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YOUTH APPROPRIATION OF THE BODY : YOUTH APPROPRIATION OF ICTS – SENEGALESE YOUTH AT THE CROSSROADS BETWEEN COOSAN (TRADITION) AND DUND TOUBAB (THE LIFE OF THE WHITES)

Ricardo M. Falcão
ISCTE-IUL / CEA-IUL
ricfal@gmail.com

Abstract

Senegalese youth has a negative status and is accused of being prone to a scandalous sexual behavior. This negative status surpasses simple contextual meanings, it is consequence of a long-standing questioning of social values. At the heart of this negative status of youth is the «body», in more than one dimension, through its sexuality, through patterns of consumption, through its mediatization. What I will consider in this paper is the appropriation by senegalese youth of their bodies, their appropriation of ICTs, and try to understand how these are at the crossroad between social tensions and new relational standards, new expectations on sexuality, pleasure, family.

Keywords: Youth, Body, Sociability, Cosaan, ICTs, appropriation

Introduction

In today's Senegal Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have become generalized, mostly due to mobile telephony. The debate in senegalese society around the “benefits and dangers” of technologies focus on the way instruments of communication have changed older patterns of sociability. Young and old people, traditional and newer media, all reflect on these changes.

But, *“what the Internet [and ICTs] produces cannot be understood in terms of the liberation of new and fluid identities. Not only were older identities, such as religion, nation, and family, embraced online, but the Internet could be seen by many as primarily a means of repairing those allegiances. This requires special attention to the ways in which freedom and normative are linked rather than sundered in these newer media of social interaction”* [Miller & Slater, 2000 : p.18]

I won't be addressing «nation», «religion» or «family» straightforwardly, but ideas about those are important references to consider senegalese «youth», its appropriation of their bodies, their appropriation of ICTs, and the way those two appropriations are at a crossroad of change in sociability, relatedness, and dimensions of bodily life, namely sexuality. This double appropriation stresses a social tension between generations, but is also connected to larger social questions in today's societies in Africa.

This «youth» is trapped in what Alcinda Honwana, picking up from Diane Singerman [cf. Singerman, 2007], called «waithood», trying to make up new strategies of life, through hardships and social pressure, to become adults. Honwana justly remarks how «waithood» is not a simple failed transition but a sign of wider social issues "... a breakdown in the social economic system supposed to provide ..." [Honwana, 2012, p.3]

In the face of limited opportunities to fulfill their desire for «success» [cf. Fall, Abdou Salam, 2007], in social spaces where consumption and value are supposed to be materialized [cf. Buggenhagen, 2011] and displayed, bodies are assets and technologies instruments of action.

Bodily life in Senegal is, on the other hand, considered cynically through the lens of ideology. Youth is faced with a negation of the body and the negation of sexuality outside the framework of marriage, and *Cosaan*, roughly translated as tradition, as become an aspiration for some [cf. Fall, Iba 2010], on the quest for a renewed, and seemingly impossible, regulation of the bodies.

1. Theoretical considerations

a) A short consideration on technology studies in Africa.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have recently generalized in african countries. The first decade of the 21st century has seen the increasing appropriation of technologies such as the cellphone and the Internet (even if to a lesser extent), throughout most of the countries in the continent accompanied by a rhetoric of development on the levels of state and NGOs, local and global. Much has been said on the benefits of such technologies for economic and social development but also much concern about africans lagging behind the new digital-informational economy. The concept of «digital divide» was forged to try to explain how Africa, once again, should catch a moving train. This discourse was a clear follow up to the development studies [cf. Alzouma, 2005] and the benefits of ICTs for Africa are still being discussed. A « rise » of the continent is in order so the narrative goes.

On the other hand, very few works consider technologies as they are domesticated by africans [cf. Hahn e Kibora, 2008; Nyamba, 2000], even if there are some examples of how

innovative uses of ICTs have impacted in long-standing problems in the African continent in the domains of : health, civil services, market information, banking, [cf. Cheneau-Loquay, 2010 ; Molony, 2008] and even political participation [cf. Sylla, 2012]

Without trying to play down the dynamic of growth of digitalization in the continent, I wanted to consider something of a different nature, by trying to look into the relationship of people to technologies, and to each other through communication technologies, and the tense social representations that emerge around the widespread use of ICTs among youth.

