again*, 2012), deploys a meticulous gestural language embodied by an androgynous figure juxtaposed to a hyperfeminine one, while her group work, *Le bal du cercle* (*The Circle Ball*, 2015), explores female sexuality through a disjointed structure. In each work, womanhood unfolds boundlessly, limitlessly, imbued with complex layers that are not meant to be understood by all. As they circulate on global stages, the artists refuse to accommodate universally legible narratives of African womanhood that have disseminated since the violent initial rupture of enslavement and colonization. They equally refuse to offer simplistic correctives to such discourses, instead staging the complex and often contradictory specificities of their subject matter.

In the book *Postcolonial Hauntologies: African Women's Discourses of the Female Body*, Ayo A. Coly asks, "How do African women lay claim to a body so heavily marked and under ideological siege?"² Construed as naked, barbarous, and disorderly, representations of the African female body confirmed the colonial mapping of difference that justified the civilizing mission. Coly traces colonial-era depictions of "the African female body," suggesting that it "was a foundational and structural element of the co-invention of Europe and its others."³ Later, anticolonial nationalist movements, including Negritude, shepherded in idealized representations of African women as custodians of tradition with little agency or public life. For example, Senghor's widely circulated poem, *Femme nue, femme noire* (*Nude Woman, Black Woman*, 1945), conflates African women—portrayed as passive, regal, and submissive—with Africa itself. The archetypal African woman emerges throughout Negritude creative writing as, in the words of Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka, "a voiceless and defenseless object of whom everyone takes advantage."⁴ Postcolonial discourses carry forth and respond to colonial discourses, revisiting the trope of the hypersexual and grotesque African woman as cause for patriarchal preoccupations with the African female body. For example, assertions of modernity repeatedly attempt to police African women's bodies through policies and controversies regarding women's clothing as a means of resisting the backwardness that the African female body purportedly signifies.⁵

The international performance venues that these artists momentarily

claim are haunted by such colonialist narratives, discourses, and images of Black African womanhood. All but one of these works circulated outside of Africa in cities such as Paris, New York, and Rio de Janeiro.⁶ As Keguro Macharia insists, “blackness sutures Africa and Afro-diaspora.”⁷ Centuries-long discourses of hypersexuality and grotesquerie transcend geopolitical boundaries to describe both the colonized and enslaved Black woman. Across the African diaspora, Blackness and femaleness intersect in the production of “markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean,” as Hortense Spillers writes.⁸ I do not mean to equate the lived experiences and meanings of Blackness on the continent and in the diaspora, but rather to situate international performance venues as contact zones where multiple discourses and images of the Black female body converge. The “visual logic of blackness . . . does not care for such distinctions,” Macharia notes.⁹ Indeed, the specific, salient identities—whether national, racial, ethnic, or otherwise—of any single choreographer or performer are often glossed over by the universalizing tendencies of Black African womanhood. Overdetermined by signifying markers that transcend geographic and temporal locations, Black African females on global stages comprise “a locus of confounded identities.”¹⁰

Taking my cue from the artists, I slip between the descriptors African, Senegalese, and Black in this chapter as these overlapping categories are variously evoked in the performances. In different ways, the artists draw upon tropes specific to Senegalese women and refer to broader conceptions of womanhood across Africa and the diaspora. They include references to Senegalese *sabar*, Yoruba tradition, the archetypal African woman, the Middle Passage, 1960s Black radicalism, and more. They evince “Africanist multitudes,” what D. Soyini Madison places at the center of Black performance theory in recognition of the density of genealogies of circum-Atlantic Black performance.¹¹ Continuously unfolding and variously legible stagings of womanhood rub up against the narrow, injurious renderings of the Black African female body constructed across colonial and postcolonial discourses.

Turning to Women

The outpouring of contemporary African dance works inquiring into womanhood took off after the eighth edition of *Danse l’Afrique danse !* in Bamako, Mali, in 2010. At this major platform, artists gave voice to the conspicuous absence of female choreographers and dancers programmed for the festival. Out of more than forty performances, only seven were choreo-

graphed by women, of which only two took part in the coveted competition. Further, few works by male choreographers featured female performers.¹² During public discussions at the festival, choreographers including Mamela Nyamza and Nelisiwe Xaba of South Africa voiced their concern for the lack of female participants despite numerous female dance practitioners on the ground.¹³ Notwithstanding important West African female pioneers and choreographic voices including Acogny, Irène Tassembédo (Burkina Faso), Kettly Noël (Haiti/Mali), and the late Béatrice Kombé (Côte d'Ivoire), West African females were especially sparse at the festival compared to those from southern Africa. Annie Bourdié shows that the festival upheld a systematic valorization of powerful, Black masculine bodies, often partially unclothed and dripping with sweat. She writes that even female curators privileged submissions by men, deeming their work more choreographically solid.¹⁴

Conversations in Bamako fueled a broad recognition and response to the dearth of female practitioners across the continent. Choreographers and programmers created new workshops, tours, festivals, and companies for female dancers, including an exclusively female counterpart to *Compagnie Jant-bi*, called *Jant-bi Jigéen* (*Jant-bi Woman*), in Senegal. Training workshops such as *Bienvenue Bazié's* and August Ouédraogo's *Engagement Féminin*, an annual month-long workshop in Burkina Faso for young female choreographers, expanded throughout the early 2010s.¹⁵ International tours and festivals featuring exclusively female African choreographers, including the United States *Voices of Strength* tour in 2012 and the *Moussokouma* festival in Berlin in 2013, illustrate efforts by non-African presenters to increase the visibility of African female choreographers on global stages. As Sieveking writes, "The status of female choreographers from Africa as an underrepresented and subordinated category of artists has become an asset on global art markets."¹⁶

Although the proportion of selected works by male versus female choreographers did not significantly change for the ninth edition in 2012, by 2016, the tenth edition of *Danse l'Afrique danse!* in Burkina Faso showcased a noteworthy shift.¹⁷ From a roundtable discussion with the three "grandes dames de la danse"—Germaine Acogny, Elsa Wolliaaston, and Irène Tassembédo—to a number of young women performing their own work for the first time, female artists were hypervisible on stage and off.¹⁸ The widely distributed image on the cover of the festival program and on posters and billboards throughout Ouagadougou showcased Mozambiquan Gaby Saranouffi in her piece, *Lady Lady*, dressed in a red mini-skirt and matching high heels, photographed in a stylized flaunt, her facial expression revealing her critical



Figure 15. Flyer for the tenth edition of *Danse l'Afrique danse!* (2016)

stance of this performance of femininity. Hardo Kâ and Gnagna Guèye went a step further by parodying what had become cliché in their humorous *Répetition à la maison* (*Rehearsal at Home*) about the position of African women. Journalists covering the festival agreed that programmers made a conscientious effort to provide more opportunities for women, and Sophie Renaud, director of artistic exchange and cooperation at the French Institute of Paris, explained that the Institute devoted more attention and resources to support women's choreographic projects.¹⁹

The widespread effort to forge new pathways for women intrinsically upholds the category “woman” as a discrete and stable identity, in opposition to the category “man,” and in need of representation. While it was certainly a valid and necessary project, increasing representation and visibility risks homogenizing the idea of the African woman, contradicting foundational Africanist conceptions of gender as fluid, unstable, and externally imposed. For example, Ifi Amadiume shows how in Igbo society, a flexible gender system renders daughters the possibility to become sons or husbands and “consequently males” without implying that they should be seen as “man-like.”²⁰ Oyèrónkè Oyèwùmí argues that in pre-colonial Yoruba society, gender was not a meaningful category. Rather, age and lineage determined social hierarchies whereas gender was introduced and implemented through colonialism.²¹ Similar to the structure of the Yoruba language upon which Oyèwùmí bases part of her argument, the Wolof language contains few words that differentiate between genders. Pronouns are not gendered but rather indicate proximity to the speaker. Instead of words that translate to “brother” and “sister,” there are words that translate to “older sibling” (*mag*) and “younger sibling” (*raak*), illustrating the social significance of age over gender. Although pre-colonial African societies cannot be grouped together as a homogeneous entity, authors have shown that fluid gender categories were prevalent across various African contexts in opposition to the stability imposed by the imperial Western gender lexicon. While the initiative to increase African women's participation in contemporary dance risks calcifying this identity category, Acogny, Ouamba, Cissé and others blur the boundaries of what constitutes African womanhood, collectively pointing to its irreducibility. Their works privilege Africanist conceptions of gender fluidity and flexibility.

At the same time that they confound the broad category “African woman,” they make reference to and challenge specific aspects of ideal Senegalese womanhood, or *jigéen ju baax* (good woman). As examined in the last chapter, the set of practices and standards known as *sutura* constitute gendered legibility in Senegal, and women are disproportionately respon-

sible for upholding this social contract. Sutura, as a virtue of Senegalese womanhood and constitutive of normative sexuality, “prescribes certain attitudes, language and appearances that are deemed appropriate.”²² Ideal Muslim Senegalese women are imagined as modest, submissive to male authority, married, and mothers. They are expected to excel at *liggéeyu ndey* (mother’s work), their caregiving role a primary marker of their value and worth.²³ The virtues of feminine honor tethered to sutura also encompass the standard of “silence with regard to discussing sexuality with elders, and refraining from articulating same-sex desires in general.”²⁴ As Loes Oudenhuijsen writes, “A woman who breaks with these norms arguably breaks with legible womanhood.”²⁵

The performances that I discuss below defy the standards of *jigéen ju baax*. Their opaque portrayals of womanhood challenge the gendered moralities that define “what acceptable behaviour is in relation to others,” which, Hélène Neveu Kringelbach argues, is especially perceptible through dance in Dakar.²⁶ Neveu Kringelbach asserts that “morality is particularly at stake for women dancers, who must navigate the fascination of global audiences with Black bodies whilst simultaneously maintaining their reputations at home.”²⁷ For the young female performers in the group works that I discuss below—Ouamba’s *Espace commun 100 %* and Cissé’s *Le bal du cercle*—maintaining one’s reputation while participating in this art form often proved challenging. Arriving home late at night after long rehearsals, spending weeks or months away from one’s family during a creative residency or international tour, have higher stakes for women than for men. Khadija (pseudonym), a dancer from Louga in the north of Senegal who spent several months in Dakar away from her family rehearsing for *Espace commun*, lamented that her family members considered her participation *prostitution artistique* (artistic prostitution). She returned home after a rigorous, physically and mentally taxing creative process having to convince her family that she did not “devenir une pute pour devenir quelqu’une” (become a whore to become somebody). She described a moment earlier in her career of being subjected to physical violence from her father who believed that she would “salir notre famille” (dirty our family) by pursuing dance professionally given that they are not a griot family. Her mother was more understanding, and she was affirmed by other artists in her neighborhood who recognized her talents and encouraged her to continue dancing. But her father’s perspective illustrates the tenacity of the historical tethering of honor to the social caste system and its intersections with gendered honor, or sutura, for some families.²⁸

Other dancers described receiving questions from parents and relatives

such as, “Toi qu’est-ce qu’il y a? Pourtant tu n’es pas une femme?” (What’s going on with you? You’re not a woman, though?).²⁹ The five women in *Espace commun* were all unmarried at the time of the performances and between the ages of nineteen and twenty-nine. They described the social pressure they felt to marry and have children while their pursuit of contemporary dance necessarily made meeting those expectations difficult. They balanced rehearsals with demanding domestic chores and repeatedly had to explain themselves to misunderstanding family and community members. They seemed to occupy a liminal space in which they were staving off the gendered expectations of *jigéen ju baax* while channeling energy into their dance careers. For some, family members were gradually persuaded due to their unwavering commitment and the lucrative potentiality of the art form. Clarisse Sagna, a dancer in both *Espace commun* and *Le bal du cercle*, recalls her mother being brought to tears after seeing her dance onstage for the first time, finally recognizing the effort she has poured into her art after years of skepticism. Alicia Gomis, a performer in *Le bal du cercle*, explained that when she brought home five hundred thousand CFA francs (approximately eight hundred USD) after performing in the opening ceremony of the 2010 Festival mondial des arts nègres (FESMAN), her father understood for the first time that “c’est de l’art, que je travaille” (it’s art, that I work).³⁰ As *Espace commun* dancer Kéwé Lô explained, “le problème ne vient pas de la danse elle-même mais ça vient plutôt de notre société dans laquelle il y a une attente chez des femmes qui est assez lourde” (the problem does not come from dance itself but rather comes from our society in which there is an expectation on women that is quite heavy).³¹

While performing risks tarnishing women’s reputations in contemporary Senegalese society, the works I discuss below importantly gesture toward alternative ways of embodying femaleness. They delink from the systematic valorization of powerful, unclothed, Black male dancing bodies, from overdetermined signifiers of the African female body, and from virtues of ideal Senegalese womanhood. Without providing concrete answers, they gesture toward the inexhaustibility of Black, African, and Senegalese female subjectivities.

Germaine Acogny’s *À un endroit du début* (*Somewhere at the Beginning*)

“Le pouvoir se transmet de femme à femme,” (Power is passed down from woman to woman), Acogny repeats, walking slowly and steadily toward the audience as video footage of an elderly woman’s face envelopes the wall behind her. Acogny’s long black dress and iconic shaved head amplify her command-

ing presence as she crosses the fringed curtain that bisects the stage. Her assertion grows louder and louder, emphasized by the crescendo in Fabrice Bouillon's original score. In her insistence, Acogny affirms Yoruba matrilineal custom, particularly her right of inheritance to *les couteaux*, sacrificial knives that belonged to her grandmother, the Yoruba priestess Aloopho.³²

This follows the opening of the solo, in which she reads from her deceased father's unpublished autobiography and begins a dialogue with him that recurs throughout the performance. She recounts the story of her birth, when her grandmother's totem, a dove, landed on her windowsill, a sign that *iya tunde* (mother has returned). Claiming that she *is* her grandmother reincarnated, the sacrificial knives belong to her. However, in assimilating to European culture and converting to Christianity, her father, Togoun Servais Acogny, a former colonial administrator whose uniformed image is projected on the fringed curtain at the start of the performance, took possession of these knives, failing to uphold matrilineal passage. Acogny seethes in anger at her father's betrayal of indigenous custom and belief. Her shoulders hunched like a boxer, she pounds the rear wall of the theater with her back and elbows after his image fades away. She demands answers from him: "Mais, pourquoi tu abandonnerais tes gris-gris papa ? . . . Non, papa. N'abandonne pas tes gris-gris. Moi, les gris-gris me protègent !" (But, why would you abandon your amulets papa? . . . No, papa. Do not abandon your amulets. They protect me!).³³ She reprimands him: "Papa, Aloopho avait raison. Il ne fallait pas te convertir. Arrêtez ! Arrêtez ! Arrêtez de vous mettre la farine sur le visage !" (Papa, Aloopho was right. You should not have converted. Stop! Stop! Stop putting flour on your face!).

À un endroit du début (Somewhere at the Beginning) was created in collaboration with French director Mikaël Serre, composer Fabrice Bouillon, and videographer Sébastien Dupouey, and toured Europe and the United States between 2015–2020 to significant acclaim. Through multiple dramaturgical modalities including choreography, storytelling, and film, which together form what Acogny calls *théâtre complet* (total theater), the piece binds together disjointed temporalities and geographic locations into a non-linear autobiographical performance.³⁴ The past, present, and possible futures interweave, illustrating unanticipated resonances between disparate references, from the Greek myth Medea to her grandmother's folktales to the European migrant "crisis" playing out at the time of the performance.³⁵ Throughout, Acogny slips in and out of various roles, visiting different time periods and locations. She layers these upon one another in ways that illuminate the ongoing colonial past in the present. She is errant, in Glissant's formulation



Figure 16. Germaine Acogny, *À un endroit du début* (2015). Photo by Thomas Dorn.

of the word, divorced from the totalizing idea of roots that underpins nation building.³⁶ Breaking from her previous alignment with Senghor's Negritude and its foundational rootedness, she embodies an unseizable, nomadic subjectivity rendered through the trans-spatiotemporal relationships that the performance summons.

About half-way through the piece, a narrator recounts Aloopho's folktale, "Tiviglititi, le Sage" (Tiviglititi, the Wise), about a man who was ordered to be sealed in a coffin and thrown into the river after repeating a disagreeable prophecy to the king: "tu sais où tu es né, mais non où tu mourras" (you know where you were born, but not where you will die). Miraculously, he is still alive when the coffin washes up on the shore of a foreign village. There, he is made king, as according to the village's custom, only exceptional people who were *not* born there can become kings. As the story is told, Acogny stands tall

in front of video footage of a boat, crowded with African migrants, rocking dangerously in open sea. She wears a T-shirt that says “Welcome to Europe” on the front and turns her back to the audience to reveal the text, “Now go home” on the back. This moment, like several other equally layered moments, brings together the dehumanization of anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy during Europe’s so-called refugee “crisis”—which reached an extreme in 2015, the year the performance premiered—and Acogny’s grandmother’s tale, a counter-perspective that values outsiders. These opposing discourses layered upon one another invite reflection on the power of prevailing rhetoric connected to histories of colonialism and imperialism that disempowered indigenous perspectives like the one shared in the folktale.

The black T-shirt that she pulls over her long black dress un-genders Acogny’s body, her shaved head contributing to her androgynous appearance. With the backdrop of African migrants at sea, I am reminded of the entwined un-gendering and commodification of abducted Africans during the Middle Passage, as Spillers forcefully theorizes. Africans’ coerced entry into the New World was wrought through the transformation of the human into a commodifiable thing, “a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific.”³⁷ The transatlantic slave trade, “the key point in the beginning of global capital,” in the words of Christina Sharpe, is evoked against a visualization of the “ongoing crisis of capital in the form of migrants fleeing lives made unlivable.”³⁸ As Eleanor Paynter writes, “Ferrying people between former colonies and former colonizers, today’s Mediterranean boats are inextricably tied to slave ships that transported ‘human cargo’ across the Atlantic, linking the Black Mediterranean and the Black Atlantic.”³⁹ A gender-ambiguous Acogny is the connective node bridging colonialism, enslavement, and twenty-first century border-policing. These intersections gesture toward the ongoing violence of African migrants transformed into nongendered things, their humanness cast aside as Europe polices its borders with ruthlessness.

Transatlantic slavery is referenced again when Acogny then auctions off her children. Soon after the tale of Tivigliiti, Acogny speaks candidly about the difficulties of raising children. She offers to sell them, speaking directly to members of the audience. She barter, laughing maniacally, “un euro pour sauver leurs vies!” (one euro to save their lives!). A few minutes later, in reference to Medea, she slaughters her children. Acogny’s staging of the slaughter of her children is enacted upon a shape-shifting cushion that operates interchangeably as a functional support for her arthritic knees, a tactile source of comfort, and a representation of a baby that she

cradles tenderly. She thrashes the cushion up and down and tears it apart, its white feathers bursting through the air and floating downwards to blanket the stage as the sound score intensifies in a highly emotional scene. Acogny, as Medea, travels in time and space to the slave auction. Rather than solely alluding to this key event in Medea's story, perhaps her actions are more aligned with Afro-diasporic fictional representations of mothers killing their children during slavery, such as in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* or Yvette Christianse's *Unconfessed*. Here, Acogny positions herself as a Black woman. She transcends Yoruba specificity, contributing to what Hershini Bhana Young identifies as a "black diasporic repertoire" of instances of "embodied responses to the violence of subjugation" that include inflicting violence on one's offspring.⁴⁰ At the same time, she parodies white saviorhood in relation to the archetypal, abject African woman as she self-deprecatingly offers to sell her children to her white audience members in order that they *sauver leurs vies* (save their lives). She brings these cultural representations and discourses into proximity with one another, implicating her audience in a powerful illustration of the spatiotemporal entanglements that define the colonial present.

This emotional scene not only evokes diverse cultural representations of mothers killing their children, but also creates a fascinating tension with Acogny's offstage persona as the "mother" of African contemporary dance. Referred to by African and overseas dancers as *Maman Germaine* (Mother Germaine), Acogny became one of the most respected figures in the dance landscape in Senegal and across Africa. Her achievements at the turn of the century with the establishment of École des Sables and Jant-bi coincided with the publication of several African feminist texts that emphasize the value placed on motherhood. Authors including Ifi Amadiume, Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, and Obioma Nnaemeka describe the overwhelming importance of the designation of motherhood in affirming African women's identities.⁴¹ For these scholars, motherhood is a fundamental concept at the heart of African women's experiences, worldviews, and identities. "Motherism" may even be considered a conceptual framework for investigating African women's experiences as an alternative to feminism, as Acholonu suggests. Living and working within the context that these authors describe, Acogny's symbolic motherhood designates her highly respected reputation. She relishes this title, moving through the world with dignity and charisma, and speaking of *sablistes* (former and current École des Sables students) with the pride of a mother. Her status was affirmed by the enthusiastic audiences who filled the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris for the March 2016 run of

À un endroit du début. Performances were largely attended by African dancers and choreographers living in France, many of whom were directly influenced by Acogny at a critical juncture in their careers, as they recounted over drinks following one of the performances.

