



# Making Fashion, Forming Bodies and Persons in Urban Senegal<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article traces the interwovenness between fashion and changing conceptions of the body and bodily practices in the metropolitan area of Dakar. As a vital part of material culture as well as an expression of sociocultural and aesthetical practices, fashion plays a crucial role in constructing and negotiating identities, and the widely used concept of *sañse* refers to the centrality of fashion in everyday life. Despite the long history of the importance of fabrics and bodily adornment, the role of the body has often been neglected in the analysis of fashion. The article suggests that more attention should be drawn to the making and remaking of bodies since the body works as an important resource in terms of display and mobility and ties the social to the individual sphere.

## Résumé

Cet article étudie l'interdépendance entre la mode et les conceptions changeantes du corps et des pratiques corporelles dans la région métropolitaine de Dakar. La mode, en tant qu'élément vital de la culture matérielle et expression de pratiques socioculturelles et esthétiques, joue un rôle crucial dans la constitution et la contestation des identités et le concept de *sañse* fait référence au caractère central de la mode dans la vie quotidienne. Malgré la longue histoire de l'importance des tissus et de la parure corporelle, le rôle du corps a jusqu'à présent souvent été négligé dans l'analyse de la mode. L'article suggère de se pencher sur la fabrication et la transformation des corps, car le corps fonctionne comme une ressource importante en termes d'affichage et de mobilité, et lie le social à la sphère individuelle.

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## **Introduction**

The human body, fashion, and questions of personhood and identity are intimately interwoven. By analyzing central concepts and key figures as the basis for a discussion of the dynamics in conceptions of the body and fashion practices, this article traces the multi-layered interrelations between the body, fashion and the person that can be identified from various periods of Senegalese history up to the present. The article is based on three arguments.

Firstly, fashion and styling should rather be conceived as existential necessities than as luxurious practices of distinctive groups. This became particularly clear during my previous research with female Nigerian migrants on the role of the body in migration in Morocco and Spain (Kastner 2014). Amid times of crises and threatening spaces, the adorned and stylised body became a way of remaining human and of restoring one's bodily integrity. The roof-deck of the clandestine houses where the undocumented migrants hid and sometimes waited for years before they managed to cross one of the European borders, became stages and studios for the presentation of a self that, at least for the time being, managed to escape the daily violence and uncertainty. Scarce financial resources were invested into clothes, wigs, hair extensions, accessories, and as far as possible, into the visit of a photo studio to document and celebrate the dream of a good life through the presentation of the body by means of a stylish outfit and the regalia of a free and 'modern' way of life.

Thus, the styling and presentation of the bodily self do not reflect mere superficialities but are intimately tied to being human, tied to the (bodily) self and the (social) person. This argument stands in contrast to a predominantly Western perspective that equates fashion and styling with superficial practices which, up to now, has influenced and hindered serious academic work on fashion. Also, in Senegal, fashion and the presentation of the bodily self go far beyond the meaning for the single individual. As Hudita Mustafa argues, fashion is 'embedded in African community life and it should be exploited as a politically and socially embedded practice' (1998: 45). Therefore, I understand fashion as a part of material culture and an expression of sociocultural and aesthetic practices that plays a decisive role in the construction and negotiation of identities.

Secondly, fashion practices can only be conceived in relation to the human body and bodily practices. This rather simple suggestion points to the striking neglect of a profound analysis of the body in the research on fashion as it is only through the body and the act of wearing, through movement and performance that clothes unfurl their full effect. In order to deal with this phenomenon, I underline the deep embeddedness of the

Senegalese fashion system<sup>2</sup> in the broader context of bodily representation and ideas about the person and the self. Fashion in Senegal is an omnipresent and dynamic phenomenon shared by all spectra of the society. Moreover, in the Senegalese fashion system it is not the body that has to adapt to an industrially produced commodity; rather it is the fashionable garment that, in the negotiation process between the tailor and the client, is adjusted to the individual body. Simultaneously, not only fashion but also bodily ideals and bodily expressions are subjected to change in contemporary Senegal, generated mainly by discourses about health issues as well as fashion and bodily ideals from the ‘West’.