Technologies are as important for those who possess them as for those who don't. They bring about important material mediation to social relationships that shouldn't be disregarded, playing an active role in the shaping of sociability. The best way to consider how technology affects society is not a debate that has been closed. According to Brey:

"There is general agreement in technology studies [not anthropology] that the introduction and use of a new technology is often accompanied by significant changes in its social context. Such changes may include changes in individual and collective behaviors, attitudes and beliefs, in social statuses and roles, and in social structures and institutions. This generally accepted idea goes against the notion that technologies are neutral ..." [Brey, p.61].

But, in a less deterministic fashion ANT (actor-network theory) has it that

"...artifacts and their properties should be analyzed neither as objective facts nor as mere social constructions, but as both real and constructed. Artifacts and their properties emerge as the result of their being embedded in a network of human and nonhuman entities". [Brey: p.62]

ICTs in Senegal, have promoted the multiplication of «youth» sociability in space and time, allowing for extended networks of relatedness, as well as networks of people (and technologies) less dependent on locality, and according to popular belief, exposing them also to new dangers.

Having at least a cellphone is a new imperative in Senegal, a new requirement for social inclusion. Being «youth» in today's Senegal is «being connected» or the least, «being available»¹, through and with ICTs. But devices aren't just for communication they can also be fashion accessories, or «*instruments de la drague*»², indicators of social statuses, but also as instruments of production of representations of younger generations and their bodies.

Things don't have only instrumental values, and people don't always have clear ends as to what they want from something they use, sometimes the attachment to objects like the cellphone is not the communication in itself, but the image of oneself as someone who partakes in what's happening, meaning 'not feeling excluded', and less the actual 'use' of the instrument.

In Senegal social relationships value the bond between the individual, its family, community (a religiously bound one), the sense of «duty», the social contract, and social solidarity. Those ideological dimensions of culture shape not only the way social relations are thought of, but also the value attributed to the possibilities opened up by technologies. Being 'able to act' is not a value *per se*, and the way technologies open up new possibilities of social interaction aren't always taken as necessities by everyone. Technologies go deep into the ways people think society. Questions of what is culturally acceptable or not have become common talk. Those questions attribute an ambiguous value to technologies and enter the realm of the acceptability of certain bodily practices, of youth and even more so of women.

Hence the generalization of ICTs on the african continent³ during the last decade, might represent the glory of a certain economic-technical⁴ capitalist ethos, but it doesn't erase the many

1 This 'availability' is also the reason some youngsters I interviewed thought better not to have cellphones.

2 <http://www.osiris.sn/Dakar-Quand-les-Smartphones.html>

3 It's only a relative generalization but the penetration rate of cellphones is 93% in Senegal, and Internet is now around 9%.

4 Techno-critical would probably be more accurate.

questions different communities are considering when faced with this “inevitable development” [cf. Nyamba, 1999].

If in pragmatical terms they introduce more efficient ways of working in market economies, in societal terms the possibilities they open in terms of access to information and ability to open up communication aren't always welcome, neither the power they give to individuals to pursue their own interests away from social, community or familial control and networks of solidarity. They generate new spaces of reflection and autonomy, enable participation, but also overload with information what once was kept silent. They influence notions of distance and kinship, citizenship and participation, and notions of the body.

They're not only a «medium» for the body to be produced, but they play a fundamental role in that production.

In this paper I try to show how senegalese youth have appropriated ICTs and how through them they produce a body in society which is considered to be problematic, because it is sexualized and transgressive. The «ethos» produced is in stark contrast with the canons of accepted behavior and is considered an improper one for a good life in society.

Senegalese society values the absence of the «sexualized body» from the public domain, and in general from any type of conversation. The silence around «intimacy» is contained in the praise of notions such as that of «*kersa*», «*sutura*» or «*muñ*»; and also in general values of «compliance» and «submission» to authority (*am kilifa*), be it patriarchal, gerontocratical or religious.