If motherhood designates Acogny's esteemed social status, then her onstage performance troubles the uncritical, celebratory idea of motherhood that she embodies offstage. More recent texts by African authors put pressure on African feminists' celebrations of motherhood. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf suggests that theories that privilege motherhood are complicit with patriarchal power, reinforcing women's "emphatically socially subordinate" roles as caregivers.⁴² Coly links the prominence of the trope of motherhood in African feminist thought with the postcolonial desexualization of the African female body.⁴³ And, as Macharia notes, the language of motherhood, linked to marriage, problematically centers heteronormative kinship and reproduction as markers of social legibility and citizenship.⁴⁴ In *À un endroit du début*, Acogny redirects the trope of African motherhood away from a celebratory perspective. She performs the opposite of the socially subordinate role of caregiving by enacting its antithesis. Killing one's offspring violently interrupts understandings of idealized African motherhood, rupturing hetero-reproductive temporality. In relation to her offstage relishing of her role as the "mother" of African contemporary dance, the performance confounds her gendered identity, offering an expression of womanhood that is as errant as the figure she portrays.

Similarly, Acogny's performance of what may be perceived as decolonial feminism rubs up against her offstage utterances about the performance in ways that generate friction. Onstage, her condemnation of her father's assimilation and conversion, linked to his disavowal of indigenous matrilineal inheritance, is as crystal clear as her vehement denunciation of polygyny (referred to as polygamy in Senegal) as she celebrates her decision to leave her first husband the moment that he took a second wife. Video footage of Senegalese women bickering about polygyny drives home her point. On the surface, *À un endroit du début* is a "strongly feminist work," as dance scholar Ramsay Burt attests, or "an argument with the patriarch—and with patriarchy and colonialism—simmering with murderous rage" as Brian Seibert writes in his *New York Times* review.⁴⁵ The narrative maps onto the work of Fatou Sow, a sociologist and pioneer of feminism in Senegal, who describes the establishment of a "spiritual patriarchy" with the rise of Islam and state-sanctioned Koranic dispositions, including legal polygyny and inheritance that favors male offspring, in an officially secular state.⁴⁶ These phenom-

ena are relatively recent, given that indigenous religions in Senegal affirm collective identity through practices and rites largely governed by women. While the performance appears to align with Sow and other African feminist texts that describe the interrelation between colonialism and women's disempowerment, Acogny troubles narratives of feminism and decolonization that liberal audience members, including myself, are likely to perceive. For example, in a post-performance discussion in Germany that Sabine Sörgel recounts in her book, *Contemporary African Dance Theatre*, Acogny contextualized the value of polygyny in Senegal rather than confirming her seemingly unequivocal opposition to it embodied in the performance. Sörgel describes feeling unsure what to make of Acogny's statements and feeling "less sure of Acogny."⁴⁷ Sörgel's sentiment attests to Acogny's ability to evade the colonialist logic of classification. When made to answer questions about the performance, she provides what Macharia calls "wayward" responses that create tension with conclusions that her international audiences might draw. She tactfully delinks from identity-centric narratives and ideological affinities in "a stubborn refusal to come to the point."⁴⁸

When I interviewed her at her home in Toubab Dialaw one month after viewing the performance in Paris, she was adamant in her intention to tell *her* story, to explain through her body and words "ce que je suis" (what I am). Like many people I spoke to during my research, Acogny is ambivalent about identifying as feminist. She explained:

Moi je ne suis pas une, comme on dit, une féministe engagée qui lutte pour être dans un club, pour aller dans la rue, parler, non. Je suis femme. Je suis très heureuse d'être femme. En plus je trouve que c'est un avantage pour moi parce que je peux jouer sur les deux tableaux. C'est-à-dire être femme, être homme. C'est-à-dire je joue de ma partie féminine ou de ma partie masculine, puisqu'en chaque être, il y a les deux. . . . Les féministes voient que je me bats comme le féminisme, les anticolonialistes voient que je me bats comme les anticolonialistes, mais c'est vrai. Je me révolte dans tout ça . . . parce que tous les jours je suis féministe. Tous les jours. Voilà.

I am not, as they say, a committed feminist who struggles to be in a club, to go to the streets, to speak, no. I am a woman. I am very happy to be a woman. Plus, I find that it's an advantage for me because I can play both sides. That is to say, to be a woman, to be a man. I play on my feminine part or my masculine part, because in each being, there are

both. . . . Feminists see that I fight like feminism, anti-colonialists see that I fight like anti-colonialists, but it's true. I'm rebelling through all of this . . . because every day I am a feminist. Every day. Voilà.⁴⁹

Acogny's equivocal response reveals the inadequacy of existing definitions of the term *feminism*. She indicates that the meaning of feminism is largely overdetermined by political activism, which for her conjures Western feminism and fails to account for her own interests. This is a shared sentiment in Senegal, one that several of my female interlocutors related, while there also exists numerous organizations there that explicitly identify as feminist.⁵⁰ Ndeye Fatou Tounkara, president of Gënji Hiphop, an association of female rappers, graffiti artists, and DJs whose lyrics and workshops overtly confront women's issues, sums it up quite clearly: "Le mot féminisme n'a pas d'équivalent en wolof. Il reste associé à quelque chose d'occidental et n'a pas de résonance dans notre société. Il renvoie aussi à #MeToo, un mouvement qui n'est pas bien compris ici" (The word feminism does not have an equivalent in Wolof. It is still associated with something Western and is not resonant in our society. It also invokes #MeToo, a movement that is not well understood here).⁵¹

The different ways in which organizations, artists, and others relate to the term *feminism* reveals the label's shortfalls while illuminating women's longstanding roles in the fight for women's citizenship rights through political and artistic action. Senegalese politician Awa Thiam gestures toward the long legacy of African women's resistance to colonization and patriarchy through means that disassociate from Western feminism, given that "la lutte des femmes noires et celle des femmes blanches ne se situe pas au même niveau" (the Black woman's struggle is of a different nature from that of white women).⁵² Thiam's *La parole aux négresses*, published in 1978, just after the Combahee River Collective's 1977 statement and prior to more familiar texts on intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, and others, evidences a long history of awareness of the structural differences between African and white women's lives.⁵³ Given this history, the term *feminism* is a misnomer, failing to address the specific contexts of Senegalese, and, more broadly, African, women's lives at the intersection of colonialism, Islam, anti-colonial nationalism, and postcolonial patriarchy.

However, Acogny does not entirely dismiss identifying as feminist and, almost in the same breath as her disavowal of feminism, she exclaims that she is a feminist every day. While this seems to contradict her initial statement, I understand it as her own epistemology in which her "everyday feminism"

materializes not in direct political actions or the promotion of a specific ideology, but in her ongoing performance of self. In the introduction to her edited anthology, *Sisterhood, Feminisms, and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora*, Nnaemeka asserts that “the majority of African women are not hung up on ‘articulating their feminism’; they just do it.”⁵⁴ Taking up this assertion, I contend that Acogny’s everyday habitus constitutes her own version of feminism.

Layered references that may not immediately make sense to viewers unfold throughout *À un endroit du début*. The performance’s complexity is amplified when considered alongside Acogny’s offstage utterances that do more to confound than to confirm spectators’ interpretations. Onstage and off, Acogny cultivates an embodiment of womanhood that resists containment. In her own words, being a woman allows her to play with “être femme, être homme” (being woman, being man), enabling slippage between femininity and masculinity.⁵⁵ Rather than circumscribing gendered identity, womanhood contains its opposite within it, opening up dual-gender possibilities, similar to Hardo Kâ’s dual-gender embodiment in *Dieu, le diable et moi*, discussed in chapter 4. Acogny’s work rejects the idea of “woman” as a stable category in ways that resonate with Oyěwùmi’s argument that “the fundamental category ‘woman’ . . . simply did not exist in Yorùbáland prior to its sustained contact with the West.”⁵⁶ At the same time, her slippage between femininity and masculinity revises the masculinism that she helped consolidate in early Jant-bi works. Whereas male bodies and masculinity were prominent in her early choreography to symbolize the legitimacy of contemporary dance as a viable profession, her more recent choreography marks a turn toward queer alternatives. Cisgender male bodies and virulent masculinity are replaced not by cisgender female bodies and femininity, but instead, by gender slippage and queer possibility.

Andréya Ouamba’s *Espace commun 100 % (100% Common Space)*

Spectators fill the theater as Tiziana Manfredi and Marco Lena’s video montage of scenes captured in Cotonou and Dakar is projected on a transparent screen. These images, shot from the back of a moped, situate the audience in the dizzying traffic that many likely just experienced first-hand on their way to the performance.⁵⁷ Behind the screen, five female dancers casually stretch and dress in brightly colored tops, shorts, and skinny jeans. Once the audience has settled, the dancers pull the screen down, and the video shuts off.

The mediated images of city life are gradually transferred into the dancers' movements. They burst from stillness into jumps and turns that throw their bodies across the stage, just barely avoiding collisions with one another; they push and pull each other and the fifteen wood cases that they maneuver throughout the performance. The dancers' force as they hurl themselves through space, or their palpable energy in stillness as every muscle appears ready to spring into action, recall the dynamism of Dakar public space. Their near collisions remind me of the way drivers weave around and past one another, coming daringly close to other vehicles and pedestrians. Launching through space and just as quickly rebounding back to their starting positions, they evoke the commotion of outdoor markets, the repetitive gesticulations and shouts of vendors vying for attention. One dancer sits bouncing on a case and soon two others are piled on her lap, three now taking up the space meant for one. I am reminded of the local *car rapides* (minibuses), and how, when full, passengers nearly sit on top of one another. All the while, they keep the fifteen wood cases in motion, repeatedly assembling them into structural formations that resemble dense urban architecture and disassembling them just as quickly.

Espace commun 100 % revises Ouamba's 2012 piece of the same name, originally choreographed for a group of male dancers in Cotonou, Benin, under the purview of Festival Dansons Maintenant. This month-long artist residency invites choreographers to create a new work with local dancers on a given theme. In 2012, the theme was "urban space." Revisiting this work in 2016, he worked exclusively with female dancers to visualize their absent presence and invisible labor in African urban space. However, the dancers' staging of gender raises more questions than provides answers. As an abstract embodiment of urban space, they depart from conventional femininity and take on the masculinist aesthetic that characterized the 2012 version and contemporary dance of the prior decade more broadly. With their hair worn short and muscular legs exposed, the performance led some audience members to ask, "mais vous êtes des mecs ou quoi?" (but are you dudes or what?).⁵⁸

This question, as recounted to me in an interview with one of the performers describing her friends' response to the performance, contains a negative connotation. Radical departures from contemporary conceptions of normative Senegalese femininity, marked by sutura and the concept of *diryaanke*, or elite women, elicit condemnation. Hudita Nura Mustafa describes *diryaanke* as "the corporal, sensory, and visual spectacle of mature femininity—a woman in flowing robes that fall underfoot, a voluptuous body polished with lotions and fragrant with incense, clinking waistbeads, and a slow, seductive



Figure 17. Rose Mendy, Khady Diop, Clarisse Sagna, Kéwé Lô, and Khadidiatou Badji in *Espace Commun 100 %* (2016). Photo by Élise Fitte-Duval.

gait that is performed for public audiences on the streets, in the markets, and at social ceremonies.”⁵⁹ In *Espace commun*, flowing robes are replaced by shorts and T-shirts, voluptuousness by toned, athletic bodies, and a slow, seductive gait by rapid, jerky movements. Rehearsals and performances were sometimes preceded by the stripping away of feminine markers as dancers carefully removed layers of underskirts, full-length dresses, and sometimes wigs to transition from Dakar public space to the secluded rehearsal. In a context where *sañsé* (dressing up) and *sutura* are crucial modes of performing respectable femininity and “a gateway for women to gain traction in a male-dominated arena,” the elimination of feminine clothing and hair styles while baring skin, in combination with the athletic choreography, elicited confusion about the dancers’ gendered expressions.⁶⁰

These stylistic and sartorial choices are motivated by Ouamba’s objective to *travestir* (cross-dress) dance, as discussed in chapter 3. Ouamba links increased gendered and sexual policing in Senegal over time to increased mismanagement of urban public space, not to suggest a causal link between these, but as a nostalgic gesture to a previous era when African cities were both cleaner and more sexually liberated. Speaking not only of Dakar but other African cities including Brazzaville and Cotonou, he explained in an

interview that in the 1950s and 1960s, “les villes étaient très propres” (the cities were very clean), compared to today, when “on n’a plus cette notion de respect de l’espace” (we no longer have that notion of respect for the space). Likewise, “les femmes fumaient en public. Aujourd’hui les femmes ne fument pas en public parce que c’est mal vu, parce que la société a complètement changé. . . . Même le regard aux homosexuels dans les années soixante est différent que le regard aux homosexuels aujourd’hui” (Women would smoke in public. Today women do not smoke in public because it is frowned upon, because the society completely changed. . . . Even the way homosexuals were seen in the sixties was different from today).⁶¹ *Espace commun* explicitly critiques over-saturation and pollution in present-day African urban space—a critique that resonates with popular youth movements in Senegal to cleanse and beautify the city—while making subtle references to greater gender and sexual liberation in the 1960s, largely through the choice of brightly colored clothing, which, Ouamba explains, was more common during that time. He acknowledges that most audience members will not understand this reference. The piece functions as a *clin d’œil* (wink) to those who do understand, he says. In other words, given today’s hostile LGBTQ+ climate, Ouamba evokes the 1950s and 1960s era of greater social possibilities for gender and sexual expression in ways that may be understood by some, but are opaque to most.

Even as the performance’s nostalgic gesture toward the previous era of greater gender and sexual liberation might be lost on many, the dancers’ non-normative gender expression is obvious. Speculation about the dancers’ genders articulated in the question, “mais vous êtes des mecs ou quoi?” sheds light on the social subordination of female masculinity, termed *jump* or *garçons manqués* in Senegal.⁶² The performer who shared this with me elaborated that some of her female friends expressed that they would not perform in a piece like *Espace commun* because “elles ne vont pas faire comme des hommes” (they will not do like men), evidencing the cultural anxiety elicited by the presentation of jump.⁶³ The question resonates with the question, “Jigéen walla góor la?” (it’s a girl or a boy?) mockingly directed at *footballeuses* (female soccer players) that Beth Packer witnessed during her research on Senegalese women’s soccer.⁶⁴ Packer notes the painful epithets and physical abuse that *footballeuses* encounter daily in their performances of “socially undesirable feminine masculinity” on and off the soccer field.⁶⁵ The social landscape out of which such questions emerge inspired Ouamba’s decision to style his dancers otherwise, to choreograph gender outside the frame of respectable femininity, despite the real possibilities for social ostracism this might cause. Regardless

of one's understanding of the reference to the 1960s, *Espace commun* contains the potential for audiences to question normative constructions of femininity and masculinity and the bodies these are typically associated with.

Espace commun furthers its critique by implicating masculine women as a visible and loud presence in Dakar's urban landscape as a corrective to the uninhibited ways in which cisgender men claim space on Dakar's streets. Although Senegalese women have worked as entrepreneurs since at least the seventeenth century when they held significant economic power, their place in the public workforce was severely constrained by the French West African government. Excluded from participating in the new cash crop system of production and wage labor, women were essentially relegated to unpaid domestic work while continuing to operate small-scale activities, such as food markets, from the privacy of their backyards.⁶⁶ Following neoliberal reform and the loss of state-sponsored jobs held by men (and their difficulties finding commensurate employment elsewhere), Senegalese men are inclined to congregate on street corners, passing much of the day outdoors. They are not merely loitering, but rather construct meaningful ways of passing time together while "waiting for the opportunity to break away to make money," what Sebastian Prothmann calls "opportunistic waiting."⁶⁷

While men pass their time "opportunistic[ally] waiting" in public spaces, women have taken on more small-scale ventures. Since the 1980s, Dakar's economy has been increasingly controlled by the informal sector, two-thirds of which is estimated to be women's work.⁶⁸ Women exercise greater freedom to operate in public, but the informal sector is excluded from national statistical data; their economic contributions are thus underrepresented.⁶⁹ The invisibilization of women's economic contributions mirrors the ways in which their labor (cleaning the city, preparing and selling food, and other entrepreneurial activities) often occurs quietly and discretely, overshadowed by men's ostentatious presence. While the very real economic crisis in neoliberal Senegal creates the conditions in which under- or unemployed men are hypervisible in public space, their disproportionate presence—in contrast to women's more discreet public roles selling vegetables on the side of the street or *ceebu jën* (a dish of rice and fish) in canteens behind closed curtains—creates a visceral experience that I came to refer to in my fieldnotes as the stifling normalization of patriarchy. *Espace commun* reverses this dynamic, situating women as a visible, loud, and somewhat disorderly presence in urban public space. If masculinity is associated with power and privilege on the streets of Dakar, Ouamba imagines powerful female masculinity as equally, if not more, legitimate in urban public space.

About half-way through the piece, Clarisse Sagna leans on bent elbows propped on a case, her shorts pulled down to her ankles. She looks at the audience as the video projection behind her displays scenes of a crowded outdoor setting. Suddenly she points a finger and yells, “Clando ! Chargé !” (Clando! Loaded!), referring to the popular clandestine taxi services, abbreviated as *clando* in Dakar. She steps out from behind the case, pointing, and exclaims, “Poubelle ! Rue ! C’est très bien.” (Garbage! Street! That’s very good.) A pause. She goes back behind the case, props her elbows, and casually observes the audience. Suddenly she reemerges: “Coincé ! Serré ! Étouffé ! Mentalité coincée, serrée, étouffée ! C’est très bien. C’est ça qui est bien.” (Stuck, tight, stifled! Mentality stuck, tight, stifled! That’s very good. That is what is good.) Moving faster, her shorts at her ankles comically confining the size of her steps, she continues. “Caca ! Rue ! Pipi ! Rue ! C’est bien. Jardins publics, zéro ! C’est bien, c’est très bien, c’est ça qui est bien.” (Poop! Street! Pee! Street! That’s good. Public gardens, zero! That’s good, that’s very good, that is what is good.) Her emphatic, abrupt statements grow louder, the pauses between them dissipating. Eventually another dancer picks her up, holds her parallel to the floor with one hand over her mouth muffling her speech, and carries her behind the stacked cases upstage.

This explicit critique of pollution, oversaturation, a lack of green spaces, and the prevalence of urinating outdoors recalls the 1990s youth movement Set/Setal (Clean/Clean it Up), or the more recent Nouveau Type de Sénégalais (New Type of Senegalese, or NTS) campaign. While Set/Setal championed cleansing the city and decorating neighborhoods with statues and murals, NTS, which came out of the *Y'en a marre* movement, aims to increase citizens’ social and political engagement. Both movements emerged out of political and economic crises and share a discourse of responsibility premised on moral and/or physical cleanliness.⁷⁰ Audiences may draw connections to these popular campaigns to beautify the city and purify the Senegalese citizen, contesting the underlying assumption that the category “youth” in these youth movements is gendered as male. The female performers emerge as authorities with the capacity to not only evoke city space, but also to critique its shortcomings.

As Sagna is hushed and carried away, the other three dancers, seated on a case near the front of the stage, softly begin singing in Wolof to the rhythm of a *bàkk*, or sabar percussion phrase.

Bàyyil sàcc, sàcc baaxul.

Stop stealing, stealing is bad.

Bàyyil sàcc, sàcc baaxul.

Stop stealing, stealing is bad.

Téjal sa gémmiñ.
 Xam nga lii! Ma ni lii!
 Mbalit mii, baaxul,
 Moom dafa dand.

Shut up.
 You know this! I said this!
 This garbage, it's bad.
 It's extremely dirty.

In a syncopated rhythm, their song develops into a forceful reprimand of stealing, littering, and polluting public space. Their lyrics repeat, accelerating and rising in volume as the women begin to play. They form a circle, clapping and chanting the *bàkk* rhythm as they sing, taking turns entering the circle and thrusting their hips, lifting their shirts, and rotating their legs in brief renditions of *sabar* and *mbalax* steps. The dancers replicate the interpersonal dynamic and vitality of social dance events, taunting one another in playful, seductive competition, joined by audience members who clap with them and cheer them on. Taking on the informal quality of a recreational event that more often occurs in the streets of Dakar than on a proscenium stage, it becomes a performance within a performance as several audience members break the conventions of concert dance, participating vocally as they would in any social dance setting.