Thirdly, and following my previous remarks I conceive the body as a form capital (Bourdieu 1980, 1979; Wacquant 1995). Especially in a society where material property is comparatively modest, a considerable part of a (female) person’s belongings is worn on the body which finds its extension in hair styles and accessories like jewelry, handbags, shoes or – recently and mainly among young men – stylish earphones and sports shoes. In her work on dance in contemporary Senegal, H el ene Neveu Kringelbach (2013) emphasized the crucial role of the body as a valuable resource in Africa that allowed, the younger generation in particular to gain new opportunities for individual display and social mobility by means of performative activities like dance or sports. By referring to her argument, I suggest that, through the analytical impact of the body, fashion should also be analyzed as a phenomenon more intimately linked to the constitution and negotiation of the person, the self and to social mobility. The paper at hand investigates the opportunities and constraints that the body enables in terms of bodily display and bodily practices, especially when linked to questions of class/caste, age and gender.

In Dakar, different bodily ideals coexist or may increasingly compete against each other: the ideal of the pure body as conceived in Islam; the display of the voluminous and elaborately dressed and adorned body, that is finished by accessories and heavy perfumes and associated with prosperity; the slender body of unmarried young women and men who are rather modelled by bodily ideals from the so-called West. Hence, bodily practices<sup>3</sup> take a central part in everyday life. At the same time, corporeal ideals and forms are by no means static. They are, on the one hand, tightly linked to the gendered life cycle and to status; on the other hand, discourses about the connection between body weight and health affect the practices of body shaping. Moreover, the urban body has to be highly flexible in order to adapt to the respective contexts (Andrewes 2005). Particularly in the urban space, the often ambivalent relationship between the individual autonomy of the self and the role of the social person is negotiated via the human body.

## Practicing *Sañse*

The following part deals with the practice and concept of *sañse*, before three key figures, *signare*, *dirriankhé* and *disquette*, are introduced that have shaped and continue to form Senegalese society. Even though they originate from Wolof society, it can be argued that they have become standard for most of Senegal due to the pervasive presence of the Wolof language and culture in the country. Throughout the country and particularly in the cities of Saint-Louis and Dakar, Wolof, the language of the numerically most prominent group, is widely used as lingua franca.

*Cutur*, the foundation for the extensive field of fashionable garment making, is a Wolof expression derived from the French *couture*. In the words of Mustafa, *cutur* comprises an interconnected field of garment production, consumption and display' (2006: 178). The author describes *cutur* as the social, economic and institutional basis of fashion in Dakar.

A concept and practice that frequently came up during my research was *sañse*. This Wolof expression is also derived from the French (*se*) *changer* and can be equally employed as noun and as verb (as is the case with most Wolof words). Thus, a distinctive aspect of fashion – namely change – is involved in *sañse*. The linguist Deborah Heath analyses *sañse* as a code and context of performance (Heath 1992: 20), as an arrangement of social relations and as a starting point for the construction of social identity and distinction: '*Sañse* forges the link between having and being, displaying both wealth and social identity.' (ibid.) While Mustafa describes *sañse* briefly as 'total outfit of dress, hair and jewelry' (2002: 189), the verbal form was more often used in the context of my own research. Hence, *sañse* was defined by Abdou Lahad Gueye, a nationally and internationally well-known designer based in Dakar, as follows:

*Sañse* is, above all, the act of beautifying oneself. However, the essence consists in knowing how to beautify oneself. That is the meaning of *sañse* in French: to beautify oneself through clothing.<sup>4</sup> (Abdou Lahad Gueye, 21 June 2016, Castors, Dakar)

Ndiaye Diop, the director of the renowned public fashion school I.C.C.M. (Institut de Coupe, de Couture, et de Mode) in Dakar defined *sañse* as follows, employing the term both as an adjective and as a noun:

*Danga sañse* means that you are well dressed. "Sa sañse rafet na" means that the clothes you wear are really beautiful. It refers to a correct wear, more than correct, a beautiful way of clothing. Hence, it is the aesthetics that intervenes.<sup>5</sup> (Ndiaye Diop, 17 June 2016, I.C.C.M., Dakar)

In both explanations, the *savoir faire* represents a key element. Given that all spectra of the society support and take part in *cutur* and that having, doing and being *sañse* is a prerequisite for achieving and maintaining prestige and status, I use the term 'fashion system' to point to the omnipresence of fashion, particularly in urban Senegal. The streets of Dakar resemble a gigantesque catwalk, especially on Fridays, and the frequent life cycle and religious ceremonies provide an opportunity for the display of valuable fabrics like the *bazin riche*<sup>6</sup> or the Malian *thioup*.

Moreover, important ties between fashion and other forms of artistic expression and the so-called popular culture can be observed and the milieus of fashion, design, graffiti and music are intimately linked. Consistently, my research partners claimed to work as designers, mannequins, stylists, and sometimes, also musicians at the same time – a statement that may also point to the unstable financial background of the persons in question which them to pursue different careers at the same time.