Alassane Sylla, in the 70's defined, «*kersa*», «*sutura*» and «*muñ*» and his definitions are still pretty much valid: «*kersa*», “*pudeur si respectueuse des convenances, qu'elle frise la timidité*”. [cf. Sylla, p.88] ; «*sutura*», *c'est ce qui cache aux yeux du public les faiblesses et les*

défauts de quelqu'un pour ne laisser paraître que ce qui le rend respectable. C'est une apparence de pureté, d'honnêteté, de compétence etc, derrière laquelle se cachent nos défauts et faiblesses. [cf Sylla, p. 94] ; «Muñ»: *être capable de conserver son intégrité, sa loyauté, ses convictions jusque dans l'adversité. Être«muñ» c'est être armé d'une patience et d'une abnegation au-dessus de toute épreuve. Et en particulier l'argent et les biens matériels ne peuvent détourner de ses convictions morales quelqu'un qui est «muñ».* [cf. Sylla, p.88]

Curiously enough, those values are invoked because they're missing. Hence, we will hear more the expressions «ñak kersa», «ñak fula» (shamelessness), «ñak kilifa» than their positive assertions, as «ñak» means «something is missing».

As such, the production of this sexualized body, through its many materializations in fashions, in images that circulate the media-scape, in homemade and professional videos and photos, and in daily practices, is also the production of a «negative» social status. This negative status of youth in Senegal is not so much a consequence of ICTs as the islamist Iba Fall suggests when he sees "(...) *une jeunesse condamnée à tourner le dos à son patrimoine historico-culturel dans un contexte de mondialisation caractérisé par une puissance incontrôlable et particulièrement dévastatrice des nouvelles technologies envers les cultures africaines en général et celles de notre société particulièrement*". [Fall, Iba, 2010 : p.19] but part of an historical process as pointed by Diouf, where :

"(...) the dramatic irruption of young people in the public and domestic spheres seems to have resulted in the construction of African youth as a threat, and to have provoked, within society as a whole, a panic that is simultaneously moral and civic. At issue are the bodies of young people and their behaviors, their sexuality and their pleasure." [Diouf, 2003 : p.3].

My argument is that ICTs have been helping to materialize and exacerbate a long standing tendency of the questioning of social values. Those tendencies are part of an historical

process that in the case of Senegal develops in a framework of post-nationalist political alternation, and economical liberalism since the year 2000.

b) Considerations on «Youth» in Senegal : youth, sexuality and ICTs

There is a general agreement that it is necessary to consider social experiences of african youth to understand the mutations of today's african societies. This «youth» is often considered through its transgressive and violent potential, and no longer like that of the Independence as the « hope of the continent » [cf. Diouf, 2003], but also, and often, through its creative ways to cope with adverse social conditions, for example the growing difficulties to achieve the social status of «adult» [cf. Honwana 2012; Biaya 2000, 2001; Fall, A.S, 2007], despite formal juridical definitions of majority.

Studies on youth in Senegal are more often than not concentrated in the region of Dakar. Academic knowledge production considering youth stemming from “the regions” (as they are called in Senegal) seem rather scarce. That doesn't mean that many of the things said about the values and expectations of young people in Dakar cannot be said about young people elsewhere. Normally though, considerations on inhabitants of the rural areas of Senegal tend to point to the backwardness of the social environment, the poor living conditions, and they seem to forget to look to what's going on with youth.

Youth in these regions are generically considered to be «good candidates to migration». There are few studies, though that consider the questions facing the lives of youth in their permanent negotiations for their futures, way before being candidates to migrate, or something else.

I would like to build upon the notion of «youth», but I will consider less the differences that separate rural from urban youth than the similarities they present in their expectations for a «good life» and the demands upon them from their peers, their families and the community. I'll consider here the relationship of youth to their bodies and through them their negotiation with an idealized tradition (*Cosaan*). I'd like to think «senegalese youth» in a historical moment, and less in a geographical, urban or rural particularization.

My hypothesis is that despite all distinctions we can establish when thinking of such an elastic category as «youth», we still can try to understand the expectations of today's youth in a common background (if only we enlarge our timeline), be them «*walo walo peasants*», «*saintlouisiens*» or «*dakarois*», «*káw káw*» (peasants) or «*wa dek ba*» (from the city), which seems to be a consequence of a strong mediatization of society, especially achieved by television. Expectations on marriage, monogamy and polygamy, number of children, work, consumption, sexuality and love [cf. Eerdjewijk, 2007], gender roles, are but a few upon the myriad of changes this youth craves for.