Here, the dancers' specifically Senegalese womanhood is briefly legible for audiences familiar with *sabar*. Neveu Kringelbach writes that *sabar* events "are dominated by girls and women, which suggests that they are connected with womanhood in important ways."⁷¹ Performed across Dakar daily apart from the month of Ramadan and Muslim holidays, *sabars* take place to celebrate weddings, naming ceremonies, neighborhood events, gatherings of women's associations, and rallies organized by political parties or civic associations. This moment situates *Espace commun* in relation to a specifically Senegalese, female-centric practice. An explicit and recognizable way in which women animate public space in Dakar juxtaposes the obscured ways in which their behind-the-scenes labor produces that space. Legible womanhood, paired with a recognizable social event, and illegible female masculinity, paired with an abstract evocation of city-space, are sutured together with the seams exposed. Ouamba plays with the boundaries of legibility of Senegalese femininity in a choreography of incommensurability.

The dancers culminate their *sabar* and abruptly transition back to Ouamba's characteristic staccato, jolting movement aesthetic. Deep lunges, jarring turns with released limbs, and quick direction changes make up the remainder of the choreography. The lights fade as the five dancers, sweat dripping and lungs heaving, walk steadily toward the audience with their bodies jerking in all directions. They stare us down with heads askew as the stage goes dark.

Over the course of the hour-long performance, the audience is presented with unfolding gender expressions routed through powerful female dancers who forego the codes and conventions of *jigéen ju baax*. For some, the moment of *sabar*, as “a female space where women perform sexually explicit dances for other women,” not only establishes recognizable Senegalese womanhood, but also enables sightings of homoeroticism.⁷² Toward the end of this chapter, I explore further the homoerotic potential of the sexually suggestive *sabar* dance in my discussion of Fatou Cissé’s *Le bal du cercle*. First, I turn to Cissé’s solo performance, *Regarde-moi encore*, which preceded *Le bal du cercle*.

Fatou Cissé’s *Regarde-moi encore* (*Look at Me Again*)

The lights come up on a bare stage and Cissé abruptly enters from the wings, carrying a chair that she hurriedly places center stage. She freezes, staring at the audience. Her sneakers, loose knee-length shorts, and button-up shirt that swallows her slender frame mark her body as androgynous, though her head scarf—or *foulard*—signals womanhood. For the first ten minutes of the forty-minute solo, Cissé simply gazes at her audience, first standing and later sitting on her chair. Her focus occasionally shifts, each small movement of her head and eyes eliciting anticipation for dancing to follow, only to settle once again on another audience member. Her prolonged pause reveals the arduous task of “strip[ping] down through layers of attenuated meanings” that Spillers articulates as necessary in order to “speak a truer word” about oneself as she decides when to move, how to move.⁷³ Refusing to perform what audiences might desire of her Black African female body, she silently lets us know that she is in control. Cissé explains that she sets up this time for audiences to confront their own expectations: “Je suis là et regardez-moi. Qu’est-ce que vous voyez ? Qu’est-ce que vous voulez ? Qu’est-ce que vous attendez de moi ? Est-ce que vous savez ce que je vais faire ? Quand est-ce que je vais démarrer ? Est-ce que je vais démarrer ?” (I am here, and look at me. What do you see? What do you want? What do you expect of me? Do you know what I will do? When will I start? Will I start?)⁷⁴

Cissé choreographed *Regarde-moi encore* (*Look at Me Again*) in 2012 with the support of the Visa pour la création program of the French Institute of Paris. Since then, she has toured the solo throughout Africa, South America, and Europe.⁷⁵ *Regarde-moi encore* revisits her first solo, *Xalaat* (*Thinking*, 2004), created when she was the only female dancer in Ouamba’s *Compagnie rer Temps*. At the time, she was beginning to explore “beaucoup de questions dans ma tête” (many questions in my head) related to her desire to pursue a

career that was *mal vu* (frowned upon) for women, given the social demands of motherhood and caregiving. *Xalaat* was a first attempt at staging these inquiries, which she took up again in 2012.

Gradually, small hand gestures disrupt her motionlessness and develop into a full-bodied movement vocabulary composed of articulate hands, quick rotations of deeply bent knees, and sudden direction changes. The audience seems to breathe a sigh of relief as the tension that accumulated during her durational stillness begins to dissipate, though it does not dissolve entirely. Her abrupt movements and quick direction changes maintain a sense of unease that is sustained throughout much of the piece. Influenced by hand gestures ranging from quotidian conversations to politicians' speeches to orchestra conductors, her hands seem to communicate a precise language of their own. Her fast-paced movement progresses like a long run-on sentence, occasionally interrupted by a brief pause that recalls the stillness and sharp outward gaze of the opening section. For instance, in the middle of a complex sequence of continuous gestures, a hand lands on her right breast, her index finger pulling her breast upwards and holding it there momentarily while she looks out at her audience before continuing to move. These interspersed pauses give the choreography an unfinished quality and uneven rhythm, as if she cannot complete a phrase, consistently holding herself back.

Her androgynous body on a brightly lit bare stage with the back wall exposed, the only sound a sustained tone that begins about fifteen minutes into the piece, creates a minimalist atmosphere that evades explicit representation. Meaning in this part of the piece is evoked through her incessant but contained energy and repetition, her limited use of space, and the occasional reference to sexualized violence. Using only the immediate space surrounding the chair, her mobility is confined. The primacy of hand gestures as well as the choice of a chair subtly conjure domesticity and the repetitive household chores that ideal Senegalese women, or *jigéen ju baax*, are expected to undertake. She paces back and forth, picks up the chair to move it, changes her mind and moves it back repeatedly. She explains, "Je vais ici, j'arrête, je vais ici, j'arrête, je vais ici, j'arrête . . . je voulais cette confusion, ce stress. Je ne sais pas où je vais aller, je ne sais pas quoi faire. . . Il y a toujours une limite. On ne va jamais jusqu'au bout . . . parce que toujours on t'arrête." (I go here, I stop, I go here, I stop, I go here, I stop . . . I wanted this confusion, this anxiety. I don't know where I'm going, I don't know what to do. . . There is always a limit. We never go all the way because we are always stopped.)⁷⁶ Her detached facial expression registers a lack of personal investment in what her body seems set up to do. Her relentless activity appears forced but not of



Figure 18. Fatou Cissé in part one of *Regarde-moi encore* (2012). Photo by Antoine Tempé.

her own accord, in contrast to the agency she evinces in the stillness of the opening section.

Over time, Cissé occupies more of the stage and intersperses her abstract movement language with references to femininity, power, and gendered violence. She turns away from the audience and flaunts upstage, exaggerating the lateral sway in her pelvis, one hand on her hip, the other held out to her side with a limp wrist. She holds her chair at an angle and thrusts her pelvis at it again and again, her control over this object replicating the power dynamic of sexual assault. These moments break up her continuous movement with distinct references that ground the performance in its overarching themes of patriarchal power, control, and gender performativity. These references also provide logic to her drastic transformation thirty minutes in: as the static noise fades into a jazzy piano interlude, Cissé wheels a clothing rack



Figure 19. Fatou Cissé in part two of *Regarde-moi encore* (2012). Photo by Antoine Tempé.

onstage. She calmly and methodically changes into a skimpy dress, its layers of bright orange sheer fabric reaching mid-thigh, with red stilettos, feathery earrings that fall below her shoulders, a poufy Afro wig, and an elegant purse. The generic wash that enveloped the stage fades to dim, warm-colored lighting that matches her ensemble and conjures a nightclub. Once she is dressed, Nina Simone's "Black Is the Color of My True Love's Hair" replaces the piano music and Cissé takes her time primping herself. She flaunts across the stage in her impossibly high heels, stopping every so often to gaze into a hand-held mirror. She applies layer upon layer of makeup, excessively perfumes herself, and adjusts and re-adjusts her clothing and hair until the lights and music fade to nothing.

Cissé's hyperfemininity in this final section distinctly juxtaposes everything that came before. The radical transition from nondescript androgyny into an overtly sexualized and feminine character, complemented by Nina Simone's voice, draws attention to the untenability and precarity of Black womanhood. The choice of Nina Simone signals that we've transcended the specificity of Senegal, tying Cissé's Senegaleseness to the African diaspora, just as the Afro wig that replaces her foulard evokes 1960s Black radicalism. Simone's sustained lingering on the word "Black" that opens the song, heightened by associations with the Civil Rights Movement and Black feminism that Simone connotes for many, animates the politics that Cissé stages. She explains that this is why she chose the song, not only for aesthetic purposes but also for the Black feminist connotations in Simone's oeuvre.⁷⁷ The slow, heavy, almost mournful quality of "Black Is the Color of My True Love's Hair" disables simplistic sightings of emancipatory achievement as Cissé prepares for a night out. Her light, bouncy feminine gait contrasts with the depth and weightiness of Simone's voice, a sonic and visual dissonance that suggests the incommensurability of Black womanhood with the attainment of freedom. Instead, her extensive process of putting on and adjusting her clothing, applying makeup, and walking back and forth that continues even as the lights fade resonates with her repetitive trajectories and relentless movement in the first section. While the two figures she embodies are radically distinct in appearance, the ways in which they both move without pause, traversing back and forth yet seemingly going nowhere, signify their shared anxiety. While it appears that she is getting dressed up for a fun night out to escape the tediousness of domesticity, moving away from the trials she visualizes in the first section, the burden of her heavy wig, makeup, clothing, and accessories disallow complete abandon. Audiences never see her outside of the domestic setting, but rather her performance of the feminine figure is entirely one of preparation, of putting on femininity. *Regarde-moi encore* fades into darkness as Cissé continues primping herself, foreshadowing the extended interrogation into the contradictions of Senegalese nightlife that she takes up in *Le bal du cercle*.

Fatou Cissé's *Le bal du cercle* (*The Circle Ball*)

Ce qui m'intéresse surtout, c'est . . . que ces filles ne passent pas par rapport à ce caractère masculin mais par rapport à ce qu'elles ont, comment elles parlent, comment elles se comportent. . . . L'envie est d'amener une pièce féminine qui est que pour les femmes, qui parle vraiment que de la femme.

What interests me most is . . . that these girls do not pass in relation to this masculine character but in relation to what they have, how they speak, how they behave. . . . The desire is to bring a feminine piece which is only for women, which really speaks only about women.⁷⁸

Speaking of *Le bal du cercle*, Cissé expresses the critical intervention of her choreography: she delinks from the pervasive masculinist aesthetic that dominated contemporary dance in Senegal since its inception to create performances that valorize women on their own terms; choreography for and about women that need not make reference to this masculine “character.” She offers a corrective to the systemic exclusion of women and femininity from contemporary dance stages by offering training workshops exclusively for women and by choreographing movement languages that take women’s concerns, sociality, and comportment as primary source material. However, as in *Regarde-moi encore*, she does not achieve this through simplistic celebrations of Senegalese womanhood or facile resistance to patriarchy. Instead, she delves deeply into the contradictions of this identity, centering womanhood while rendering it opaque through a disorderly aesthetic.

Le bal du cercle extends the burdensome costume change at the end of *Regarde-moi encore* into an hour-long meditation on this prolonged preparation process (*sañsé*) among Senegalese women. Throughout the performance, three women from Senegal including Cissé, two women from Burkina Faso, and one Senegalese man who performs in drag, dress and undress, trying on various ensembles of clothing that hang on racks around the sides and rear of the stage. In between costume changes, they seamlessly move in and out of excerpts of sabar and hip hop dancing. Occasionally, they notice and participate in another’s dance, but for much of the performance, each dancer is exclusively concerned with displaying one’s individual skills, vying for the attention of audience members with little regard for the others onstage. They speak in Wolof, French, Dioula, and Mòoré, talking over one another and creating an incomprehensible soundscape. They throw punches at invisible partners as if preparing for battle. The stage resembles a fight arena, with clothing racks bordering the performance space like the padding around the perimeter of a boxing ring, or equally suggestive of the circle of chairs that demarcate the social space of the sabar. The dancers flaunt across the stage in stilettos and undergarments, flexing their biceps and striking poses akin to fashion models. They show off their impressive sabar and hip hop skills, sometimes inciting others to form a circle around them and cheer them on, at other times seemingly unaware of others’ actions. There is no narrative arc



Figure 20. Fatou Cissé, Alicia Seybiya Gomis, and Clarisse Sagna in *Le bal du cercle* (2015). Photo by Élise Fitte-Duval.

apart from the increasingly bizarre ensembles that the dancers don. The piece wraps up when they are dressed in excessively lavish ensembles: dresses made of several layers of brightly colored, stiff fabric with dramatic cuts that reveal most of the leg, mismatching hats and neatly folded headscarves, high heels, and exaggerated makeup.

Le bal du cercle is the outcome of several years of training workshops with small groups of women and performances of different versions of the piece before its official premier at Festival d'Avignon in 2015.⁷⁹ *Le bal du cercle* refers to the *tànnébéer*, a subset of *sabar* events hosted by women's organizations that take place late at night, typically beginning between 10 p.m. and midnight. *Tànnébéers* are more formal than other *sabar* events and tend to last longer. Historically, *tànnébéers* were organized and attended by *diryaanke* and constituted vital opportunities for women to construct and perform their

social identities through clothing and through the accompaniment of *góor-jigéens*. Until the late-twentieth century, *góor-jigéens* held prominent roles at *tànnébéers*. Not only did they accompany *diryaanke* as a marker of their social class, but they were known to be the best dancers and conversation-ists.⁸⁰ In Cissé's words, "les femmes arrivent avec ces travestis pour leur donner de la valeur . . . c'est eux qui allument les soirées." (Women arrive with these transvestites to give them value . . . they are the ones who light up the evenings.)⁸¹ While this is no longer the case, Cissé refers to this previous era in Senegal through the inclusion of a male dancer who performs in drag. Similar to Ouamba's *clin d'œil* (wink) to the 1960s period of greater gender and sexual liberation in Senegal, Cissé's inclusion of the figure of the *góor-jigéen* in recollection of this previous era is meant to be grasped by some but not all audience members. Likewise, dressing and undressing throughout the hour-long performance critiques the ubiquitous practice of dressing up among *tànnébéer* attendees, a process that may or may not be familiar to spectators. Termed *sañsé* in Wolof, the practice is highly valued in urban Senegal, characterized by "well-starched, copious folds of colorful garments, accompanied by matching headdresses and abundant quantities of gold jewelry."⁸² *Sañsé* displays both wealth and social identity, encompassing an important code through which a "politics of reputation is played out."⁸³

Understanding Cissé's theorization of Senegalese womanhood through the lens of the *tànnébéer* requires further elaboration of the gendered and sexual politics of *sabars* in contemporary Senegal. In Coly's words, *sabars* are an "indigenous feminist queer praxis" that offer insights into female sexuality and homosexuality beyond of the moral logic of public Senegal.⁸⁴ Taking place on the streets of Dakar, but protected to some extent from the outside social world by the participants' circle formation, they enlist an alternative politic that asserts women as, according to Castaldi, "active erotic subjects who are in control of their bodies and desires, masterfully displaying their power of seduction in a public, albeit protected setting."⁸⁵ Neveu Kringelbach's vivid description of a *tànnébéer* offers insights into the homosocial and homoerotic nature of these events:

The women encourage each other to be daring, to roll the buttocks generously and to perform creative steps drawn from the *sabar* repertoire and from the popular *mbalax* genre. . . . Some of the dancers walk across the space and playfully lift their friends' skirts. Others stand up, turn to their friends and quickly lift their wrapper to reveal their *beeco*, or underneath wrapper. . . . One of the women, standing with her back

to the musicians at the very edge of the circle, beats her friends in boldness and reveals the full extent of her female anatomy.⁸⁶

Women encourage one another in playful competition to move and expose their bodies in increasingly erotic ways as the evening goes on. Their use of clothing, movements of their buttocks, and the “frantic to-and-fro movement” between sitting in chairs around the perimeter of the circle and jumping up to dance within the circle create a dynamic atmosphere in which Senegalese girls and women construct, transmit, and learn female personhood and sexuality.⁸⁷ Coly describes sabar dancing as “the ultimate expression and theatrical performance of erotic autonomy.”⁸⁸ As the sabar continues, “bodies draw closer and merge into a messy and tangled corporeality of desire and affect that signifies a spontaneous rescripting of sexualities, spaces, and power relations.”⁸⁹ These characteristics inform Cissé’s choreography. She does not reproduce the sabar on the proscenium stage, but rather transforms its “messy and tangled corporeality,” its “theatrical performance of erotic autonomy,” and the competitiveness that it harbors into an abstract evocation of these events on the contemporary dance stage.

By drawing inspiration from this distinctly Senegalese cultural practice without replicating it, *Le bal du cercle* is not meant to explain the tannéebéer for unknowing spectators. In her words, Cissé aimed to “aller dans des choses très décousues . . . déstabiliser, d’être un peu dans une folie” (go into very disjointed things . . . to destabilize, to be a little crazy) as a method of examining the intra-woman rivalry that plays out in the space of the tannéebéer.⁹⁰ Constructions of womanhood continuously unfold throughout the performance, disintegrating into a fragmented display of the simultaneously celebratory and competitive social space of the tannéebéer. *Le bal du cercle* strategically evades fixed images and graspable definitions while offering a complex critique of these events for spectators positioned to recognize its references. Not only is the performance confusing for many audience members, but the performers are at times incomprehensible even to one another, speaking over each other in their multiple native languages. Their multivocality furthers the work’s portrayal of “Africanist multitudes” rather than striving for a coherent or transparent evocation of African women.⁹¹

Le bal du cercle is a disorderly performance. Disorganization, bawdiness, and cacophony are aesthetic priorities that conjure the space of the tannéebéer while protecting the Black African performers from intimate knowability. Individuals vying for space and attention in a messy, loud, visually overwhelming way instantiate Cissé’s critical perspective of the tannéebéer as not

only a space where female autonomy and sexual expression are constructed and transmitted with abandon, but also a space in which jealousy, rivalry, and competition among female neighbors, friends, and co-wives play out. Just as *Regarde-moi encore* depicts the inescapable constraint that marks women's social positions within the home, *Le bal du cercle* similarly disavows any simplistic liberatory narrative. Instead, it draws attention to the obfuscated dimensions of rivalry that form an undercurrent at tannéebeers and the ways in which women themselves uphold barriers to their own liberation.

If, as Macharia proposes, "the civilizing mission is about organizing intimate life" and premised on the idea that "*African queerness* names a failure to organize intimate life," then the disorganized intimacy that Cissé stages rejects the impulse to counter colonial discourses.⁹² Rather than "writ[ing] against intimate disorganization," Cissé leans into the disorganization already inscribed onto African queerness.⁹³ Macharia suggests that the rhetoric of disorganized intimate life transcends the period of formal colonization, shaping discourses about African intimacy in the twenty-first century, including narratives of overpopulation and the failure to plan families, the AIDS epidemic, and homophobia. Rather than placating her audience by assuring them that African intimacy is in fact organized and transparent, Cissé forefronts a mode of experimentation wrought from the indigenous, "antistructural female sabar dance" that does not adhere to Western conceptions of organization.⁹⁴ The performance intentionally avoids an explicit narrative arc, stripped of transparent logic or progression, thereby refusing empathy across cultural boundaries.

Unfortunately, reviewers at Festival d'Avignon largely misrecognized *Le bal du cercle's* purposeful disorderliness as a sign of Cissé's incompetence as a choreographer.⁹⁵ As Ananya Chatterjea ascertains, even when an embrace of global perspectives is emphasized at international venues, "the failure to investigate what difference entails" results in "irreconcilable divergences, where some kinds of innovations and artistic choices are not recognized."⁹⁶ Similarly, Sieveking suggests that *Le bal du cercle's* negative reception "indicates the persistence of an interpretive frame for dance as the medium per se for performing 'The Africa.'"⁹⁷ Whether critics misrecognize Cissé's mode of experimentation vis-à-vis imagined ideas of Africa or due to the failures of embracing difference, the friction that the performance generates is perhaps the point. *Le bal du cercle* is not meant to appease viewers nor fit into a transparent model of Senegalese or African womanhood. Its intentional opacity protects the performers from comprehensibility, mirroring the circle formation of the sabar that protects the alternative gender and sexual politics within from the overdetermining heteropatriarchy without.