## Female Icons

In what follows, the paper explores the ways in which social identity and status are communicated via the fashionable body in Senegal. In order to approach this interrelatedness, I draw on three distinctive and icon-like female figures: the historical figure of the *signare* as well as the *dirriankhé* and the *disquette* as two contemporary figures that, since the 1980s, have been foremost present in the urban environment.

Mainly in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the *signares*<sup>7</sup> of Saint-Louis and the island of Gorée significantly shaped the social and economic life of the two trading posts. They resulted from marriages between women of Wolof origin and French colonial officers. These *femmes métisses*<sup>8</sup> functioned as cultural brokers and mediators and had a considerable share in the slave trade (Brooks Jr. 1976). Many of them achieved wealth, which they exposed through sartorial display. Vividly present in the Senegalese cultural memory they form part of the country's heritage. Famous for their elegance and sartorial display the *signares* introduced a new dress style, which finds its continuity in the *ndoket*, a wide and often richly decorated long dress, which proves to be highly popular in contemporary Senegal.

Ndiaye Diop was one of many that directly linked the ascribed Senegalese elegance to the ladies of Saint-Louis and the colonial encounter:

When we talk about elegance in Senegal, we think of Saint-Louis. Thus, I think that it is this blending between the colonists and the [local] population that rubbed off on the sartorial style of these ladies who partly adopted the

dressing rules, or rather, the French *savoir faire*, which impacts on the elegance of the ladies of Saint-Louis.<sup>9</sup> (Ndiaye Diop, 17 June 2016)

In Saint-Louis the *signares'* heritage is habitualized and revitalized during the *fanal*, solemnly processions in the streets of Saint-Louis, and the *Takkoussanou N'dar* which dates back to the *femmes élégantes* of the nineteenth century and which designates the daily sartorial display in the street during the early evening hours (Kane Lo 2014: 41).

The term *dirriankhé*<sup>10</sup> refers to a lavishly dressed woman of considerable largesse and thereby, of wealth and beauty and emerged in the 1980s in times of radical socioeconomic changes. Under President Abdou Diouf, structural adjustment programs (SAPs) were launched by the World Bank IMF (International Monetary Fund). The measures resulted in the privatization of former state-owned enterprises and, as a consequence, to mass dismissals in the public sector and in a devaluation of the CFA (Communauté Financière Africaine; the common currency used in parts of West and Central Africa), to name only the most striking developments of that time. In many cases, men were no longer able to provide for the domestic home and, gradually, women began to expand into formerly male professional domains to support their families (Mustafa 1998).<sup>11</sup> As self-employed entrepreneurs, they started to operate mainly in the sector of *cutur* and cloth trade. The acquired gains and the new status as independent vendors and entrepreneurs are also displayed on the women's bodies: Exuberant clothes and jewelry embellish the voluminous and heavily perfumed bodies that are proof of and associated with economic reliability and material prosperity (Mustafa 1998). In contemporary Dakar, the *dirriankhé* is a prominent figure and continues to attract attention since she epitomizes the prevalent ideal of feminine elegance. Married or divorced these middle-aged mothers wear mainly 'traditional' clothes like the robe *taille mame* and the *ndoket* or wrap themselves in a *grand boubou*.

Despite some disparities, they renew the image of the *signare*. The historian Aissatu Kane Lo (2014) even argues for a direct line between the *signare* and the contemporary *dirriankhé* in conceiving the *dirriankhé* as the *signare's* successor, especially in terms of sartorial display and economic potency. The figure of the *dirriankhé* achieved cinematic prominence in Ousmane Sembene's feature film *Faat Kiné* (2000) whose protagonist and hero, a gas station owner, as well as her female friends embody the ideal of the *dirriankhé* and thus, the self-acquired wealth of independent businesswomen.

Regarding the general perception, the decisive characteristic of a *dirriankhé* consists primarily in her considerable body weight. Representative for numerous conversations that were conducted about the figure of the

*dirriankhé*, the description of the director of the I.C.C.M. fashion school pointed to the central aspect of the bodily form and weight that forms a *dirriankhé*:

The *dirriankhé* is a woman with certain curves. Even when she is not dressed in an elegant way, she necessarily has to have a distinctive round body shape. So this is a woman who is not slim and who is well-built, well-built à l'africaine, which means certain curves.<sup>12</sup> (Ndiaye Diop, 17 June 2016)

In order to distinguish the body of the *dirriankhé* from other bodily forms and thereby other concepts of the person and her social status and morale, Ndiaye Diop referred to her antonym, the *disquette*:

*Disquette* or *jànq* are women that are not married, that do not have certain curves. That is why [married] women, in order to distinguish a married from an unmarried woman, a young girl, prefer to have a certain body weight, because in the street, when you are slim and dressed like a young girl, one can insult you by calling you a *jànq*, which sometimes offends the married lady. Therefore, we do everything to adopt a way of clothing that differs from the young girls.<sup>13</sup> (Ndiaye Diop, 17 June 2016)

The denomination *disquette*<sup>14</sup> also emerged in the 1980s and was applied for young unmarried and slender women, as is pointed out above. Beyond, they are known for being fashion-conscious and are geared to body fitted fashion trends from the 'West'. Often well-educated and with a student background (Nyamnjoh 2005), they particularly follow the latest trends launched by US-singers such as Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj and Rihanna.

## Television and Social Media

Television and social media such as Facebook or Instagram play a decisive role in the lives of the young women who may change their outfit and profile photos several times a day, as is common among Senegalese brides on their wedding day as a marker of affluence. Persons from the elderly well-established generation who consider themselves intellectuals sharply criticize Facebook. Representative for her class and age group Fatou Sy, teacher and damask trader, and a frequent Facebook user herself, claimed:

Facebook is the horror in Africa! You see a woman who has nothing [who is very poor], and she dresses up for Facebook in order to attract attention.<sup>15</sup> (Fatou Sy, 17 May 2016, Marché HLM, Dakar).

With a certain nostalgia in her voice she added that before television,

It was the intellectual class that conveyed the beauty [standards], but nowadays, it is the singers, the griots... There is much more make-up than reality.<sup>16</sup> (ibid.)

In contrast, others claimed that the access to television and internet and, thereby, to alternative body shapes and ideals could also have a positive effect, as was underlined by the fitness coach Philomène Kane:

Fortunately, with the social media at our disposal, the internet, they learn what is going on in the world, how it is going on, the changes that exist in the world nowadays. The young [girls] like to copy the style they see. When you come from a family that is very much anchored in religion, they [the daughters] are very categorical, they do not practice their religion. You see a girl that tells you “Me, I want to do sports”. Why? Because she sees a Beyoncé on television, a Nicki Minaj on television, etc. She tells you that she wants to have her body, because they know, if they follow their parents’ way of life, everything will be lost right from the beginning.<sup>17</sup> (Philomène Kane, 20 May 2016, Club Olympique, Dakar)

In our conversation, Philomène Kane praised the social media and the internet, particularly for those young adults who had no opportunity to go to school. She also drew a strict line between the older generation and the younger, between Islam and a contemporary life style. However, and what she also remarked during our ongoing conversation when resuming her professional career as a coach so far, the young women in particular managed to balance a changing body conception as a consequence of globally circulating new ideals and practicing their religion.

Thus, differing body ideals and outfits are pursued in contemporary Senegal. The Friday outfit in Senegal illustrates the ways different age groups dress, respectively dress up. In the course of the last two to three decades it has become common to dress *à l’africaine* on Fridays, the day of the most important Muslim prayer, *jummah*. This means for people of various social, cultural and religious backgrounds a *grand boubou* or *kaftan* for men and a *robe taille mame*, a *ndoket* or a *grand boubou* for married women. The younger women including the *disquettes* mostly wear a fashionable *taille basse*, a fitted adorned two-piece composed of a top and an ankle-length skirt.

Still, the most refined fashionable clothing is shown to advantage only when worn on the body. Therefore, the following part will explore more closely the changes in bodily forms and ideals before delving into changes in fashion and fashion design itself.

### **Changes in Body Forms and Bodily Ideals**

When recalling the photographs of his mother and his grandmother and discussing possible changes in the shape of the body, the stylist Abdou Lahad Gueye lamented the increasing decline in bodily forms that he linked to a decline in education:



Necessarily, things have been changing. Maybe it is due to the food. When looking at the photos of our mothers' generation, my mother was much more beautiful, more graceful, much more sculptured. For us, a beautiful woman has to have a small waist, but with distinctive curves, a nicely developed breast so one can see the shape once she wears a corset. Still, this is no longer the case, because the women do not wear the *pagne* anymore. They wear trousers that do not shape the waist, which has deformed most of our girls. Our mothers wore their *pagne* well attached to the waist, which provoked a small waist. However, this is no longer the case. Hence, there are girls that are out of shape somehow everywhere. We, the tailors, find the means to embellish these body parts to render them more beautiful, but still, the women's bodies have changed a lot, also because of the way our grandmothers used to educate our mothers, but this is no longer the case since everybody is too busy to really assist their children.<sup>18</sup> (Abdou Lahad Gueye, 21 June 2016)