The concept of "*Youth should be understood in their relation to specific spaces and places*⁵, which Christiansen et. al. (2006) have termed 'navigation'. Youth is thus a 'navigational' concept as it indicates how and by following which trajectories, a 'certain' group of people in society produce, occupy, or escape from certain spaces and places. Redefining youth as an identity-project of 'becoming somebody" [van Dijk, Rik et. al., 2011 : p6].

Today's youth was already preceded, in the 90's, by the so-called generation «*buul fale*» (don't give a shit), a «youth» with a different take on deep seated values :

5 Such a consideration should entail a description of the environments where this youth evolves, the school, the domestic environment, the specific spaces and places of this socialization. Unfortunately these are out of the scope of this article.

"Le buul fale délaisse le boubou, préfère le pantalon, la chemise et la coupe «Tyson», et adopte un langage truffé d'anglicismes. On est loin des générations précédentes, frères de leur président agrégé de grammaire, qui s'identifiaient à son parcours intellectuel et assumaient son projet de société ou respectaient les édits islamiques. Aujourd'hui, beaucoup de jeunes Dakarais s'enthousiasment pour les danses érotiques de rue (sabar et arwatam), vite reconverties en leumbeul dans les night-clubs." [Biaya, 2000: p.27]

This «new attitude» was concomitant in social and economic terms with a Dakar saturated with people coming from rural areas, following the serious rural crisis that made many areas in Senegal be considered «emergency zones», after a decade between the 70's and the 80's of harsh drought⁶. Families not only lost their livelihoods but they were also forced to migrate to urban areas, where a true «*culture de débrouillardise*» has become the norm [cf. Fall, Abdou Salam, 2007], and also abroad [cf. Roquet, 2008]. The Structural Adjustments Programme from the IMF and the devaluation of the franc CFA lead by France, deepened this tendency.

As balance was made by the «*culture de migration*» that has become the new norm [cf. Diop, 2008] and remittances have played, and continue to play an enormous role in domestic budgets, creating new «models of success», which are important in the creation of new standards of life⁷. The success of migrants was sort of canonized in and around the construction of villas, the use of expensive cars, and in general a mode of life where the display of economic power is compulsory.

These changing models of success are more and more connected to lifestyles, money and consumption [cf. Nyamnjoh, 2004]. These mutations are accompanied by ideological struggles and the questioning of gender roles inherited from the colonial and post-colonial nationalist period [cf. Aniekwu, 2006].

6 See Waalo Waalo, documentary film by Ricardo Falcão and Ricardo Silva, 2009, <https://vimeo.com/17473503>

7 This idea that migration has contributed to new standards of success shouldn't hide the fact that there are new «models of success» there are also new «models of failure».

All these factors contributed to a youth who finds it increasingly difficult to «become an adult».

On the one side, this problem to become an adult, might be defined well by the term «waithood», used by Diane Singerman:

"Waithood" places young people in an adolescent, liminal world where they are neither children nor adults. In this liminal state, young people remain financially dependent on their families (who, in large part finance the costs of marriage) for far longer than previous generations and they must live by the rules and morality of their parents and the dominant values of society which frown on unchaperoned fraternization and unmarried relationships. Yet, as more and more men and women delay marriage, the institution of marriage is changing and new marriage "substitutes" and sexual norms are emerging beyond the margins of society." [Singerman, 2007, p.6]

On the other hand, as already pointed with Singerman, Tshikala Biaya had already underlined in the nineties that:

"L'âge d'entrée dans la vie adulte - qui se caractérise, du moins chez les garçons, par l'autonomie financière, la sortie du toit parental et l'entrée dans l'univers de l'emploi - recule. Ce recul entraîne une grande part d'angoisse sexuelle et est à l'origine de conduites neuves (...). Dans les classes moyennes et pauvres, quelque soit le type d'habitat - concession ou parcelle - deux, voire trois générations d'une même famille vivent dans la maison, privant le jeune homme d'une vie intime. Il ne peut s'autoriser une vie amoureuse faite de jeux, caresses ou conduisant à l'acte sexuel sans que n'éclate un conflit éthique avec son environnement immédiat." [Biaya, 2001: p.78]