Conclusion

At the moment that African female dancers were summoned into visibility through a global effort to increase their access to contemporary dance, Acogny, Ouamba, Cissé, and others queered essentialist portrayals of Senegalese, African, and Black womanhood. Aware of the loaded presuppositions that African female performers elicit, they used the contemporary dance stage not only as a means of transmitting creative inquiries that are meaningful to their everyday lives, but also as a platform to obfuscate the narratives that precede them. Multiple iterations of womanhood unfold within and across their works, evading capture on global stages. Their unfolding nature privileges multiplicity, density, and opacity over stability or coherency. They make space for queer possibilities, including homoerotic allegiances between women, female masculinities, and trans identities. They purposefully elude explanatory narrativization, refusing to succumb to the colonial logic of order and organization by incorporating references that make sense only to those positioned to understand their submerged meanings. Refusing universal legibility, the artists implore audience members to confront their expectations of Black African performance. They forefront the specific ways in which gendered oppression is experienced in Senegal and elsewhere while protecting the performers from intimate knowability.

Like the other performances and pedagogies examined throughout this book, transnational networks subtend their creative processes and the venues where they perform. The artists leverage their access to the transnational to create performances that defy the terms of *jigéen ju baax*, or ideal Senegalese womanhood. The contemporary dance stage constitutes a privileged space where artistic approaches may be pursued away from the state's surveillance, in defiance of the codes and conventions of gendered national belonging. However, artists are not entirely satisfied with this arrangement. Indeed, the proscenium stage is a colonial inheritance that draws a relatively small sampling of the Senegalese population. In this book's conclusion, I discuss contemporary artists' emerging initiatives to perform in public settings, away from the enclosed proscenium stage and in full view of diverse Senegalese publics. In attempts to build a local economy and draw in unsuspecting spectators—people who would not necessarily go to the theater to see a performance—they daringly venture outdoors without diminishing the queer possibilities evoked in their work.

Conclusion

La ville en mouvement and Queer Afro-Futurities



On May 17, 2022, a video of a violent mob of approximately one hundred people in Dakar attacking an African American male, presumed to be homosexual due to his “flamboyant” clothing and hair style, went viral.¹ The video reveals the victim stripped to boxer shorts, bleeding, held at the wrists and dragged through the streets while a swelling crowd hurls insults at him. The attack occurred two days after Idrissa Gueye, a Senegalese soccer player on Paris’s Saint-Germain team, sat out from his team’s match after players were asked to wear jerseys with rainbow colors in recognition of the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia.² Though he was reprimanded and asked to publicly apologize in France, Macky Sall, the president of Senegal at the time, commended him. Sall posted on Twitter, “Je soutiens Idrissa Gana Gueye. Ses convictions religieuses doivent être respectées” (I support Idrissa Gana Gueye. His religious convictions must be respected). The hashtag, #WeAreAllIdrissa trended on Twitter over the following days with comments ranging from blatant homophobia to defense of free speech. These events constituted a stark reminder of the dangers associated with presenting oneself outside the strict parameters of gender normativity in Senegal, and the broad encouragement—including from the state’s highest ranking official—for publicly defying LGBTQ+ support.

Just one week later, local and international artists occupied the streets of a handful of Dakar’s working-class neighborhoods with a series of immersive performances, many of which blurred the line of binary gender or boasted the multicolor symbolism of the LGBTQ+ agenda. Multidisciplinary art-

ists invited for the third edition of Fatou Cissé's street performance program, *La ville en mouv'ment: Les arts dans la rue (The City in Movement: Art in the Street)*, interrupted the usual flow of activities with a week-long series of unannounced public performances. Andréya Ouamba staged a futuristic, fictional protest on the median of a busy street with a group of twenty dancers, all covered in multicolor balloons. While protesting an imagined dystopian future caused by climate change, they simultaneously saturated the space with colors that evoked the widely recognizable rainbow symbol. The Cameroonian artist who goes by Zora Snake stomped and undulated his way across a congested intersection covered from head to toe in deep green body paint. He wore a pair of women's bright pink underwear, a tunic of transparent red netting covered in shimmering rhinestones, and two plastic jugs that fell across his chest like breasts. Feathers were strapped to his hands and feet and protruded up from a metal tray of bananas balanced on his head. Congolese artist Androa Mindre Kolo, adorned in a transparent white dress dripping with orange palm oil with strips of bicycle inner tubes dangling from his neck, led a crowd of spectators through three hectic outdoor markets. Throughout this durational performance, he carried two chickens whose orange and white coloring closely resembled his ensemble. These and other artists who performed throughout *La ville en mouv'ment* blurred the boundaries between man and woman, human and animal, real and imagined, elite and popular art.³ By adorning themselves in ways that defy the logic of dichotomies, they put their bodies on the line in fleeting, improvisatory public acts that imbue the heteronormative present with queer possibilities.

As I have argued throughout this book, queer possibility in contemporary dance is intrinsically tied to artists' embeddedness in the global arts market. Cissé's initiative to move from the stage to the street is closely linked to the increasingly urgent need to recalibrate dependencies on international resources. In part due to the rippling effects of the 2008 global recession, the European organizations that contemporary artists long relied upon reduced their budgets in the mid-late 2010s. As a result, several artists, companies, and institutions faced unprecedented precarity even before the COVID-19 pandemic caused theaters to go dark. The AEx-Corps workshop in 2016 discussed in chapter 3 turned out to be the last of its kind, as the French embassy's annual €12,000 contribution to Ouamba's Association 1er Temps was discontinued shortly thereafter. In 2018, Cissé produced a version of her then work-in-progress, *Performance D*, sponsored by the French Institute, but their support was so negligible that she struggled to pay her collaborators the small cost of transportation to and from rehearsals, considered a minimal

requirement for regular rehearsal attendance. At École des Sables, the final three-year grant from the Netherlands-based DOEN Foundation, that sustained the school's operating budget for more than a decade, ended in 2017, leading administrators to confront the possibility of bankruptcy. In response, École des Sables created new tuition-based workshops and artist residencies while implementing crowdfunding campaigns for the first time. With a well-established global network and under the artistic direction of Alesandra Seutin and Wesley Ruzibiza since 2020, they were able to avoid bankruptcy. However, the school's programming drastically—perhaps permanently—shifted as it remains more reliant than ever on non-African participation and no longer has the capacity to allow all African dancers to study free of charge.

For the dance community, the second decade of the twenty-first century was characterized by increasing precarity and intensified desire for mobility. Several artists looked elsewhere for opportunities, leaving Senegal when possible or undertaking more lucrative, non-dance employment. They were habituated to generating flexible responses to a fluctuating terrain in order to stay in motion. As we saw in chapter 3, improvisation was a longtime strategy not only in the dance studio as a mechanism for developing new movement vocabularies and innovative performances, but also for managing the shifting landscape characteristic of the postcolonial, neoliberal city. *La ville en mouv'ment* provides a snapshot of the creativity that emerged in response to mounting urgency, cultivated through the longstanding improvisatory ethos of urban Senegalese artists.

La ville en mouv'ment is integral to Cissé's broader intention to establish new modes of locally sustainable artmaking following a progressive decline in the availability of international resources. Beginning in 2019, she collaborated with a team of interdisciplinary artists in the creation of this annual program that brings multidisciplinary performances and installations into public spaces, directly interfacing with society and diminishing the boundaries between artist and audience that the proscenium stage upholds. She aims to build on a lineage of indigenous African performances that take place in outdoor settings and instill in them a distinctively contemporary approach as a method of inculcating a local identity and tradition of experimental performance. *La ville en mouv'ment* moves away from the inherited proscenium stage and into public spaces that have long been the settings of outdoor ritual and ceremonial performances and protests.⁴ It draws references from everyday life and takes part in what Jay Pather and Catherine Boule refer to as a "precolonial and decolonial African genealogy of ritual, ruptures, and experimentality."⁵ If experimental performance is more widely accessible, Cissé

suggests, local agencies would be more familiar with and enthusiastic of the art form and therefore more willing to allocate funds toward contemporary performance. While the desired outcomes have not been straightforward, there have been positive signs: for the first time in her decades-long career, Cissé obtained funds from the City of Dakar for the third edition in 2022.

La ville en mouvement is the latest iteration of contemporary artists transforming rigidly heteronormative spaces into sites that are full of queer possibility. Like the works discussed in chapters 4 and 5, they do this not by theatricalizing recognizably queer identities or overtly protesting Senegal's anti-homosexual legislation, but by embodying opaque figurations that contain layers of possible meanings, including queer affirmative ones. Away from the enclosed dance studios and venues that much of this book focuses on, within the very settings that violently reject queer life, experimental performance insists on the potentiality for queer aesthetics to coexist with the anti-LGBTQ+ present. These performances poke holes in the seemingly fixed homophobic and transphobic practices and policies that engulf the public sphere, illustrating the leakiness of discriminatory structures and their incommensurability with indigenous modes of being and belonging. They enlist other kinds of encounters, interactions, and physical proximities than those that violently negate nonconforming persons from full citizenship. Throughout *La ville en mouvement*, I witnessed spectators holding the gaze of gender-bending performers who approached them in close proximity. In stark contrast to the violent behaviors caught on camera one week earlier, they paused and peacefully looked at one another for several seconds. They accepted performers' offerings, including bananas that Snake handed out toward the end of his performance and eggs that Kolo purchased at a market and offered to boys exiting a nearby mosque. As a laboratory for creative experimentation, these impromptu performances for broad, unsuspecting Senegalese publics encourage passersby to consider configurations of queer, decolonial, Afro-futurities as latent realities in the here and now.

Throughout this book, I have argued that contemporary dance artists in Senegal strategically evade both national disciplinary norms that govern gender and sexuality and globalized narratives of Black African performance. Through a queer praxis of dancing otherwise in dance studios, their improvisations and deconstruction methods inherently reconfigure gendered and sexual embodiments as they move away from familiar movement repertoires and toward unknown alternatives. Their studio practices cultivate performances for proscenium stages (and city streets) that elude transparency. Their choreographic works are intentionally opaque: a tactic of simultaneous eva-



Figure 21. Andréya Ouamba and dancers performing in *La ville en mouv'ment*, 2022. Photo by the author.



Figure 22. Zora Snake and collaborators in *La ville en mouv'ment*, 2022. Photo by the author.



Figure 23. Androa Mindre Kolo approaches a market vendor in *La ville en mouvement*, 2022. Photo by the author.

sion and specificity; a rejection of “schemas of visibility, representation, and identity that prevent sufficient understanding of multiple perspectives of the world and its peoples” in favor of the unquantifiable diversity of subjects.⁶ Rather than appeasing audience appetites for transparency, they foreground the complexities and multiplicities that define their subjectivities in ways that are not meant to be understood by all. Opacity is a disavowal of adhering to logics of recognition from identity-centric perspectives as a prerequisite for social belonging. Opaque performances eschew order, intelligibility, and consistency in the pursuit of expressing the ineffable.

These artists’ nuanced choreography with its layers of subtle dissent is made both necessary and possible by the transnational entanglements that underlie the field of contemporary dance in postcolonial, post-structural adjustment Senegal. The deeply entrenched dependencies on foreign resources resulting from colonialism and neoliberal reform contributed to the moral panic that ensued around gender and sexuality in the early twenty-first century *and* helped forge sites for artmaking within the nation yet apart from its disciplinary protocols. These artists leverage their access to the global arts

market while negotiating and rearranging its power asymmetries over time. Following local precedents that illustrate the longstanding entwinements of transnationalism and queer possibility in dance in Senegal since the 1970s, they put forth performances that rupture the current wave of homophobia and transphobia. They carve out arenas where queer aesthetics may be glimpsed, evidencing the instability of the current anti-LGBTQ+ climate. At the same time, they challenge international audiences, patrons, and critics to rethink African performance as expansive, experimental, and multifarious. Their work counters the impulse to categorize and comprehend Black African subjectivities and artistic expressions as coherent entities, revealing the proliferation and multiplicity of identities and performance modes on the continent instead.

Glissant's conceptualization of opacity stems from the global entanglements wrought through transatlantic slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism. Opacity signals minoritarian subjects' right to withhold, to refuse acquiescence to the imperialist, assimilationist, and universalizing aspirations of the colonizer. To accept humanity as "the evergrowing network of recognized opaque structures" is to defy colonialist attempts to reduce, classify, and comprehend the other.⁷ This book extends opacity beyond the dialectic of North-South, or the metropolitan-minoritarian paradigm, to also account for divergences *within* minoritarian cultures. Not only do contemporary artists in Senegal deploy opacity before non-African audiences, but they strategically create works that withhold transparent expression from diverse Senegalese publics as a mechanism to evade state censorship and public outcry in the current anti-LGBTQ+ climate there. To that end, I hope that other scholars will take up opacity as a multifaceted, multidirectional approach that functions both within and between cultures. The rubric of opacity enables deeper understandings of minoritarian subjects' agency and creativity vis-à-vis hegemonic structures of various proximities.

This ethnography suggests new directions for African studies that center embodiment as a vital contribution to existing work on gender and sexuality in literature, cinema, and other text-based genres. This book's focus on dance reveals the ways in which corporeality, gesture, and dress offer insights into the multivalent ways in which gender and sexuality are imagined and critiqued; how the flip of a wrist, proximity with another body, or donning a particular accessory might alter how audiences see gender and sexuality play out. The nonverbal realm of dance underscores the multiplicity of possibilities for queer aesthetics currently submerged in, yet very much a part of, oppressive anti-LGBTQ+ climates. Dance enables opaque expressions that may

be disallowed through logocentric means alone. In that vein, this book also encourages further studies of the queer potentialities of dance beyond the North American and European locations that have predominated inquiries into queer dance. What else might dance illustrate in places where homosexuality is criminalized and where the stories that circulate in the media focus on spectacular acts of homophobic and transphobic violence? As Gibson Ncube suggests, embodied cultural production can “reveal that queer embodiment is thinkable, possible, and indeed imaginable, even in sociocultural and religious contexts that are considered conservative.”⁸ Movement, choreography, and performance offer other kinds of stories than those most easily identifiable with overwhelmingly heterosexist locations.

The artists whose work populates this book invite audiences to dwell in discomfort. *Dancing Opacity* insists that there is much to learn by attending to challenging, confusing, or downright incomprehensible aspects of creative work. By sitting with the unintelligible dimensions of choreography, by accepting that aspects of a performance may not be meant to be understood by all, we can let go of the impulse to know. We can embrace minoritarian artists’ right to opacity.

Epilogue



“Tire ! Plus que ça ! Avec le dos !” (Pull! More than that! With your back!), Andréya Ouamba commands as I engage just about every muscle in my upper body to extend my right arm across and to the left as far as it will reach, my back parallel to the floor. I feel my arm begin to shake and my back muscles ache, sweat dripping to the floor. We have been working on this improvisational task for the last hour. Ouamba asks me to imagine that my limbs are being pulled by an external force, one after another. An arm is pulled across the front of my body. Abruptly, a knee is pulled to the opposite diagonal, followed by my other arm swinging and pulling behind me, and so on. As with everything we have worked on over the past week, Ouamba demands more. He recognizes my movement patterns, my habits, and points them out, insisting that I let them go and uncover something new. We work on each improvisational directive until we have exhausted its possibilities. We may pick it back up again tomorrow, or we may not.

It is May 2023 and Ouamba and I are in the middle of a three-week residency in Dakar devoted to the creation of a new solo that takes my positionality as a white researcher in Africa as a point of departure. Ouamba proposed creating a solo for me as an extension of our longstanding collaboration throughout my time in Senegal, including more than a decade of of engaging his studio practice and choreography, and participating in early rehearsals for a new piece in June 2022. I wrestled with the idea for several months, questioning the optics—and my physical capacity—of creating and performing such a piece before I agreed and sought funds to return to Senegal to begin working.

We spend several hours each morning trying various improvisational prompts inspired by lengthy conversations in the dance studio, over lunch,

and on walks home after rehearsal. Our conversations revolve around discourses about race within and between the international contexts that we each traverse regularly, including his encounters as an internationally touring artist on African and European contemporary dance circuits and the different racial discourses I navigate as I travel between dance spaces in Senegal and academic spaces in the United States. These rich conversations lead to various movement prompts that eventually generate an embodied meditation on discomfort and indecision. The ambivalence I feel about this very process, particularly about performing a solo in Dakar at the end of our residency and how this would inevitably center my white body, is folded into the work itself.

Several months later as I complete this book manuscript, I continue to feel pulled in multiple directions. I recognize the potential harm of participating in the coloniality of knowledge production by researching and publishing my findings about Senegal as a white North American cis-woman. At the same time, I am invested in telling these stories about artists who are continually marginalized on the global contemporary dance circuit, and I am inspired by their invitations to return to Senegal and continue working together. This epilogue offers a brief account of my history of involvement in contemporary dance in Senegal, my motivation for pursuing this project, and reflections on my positionality in relation to my research collaborators.

I met Ouamba in 2010. What was intended as a three-month trip to Senegal to deepen my understanding of neotraditional West African dance, a form that I fell in love with during a course I took in college, extended to a year abroad. With the help of my college instructor, Djibril Camara, I connected with local artists and within a few days of arriving, I was dancing every day. I relished the physically taxing, hours-long dance classes, delving into the intricacies of dances including Soli, Triba, Dundunba, and more. Soon, I began frequenting the Blaise Senghor Cultural Center, where several companies rehearsed each evening. After a few months, I started dancing with the late Papa Sangone Vieira's company Afreekanam, learning Vieira's unique blend of neotraditional dance, hip hop, and modern dance. This led me to stumble upon Ouamba's *Ateliers expérience et corps* (AEx-Corps), an intensive international contemporary dance workshop. While waiting to begin Afreekanam rehearsals across the lobby at Blaise Senghor, I observed morning classes taught by Kenyan choreographer Opiyo Okach with a group of participants from Senegal, Mali, and Burkina Faso, and even participated one day when they needed an extra body.

This fortuitous encounter with AEx-Corps sparked an enduring fasci-

nation that would eventually define my career trajectory. I applied and was accepted to participate in the next edition of AEx-Corps and returned to Senegal the following two years to participate in subsequent editions. These were some of the most meaningful, rigorous, and exciting dance training endeavors I had ever experienced. The intensity of the program fostered tangible artistic growth and cultivated a sense of community and trust among participants. I formed relationships with dancers from Senegal and those who traveled there from Congo, Mali, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Benin, and Mozambique while pushing myself physically and mentally in ways that exceeded my previous training. The instructors were largely international, spanning the African continent, Europe, and North America, but it was Ouamba and his collaborator, Fatou Cissé, whose teaching I most admired. Group trips to École des Sables in Toubab Dialaw and encounters with artists from Saint-Louis in the north expanded my understanding of and captivation with this robust dance world that had previously been outside my purview. However, returning home to Chicago between AEx-Corps workshops and talking about my travels with friends, or seeking and failing to find dance classes with a similarly diverse approach to movement, invariably reminded me of the persistence in some circles in the United States of the idea of African dance as traditional, fixed in the past, and sequestered from notions of contemporaneity.¹ These observations led me to pursue a PhD and eventually to write this book in hopes of contributing to more nuanced understandings of global contemporary dance.

The relationships I formed during those early years as a regular AEx-Corps participant facilitated my dissertation research. When I returned to Senegal as a researcher for the first time in 2014, Ouamba, Cissé, and several former AEx-Corps participants were quick to grant me permission to watch or participate in rehearsals for their ongoing projects. The social network I had cultivated through AEx-Corps led to meeting several other dance artists over the course of my research, including Cissé's father and former director of Senegal's second national dance company, Ousmane Noël Cissé. I also connected with artists outside Dakar, particularly at École des Sables, including Germaine Acogny and Patrick Acogny. While my presence at École des Sables was initially met with a healthy combination of skepticism and hospitality, my persistence and regular conversations about my research with administrators, instructors, and students demonstrated my intent to accurately and thoughtfully document the school's activities. I was granted permission to watch, and sometimes participate in, workshops there. Over time, I developed a relationship with Germaine Acogny and her husband, Helmut

Vogt, who I continue to reconvene with regularly in Senegal or elsewhere when they are on tour.

Despite being largely embraced by Senegal's contemporary dance community, I was an ambivalent researcher. As a graduate student immersed in postcolonial and critical race theory during the emergent Black Lives Matter movement, I gained an acute awareness of the injurious nature of my role as a white North American ethnographer in Africa that had largely escaped me as a young dance practitioner. My academic affiliation and the grants and fellowships that sponsored my trips, instead of relying on savings from piecemeal jobs and a frugal lifestyle, made the socioeconomic differences between Senegalese artists and me feel more pronounced. I began to question the extent to which I was merely perpetuating colonial schemes of traveling to Africa and disseminating knowledge about racialized others as a so-called expert.