In his elaborate statement, Abdou Lahad Gueye approached three crucial aspects in the making of bodies: nutrition, clothing and education. Firstly, the eating habits have not been adapted to the urban lifestyle of a middle-class generation who barely moves due to the urban working conditions in offices and the lack of physical exercise. Heavy rice-based meals, sugared tea and soft drinks result in a weight gain, often accompanied by chronic diseases such as diabetes, whereas the bodies of the rural population do not experience comparable transformations since labor in agriculture and physical movement are part of the daily routine. Secondly, Abdou Lahad Gueye refers to the transformative capacity of clothing the body that has been subjected to distinctive modifications. He mentions the decreasing use of the traditional *pagne* among young women, which tends to result in a less accentuated waist and, as he regretfully explained, to more and more shapeless bodies in general. Thereby, he draws a direct connection between the way of clothing and the body shape. I want to extend this point by introducing the bodily *habitus* and the way it is connected to the presentation of the dressed person. Education, which is Abdou Lahad Gueye's third aspect, body-shaping and incorporated learning are intimately connected to the habitual development. The practice of the (gendered) modelling of the body and of certain body parts starts soon after birth. For girls the mother tries to accentuate the waist and bottom while for boys more emphasize is laid on the modelling of the shoulders. The practice of carrying one's baby on the back which favors a position where the baby's bottom is constantly the lowermost part of the body, certainly also contributes to the accentuation of the body shape. Recurring on the way of clothing the wearing of tightly fitted garments like the *taille basse* at an early age impacts on the way of walking as steps must be small of necessity. Also, the *grand boubou* generates and, at the same time, presumes a distinctive *habitus* as its wearer is

supposed to elegantly deal with an ankle-long wavy robe made from six meters of relatively stiff *bazin riche*. Generally worn by middle-aged men and married women, this garment speaks of a certain status which, again, is connected to a voluminous and prosperous body that moves with dignity and elegance.

The state of the female body is particularly observed and cared for, as it not only belongs to the individual woman and mother, but also to the family and the community (Ndiaye 2015; 2006). Interventions to change the body shape were performed exclusively to increase the body weight. Therefore, engaging in sports was generally not imaginable, as was claimed by the coach Massamba Thiam:

At first, the female body was considered as something sacred. Therefore, the woman must not do sports. Particularly here in Senegal, the healthy woman is the well-built woman, the *dirriankhé*, as we use to say. However, nowadays, this tends to vanish.<sup>19</sup> (Massamba Thiam, 23 May 2016, Club Olympique, Dakar)

Even though Massamba Thiam talked about a ‘bouleversement mental’ in the course of our conversation, both he and his colleague Philomène Kane claimed the difficulties they faced because of the continuing impact of the local culture in terms of body ideals.

Gender and age continue to be important factors regarding female body ideals and weight, as was revealed by Ndiaye Diop:

However, as soon as she gets married, she is supposed to have certain curves, because this is a sign of good conditions in her ménage. When a woman gets married and loses weight we assume that she must have some problems in her household. That is our view here in Senegal. This means that even if you are naturally slim, you have to rely on fortifiers from the very beginning of the marriage in case you do not gain weight. Thus, a woman with a certain age necessarily has to have a certain body weight. However, this tends to change currently, the mentalities change because of the younger generations that have a lot of knowledge and went to school and know, that this gain in weight is not important and may lead to health problems. We face overweight, high blood pressure, diabetes etc. This means that, nowadays, even if you can put on weight, you try to limit it in order to avoid obesity.<sup>20</sup> (Ndiaye Diop, 17 June 2016)

Marriage, as a central marker and socially expected turning point in terms of weight and outfit, plays a decisive role in a female biography. As indicated above, women currently seek a compromise to balance questions of beauty and health.

This tendency is accompanied by new critical attitudes towards the popular and harmful practice of skin bleaching, *xeesal*,<sup>21</sup> and the support of the growing *nappy*-movement, which was first launched by Afro-Americans in the

2000s. The West African followers are mostly young women who emphasize their *Africanité* by self-confidently wearing their natural hair and renouncing chemical treatment, hair extensions or wigs. Both trends are promoted during the prominent *Dakar Fashion Week* whose organizer, Adama Paris, renounces models that practice skin bleaching and who, during the last edition of the Fashion Week 2016 let all her models run *nappy*.