As Mamadou Diouf stressed, the «body» and «sexuality» are at the center of the negative status of «youth». As new sexual practices become the norm [cf. Biaya, 2001] the pressure for autonomous spaces becomes bigger. Family dependence hardly allows this autonomy and tensions arise when generations, with different perspectives on life are forced to share the same sometimes exiguous spaces.

To make sense of these tensions older generations often express youth's disregard for traditions, *Cosaan*. Which entails a respect for the gerontocratical principles that guide most senegambian societies.

An idea of senegalese tradition (*Cosaan*) was expressed by my interlocutors, both youth and their parents, not as a positive value, not as a quest for an identity, but as : a) an expectation on the regulation of behaviors; b) a substitute for the problematic parenting; c) a pillar against individualization; d) the fixation of values against western influence ; but also for some, especially to youth, as e) a constraint.

But the irruption of «youth» in the private sphere is only a part of it. Youth has also erupted in the public sphere. Youth movements claim more strongly for an active citizenship, for political voice, and for their demands to be met. *Y'en a Marre* is one such movement. Created in 2011 in the suburban areas of Dakar, to voice the many frustrations felt by populations, this movement actually played an important role in the tense electoral process of 2012, through its vigilance of democratic alternation.

So the struggle, in the public as in the private sphere, is for youth to have a voice, «*am bàat*», that is, to be considered, be someone (*nek kilifa*) but also to '*nek kilifa boppam*', to be autonomous. But this youth is said to have taken down the path of individualism, as it is expressed in the expression «*top sa bakkan*»⁸, disregarding the necessary parsimony to follow traditional and religious precepts ; and being accused of shamelessness (*ñak fula*), and lacking authority (*ñak kilifa*), ultimately representing a danger to the values of solidarity and community.

But as «youth» is accused of disrespect for *Cosaan*, it is women who are targeted by most of the moral judgments, their bodies thought to be temples of depravity. Fashion tendencies also

8 Top sa bakkan means «to do what you please» (lit. To follow your nose).

contribute to the idea of expensive bodies as they're nowadays focused in considerable investments, and prone to exhibitionism. The *pathial*⁹ focused on women breasts, the *taille baisse*¹⁰, the *khéssal* (skin bleaching), the *greffage* (hair extensions) are often criticized as unacceptable modernities, who cost what most women cannot afford. This focus makes this a gendered account, because it is the bodies of females who are under close scrutiny.

The supposed individualism of youth manifests furthermore in frivolous consumption [cf. Nyamnjoh, 2004], well captured in the expression *lek sa xaliss*. The expression in wolof *lék sa xáliss* means literally «to eat your money». Its common sense though is wider and means someone who is able to dispose of money to consume in a growing consumist society. The expression is especially used in the context of salutations. *Yangi lék sa xáliss ?* are you eating your money ? The reply can be positive or negative. One might say *lékouma dara*, meaning that nothing is going on, or in the positive sense, *namouma dara*, meaning “I can't complain” (lit . I miss nothing).

Here also, it is again women who are often accused of using all the means necessary to be able to consume, like the practice of *mbaraan* (multi-partnership) [cf. Foley, 2013 ; Fouquet, 2011 ; Biaya, 2001]. *Mbaraan* is an interesting case of what Leclerc-Madlala called «transaccionalité of sex» [cf. Hunter, 2002 ; Haram, 2004 ; Fouquet, 2011; Leclerc-Madlala, 2004].

Mbaraan, as it exists today, is most likely a recent phenomenon, despite that it might be stemming from age old institutions in senegalese society [cf. Fouquet citing Thioub, in Fouquet, 2011]. Even if this is the case, *mbaraan* today can be seen as

9 «*pathial pathial*» means to squeeze in Wolof. The term «*pathial*» has acquired a new meaning though, meaning today accentuated cleavages where the female breast are squeezed to accentuate sensuality.