I have not fully resolved these tensions and suspect that I never will. While I attempt to flesh out the complexities of the imbrications of neocolonialism in the lives of the artists I write about, I cannot claim to have moved beyond the coloniality of researching and writing about Black Africans. The possibility that I misrepresent an artist's work due to the distance between our subject positions haunts me as I complete this text. With varying degrees of (dis)comfort, I take part in the uneven transnational entanglements that have always characterized contemporary dance in Senegal and which cannot be neatly parsed into binary categories of coloniality versus decoloniality, or simply avoided.

My goal has always been to "advance the interests of the world's majority" by shedding light on minoritarian subjects' astute creative-theoretical work.² I also aim to uproot positivist models of ethnographic research that assume the legitimacy of the Western intellectual as the authority on non-Western cultures. To this end, I included my research subjects in the revision process of this manuscript by discussing my writing with them and sending excerpts for their review. Perhaps more significantly, my continued artistic collaborations with Ouamba, Cissé, and others have allowed me to remain a dancer rather than solely a researcher. Ouamba's invitation to work with him on a solo in 2023, which was followed by an invitation from Cissé to perform a work-in-progress of the solo in the fourth edition of her festival, *La ville en mouv'ment*, affirmed our shared desire to collaborate. Cissé appreciated that performance to the extent that she invited me back for her next edition of *La ville en mouv'ment* in 2024, and Ouamba and I have plans to pick up our project again in the future. These collaborations, in which Ouamba and Cissé hold authoritative roles as choreographer and director respectively,

“disperse ethnographic authority in the direction of the traditional ‘objects’ of study,” as Faye V. Harrison suggests as a method of empowering one’s research subjects.³ Stemming from my involvement with the Senegalese dance community several years prior to pursuing research or considering an academic career, these exchanges are forged from, in the words of Dwight Conquergood, “copresence, humility, and vulnerability,” enabling an epistemology premised on “*solidarity with*, not separation from.”⁴ Rehearsing with Ouamba and performing in Cissé’s festival while dialoguing with them (and others) about this text, sharing with them excerpts of my writing concerning their work, subverts traditional models of ethnography. Motivated by their ongoing critical work and invitations to collaborate, I affirm that these stories must be shared.

The findings elaborated in this book emerged from my subjective experiences in Senegal as a dancer with insider embodied knowledge and as an outsider whose racial, national, and socioeconomic privilege distances me from the lived experiences of my research collaborators. I have done my best to reflect the realities of the contemporary dance world in Senegal while paying particular attention to the unspoken undercurrents of this art form. However, the preceding pages are the result of my own perspective, which may differ from those of others involved in this artistic world. Far from an exhaustive, conclusive account of contemporary dance in Senegal, I hope that this book opens further conversations and provokes new lines of inquiry for other scholars to take up.

Glossary



- Afrique en créations*: A French organization established in 1990 to support the development of African arts through French and African partnerships.
- Aloopho*: The name of Germaine Acogny's paternal grandmother, a Yoruba priestess. Aloopho is also the name of one of the two dance studios at École des Sables and it was the title of a work performed by Mudra Afrique students.
- Ateliers expérience et corps (AEx-Corps)*: Experience and Body Workshops; contemporary dance training workshops in Dakar, established by Andréya Ouamba in 2008.
- Biennale de la danse en Afrique*: Biennial of Dance in Africa; the preeminent contemporary dance festival in Africa that takes place in different cities and features select artists from across the continent. Formerly known as *Danse l'Afrique danse !* and before that, the *Rencontres chorégraphiques de l'Afrique de l'Océan Indien*.
- Boubou* (or *mbub*): a loose, full-length, unfitted garment worn by men and women in West Africa. In Senegal, boubous are conventional attire for special occasions, Muslim celebrations, and Friday afternoon prayers.
- Bouleversement*: A French word that indicates upheaval, from the verb *bouleverser*: to upset, disrupt, or shake.
- Centre culturel français (CCF)*: French Cultural Center; the former title of the *Institut français* (see below).
- Danse l'Afrique danse !*: Dance Africa Dance!; the contemporary dance festival today known as the *Biennale de la danse en Afrique* (see above).

- Danse répédé*: A syncretic dance technique created by Ousmane Noël Cissé in the 1970s. Cissé coined the term *répédé* to signify physical and mental strength and rigor.
- Diryaanke*: A Wolof term for elite Senegalese women who exude mature femininity through their clothing, gait, and accessories.
- École des Sables*: School of Sands; an international dance school in Toubab Dialaw, Senegal, established by Germaine Acogny and Helmut Vogt in 1998 and officially inaugurated in 2004.
- Festival Duo Solo Danse*: An annual contemporary dance festival held in Saint-Louis, Senegal, established by Alioune Diagne in 2008.
- Festival mondial des arts nègres (FESMAN)*: World Festival of Black Arts; a festival featuring artists of various disciplines from Africa and the diaspora. The inaugural edition took place in 1966 in Dakar, hosted by president Léopold Senghor. Subsequent editions included the 1977 FESTAC in Nigeria, and the 2010 FESMAN in Dakar.
- Garçon manqué*: A French term for tomboyism describing women who present as masculine through their appearance or behavior.
- Géwël*: Wolof term for *griot* (see below).
- Góor-jigéen*: A Wolof term that translates to “man-woman” and historically meant gender and sexual variance, most often in reference to cross-dressing men, effeminate men, and trans women. Today, the term is pejorative and conflated with homosexuality.
- Griot*: A caste of oral historians, praise singers, musicians, and performers, historically determined by family lineage in parts of West Africa.
- Gris-gris*: A talisman, or form of protection or luck, stemming from indigenous West African religions. *Gris-gris* are most often worn on the person.
- Institut français*: French Institute; an organization of the French state geared toward the spread of the French language and culture.
- Jant-bi*: The resident company of *École des Sables*, established by Germaine Acogny in 1999. *Jant-bi* was an exclusively male company until 2012, when an all-female counterpart, *Jant-bi Jigéen*, was created.
- Jigéen ju baax*: A Wolof term that translates to “good woman,” referring to standards of ideal Senegalese womanhood, including modesty, submissiveness, marriage, and motherhood.
- Mbalax*: A popular music and dance form in Senegal.
- Mouride*: An adherent of the *Muridiyya* (see below).
- Mudra Afrique* (officially *Centre africain de recherche et de perfectionnement de l'interprète*): A dance school in Dakar from 1977–1982, affiliated with

- Maurice Béjart's Mudra school in Brussels. Germaine Acogny directed the school and president Senghor helped sponsor it.
- Muridiyya*: The most prominent Senegalese *tariqa*, or Sufi order, founded by Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbàkke.
- Ndëpp*: An indigenous Wolof psychotherapeutic ritual, most often practiced by Senegal's Lébou community.
- Oscars des vacances*: Popular televised national dance competitions in Senegal.
- Pédé*: A French slur, short for *pédéraste*, meaning gay or queer.
- Rencontres chorégraphiques de l'Afrique et de l'Océan Indien*: Former name for the *Biennale de la danse en Afrique* (see above).
- Sabar*: A Wolof and Serer term that denotes a popular dance, rhythm, type of drum, and the event itself, held in public spaces to celebrate weddings, baptisms, political rallies, sporting events, and more.
- Sañse*: A Wolof term that designates Senegalese women's practice of dressing up for special occasions. Along with *sutura*, *sañse* is a crucial mode of performing respectable femininity in Senegal.
- Sutura*: A Senegalese cultural ethic of discretion, modesty, privacy, and protection. *Sutura* historically applied to honor associated with social caste, but today, the term is predominantly linked to the virtues of gender conventions, and women are disproportionately responsible for upholding this social contract.
- Tannebeer* (or *tanh beer*): A subset of the *sabar*, typically organized and hosted by women and held late at night.
- Teraanga*: A Senegalese cultural ethic and tradition of hospitality and reciprocity.
- Toubaab*: The Wolof word for white person, sometimes used to describe anyone from outside the African continent regardless of skin color.

Notes



Introduction

1. Tobias Warner, *The Tongue-Tied Imagination: Decolonizing Literary Modernity in Senegal* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 208.

2. Hélène Neveu Kringelbach, “Choreographic Performance, Generations and the Art of Life in Post-Colonial Dakar,” *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute* 84, no. 1 (2014): 38.

3. Fatou Sow, “Gender Parity in Politics and Women’s Movements in Senegal” (Women Living under Muslim Laws WELLD-WLUML Leadership Workshop, Cairo, 2013); Marianne Tøraasen, “Gender Parity and the Symbolic Representation of Women in Senegal,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 57, no. 3 (2019): 459–81.

4. Kwame Edwin Otu, *Amphibious Subjects: Sasso and the Contested Politics of Queer Self-Making in Neoliberal Ghana* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 16.

5. Otu, *Amphibious Subjects*, 18.

6. My argument builds on studies that assert the necessity of queer legibility in Africa, such as Gibson Ncube’s *Queer Bodies in African Films* (2022). Ncube suggests that queer bodies in African films are texts that can be read and thus inscribe queer lived realities with legibility, serving “towards the normalisation of queer bodies” (64). My study offers opacity as another facet of queer embodiment in African cultural forms. While queer legibility is vital in some African contexts, opacity may be necessary in others. See Gibson Ncube, *Queer Bodies in African Films* (Makhanda, South Africa: NISC (Pty) Ltd, 2022).

7. Marshall and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968); Katrina Hazzard-Donald, *Jookin’: The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport, CT: Greenwood

Press, 1996); Jacqui Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues: The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Thomas DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, eds., *Black Performance Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

8. Tsitsi Ella Jaji, *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music, and Pan-African Solidarity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

9. This book is particularly indebted to H el ene Neveu Kringselbach's *Dance Circles: Movement, Morality, and Self-Fashioning in Urban Senegal* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013). Neveu Kringselbach brings together a breadth of dance practices across social and concert dance settings to examine how dance plays a role in Senegalese peoples' constructions of self, their gendered moralities, and social hierarchies. S orgel's *Contemporary African Dance Theatre: Phenomenology, Whiteness, and the Gaze* (2020) focuses on how contemporary performances by African artists on European stages lead audience members into processes of un-suturing whiteness, while Cole's *Performance and the Afterlives of Injustice* (2020) interrogates aesthetic strategies for expressing and representing violence by South African contemporary performers. Both books offer invaluable findings about how contemporary African artists confront, challenge, and subvert their racialization on global stages in the afterlives of colonialism and/or apartheid. Other examples of full-length books devoted fully or in part to contemporary African dance include Adrienne C. Sichel, *Body Politics: Finger Printing South African Contemporary Dance* (Gauteng, South Africa: Porcupine Press, 2018); Ketu H. Katrak, *Jay Pather: Performance and Spatial Politics in South Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021); Ananya Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance: South-South Choreographies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

10. April Sizemore-Barber, *Prismatic Performances: Queer South Africa and the Fragmentation of the Rainbow Nation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 17. Other examples of recent queer African studies publications with a focus on embodiment include Xavier Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies: Remastering Space and Subjectivity in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2020) and Gibson Ncube (2022).

11.  douard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 190.

12.  douard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 133.

13. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 133.

14. David A. B. Murray, *Opacity: Gender, Sexuality, Race, and the "Problem" of Identity in Martinique* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 15.

15. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 133. Emphasis in original.

16. Stanley, Eric A., "Anti-Trans Optics: Recognition, Opacity, and the Image of Force," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no. 3 (2017): 618. See also Murray, *Opacity*; Nehal El-Hadi, "Ensemble: An Interview with Dr. Fred Moten," *MICE Magazine*, 2018, <https://micemagazine.ca/issue-four/ensemble-interview-dr-fred-moten>; Thea Quiray Tagle, "Becoming Abstract Together: Opacity's Ethical

Intervention,” *American Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (2020): 993–1010; Christina A. León, “Forms of Opacity: Roaches, Blood, and Being Stuck in Xandra Ibarra’s Corpus,” *ASAP Journal* 2, no. 2 (2017): 369–94; Zach Blas, “Opacities: An Introduction,” *Camera Obscura* 31, no. 2 (2016): 149–53; Sampada Aranke, “Material Matters: Black Radical Aesthetics and the Limits of Visibility,” *e-flux Journal* 79 (2017), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/79/94433/material-matters-black-radical-aesthetics-and-the-limits-of-visibility/>.

17. Blas, “Opacities,” 150.

18. Blas, “Opacities,” 149.

19. Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance*, 12.

20. Keguro Macharia, “On Being Area-Studied: A Litany of Complaint,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 22, no. 2 (2016): 188.

21. SanSan Kwan, “When Is Contemporary Dance?” *Dance Research Journal* 49, no. 3 (December 2017): 38–52; Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance*; Ramsay Burt, *Ungoverning Dance: Contemporary European Theater Dance and the Commons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

22. Fatou Cissé, interview with the author, April 12, 2016. When quoting my research collaborators, I include the original French language used during the interview, followed by my English translation, in order to accurately represent their words while reaching an English-language readership.

23. Andréya Ouamba, interview with the author, September 30, 2016.

24. For more detailed studies of American postmodern and European contemporary dance, see Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987); Cynthia Jean Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Rebecca Chaleff, “Activating Whiteness: Racializing the Ordinary in US American Postmodern Dance,” *Dance Research Journal* 50, no. 3 (2018): 71–84; Noémie Solomon, *Danse: An Anthology* (Dijon: Les Presses du Reel, 2014); Rudi Laermans, *Moving Together: Theorizing and Making Contemporary Dance* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015); Burt, *Ungoverning Dance*.

25. Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles*, 35–43; Joshua Cohen, “Stages in Transition: Les Ballets Africains and Independence, 1959–1960,” *Journal of Black Studies* 43, no. 1 (January 2012): 11–48.

26. Francesca Castaldi, *Choreographies of African Identities: Négritude, Dance, and the National Ballet of Senegal* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 76.

27. Castaldi, *Choreographies of African Identities*, 80.

28. Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles*; Ayo A. Coly, *Postcolonial Hauntologies: African Women’s Discourses of the Female Body* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019).

29. Alicia Seybiya Gomis, interview with the author, December 5, 2016.

30. Kwan, “When Is Contemporary Dance?” 45.

31. Emily Coates, “Portfolio: Reggie Wilson and Andréya Ouamba in Rehearsal,” *Theater* 40, no. 1 (February 2010): 89.

32. Raouf Tchakondo, interview with the author, May 12, 2016.

33. Nanie Oliva Randrianasolo, interview with the author, May 26, 2016.
34. Sörgel, *Contemporary African Dance Theatre*, 3.
35. For more detailed accounts of how African artists debate and define (African) contemporary dance, see Alphonse Tiérou, *Si sa danse bouge, l'Afrique bougera* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2001); Miranda Young-Jahangeer, ed., *African Contemporary Dance? Questioning Issues of a Performance Aesthetics for a Developing and Independent Continent: Proceedings of the 7th JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Conference* (KwaZulu-Natal: University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2004); Salia Sanou, *Afrique danse contemporaine* (Paris: Édition Cercle d'Art, 2008).
36. Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance*, 20.
37. Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance*, 20.
38. Castaldi, *Choreographies of African Identities*; Kelly Michelle Askew, *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles*.
39. Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance*; Jacqueline Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Priya Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012).
40. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds., *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 21.
41. Lionnet and Shih, *Minor Transnationalism*, 21.
42. Building on Arif Dirlik's call to resituate terms such as Global South and Third World, Chatterjea proposes the South–South framework as a more nuanced model for interrogating power. The South–South framework departs from a geospatial paradigm and recognizes how “interlocking oppressive hierarchies” affect different communities across the globe in different ways while creating grounds for solidarity. Alterity is a central principle of the South–South framework; there is no singular approach to dance-making across South–South choreographies. Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance*, 24; Arif Dirlik, “Global South: Predicament and Promise,” *The Global South* 1, no. 1 (2007): 12–23.
43. Jean-Loup Amselle, “L'art de la friche. French Artistic Networks in Africa,” trans. Richard George Elliott, *Art in Translation* 10, no. 3 (2018): 327.
44. Cole, *Performance and the Afterlives of Injustice*, 26.
45. Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009); Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Ella Tsitsi Jaji, *Africa in Stereo*; Tejumola Olaniyan, *Arrest the Music! Fela and His Rebel Art and Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Nadine George-Graves, “Diasporic Spidering: Constructing Contemporary Black Identities,” in *Black Performance Theory*, ed. Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 33–44.
46. The term *griot* is used widely in West Africa to refer to a caste of profes-

sional storytellers, musicians, and other types of performers. In Senegal, the Wolof term *gëwël* is used more often. Gëwël, along with artisans, belong to the subordinate *ñeeño* caste, whereas the upper caste, termed *gээр*, is made up of nobles, or non-artisans. For more on caste in Senegal, see Abdoulaye-Bara Diop, *La société wolof: tradition et changement. Les systèmes d'inégalité et de domination*. (Paris: Karthala, 1981).

47. Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles*; Elizabeth Harney, *In Senghor's Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960–1995* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

48. For readers interested in the interrelatedness of caste and dance or music, see Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles*; Patricia Tang, *Masters of the Sabar: Wolof Griot Percussionists of Senegal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007).

49. Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 17.

50. See Susan Manning, “Dance History,” in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Dance Studies*, ed. Sherril Dodds (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2019), 303–26.

51. My approach to studying dance’s politics of representation alongside its material conditions is influenced by recent publications in dance studies, such as Arabella Stanger, *Dancing on Violent Ground: Utopia as Dispossession in Euro-American Theater Dance* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2021), 14.

52. Babacar M’Baye, “The Origins of Senegalese Homophobia: Discourses on Homosexuals and Transgender People in Colonial and Postcolonial Senegal,” *African Studies Review* 56, no. 2 (September 2013): 121–22; and see Mouhamadou Tidiane Kassé, “Mounting Homophobic Violence in Senegal,” in *Queer African Reader*, ed. Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas (Dakar, Nairobi, and Oxford: Pambazuka Press, 2013), 263.

53. Ayo Coly, “The Invention of the Homosexual: The Politics of Homophobia in Senegal,” in *Gender and Sexuality in Senegalese Societies: Critical Perspectives and Methods*, ed. Babacar M’Baye and Besi Brilliant Muhonja (London: Lexington Books, 2019), 30.

54. Coly, “The Invention of the Homosexual,” 28–29.

55. Codou Bop, “Senegal: Homophobia and Islamic Political Manipulation,” Working Papers (Sexuality Policy Watch, 2014), 3.

56. See Alessandra Prentice, “Senegal Rejects Bid to Toughen Strict Anti-LGBT Law,” *Reuters*, January 6, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/senegal-rejects-bid-toughen-strict-anti-lgbt-law-2022-01-05/>; Mohamed Mbougar Sarr, “Qui a Brûlé Le Cadavre de C.F.?” *Senepius*, November 2, 2023, <https://www.senepius.com/opinions/qui-brule-le-cadavre-de-cf>.

57. Sylvia Tamale, “Confronting the Politics of Nonconforming Sexualities in Africa,” *African Studies Review* 56, no. 2 (September 2013): 31–45.