## Changes in Fashion Design

Besides changes in body ideals and body shapes, distinctive changes in fashion design can be observed. Given that change is, in any case, a central characteristic of fashion, I lay more emphasize on the fashionable adaptations of so called traditional robes like the *grand boubou*, before turning to general features of fashion made in Senegal in terms of creative appropriation:

Our mothers wore quite bulky grands boubous, but nowadays we use a stylised version of these grands boubous. You can wear them to go to work as well as for ceremonies and they do not encumber anymore, which was a work of research. Thus, we try to modernise these traditional garments.<sup>22</sup> (Ndiaye Diop, 17 June 2016)

The men's *boubou*, too, is currently subject to change in order to meet the claims of the life of the middle and upper classes:

'For the men, too, I make boubous, but a lot more modern and adapted to various circumstances, so the men can wear them to go to the office or to the national assembly without feeling cramped.'<sup>23</sup> (Abdou Lahad Gueye, 21 June 2016)

Contemporary adaptations of so-called traditional garments reveal that the long-standing dichotomy between clothes and fashion has to be rethought in order to meet the realities of Senegalese fashion practices that are characterized by an outstanding ability to adopt and fuse diverse influences and styles to create something new and original. Abdou Lahad Gueye described this process as follows:

The Senegalese have a strong capacity to appropriate, because when we travel it is the same as when we study. We learn, but this does not mean that we adopt everything. We only take what we consider as good and we try to appropriate it and maybe add our personal touch. Generally, all journeys are beneficial, because during every journey you learn from the other.<sup>24</sup> (Abdou Lahad Gueye, 21 June 2016)

For Abdou Lahad Gueye travelling represented an important source of inspiration. However, for the majority of Senegalese stylists and tailors, physical mobility is rather limited. Whether their journeys be real or imagined, the sartorial outcome proves to be a genuinely cosmopolitan

product. Moreover, a certain lack of means may not manifest itself in the impediment of change. On the contrary, it may push creative work, as Barkinado Bocoum, artist and professor at the I.C.C.M., was convinced:

Sometimes, there is a lack of means that pushes you to be creative, for example if you want to produce something similar to something from abroad and you do not have the means to do so. Maybe we take our means and try to adapt these elements according to our realities.<sup>25</sup> (Barkinado Bocoum, 24 May 2016, I.C.C.M., Dakar)

Certainly, this ‘brassage continue’ in fashion – an expression I borrow from the conversation with Fatou Sy – is a distinctive feature not exclusively reserved for the field of fashion, but also for music and craft. It is precisely this *brassage*, this *métissage* that Barkinado Bocoum stated as an important characteristic of identity:

When you go to the US, for example, you wear a shirt made of wax print or legos and it automatically gives you an African identity or something like that. I think that this is the very richness. Nowadays, there are many different influences. Before, it was the occident [the “West”] that had an impact on us, but we start influencing Western fashion in terms of material, colors, variety and everything else.<sup>26</sup> (Barkinado Bocoum, 24 May 2016, I.C.C.M., Dakar)

## Conclusion and Outlook

Due to its distinctive history and geographical position, Senegal has been a space of continuous and manifold cultural and religious encounters and influences. Past and present practices of beauty and fashion are influenced by Islamic as well as European and Asian features and the Senegalese fashion system ties in with a long tradition relating to fabrics, clothes and beauty, where the *métissage* is considered an important feature of contemporary styles and practices:

We are cultural métis. We take a bit from us, a bit from the other. That is the blending, the globalisation. Nobody can stop it anymore. Everybody has to contribute.<sup>27</sup> (Fatou Sy, 17 May 2016)

The globalisation referred to by Fatou Sy started already centuries ago in the trading post of Saint-Louis,

With the headscarves, the jewellery, and all that the women created marvels, even if the materials were from Europe.<sup>28</sup> (Abdou Lahad Gueye, 21 May 2016)

As has been shown, the interrelated dynamics of body ideals and fashion also contest long-standing dichotomies like the local and the global, tradition and modernity or clothing and fashion. Based on three basic arguments I

argued for the analytic importance of the human body in fashion research, since the processes of making and remaking bodies are revelatory in terms of constructing and negotiating identities.

A better understanding of various forms of belonging related to the fashionable outfit of the diaspora as well as the impact of 'travelling fashion' could be future research topics, since fashion made in Africa is about to conquer what was referred to as the 'Occident' by my interview partners.