58. M’Baye, “The Origins of Senegalese Homophobia,” 113.

59. Ayo A. Coly, “Introduction,” *African Studies Review* 56, no. 2 (September 2013): 21–30.

60. Coly, “The Invention of the Homosexual,” 27.
61. Stella Nyanzi, “Dismantling Reified African Culture through Localised Homosexualities in Uganda,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 15, no. 7/8 (August–September 2013): 954.
62. Collectif Free Sénégal, accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.collectif-free-senegal.org/>.
63. For example, Marc Epprecht (2008) suggests that queer theory, and even the use of the term *queer*, should not be applied to studies of African sexualities because of the gap between queer theory and African sexualities in practice. Conversely, Keguro Macharia (2020), asks “what an encounter between something called *queer* and something named *Africa* might generate.” Rather than dismissing queer theory in Africa altogether, Macharia (2015) suggests that queer African studies center “Africa-based archives and methods, African thinkers and artists, African geo-histories and fractures.” Marc Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa? The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008); Keguro Macharia, “Belated: Interruption,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 26, no. 3 (June 2020): 561; Keguro Macharia, “Archive and Method in Queer African Studies,” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 29, no. 1 (2015): 145.
64. I am particularly inspired by recent book-length studies and edited volumes: Coly, *Postcolonial Hauntologies*; Sizemore-Barber, *Prismatic Performances*; Serena Owusua Dankwa, *Knowing Women: Same-Sex Intimacy, Gender, and Identity in Postcolonial Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Otu, *Amphibious Subjects*; B. Camminga and John Marnell, eds., *Queer and Trans African Mobilities* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2022); Ncube, *Queer Bodies in African Films*.
65. Ayo A. Coly, “Carmen Goes Postcolonial, Carmen Goes Queer: Thinking the Postcolonial as Queer,” *Culture, Theory and Critique* 57, no. 3 (2016): 405.
66. Zethu Matebeni, Surya Monro, and Vasu Reddy, eds., *Queer in Africa: LGBTQI Identities, Citizenship, and Activism* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2018), 1.
67. Sokari Ekiné and Hakima Abbas, eds., *Queer African Reader* (Dakar, Senegal: Pambazuka Press, 2013), 3.
68. Camminga and Marnell, *Queer and Trans African Mobilities*, 5; quoting Stella Nyanzi, “Queering Queer Africa,” in *Reclaiming Afrikan: Queer Perspectives on Sexual and Gender Identities*, ed. Zethu Matabeni (Cape Town: Modjadji Books, 2014), 65–68.
69. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.
70. Ncube, *Queer Bodies in African Films*, 10.
71. Several key texts in the field of Black queer studies elaborate the intersections of gender, sexuality, and race in the United States. E. Patrick Johnson’s edited volume *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies* (2016) moves beyond U.S. borders but retains the U.S. as the primary point of reference, theorizing “black queer subjectivity not separate from, but in relation to U.S. blackness and queer-

ness.” E. Patrick Johnson, ed., *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 3.

72. Macharia, “On Being Area-Studied: A Litany of Complaint,” 185.

73. M’Baye and Muhonja, *Gender and Sexuality in Senegalese Societies*, 5.

74. Margaret Thompson Drewal, “The State of Research on Performance in Africa,” *African Studies Review* 34, no. 3 (December 1991): 34.

75. After hearing about Collectif Free, a shelter for estranged LGBTQ+ individuals, I contacted the founder, Souleymane Diagne (pseudonym), which led to our ongoing correspondence. When I returned to Senegal in 2022, I made multiple trips to the shelter and developed relationships with staff and residents there.

76. D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 20.

77. Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 3.

78. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Faye V. Harrison, ed., *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation*, 2nd ed. (Arlington: American Anthropological Association, 1997); Dwight Conquergood, “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 145–56; D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography*.

79. Madison, *Critical Ethnography*; Conquergood, “Performance Studies,” 149.

Chapter 1

1. Kwame Edwin Otu, *Amphibious Subjects: Sasso and the Contested Politics of Queer Self-Making in Neoliberal Ghana* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 16.

2. James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Nicolas Van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979–1999* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

3. Ananya Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance: South-South Choreographies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 24.

4. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds., *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 7.

5. Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009), 1.

6. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 14.

7. Achille Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 211, 214.

8. Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 215.

9. The Rencontres chorégraphiques has undergone two name changes: in 2006, it became Danse l’Afrique danse !, and in 2020 was renamed the Biennale de la danse en Afrique.

10. Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 80.
11. Brian Valente-Quinn, *Senegalese Stagecraft: Decolonizing Theater-Making in Francophone Africa* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2021), 41.
12. Altaïr Despres, *Se faire contemporain: les danseurs africains à l'épreuve de la mondialisation culturelle* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2016), 24.
13. Valente-Quinn, *Senegalese Stagecraft*, 68; Despres, *Se faire contemporain*, 24.
14. Despres, *Se faire contemporain*, 32.
15. Jean-Loup Amselle, "L'art de la friche. French Artistic Networks in Africa," trans. Richard George Elliott, *Art in Translation* 10, no. 3 (July 2018): 319.
16. Valente-Quinn, *Senegalese Stagecraft*, 44; Despres, *Se faire contemporain*, 33.
17. Centre culturel français de Dakar, "Rapport d'activités mai-juin-juillet 1980 et de fin d'année," 1980, Ministère de la Coopération, MCAC Dakar 220, Versement 1959–1989, Fonds 2, Centre des Archives diplomatiques du Nantes, Nantes, France.
18. Centre culturel français Gaston Berger, Saint-Louis, "Rapport semestriel," 1980, Ministère de la Coopération, MCAC Dakar 220, Versement 1959–1989, Fonds 2, Centre des archives diplomatiques du Nantes, Nantes, France.
19. Valente-Quinn, *Senegalese Stagecraft*, 44.
20. "Incendies criminels au Centre culturel français et au ministère des Travaux Publics," *Le Soleil*, January 18, 1971, MCAC Dakar 213, Versement 1959–1989, Fonds 2, Centre des archives diplomatiques du Nantes, Nantes, France.
21. In 2004, the CCF in Dakar was renamed the Institut français de Léopold Sédar Senghor. In 2011, the French Cultural Center merged with Cultures France, formerly the Association Française d'action artistique (AFAA), and became the Institut français, or French Institute. In the same year, the center in Dakar was renamed Institut français. See Hélène Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles: Movement, Morality, and Self-Fashioning in Urban Senegal* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 151, 177.
22. Pierre Chevalier, interview with the author, August 9, 2016.
23. Mamadou Ciré Cissé, interview with the author, September 6, 2016.
24. Abdoulaye Koundoul, interview with the author, September 22, 2016.
25. Jacques Pelletier, "Programme envoyé aux participants des ateliers," January 1990. For a detailed analysis of the 1990 meetings that inaugurated the establishment of Afrique en créations, see Annie Bourdié, "Créations chorégraphiques d'Afrique francophone: Systèmes de représentations et stratégies de reconnaissance en période contemporaine" (PhD diss., Université Paris-Est, 2013), 342–49.
26. Amselle, "L'art de la friche," 327.
27. Nadine Sieveking, "Culture as a Resource for Development? Critical Perspectives from the Field of Contemporary African Dance," in *Self-Reflexive Area Studies*, ed. Matthias Middell (Leipzig: Universität Leipzig, 2013), 249–77. Sieveking observes a similar emphasis on culture as a resource for development in early twenty-first century dance collaborations between Germany and Burkina Faso. This paradigm reflects the objectives of organizations including UNESCO, the World Bank, and the European Union, all of which emphasize a "supposedly essential and effective link between culture and development" (256).

28. Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles*, 151.
29. Bourdié, “Créations chorégraphiques d’Afrique francophone,” 348.
30. Despres, *Se faire contemporain*, 38–39.
31. Despres, *Se faire contemporain*, 53. Despres quotes Tiérou from documents of the first Rencontres Chorégraphiques festival in 1995.
32. Despres, *Se faire contemporain*, 54. Despres quotes selection criteria as published in a 1994 edition of *Revue Noire*.
33. Altaïr Despres, “The Emergence of Contemporary Dance in Africa: A History of Danse l’Afrique Danse! Biennale,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 31, no. 3 (December 2016): 338; Despres, *Se faire contemporain*, 54.
34. Cultures France was eventually consolidated with the French Institute.
35. Despres, “The Emergence of Contemporary Dance in Africa,” 341.
36. Sieveking, “Culture as a Resource for Development?,” 263; Despres, “The Emergence of Contemporary Dance in Africa,” 4; Adrienne C. Sichel, *Body Politics: Finger Printing South African Contemporary Dance* (Gauteng: Porcupine Press, 2018); Ketu H. Katrak, *Jay Pather: Performance and Spatial Politics in South Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021).
37. Funding for these projects was supplemented by organizations in other European and North American countries as well, including the Netherlands, the United States, Spain, and Belgium.
38. This was part of a larger pattern in the French contemporary art world, following an impasse due in part to the self-referential character of contemporary art, which inevitably “dries up.” The solution for some artists was to look to “exotic artistic forms,” particularly African, as a way of regenerating their art. Amselle, “L’art de La Friche,” 311, 321.
39. Despres, “The Emergence of Contemporary Dance in Africa,” 336.
40. Despres, “The Emergence of Contemporary Dance in Africa,” 337.
41. Sanou and Boro were specifically supported by Michel Chialvo, administrator of the Centre chorégraphique national de Montpellier. Chialvo invested in their company and helped manage and support the development of the CDC La Termitière, with additional support from the CCF of Ouagadougou. Despres, *Se faire contemporain*, 44–51.
42. In addition to Sanou and Boro, Irène Tassembédo is another pioneering figure of contemporary dance in Burkina Faso. Tassembédo studied at Mudra Afrique before establishing the National Ballet of Burkina Faso in 1998 and creating the École de Danse Irène Tassembédo (EDIT) in 2009. For more on Tassembédo, see Nadine Sieveking and Sarah Andrieu, “The Evolution of Professional Contemporary Dance in Burkina Faso,” *Critical African Studies* 11, no. 1 (September 2019): 63–86.
43. Olu Oguibe, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).
44. Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles*, 152.
45. Bourdié, “Créations chorégraphiques d’Afrique francophone,” 401.
46. Despres, “The Emergence of Contemporary Dance in Africa,” 338.
47. Oguibe, *The Culture Game*, xiii.

48. Oguibe, *The Culture Game*, xiv.
49. Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance*, 20.
50. Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), 30.
51. Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 32.
52. Hershini Bhana Young, *Illegible Will: Coercive Spectacles of Labor in South Africa and the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 145.
53. Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 55. Huggan quotes Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 69–70.
54. Nuttall, *Entanglement*, 6; Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).
55. Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 80.
56. Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 78–79.
57. Sieveking and Andrieu, “The Evolution of Professional Contemporary Dance in Burkina Faso,” 15.
58. The artistic committee for the eleventh edition of the Biennale included Taoufiq Izeddiou (Morocco; artistic director), Salia Sanou (Burkina Faso), Faustine Linyekula/Virginie Dupray (Democratic Republic of Congo), Hafiz Dhaou (Tunisia), Qudus Onikeku (Nigeria), Quito Tembe (Mozambique), and Nedjma Hadj Benchelabi (Algeria; coordination).
59. Germaine Acogny et al., “Danse contemporaine, parcours de vie” (Roundtable discussion, French Institute of Burkina Faso, November 30, 2016).
60. Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance*, 13.
61. Anaïs Heluin, “Festival d’Avignon—Danse africaine : Retour aux racines,” *Le Point Afrique*, accessed August 30, 2017, http://afrique.lepoint.fr/culture/festival-d-avignon-danse-africaine-retour-aux-racines-17-07-2017-2143814_2256.php.
62. Mark Franko, “Period Plots, Canonical Stages, and Post-Metanarrative in American Modern Dance,” in *The Returns of Alwin Nikolais: Bodies, Boundaries, and the Dance Canon*, ed. Claudia Gitelman and Randy Martin (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 171.
63. “Programme: Danse l’Afrique Danse! Triennale—Semaine Professionnelle du 26 au 30 Novembre 2016, 10e édition,” Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, November 26–30, 2016.
64. Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 98 (emphasis in original).
65. Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 210.
66. Lionnet and Shih, *Minor Transnationalism*, 19.
67. Serge Aimé Coulibaly, interview with the author, December 3, 2016.
68. Coulibaly, interview with the author, December 3, 2016.
69. Serge Aimé Coulibaly et al., “Création contemporaine et echos du monde” (French Institute of Burkina Faso, November 28, 2016).
70. L’Observateur du Maroc et d’Afrique, “Hmadcha de Taoufiq Izeddiou. La spiritualité hors de religieux,” posted December 8, 2021, YouTube video, 10:12, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SB8q_QEtkc.

71. “Biennale de la danse en Afrique: Marrakech 2021,” Festival program, Marrakech, Morocco, November 22–27, 2021 (my translation from the French).
72. Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 210.
73. Funmi Adewole et al., “African Dance and the Imagined Future” (Zoom forum, Afropolis.org, November 24, 2021).
74. Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 80.

Chapter 2

1. Ousmane Noël Cissé, interview with the author, September 23, 2016.
2. Ousmane Noël Cissé, interview with the author, June 25, 2018.
3. To date, Mudra Afrique has received significantly more scholarly attention than the Manhattan Dance Center. See Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles: Movement, Morality, and Self-Fashioning in Urban Senegal*; Neveu Kringelbach, “Choreographic Performance, Generations and the Art of Life in Post-Colonial Dakar”; Annie Bourdié, “Moderniser’ la danse en Afrique. Les enjeux politiques du centre Mudra à Dakar,” *Recherches en danse* 4 (2015): 1–18; Susan Leigh Foster, “Muscle/Memories: How Germaine Acogny and Diane McIntyre Put Their Feet Down,” in *Rhythms of the Afro-Atlantic World: Rituals and Remembrances*, ed. Mamadou Diouf and Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 121–35.
4. Achille Mbembe, “SPRC In Conversation with Achille Mbembe,” University College London, Sarah Parker Remond Centre. Recorded on June 17, 2020, <https://soundcloud.com/ucl-arts-social-science/sprc-in-conversation-with-achille-mbembe>. Donna V. Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy: Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *African Art as Philosophy: Senghor, Bergson, and the Idea of Négritude* (London: Seagull Books, 2011); Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Négritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Négritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).
5. Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 161.
6. Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 4.
7. Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 196.
8. Wilder, *Freedom Time*, 11.
9. Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Liberté 1: Négritude et humanisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), 9. My translation.
10. Precedents of Black internationalism can be found in texts that would become central to elaborating Négritude, including Jane Nardal’s essay, “Internationalisme noir,” published in the founding issue of *Le dépêche africaine* in 1928. Monique Bedasse et al., “AHR Conversation: Black Internationalism,” *American Historical Review* 125, no. 5 (2020): 1732.
11. Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*.

12. Wilder, *Freedom Time*, 59.
13. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée Noir," in *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et Malgache de langue française*, by Léopold Sédar Senghor (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948); Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "In Praise of the Post-Racial: Negritude Beyond Negritude," *Third Text* 24, no. 2 (2010): 243.
14. Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles*, 37–38.
15. Francesca Castaldi, *Choreographies of African Identities: Négritude, Dance, and the National Ballet of Senegal* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).
16. Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles*, 42–43.
17. Tsitsi Ella Jaji, *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music, and Pan-African Solidarity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 106. Jaji quotes William Greaves, "The First World Festival of Negro Arts: An Afro-American View," in *Crisis Magazine* 73, no. 6 (June–July 1966), 312.
18. For a detailed analysis of Dunham's role in 1960s Senegal, see Joanna Dee Das, *Katherine Dunham: Dance and the African Diaspora* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 164–71.
19. Jaji, *Africa in Stereo*, 99.
20. Elizabeth Harney, *In Senghor's Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960–1995* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 78.
21. Andrew Apter, "Beyond Négritude: Black Cultural Citizenship and the Arab Question in FESTAC 77," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (September 2016): 313–26; Wole Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988); Abiola Irele, *The Negritude Moment: Explorations in Francophone African and Caribbean Literature and Thought* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2011).
22. Harney, *In Senghor's Shadow*, 53.
23. Bourdié, "Moderniser' la danse en Afrique."
24. Bourdié, "Moderniser' la danse en Afrique," 4.
25. I witnessed this demonstration in various master classes and public discussions with Acogny, and it is captured in the documentary film, *Movement (R)evolution Africa: A Story of an Art Form in Four Acts*, directed by Joan Frosch and Alla Kovgan (2008).
26. Frédéric Grah Mel, "Rencontre avec Germaine Acogny: Faire revoir aux africains leurs propres cultures," *Fraternité Matin*, June 23, 1981.
27. Germaine Acogny, *Danse Africaine/Afrikanischer Tanz/African Dance* (Dakar: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1980), 23.
28. Booker Washington Sadj, "Triomphe de la symbiose des cultures à Sorano avec Germaine Acogny," *Le Soleil*, June 6, 1974, Le Soleil Archives.
29. Sadj, "Triomphe de la symbiose des cultures."
30. Germaine Acogny, interview with the author, July 6, 2018; Dominique Genevois, *Mudra, 103 Rue Bara: L'École de Maurice Béjart, 1970–1988* (Brussels: Contredanse, 2016), 352.
31. Gaston Berger's grandmother was a *signare*, a creole descendant of a Portuguese settler and Wolof woman. Bourdié, "Moderniser' La danse en Afrique." 3.

32. Lucien Pagni, “Avant sa prochaine tournée en Afrique: Rencontre avec Maurice Béjart et ses danseurs noirs,” *Courrier de l’Association*, August 1973, Archives Nationale du Sénégal; Genevois, *Mudra*, 103 Rue Bara.

33. Other candidates for the second Mudra school included Togo, Morocco, and Ivory Coast. Bourdié, “Moderniser’ la danse en Afrique,” 5.

34. Genevois, *Mudra*, 103 Rue Bara, 352.

35. Bourdié, “Moderniser’ la danse en Afrique,” 9.

36. Personal correspondence with Aïssatou Bangoura, 2023.

37. Acogny, *Danse africaine/Afrikanischer Tanz/African Dance*, 23.

38. Mé, “Rencontre avec Germaine Acogny.”

39. Aïssatou Bangoura, interview with the author, September 22, 2016.

40. Léopold Sédar Senghor, “Exprimer dans un rythme nègre les idées-sentiments de l’homo-Nigériensis,” *Le Soleil*, November 23, 1977, Le Soleil Archives.

41. Instructors included renowned Senegalese artists Doudou Ndiaye Rose (percussion) and Julien Jouga (singing), as well as former dancers with the Ballet du XXe siècle Alain Louafi (France/Algeria), Jorge Lefebvre (Cuba), and Raymond Phillips (Trinidad) who taught ballet and the Martha Graham technique. Acogny was the only female instructor. Genevois, *Mudra*, 103 Rue Bara, 351–54.

42. “Mudra-Afrique: A ‘Cuillère sale’ de Birago Diop sur scène en avril prochain,” *Le Soleil*, November 7, 1978, Le Soleil Archives.

43. Bourdié, “Moderniser’ la danse en Afrique,” 3.

44. For a more detailed discussion of the Acogny Technique, see my writing elsewhere: Amy Swanson, “Codifying African Dance: The Germaine Acogny Technique and Antinomies of Postcolonial Cultural Production,” *Critical African Studies* 11, no. 1 (2019): 48–62. Also see chapter four of Ananya Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance: South-South Choreographies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); and Susan Leigh Foster, “Muscle/Memories.”

45. Foster, “Muscle/Memories,” 125.

46. Foster, “Muscle/Memories,” 125.

47. Neveu Kringelbach, “Choreographic Performance, Generations and the Art of Life in Post-Colonial Dakar,” 41.

48. Ousmane Noël Cissé, interview with the author, September 23, 2016.

49. Ousmane Noël Cissé, interview with the author, June 25, 2018.

50. Ousmane Noël Cissé, interview with the author, June 25, 2018.

51. Ousmane Noël Cissé, interview with the author, June 25, 2018.

52. Kringelbach, “Choreographic Performance, Generations and the Art of Life in Post-Colonial Dakar,” 42.

53. Cissé would eventually be recognized by each of Senegal’s first four presidents. Most recently, former president Macky Sall awarded him the Ordre national du lion, Senegal’s highest distinction, in 2018.

54. Jean Tamba, interview with the author, September 26, 2022.

55. Fatou Cissé, interview with the author, October 2, 2016.

56. Ousmane Noël Cissé, interview with the author, September 23, 2016.

57. Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.
58. Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism*, 1.
59. Felwine Sarr, *Afrotopia*, trans. Drew S. Burk and Sarah Jones-Boardman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 14.
60. Sarr, *Afrotopia*, 14.
61. Sylvester Ogbechie, "The Perils of Unilateral Power: Neomodernist Metaphors and the New Global Order," in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, ed. Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee, and Terry Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 183.
62. See for example José L. Reynoso, "Choreographing Modern Mexico: Anna Pavlova in Mexico City (1919)," *Modernist Cultures* 9, no. 1 (2014): 80–98.
63. Harney, *In Senghor's Shadow*, 105–15.
64. Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 22.
65. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 20–21.
66. Wilder, *Freedom Time*, 10–11.
67. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa* (London: Routledge, 2012), 13.
68. Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory from the South*, 12.
69. Ayo A. Coly, Omofolabo Ajayi, and others elaborate the gendered dimensions of anti-colonialist and nationalist thought. Women were positioned as reproducers and guardians of national culture while men were considered natural spokespersons with the agency to effect change. These kinds of gendered distinctions showed up in neotraditional dance, particularly through gendered groupings of dancers, exclusively male drummers, and heterosexual couplings. For example, Francesca Castaldi notes the heteronormative choreography of *Pangols*, a legendary work of the National Ballet of Senegal. Ayo A. Coly, *The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood: Gender and Migration in Francophone African Literature* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010); Omofolabo Ajayi, "Negritude, Feminism, and the Quest for Identity: Re-Reading Mariama Ba's 'So Long a Letter,'" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 1997): 35–52; Castaldi, *Choreographies of African Identities*, 23–25.
70. Fatou Sow, "Fundamentalisms, Globalisation and Women's Human Rights in Senegal," *Gender and Development* 11, no. 1 (2003): 69–76.
71. Oumar Kane and Hawa Kane, "The Origins of the Feminist Movement in Senegal: A Social History of the Pioneering Yewwu-Yewwi," *African Sociological Review/Revue Africaine de Sociologie* 22, no. 1 (2018): 20.
72. Kane and Kane, "The Origins of the Feminist Movement in Senegal."
73. "Samedi prochain: 'Mudra Afrique' à Iba Mar Diop," *Le Soleil*, October 5, 1979, Le Soleil Archives.
74. Gudie Lawaetz, "Spectacle: Le phénomène Mudra," *Le Soleil*, October 15, 1979, Le Soleil Archives.