## Notes

1. This paper is based on preliminary findings of my ongoing research on fashion in greater Dakar (April - August 2016) financed by a Postdoc-scholarship provided by the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service). The methods mainly draw on participant observation and interviews with various experts and actors in the vast field of fashion.
2. I explain my understanding of the term below; see the passage 'Practicing Sañse'.
3. For the significant value of the female body in Wolof society, especially in terms of proliferation and prosperity, see Ndiaye (2006; 2015).
4. '*Sañse*, c'est avant tout le fait de se faire beau ou bien de se faire belle. Mais l'essentiel est de savoir comment se faire beau ou bien comment se faire belle. *Sañse* signifie ça en français. C'est de se faire beau à travers ses vêtements.'
5. '*Danga sañse* c'est-à-dire tu es bien habillé. *Sa sañse rafet na* c'est-à-dire les vêtements que tu portes sont bien jolis. Cela renvoie à un habillement correct, plus que correct, un joli port vestimentaire. Donc là c'est l'esthétique qui intervient.'
6. For the importance of the bazin in Senegalese ceremonial life, see Kirby (2013). For the meaning of fabrics and especially the exchange of fabrics in Senegalese society, see Buggenhagen (2012).
7. From the Portuguese *senhora*.
8. The term *métissage*, derived from the Portuguese, is one of the first in history to describe phenomena of cultural hybridity.
9. '[S]i on parle d'élégance au Sénégal, on pense à Saint-Louis. Donc je pense que c'est ce brassage entre les colons et ces populations qui a déteint sur le port vestimentaire de ces dames qui ont un peu épousé les règles d'habillement, ou bien de savoir-faire français. Ce qui fait que ça déteint sur l'élégance des femmes saint-louisiennes.'
10. For the origin of the term, see Buggenhagen (2012: 181).
11. For the transformations in the relation between femininity, masculinity, sexuality and changing gender and sexual roles especially for the younger, unmarried generation in the 1980s, see Biaya (2001).
12. '*La dirriankhé* c'est une femme qui a une certaine rondeur. Même si elle n'est pas habillée de façon élégante, il faut qu'elle ait une certaine rondeur. Donc c'est une femme qui n'est pas mince, donc qui est bien bâtie sur le plan physique, bien bâtie à l'africaine, donc avec une certaine rondeur.'

13. '*Disquette* ou *jàng*, ce sont les femmes qui ne sont pas mariées, qui n'ont pas certaines rondeurs. C'est pourquoi les femmes, pour faire cette démarcation entre la femme qui est mariée et la femme qui n'est pas mariée, la jeune fille, là elle préfère avoir du poids parce que dans la rue, si tu es mince, si tu es habillée comme une jeune fille, on peut t'apostropher pour te dire *jàng* et là des fois ça heurte la dame mariée. Donc c'est ce qui fait qu'on fait tout pour, sur le plan vestimentaire, adopter un port vestimentaire différent des jeunes filles.'
14. For speculations about the origin of the term, see Nyamnjoh (2005).
15. '[F]acebook, c'est l'horreur en Afrique! Tu vois une femme qui n'a rien, elle fait une toilette pour sortir à facebook afin de faire le buzz.'
16. 'c'était la classe intellectuelle qui véhiculait la beauté, c'est-à-dire l'apparat. Mais maintenant ce sont les chanteurs, les griots... il y a beaucoup plus de maquillage que de réalité.'
17. 'Heureusement qu'avec les réseaux sociaux qu'on a, avec le net, ils apprennent ce qui se passe dans le monde, comment cela se passe, les changements qu'on a dans le monde maintenant. Avec ce style-là qu'ils voient, qu'ils ont envie de copier, ils se disent par exemple... tu vois une fille qui est d'une famille vraiment ancrée dans la religion, elles [les filles] sont catégoriques, elles pratiquent pas, tu vois une fille qui te dit, 'moi je veux faire du sport.' Pourquoi ? Parce qu'elle voit une Beyonce à la télé, une Nicki Minaj à la télé etc. Elle te dit que 'je veux avoir son corps'. Donc elles savent si elles suivent le chemin des parents, c'est perdu d'avance.'
18. 'Forcément il y a eu changement. Peut-être là c'est dû à la nourriture. Parce que au début moi je me dis que en regardant les photos de nos mamans, ma maman était beaucoup plus belle, plus gracieuse, beaucoup plus sculptée. Par exemple ici chez nous, une belle femme doit avoir une taille fine, mais avec des rondeurs, une poitrine un peu développée pour que si la personne met un corset qu'on puisse voir la forme (...) alors tel n'est plus le cas, parce que les femmes d'aujourd'hui ici chez nous, les pagnes ne passent pas. Donc elles mettent des pantalons. Du coup, ils ne serrent pas la taille. C'est ce qui a déformé la majeure partie de nos filles. Nos mamans mettaient leur pagne en attachant bien leur taille. Ce qui faisait que leur taille était petite. Mais tel n'est plus le cas. Donc il y a des filles qui débordent un peu partout maintenant. Et donc nous, les couturiers, on trouve les moyens d'embellir ces parties-là pour les rendre beaucoup plus jolies, mais les corps des femmes ont beaucoup changé même. Parce-que aussi il y a une sorte d'éducation que nos grandes mamans inculquaient à nos mamans, mais tel n'est plus le cas parce que personne n'a plus le temps d'assister sa fille ou bien son enfant dans le cadre général.'
19. 'Dans un premier temps le corps était considéré comme quelque chose de sacré chez la femme. Donc la femme, elle ne devait pas faire de sport. Surtout ici au Sénégal, la femme en bonne santé c'est la femme balèze, voilà *dirriankhé* comme on l'appelle dans notre jargon. Mais maintenant cela a tendance à disparaître.'
20. 'Mais dès l'instant qu'elle se marie, on pense qu'elle doit avoir des rondeurs parce que là c'est signe de bonnes conditions dans son ménage. Si une femme se marie et perd du poids, donc on sous-entend qu'elle doit avoir des problèmes au niveau de

son ménage. C'est la conception que nous avons au Sénégal. C'est ce qui fait que, même si de nature on doit être de corpulence mince, dès l'instant qu'on se marie, si on ne prend pas de poids, on est obligé de recourir aux fortifiants pour prendre du poids. Donc c'est ce qui fait que, une femme, avec un certain âge doit forcément avoir du poids. Mais actuellement ça a tendance à changer, les mentalités changent parce que avec les jeunes générations qui ont eu beaucoup de connaissances, qui ont été à l'école, savent maintenant que cette prise de poids n'est pas importante. Cela peut créer des problèmes de santé. Nous avons l'obésité, nous avons l'hypertension artérielle, nous avons le diabète etc. C'est ce qui fait que actuellement, même si on peut avoir du poids, mais il faut limiter cette prise de poids pour éviter l'obésité.'

21. For a current critique of *xeesal* in Dakar, see the campaign *nioul kouk*: <http://www.wakhart.com/nioul-kouk-la-contre-campagne> (20 June 2018).
22. [N]os mères portaient des grands boubous qui étaient un peu encombrants. Mais actuellement on utilise ces grands boubous de façon stylisée. On peut le porter pour aller au travail, aux cérémonies et ça n'encombre pas. Ce qui fait qu'il y a un travail de recherche qui se fait. Donc on essaie de moderniser ces vêtements traditionnels.'
23. 'Pour les hommes aussi je fais des boubous mais beaucoup plus modernes adaptés à plusieurs circonstances que les hommes peuvent mettre pour aller au bureau, que les hommes peuvent mettre pour aller à l'assemblée nationale sans pour autant être encombrés.'
24. 'Les Sénégalais ont une capacité vraiment de faire une appropriation parce que quand on voyage aussi c'est si on continue à faire des études. On apprend, mais cela ne veut pas dire qu'on prend tout. On prend juste ce qui nous semble bon et on essaie aussi de faire une appropriation, peut-être y ajouter notre touche personnelle. Mais de toute façon, tous les voyages sont bénéfiques parce que, à chaque fois qu'on voyage, on apprend chez l'autre.'
25. '[P]arfois il y a un manque de moyens qui peut pousser vers la créativité, par exemple vouloir faire quelque chose de semblable à quelque chose d'ailleurs et qu'on n'a pas les moyens de le faire. On va peut-être prendre nos moyens et essayer d'adapter ces éléments par rapport à nos réalités.'
26. 'Quand par exemple tu vas aux Etats Unis, tu portes une chemise en *wax* ou bien en *legos* automatiquement ça donne une identité africaine ou bien quelque chose comme ça. Moi je crois que c'est ça même la richesse. Et maintenant, présentement il y a beaucoup d'influences. Auparavant c'était l'Occident qui faisait des influences sur nous. On commence à influencer la mode occidentale sur le plan des matières, sur le plan de la couleur, des richesses et tout.'
27. 'Nous, nous sommes des méteils culturels. Nous prenons un peu de nous, des autres. C'est le brassage, c'est la mondialisation. Personne ne peut plus l'arrêter. Il faut que chacun apporte.'
28. 'Avec les foulards, les bijoux et tout, même si les matières qu'elles [*les signares ; les femmes élégantes*] utilisaient c'était des matières européennes, on parvenait à faire des merveilles.'



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