75. Djib Diedhiou, “Ce soir à Sorano: Mudra Afrique crée ‘La cuillère sale,’” *Le Soleil*, June 1, 1979, Le Soleil Archives; Papa Sedikh Mbodj, “Mudra Afrique à Iba Mar Diop: Un test réussi,” *Le Soleil*, October 10, 1979, Le Soleil Archives; Genevois, *Mudra*, 103 *Rue Bara*, 355; Gudie Lawaetz, dir. *Mudra-Afrique*. London and Detroit: Associated Film Production and WTVS, 1980; Mel, “Rencontre Avec Germaine Acogny.”

76. The Acogny Technique is comprised of movement sequences named after flora and fauna. The *baobab fou* references the deep roots of the baobab tree and the lightness of its leaves and fruit.

77. Susan Leigh Foster, “The Ballerina’s Phallic Pointe,” in *Corporealities: Dancing, Knowledge, Culture, and Power*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (London: Routledge, 1996), 1–24.

78. Germaine Acogny, interview with the author, July 6, 2018.

79. Acogny, interview with the author, July 6, 2018.

80. Susan Leigh Foster, “Closets Full of Dances: Modern Dance’s Performance of Masculinity and Sexuality,” in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 149.

81. Foster, “Closets Full of Dances,” 150.

82. Foster, “Closets Full of Dances,” 149.

83. Diedhiou, “Ce Soir à Sorano.”

84. Yves Alavo, “Une révolution de la chorégraphie négro-africaine,” *Le Soleil*, May 4, 1978, Le Soleil Archives.

85. Alavo, “Une révolution de la chorégraphie négro-africaine.”

86. Jean Pires, “Spectacle de danse au C.C. Français: Rhythm et gestuelle au rendez-vous,” *Le Soleil*, February 23, 1983. Ministère des affaires étrangères, Dakar Service de Press. Centre des Archives diplomatiques du Nantes, Nantes, France.

87. Anna Diallo, “Germaine Acogny au centre culturel français: Du rythme . . . et encore du rythme,” *Le Soleil*, May 31, 1976, MCAM Dakar 214, Versement 1959–1989 Fonds 2, Centre des Archives diplomatiques du Nantes; Pires, “Spectacle de Danse Au C.C. Français.”

88. Ousmane Noël Cissé, interview with the author, June 25, 2018.

89. Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 22–23.

90. Penny Farfan, *Performing Queer Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 42.

91. Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 33.

92. Susan Manning, “Choreographing the Classics, Performing Sexual Dissidence,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Greek Drama in the Americas*, ed. Kathryn Boshier, Fiona Macintosh, Justine McConnell, and Patrice Rankine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 8; Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes*, 373.

93. Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 13, 28.

94. Pires, “Spectacle de danse au C.C. Français”; Diallo, “Germaine Acogny Au Centre Culturel Français”; Alavo, “Une Révolution de La Chorégraphie Négro-Africaine”; Mbodj, “Mudra Afrique à Iba Mar Diop.”

95. Centre culturel français de Dakar, “Note d’Information sur le Centre culturel français de Dakar,” January 1982, Ministère de la Coopération, MCAC Dakar 220, Versement 1959–1989, Fonds 2, Centre des archives diplomatiques du Nantes.

Chapter 3

1. Salia Sanou, *Afrique danse contemporaine* (Paris: Édition Cercle d’Art, 2008), 28.

2. Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 24.

3. Clare Croft, ed., *Queer Dance: Meanings and Makings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 26.

4. Sanou, *Afrique danse contemporaine*, 28.

5. Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith, eds., *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 3.

6. Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), x.

7. Victoria Fortuna, *Moving Otherwise: Dance, Violence, and Memory in Buenos Aires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 4.

8. Ayo A. Coly, “Carmen Goes Postcolonial, Carmen Goes Queer: Thinking the Postcolonial as Queer,” *Culture, Theory and Critique* 57, no. 3 (September 2016): 391.

9. Croft, *Queer Dance*, 9.

10. Kemi Adeyemi, Kareem Khubchandani, Ramón H. Rivera-Servera, eds., *Queer Nightlife* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021); Kareem Khubchandani, *Ishtyle: Accenting Gay Indian Nightlife* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020); Kemi Adeyemi, *Feels Right: Black Queer Women and the Politics of Partying in Chicago* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022); Xavier Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies: Remastering Space and Subjectivity in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

11. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 130

12. Happiness Peter Kulwa Majige, interview with the author, June 8, 2016.

13. Helmut Vogt, “Story of École Des Sables” (Presentation, Toubab Dialaw, March 9, 2016).

14. Agnès Kraïdy, “Danses contemporaines africaines: Germaine Acogny: Non aux carcans,” *Franternité Matin*, August 2, 1997, Le Soleil Archives.

15. Helmut Vogt, interview with the author, September 14, 2016.

16. My use of “international” follows the use of the term by École des Sables administrators to describe workshops open to non-African participants. I do not wish to imply that workshops for exclusively African dancers from any African country are not international.

17. Vogt explained that grants from the French Institute of Paris that once amounted to €30,000–\$40,000 were reduced to €10,000 or less.

18. Vogt, interview with the author, September 14, 2016.
19. Patrick Acogny's appointment to director of École des Sables followed his extensive career as a professional dancer in Irène Tassebédou's company Ebène, as director of Kokuma Dance Theatre in the United Kingdom, and as an instructor at École des Sables and at the Academy of Theatre and Dance in Amsterdam.
20. Nanie Oliva Randrianasolo, interview with the author, May 26, 2016.
21. Carmelita Siwa, interview with the author, May 19, 2016. Still others described their studies at École des Sables and the Acogny Technique specifically as something that "nous ramène toujours à l'Afrique" (always brings us back to Africa), and as a mode of affiliation for Black Africans. Kadidja Tiemanta, interview with the author, May 20, 2016, and Cheikh (pseudonym), interview with the author, May 26, 2016.
22. Patrick Acogny, interview with author, July 5, 2016.
23. Tejumola Olaniyan, *Arrest the Music! Fela and His Rebel Art and Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Evan Mwangi, *Translation in African Contexts: Postcolonial Texts, Queer Sexuality, and Cosmopolitan Fluency* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2017).
24. Olaniyan, *Arrest the Music!*, 164.
25. Mwangi, *Translation in African Contexts*, 158.
26. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa* (London: Routledge, 2012), 6.
27. Ananya Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance: South-South Choreographies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 144.
28. The first edition in 2015 focused on dance technique and performance. The second edition in 2016, which I observed, focused on both performance and choreographic tools, and the third edition in 2017 focused more intensely on choreography.
29. Patrick Acogny, *Contemporary African Dance Deconstructed* (Amsterdam: The Bachelor of Dance in Education of the Academy of Theatre and Dance, 2022), 16.
30. For a more detailed discussion of Patrick Acogny's teaching, see his 2022 book and supplemental film: Lot Siebe, "Patrick Acogny African Aesthetics and Contemporary Dance: A Practitioners Perspective," posted October 22, 2019, YouTube video, 24:24. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UsxMiHB-Lk>.
31. Patrick Acogny, interview with the author, July 5, 2016.
32. Patrick Acogny, interview with the author, July 5, 2016.
33. Castaldi, *Choreographies of African Identities*, 82; Ayo A. Coly, *Postcolonial Hauntologies: African Women's Discourses of the Female Body* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 70.
34. Patrick Acogny, interview with the author, July 5, 2016.
35. Sophiatou Kossoko, interview with the author, November 20, 2023. Kossoko is a Franco-Beninese choreographer, dancer, and dance teacher who trained in Copenhagen and earned her Master of Arts at the Université Paris VIII.
36. Sophiatou Kossoko, interview with the author, November 20, 2023.
37. Sophiatou Kossoko, interview with the author, November 20, 2023.

38. Agathe Djokam, interview with the author, May 21, 2016. Another dancer exclaimed that, in relation to gender, “ici on ne fait pas la différence” (here we do not make a difference) and that everyone does the same movements and are held to the same standards. Kadidja Tiemanta, interview with the author, May 20, 2016.

39. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 93.

40. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 93.

41. Sylar Robert Ssempijja, interview with the author, May 26, 2016.

42. Ouamba’s recent choreography includes *Sueur des ombres* (*Sweat of Shadows*, 2011), *J’ai arrêté de croire au future* (*I Stopped Believing in the Future*, 2015), *De-quoi sommes nous fait ?!* (*What Are We Made Of?!*, 2018), *Objet sans titre* (*Untitled Object*, 2021), and *Complices : Il pleuvait et nous nous sommes rencontrés* (*Accomplices: It Was Raining and We Met*, 2023).

43. Other invited choreographers have included Opiyo Okach (Kenya/France), Roberto Torres (Spain), Kathleen Hermesdorf (United States), Keith Hennessy (United States/Canada), Olivier Tarpaga (Burkina Faso/United States), Esther Baker-Tarpaga (United States), Mar Gomez (Spain), Seydou Boro (Burkina Faso), and Olivier Dubois (France).

44. Andréya Ouamba, interview with the author, September 30, 2016.

45. Andréya Ouamba, interview with the author, September 30, 2016.

46. Nkala (pseudonym), interview with the author, May 23, 2016.

47. Nadine George-Graves, “Diasporic Spidering: Constructing Contemporary Black Identities,” in *Black Performance Theory*, ed. Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 37.

48. Reggie Wilson, interview with the author, May 18, 2016.

49. Felwine Sarr, *Afrotopia*, trans. Drew S. Burk and Sarah Jones-Boardman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 104; Gracia Clark, “The Permanent Transition in Africa,” *Voices: A Publication of the Association for Feminist Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (2010): 6–9.

50. Caroline Melly, *Bottleneck: Moving, Building & Belonging in an African City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 13–17.

51. Melly, *Bottleneck*, 10.

52. Rosalind Fredericks, *Garbage Citizenship: Vital Infrastructures of Labor in Dakar, Senegal* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 10.

53. In *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces* (2013), SanSan Kwan draws upon her experience of moving through urban space in her analyses of dance works that are in dialogue with those spaces. Without implying that her personal kinesthetic experience represents those of others, she suggests that “the personal-somatic, the sociopolitical, and the aesthetic . . . are mutually informative as well as mutually productive.” SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2, xiii.

54. Jonathon Repinecz, “Senegalese Wrestling Between Nostalgia and Neoliberalism,” *African Studies Review* 63, no. 4 (2020): 906–26; Fatoumata Seck, “Goorlooru, the Neoliberal Homo Senegalensis: Comics and Economics in Postcolonial Senegal,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 30, no. 3 (2018): 263–78.

55. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 102.
56. Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 108.
57. Coly, “Carmen Goes Postcolonial, *Carmen Goes Queer*,” 391.
58. Coly, “Carmen Goes Postcolonial, *Carmen Goes Queer*,” 394.
59. Coly, *Postcolonial Hauntologies*, 71.
60. Jean Tamba, a former student of Ousmane Noël Cissé, was one of the only other choreographers in Dakar working in the vein of contemporary dance, but his “métisse dance” approach differed significantly from that of Ouamba.
61. Ouamba, interview with the author, September 30, 2016.
62. Fatou Cissé, interview with author, October 2, 2016.
63. Amadou Diop (pseudonym), interview with author, June 15, 2016.
64. Mamadou Dieng, interview with author, June 16, 2016.
65. Alphonse Tiérou, *Alphabet de la danse africaine: Méthode Tiérou* (Toulouse: Rolland Éditions, 2014), 101.
66. Tiérou, *Alphabet de la danse africaine*, 101–2.
67. Marshall and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968); Jacqui Malone, *Steppin’ on the Blues: The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Katrina Hazzard-Donald, *Jookin’: The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African American Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990); Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996); Naomi Macalalad Bragin, *Kinethic California: Dancing Funk & Disco Era Kinships* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2024).
68. Thomas F. DeFrantz, “Intermediality and Queer African American Improvisation: Dianne McIntyre, Sounds in Motion,” *Theatre Research International* 46, no. 2 (2021): 122.
69. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 7.
70. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 24; Sarr, *Afrotopia*, 102.
71. Sarr, *Afrotopia*, 102.
72. Croft, *Queer Dance*, 26.
73. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.
74. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1. Emphasis in original.
75. Coly, “Carmen Goes Postcolonial, *Carmen Goes Queer*,” 394.
76. Coly, “Carmen Goes Postcolonial, *Carmen Goes Queer*,” 394.

Chapter 4

1. Clarisse Juompan-Yakam, “Mohamed Mbougar Sarr: ‘Colonisation is a thorn in the side of the colonised,’” *The Africa Report*, December 31, 2021, <https://www.theafricareport.com/162484/mohamed-mbougar-sarr-colonisation-is-a-thorn-in-the-side-of-the-former-colonised/>.
2. The image was posted to multiple websites. See for example: Abdallah

Soidri, “Quand le sac à main d’un chanteur relance l’homophobie d’état au Sénégal,” Marianne, February 10, 2016, <https://www.marianne.net/monde/quand-le-sac-main-dun-chanteur-relance-lhomophobie-detat-au-senegal>.

3. Soidri, “Quand le sac à main d’un chanteur relance l’homophobie d’état au Sénégal.”

4. Elise Colette, “Sénégal : affaire du dessin dans Jeune Afrique—La rédaction s’explique,” JeuneAfrique.Com (blog), January 28, 2016, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/297788/societe/senegal-affaire-dessin-jeune-afrique/>.

5. “Vidéo—Grand Théâtre: Wally Seck déchire son sac à main et présente ses excuses aux Sénégalais,” *Leral Net*, January 31, 2016, http://www.leral.net/Vidéo-Grand-Theatre-Wally-Seck-dechire-son-sac-a-main-et-presente-ses-excuses-aux-Senegalais_a163847.html.

6. Wally Seck Officiel, “Wally Seck sur TV5 Monde dans L’invité,” posted February 8, 2016, YouTube video, 8:02, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mejErAVcS7U>.

7. Wally Seck Officiel, “Wally Seck sur TV5 monde dans L’invité.”

8. Soidri, “Quand le sac à main d’un chanteur relance l’homophobie d’état au Sénégal.”

9. Ivy Mills, “Sutura: Gendered Honor, Social Death, and the Politics of Exposure in Senegalese Literature and Popular Culture,” (PhD Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011), 2–3; Juliana G. Friend, “Don’t Watch This Video! : Online Privacy, Porn, Sutura, and Health among Senegal’s Digital Dissidents,” (PhD Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2022), 1.

10. For more on how sutura functioned in relation to Senegal’s historical social caste system, see Mills, “Sutura.”

11. Mills, “Sutura,” 4.

12. Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 212.

13. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 213.

14. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3.

15. Matt Fournier, “Lines of Flight,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (May 2014): 121.

16. Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books, 1987); Oyèrònké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

17. Babacar M’Baye, “The Origins of Senegalese Homophobia: Discourses on Homosexuals and Transgender People in Colonial and Postcolonial Senegal,” *African Studies Review* 56, no. 2 (September 2013): 109–28; Ayo Coly, “The Invention of the Homosexual: The Politics of Homophobia in Senegal,” in *Gender and Sexuality in Senegalese Societies: Critical Perspectives and Methods* (London: Lexington Books, 2019), 27–51; Christophe Broqua, “Góor-Jigéen: La resignification néga-

tive d'une catégorie entre genre et sexualité (Sénégal)," *Socio* 9 (December 2017): 163–83.

18. Coly, "The Invention of the Homosexual," 34.

19. Coly, "The Invention of the Homosexual," 35.

20. The conflation of indigenous terminology that signals gender fluidity or effeminate men with the Western conception of homosexuality exists in other African contexts as well. For example, Kwame Edwin Otu charts a similar phenomenon in Ghana. Kwame Edwin Otu, *Amphibious Subjects: Sasso and the Contested Politics of Queer Self-Making in Neoliberal Ghana* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 7, 33–34.

21. Coly, "The Invention of the Homosexual," 34.

22. Aminata Cécile Mbaye, "Queer Political Subjectivities in Senegal: Gaining a Voice Within New Religious Landscapes of Belonging," *Critical African Studies* 10, no. 3 (2018), 303; Mills, "Sutura."

23. Mills, "Sutura," 153, 120.

24. Codou Bop, "Senegal: Homophobia and Islamic Political Manipulation," Working Papers (Sexuality Policy Watch, 2014), 2, www.sxpolitics.org.

25. Aminata Cécile Mbaye, "Queer Political Subjectivities in Senegal," 306. Mbaye references a 1984 article published in a special issue of the newspaper *Djamra*, titled *Prostitution, débaucherie et homosexualité au Sénégal*.

26. Mbaye, "Queer Political Subjectivities in Senegal," 306.

27. Bop, "Senegal: Homophobia and Islamic Political Manipulation."

28. Bop, "Senegal: Homophobia and Islamic Political Manipulation."

29. Jordanna Matlon, *A Man Among Other Men: The Crisis of Black Masculinity in Racial Capitalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022).

30. Alcinda M. Honwana, *The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change, and Politics in Africa* (Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press Pub., 2012), 165.

31. Donna L. Perry, "Wolof Women, Economic Liberalization, and the Crisis of Masculinity in Rural Senegal," *Ethnology* 44, no. 3 (2005): 209.

32. Sebastian Prothmann, "Migration, Masculinity, and Social Class: Insights from Pikine, Senegal," *International Migration* 56, no. 4 (2018): 98; Prothmann quotes J.-P. Warnier, "The King as a Container in the Cameroon Grassfields," *Paid-euma* 39 (1993): 305.

33. Babacar M'Baye, "Representations of the Gôr Djiguène [Man Woman] in Senegalese Culture, Films, and Literature," in *Gender and Sexuality in Senegalese Societies: Critical Perspectives and Methods* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019), 78.

34. Juompan-Yakam, "Mbougarr Sarr."

35. Devin Bryson, "In and Out in Senegal: Unearthing Queer Roots in Mohamed Mbougarr Sarr's *De purs hommes*," *African Studies Review* 64, no. 4 (December 2021): 805.

36. Juompan-Yakam, "Mbougarr Sarr."

37. M'Baye, "Representations of the Gôr Djiguène," 78.

38. Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities*, 2nd ed. (Lon-

don: Routledge, 2007); Jennifer Fisher and Anthony Shay, eds., *When Men Dance: Choreographing Masculinities Across Borders* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

39. For more detailed analysis of gender asymmetries in African contemporary dance, see Emily Carson Coates, “Engagement Feminin: L’Equilibre and Contemporary Dance in West Africa,” *Theater* 44, no. 1 (February 2014): 37–55; Nadine Sieveking, “Culture as a Resource for Development? Critical Perspectives from the Field of Contemporary African Dance,” in *Self-Reflexive Area Studies*, ed. Matthias Middell, 249–77. (Leipzig: Universität Leipzig, 2013); Nadine Sieveking, “C’est d’abord Moi’: Performing the Identity of a Professional Female Choreographer,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 29, no. 2 (June 2017): 227–43.

40. Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 70.

41. Aïssatou Bangoura, “Danse et genre: processus d’androgénisation de la danse au Sénégal” (Masters Thesis, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, 2011).

42. Bangoura, “Danse et genre,” 34.

43. Hélène Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles: Movement, Morality, and Self-Fashioning in Urban Senegal* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 84.

44. The first work choreographed for Jant-bi, Susanne Linke and Avi Kaiser’s *Le coq est mort*, toured throughout Europe and North America, including performances at the Festival International de Nouvelle Danse (FIND) in Montreal, Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival in Massachusetts, The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris.

45. Helmut Vogt, “Story of Ecole Des Sables” (Presentation, Workshop with P.A.R.T.S., Toubab Dialaw, March 9, 2016).

46. Germaine Acogny, interview with author, September 14, 2016.

47. As viewed on Ken Glazebrook and Alla Kovgan, *African Dance: Sand, Drum, and Shostakovich* (Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources, 2004).

48. Melissa Templeton, “Polyrhythmic Dance Currents: Race Multiculturalism and the Montreal Dance Community” (PhD diss., University of California, Riverside, 2012), 142.

49. Acogny, interview with the author, September 14, 2016.

50. Acogny, interview with the author, September 14, 2016.

51. Excerpts of *Faagala* can be seen on the film, Joan Frosch and Alla Kovgan, dirs., *Movement (R)evolution Africa: A Story of an Art Form in Four Acts* (Watertown MA: Documentary Educational Resources, 2008).

52. Julia L. Foulkes, “Dance Is for American Men: Ted Shawn and the Intersection of Gender, Sexuality, and Nationalism in the 1930s,” in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 113–46; Susan Leigh Foster, “Closets Full of Dances: Modern Dance’s Performance of Masculinity and Sexuality,” in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 147–207.

53. Thomas DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 180.
54. DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations*, 181.
55. For instance, Anthony Shay describes the role of the scandalous, effeminate, and sexually ambiguous dance performances by public male entertainers across the Islamic world as respectable masculinity's other. Anthony Shay, *The Dangerous Lives of Public Performers: Dancing, Sex, and Entertainment in the Islamic World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
56. Luke Jennings, "Sexism in Dance: Where Are All the Female Choreographers?," *The Guardian*, April 28, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/apr/28/women-choreographers-glass-ceiling>; Judith Lynne Hanna, "Patterns of Dominance: Men, Women, and Homosexuality in Dance," *TDR: The Drama Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 22–47.
57. Sieveking, "Culture as a Resource for Development?" 261.
58. Hardo Kâ, interview with the author, June 30, 2018.
59. Hardo Kâ, interview with the author, June 30, 2018.
60. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 174.
61. Olivier Dubois's repertory spans performances that feature entirely nude casts (*Tragédie*, 2012) to an anticolonial adaptation of *The Rite of Spring* (*Mon élue noire*, 2015). His work in Africa or with African dancers is extensive. He taught at Andréya Ouamba's 2012 AEx-Corps creative residency workshop, created the piece *Souls* for six men from six African countries, and collaborated with Germaine Acogny on *Mon élue noire*.
62. This possibility draws on Susan Manning's model of dance spectatorship that she terms *cross-viewing*, the potential for spectators to consider subjectivities that are widely rejected outside the theater and to alter their perceptions of them. Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance*.
63. Mamadou Dieng, interview with the author, June 16, 2016.
64. Thierno Diédhiou, interview with the author, August 4, 2016.
65. Dancers in *BOXOM* hail from Germany, Senegal, Togo, Cameroon, Israel, Ivory Coast, and Zimbabwe/Britain.
66. Ze'ev Maghen, *Virtues of the Flesh: Passion and Purity in Early Islamic Jurisprudence* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 43; quoting Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Saqi Books, 1998), 55.
67. Fatou Sow, "Fundamentalisms, Globalisation and Women's Human Rights in Senegal," *Gender and Development* 11, no. 1 (2003): 73.
68. Irene Peano, "Wrestling Masculinities: Metaphors of Purity and Metonymical Bodies in Senegalese Arenas," *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 27, no. 2 (2007): 42.
69. AEx-Corps group discussion, April 23, 2016.
70. Modou Dieng, interview with the author, June 16, 2016.
71. Royona Mitra, "Unmaking Contact: Choreographic Touch at the Intersections of Race, Caste, and Gender," *Dance Research Journal* 53, no. 3 (December 2021): 6–24.

72. Cynthia Jean Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 163.

73. Thierno Diédhiou, interview with the author, August 4, 2016.

74. I viewed *La contrainte* at the culminating AEX-Corps performance in 2014. The program notes Diop's denouncement of "un extrémisme grandissant, un manque de tolérance dans les pensées" (a growing extremism, a lack of tolerance in thinking) and his questioning of how to make alternative choices possible if thinking stays in an enclosure.

75. Friend, "Don't Watch This Video!" 1.

76. Obioma Nnaemeka, "From Orality to Writing: African Women Writers and the (Re)Inscription of Womanhood," *Research in African Literatures* 25, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 142, 153.

77. Amadou Diop, interview with the author, July 4, 2018.

78. Mills, "Sutura," 131.

79. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 33.

80. Amadou Diop, interview with the author, July 4, 2018.

81. Mbaye, "Queer Political Subjectivities in Senegal," 306.

Chapter 5

1. Nadine Sieveking, "'C'est d'abord Moi': Performing the Identity of a Professional Female Choreographer," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 29, no. 2 (June 2017): 228. Sieveking quotes Shyon Baumann, "A General Theory of Artistic Legitimation: How Art Worlds Are Like Social Movements," *Poetics* 35, no. 1 (2007): 52.

2. Ayo A. Coly, *Postcolonial Hauntologies: African Women's Discourses of the Female Body* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 3.

3. Coly, *Postcolonial Hauntologies*, 20.

4. Omofolabo Ajayi, "Negritude, Feminism, and the Quest for Identity: Re-Reading Mariama Ba's So Long a Letter," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 1997): 37.

5. Coly, *Postcolonial Hauntologies*; Ayo A. Coly, "Un/Clothing African Womanhood: Colonial Statements and Postcolonial Discourses of the African Female Body," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 33, no. 1 (January 2015): 12–26.

6. To my knowledge, Acogny's *À un endroit du début* was never performed in Africa but toured extensively in Europe, the United States, and Asia. Ouamba's *Espace commun 100 %* was performed in Senegal and an earlier version was created and performed in Benin, but this work did not tour outside Africa. Cissé's *Regarde-moi encore* circulated widely in Africa, Europe, and South America, and her *Le bal du cercle* was performed in Senegal and Tunisia in addition to various venues in France.

7. Keguro Macharia, "Belated: Interruption," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 26, no. 3 (June 2020): 565.

8. Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 65.

9. Keguro Macharia, *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy across the Black Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 6. Macharia elaborates on the “contested nature of blackness as a shared feature of Africa and Afro-diaspora” (6).

10. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 65.

11. D. Soyini Madison, “Foreword,” in *Black Performance Theory* ed. Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), viii.

12. Annie Bourdié, “Créations chorégraphiques d’Afrique francophone: Systèmes de représentations et stratégies de reconnaissance en période contemporaine” (PhD diss., Université Paris-Est, 2013), 473.

13. Esther Baker-Tarpara, “Women Choreographers: Articulating the Personal Political,” *Shifting Traces: Dance and Technology in and Outside of Africa* (blog), February 11, 2013, <https://shiftafrica.wordpress.com/2013/02/11/women-choreographers-speak/>.

14. Bourdié, “Créations chorégraphiques d’Afrique francophone,” 474.

15. Emily Carson Coates, “Engagement Feminin: L’Equilibre and Contemporary Dance in West Africa,” *Theater* 44, no. 1 (February 2014): 36–55; Sieveking, “C’est d’abord Moi.”

16. Sieveking, “C’est d’abord Moi,” 240.

17. The ninth edition of *Danse l’Afrique danse !* in Johannesburg, South Africa included nine pieces by female choreographers, two of which were created in collaboration with a male, out of forty-five total performances. Bourdié, “Créations Chorégraphiques d’Afrique Francophone,” 474.

18. Out of forty-two total performances, sixteen were choreographed by women, including two that were created in collaboration with a male artist. “Programme: Danse l’Afrique Danse! Triennale—Semaine Professionnelle Du 26 au 30 novembre 2016, 10e édition,” Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, November 26–30, 2016.

19. Léo Pajon, “Quand les femmes mènent la danse, sans carcans ni entraves,” *Jeune Afrique*, March 2, 2017, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/407066/culture/femmes-menent-danse-carcans-entraves/>; Isabelle Calabre, “Danse au sommet à Ouagadougou,” *Danser Canal Historique*, December 20, 2016, <https://dansercanalhistorique.fr/?q=content/danse-au-sommet-ouagadougou>.

20. Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 15–17.

21. Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

22. Loes Oudenhuijsen, “Quietly Queer(Ing): The Normative Value of *Sutura* and Its Potential for Young Women in Urban Senegal,” *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute* 91, no. 3 (May 2021): 436.

23. Véronique Gilbert, “A Slut, a Saint, and Everything in Between: Senegalese Women’s *Mokk Pooj*, Interpretive Labor, and Agency,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44, no. 2 (Winter 2019): 385.

24. Oudenhuijsen, “Quietly Queer(Ing),” 435.

25. Oudenhuijsen, “Quietly Queer(Ing),” 435.

26. Héléne Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles: Movement, Morality, and Self-Fashioning in Urban Senegal* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 7.

27. Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles*, 176.

28. Khadija (pseudonym), interview with the author, April 7, 2016.

29. Clarisse Sagna, interview with the author, March 7, 2016.

30. Alicia Seybiya Gomis, interview with the author, December 5, 2016.

31. Kewe Lô, interview with the author, April 12, 2016.

32. My reading of *À un endroit du début* is based on viewing the piece live in Paris in March 2016 and in New York in 2019, as well as a video recording filmed in June 2015.

33. *Gris-gris*, also known as talisman or amulets, is a form of protection or luck that stems from indigenous West African religions. They most often consist of a cloth or leather pouch containing a verse from the Koran inscribed on a piece of paper and are worn on the person.

34. Acogny explained in an interview that the performance should be understood as “théâtre complet” or “danse-théâtre africaine,” synonymous terms for an indigenous form of African performance in which there are no boundaries between dance and theater. Germaine Acogny, interview with author, April 28, 2016.

35. I put “crisis” in quotation marks here in recognition of the problematic framing of migration from the Global South to the Global North as an “emergency” or “crisis.” As Eleanor Paynter writes, this pervasive rhetoric suggests that “arrivals to southern borders are sudden, unforeseeable, and unprecedented,” obscuring the historical continuity of migration, while perpetuating ideas of migrants’ unbelonging and replicating colonial logics of racialization. Eleanor Paynter, *Emergency in Transit: Witnessing Migration in the Colonial Present* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2024): 2–3.

36. Errantry emphasizes movement and relation with others as central to self-knowledge and identity. Errantry is not a “resolute act of rejection” of origins or roots, but rather “prompt[s] the knowledge that identity is no longer completely within the root but also in Relation.” Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 18.

37. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 67.

38. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 26, 59.

39. Paynter, *Emergency in Transit*, 49.

40. Hershini Bhana Young, *Illegible Will: Coercive Spectacles of Labor in South Africa and the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 185.

41. Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*; Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women*; Catherine Acholonu, *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* (Owerri: Afa Publications, 1995); Obioma Nnaemeka, *The Politics of (m)Othering: Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997).

42. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, “Beyond Determinism: The Phenomenology of African Female Existence,” *Feminist Africa* 2 (2003): 2.

43. Coly, *Postcolonial Hauntologies*, 62.

44. Macharia, *Frottage*, 15–19.
45. Ramsay Burt, “Germaine Acogny’s ‘Somewhere at the Beginning,’” *Wordpress, Ramsayburt* (blog), May 24, 2018, <https://ramsayburt.wordpress.com/2018/05/24/germaine-acognys-somewhere-at-the-beginning/>; Brian Seibert, “Review: An African Dance Matriarch Brings Out the Knives,” *New York Times*, September 27, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/27/arts/dance/review-germaine-acogny.html>.
46. Fatou Sow, “Fundamentalisms, Globalisation and Women’s Human Rights in Senegal,” *Gender and Development* 11, no. 1 (2003): 70.
47. Sabine Sörgel, *Contemporary African Dance Theatre: Phenomenology, Whiteness, and the Gaze* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 43–44.
48. Keguro Macharia, “On Being Area-Studied: A Litany of Complaint,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 22, no. 2 (April 2016): 188.
49. Germaine Acogny, interview with author, April 28, 2016.
50. Charmaine Pereira, “Women Organising in Senegal: Charmaine Pereira Speaks with Codou Bop,” *Feminist Africa* 22 (2017): 212–23.
51. Elisabeth Stoudmann, “À Dakar, les femmes prennent la parole,” *Le Temps*, May 9, 2021, <https://www.letemps.ch/culture/dakar-femmes-prennent-parole>.
52. Awa Thiam, *La parole aux négresses* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1978), 76.
53. Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241–99; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
54. Obioma Nnaemeka, *Sisterhood, Feminisms, and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998), 5.
55. Acogny, interview with author, April 28, 2016.
56. Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, ix.
57. Unlike the other performances examined in this chapter, this version of *Espace commun* was only performed in Dakar, including performances at the Blaise Senghor Cultural Center and at the French Institute.
58. Rose Mendy, interview with author, April 6, 2016.
59. Hudita Nura Mustafa, “Eros, Beauty and Crisis: Notes from Senegal,” *Feminist Africa* 6 (2006): 25.
60. Emily Jenan Riley, “The Politics of *Terànga*: Gender, Hospitality, and Power in Senegal,” *PolLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 42, no. 1 (May 2019): 117.
61. Andréya Ouamba, interview with author, March 6, 2016.
62. Oudenhuijsen describes the Wolof term *jump* as “self-identification of young women who embody a certain masculinity,” typically through clothing. Oudenhuijsen, “Quietly Queer(Ing),” 443–44. Similarly, *garçons manqués* is a French term that roughly corresponds to tomboyism, referring to women who “display a masculine manner and physical appearance.” Basile Ndjio, “*Garçons Manqués* and *Femmes Fortes*: Two Ambivalent Figures of Butch Lesbianism in Women’s Football in Cameroon,” *African Studies Review* 65, no. 3 (September 2022): 569.
63. Rose Mendy, interview with the author, April 6, 2016.

64. Beth Packer, “Queering the ‘Greater Jihad’: Sufi Resistance and Disruptive Morality in Senegalese Women’s Soccer,” in *Gender and Sexuality in Senegalese Societies: Critical Perspectives and Methods*, ed. Babacar M’Baye and Besi Brilliant Muhonja (London: Lexington Books, 2019), 53.

65. Packer, “Queering the ‘Greater Jihad,’” 54.

66. Barbara Callaway and Lucy Creevey, *The Heritage of Islam: Women, Religion, and Politics in West Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 25–26.

67. Sebastian Prothmann, “‘Opportunistic Waiting’: Tea and Young Men’s Gatherings in Pikine, Senegal,” *City & Society* 31, no. 2 (August 2019): 218.

68. Francesca Castaldi, *Choreographies of African Identities: Négritude, Dance, and the National Ballet of Senegal* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 73.

69. Fatou Sarr, *L’entrepreneuriat féminin au Sénégal: La transformation des rapports de pouvoirs* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998).

70. Rosalind Fredericks, *Garbage Citizenship: Vital Infrastructures of Labor in Dakar, Senegal* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Sarah Nelson, “The New Type of Senegalese Under Construction: Fadel Barro and Aliou Sané on Yenamarrisme After Wade,” *African Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (March 2014): 13–32.

71. Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles*, 79.

72. Coly, *Postcolonial Hauntologies*, 209.

73. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 65.

74. Fatou Cissé, interview with author, April 12, 2016.

75. My analysis of *Regarde-moi encore* is based on my viewing of the piece in Dakar in 2012 and in Toulouse, France in 2016, as well as through access to a video recording of the performance.

76. Fatou Cissé, interview with the author, April 12, 2016.

77. Fatou Cissé, interview with the author, April 12, 2016.

78. Fatou Cissé, interview with author, October 2, 2016.

79. Earlier versions of the work, originally titled *Tànnèbéer*, were presented in Dakar during the Scénographies Urbaines Festival in 2012–2013, Andréya Ouamba’s AEx-Corps artistic residency workshop in 2013, performances at Blaise Senghor Cultural Center in 2014, Festival Duo Solo Danse in 2014, and in Tunisia as part of the Tunis Capitale de la Danse Festival in 2014. The piece was also performed at other venues in Toulouse and Aix-en-Provence prior to its Festival d’Avignon run. My analysis is based on a video recording of its premiere at Festival d’Avignon in 2015.

80. Babacar M’Baye, “The Origins of Senegalese Homophobia: Discourses on Homosexuals and Transgender People in Colonial and Postcolonial Senegal,” *African Studies Review* 56, no. 2 (September 2013): 109–28.

81. Fatou Cissé, interview with the author, October 2, 2016.

82. Deborah Heath, “Fashion, Anti-Fashion, and Heteroglossia in Urban Senegal,” *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 1 (February 1992): 20.

83. Heath, “Fashion, Anti-Fashion, and Heteroglossia in Urban Senegal,” 20.

84. Coly, *Postcolonial Hauntologies*, 74.

85. Castaldi, *Choreographies of African Identities*, 90.

86. Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles*, 78.
87. Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance Circles*, 78.
88. Coly, *Postcolonial Hauntologies*, 70–71.
89. Coly, *Postcolonial Hauntologies*, 72.
90. Fatou Cissé, interview with author, April 12, 2016.
91. Madison, “Foreword,” viii.
92. Macharia, “Belated: Interruption,” 564–66. Emphasis in original.
93. Macharia, “Belated,” 569.
94. Coly, *Postcolonial Hauntologies*, 70.
95. For example, Sam Kinchin-Smith of *Exeunt Magazine* wrote that *Le bal du cercle* featured “remarkable” athleticism but “lacked meaningful development and precision.” Sophie Jouve, writing for *Daily Motion*, lamented that it did not adequately comment on negotiations of tradition and modernity and failed to come together in a moment that seemed “un début de communion” (a beginning of communion). Sam Kinchin-Smith, “Avignon: 69, Année érotique,” *Exeunt Magazine*, August 13, 2015; Sophie Jouve, “‘Le bal du cercle’: Fatou Cissé rate son rendez-vous Avignonnais,” July 17, 2015, http://www.dailymotion.com/widget/jukebox?list%5b%5d=%2Fplaylist%2Fx4f1f_cultur%20ebox_t.
96. Ananya Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance: South-South Choreographies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 13–14.
97. Sieveking, “C’est d’abord Moi,” 241. Sieveking quotes Paula A. Ebron, *Performing Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

Conclusion

1. Donald Padgett, “Senegal Crowd of 100 Attacks American Man for Dressing Gay,” *Out Traveler*, May 31, 2022, <https://www.outtraveler.com/news/2022/5/31/senegal-crowd-100-attacks-american-man-dressing-gay>.
2. Nancy Frostick, “Idrissa Gueye and the LGBT Problem Football Needs to Solve,” *The Athletic*, May 20, 2022, <https://theathletic.com/3321894/2022/05/20/idrissa-gueye-and-the-lgbt-problem-football-needs-to-solve/>.
3. Invited international artists for the 2022 edition of *La ville en mouvement* included Andréya Ouamba, Zora Snake (Cameroon), Androa Mindre Kolo (Congo/France), and Esther Baker-Tarpaga (United States). Local artists included Fatou Cissé, Bamba Diagne, Baidy Bâ, and Khady Sow.
4. Senegal has a rich history of ritual and ceremonial events that regularly take place outdoors, including the *Simb*, or *faux lion* (mock lion), which often involves cross-dressing. Other examples include the mask performance, *Kumpo*, Mouride *dabiras*’ participatory spiritual performances in Dakar, and ndëpp rituals.
5. Jay Pather and Catherine Boule, eds., *Acts of Transgression: Contemporary Live Art in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019), 3.
6. Zach Blas, “Opacities: An Introduction,” *Camera Obscura* 31, no. 2 (September 2016): 149.

7. Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 133.

8. Gibson Ncube, *Queer Bodies in African Films* (Makhanda: NISC (Pty) Ltd, 2022), 67.

Epilogue

1. This perspective has certainly shifted in the years since those early trips between Senegal and Chicago as a greater number of United States theaters present contemporary African dance. But there are still signs at the time of writing of U.S. critics' surprise that African dancers are also contemporary dancers. For example, in a review of Burkinabé choreographer Olivier Tarpaga's *Once the dust settles, flowers bloom* at the Joyce Theater in New York in October 2023, Brian Seibert wrote in the *New York Times* that the choreography is "African, contemporary, not quite like the work of any other company." The reviewer's assumption that Tarpaga is the first choreographer to create work that is both African and contemporary, as if this is a novel choreographic approach in 2023, completely disregards the entire history of African contemporary dance. Brian Seibert, "Review: This Dance About Refugees Has Flow and a Groove," *New York Times*, October 4, 2023.

2. Faye V. Harrison, ed., *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further toward an Anthropology for Liberation*, 2nd ed. (Arlington: American Anthropological Association, 1997), 2.

3. Harrison, *Decolonizing Anthropology*, 5.

4. Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," *TDR: The Drama Review* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 149.

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