10 Low waist jeans.

"a gendered response to the reigning socioeconomic challenges in urban Senegal (...) [rather than] a sign of moral decay or the encroachment of Western consumerism and sexual norms on traditional Senegalese culture, we argue that mbaraan reflects contradictory opportunities and constraints that women face as they grapple with unfulfilled material, emotional and sexual expectations ..." [Foley, 2013, p.122]

Using *mbaraan* as a way of "asserting control over their own sexual, emotional and reproductive labor and deploy it to accomplish their ends" [Foley, 2013: p.122] fits nicely into the «women's agency» narrative, but hides the many contradictions these women are faced with, and the experimentation of youth (as young as 12) with it. Furthermore, *mbaraan* is not just what we might call a «women's thing», but also practiced by man [cf. Salomon, 2009], even though the moral judgments associated with this aren't at all as negative as with the case of women.

Anyhow, *mbaraan* as be taken up as a strategy to cope with material needs, not just in urban contexts but in rural as well, and not just by «married women» (circumscribing it like this would amount to stigmatize one specific group, excluding the others who also practice it) but also, and probably even more, by «youth».

What seems to be important though is that the body, and its relatedness (including sexuality) is seen as an «asset», something one might make a gain of. This body is judged immoral, shameless, uncontrollable, unknown. Despite of this all these references represent the negotiations of senegalese youth with norm.

c) The Body and the search for pleasure in Senegal, and its mediatization.

To talk about the body in society can be very confusing. It is very hard to define such a multidimensional entity. Since the 1970's scholars have paid increasing attention to it in the social and behavioral sciences. Many theoretical perspectives have been explored and the concept seems to conserve a certain plasticity, being adapted almost everywhere [cf. Csordas, 1990 : p.4]

A recent collective work on the "social construction of the body" in Senegal creates an interesting framework, despite its formal limitations and holistic resonances [cf. Strathern, 1996]. It starts by assuming that when we consider Senegal we are in the face of a country where «ways of life» are in transition. It goes then to construct an account based on ethnography on what is transitioning to what. So at the starting point the authors consider the «tradition» or «*coosan*» and at the arrival point «modernity» or «*dund toubab*». The axis on which were conducted the research are three. In each axis we'll find a relation to the body. Firstly we'll find the relation to death and health; secondly, the practices of eating and the perception on food; and lastly, sexuality and aesthetics.

For *Cohen et al*, the «body» in Senegal, “...*passe d'une cosmologie axée sur le mysticisme (animisme/monothéisme) à une cosmologie ancrée dans le rationalisme (modernité).*” [Cohen et. al.,2012, p.85]

It's not only the «categories» that resonate Émile Durkheim or Marcel Mauss, but also the duality in which they are presented. There is an underlying linearity, from mysticism to rationalism (western enlightened modernity), typical of a certain old fashioned anthropology.

Even though I don't subscribe to this way of presenting the question there is change in values concerning the «body» in Senegal : an increasing rationalization of the body in health for example, as people recur more and more to western type medicine ; but those same persons you'll find in the hospital, have often already tried out many pharmacopeic powders, or mystical baths, prescribed by the traditional healers (*serigne*). Both things coexist rather than exclude one another.

The «rational», also meaning here «modern» and «western» (as the original wolof «*dund toubab*» shows, translated literally as «living like the toubab») co-exists with the «*coosan*»,

which is more of a conscious expression of an expectation than an actually lived «way of life». Although this expression, «*dund toubab*» is effectively used in Senegal to talk about certain «styles of life» one should be extra careful about it. «Toubab» is an ambiguous term applied to «white people». It is used cynically and as a sign of superiority, but also as mockery. The sense here used, as «modern» is quite paradoxical, it reproduces a colonial hierarchical ethos only to void it from its value. That is, people use the expression to mean for example that you are leading the «good life», *dund toubab*, but by doing it you are a sort of a traitor to your «africinity», or your senegaleseness, basically to your «traditions» (*Coosan*). So, *dund toubab*, actually radically opposes *Coosan* in many instances. Some other times «toubab» is simply used to explain things that come from outside of Senegal.

A good example of the tensions between *Cosaan* and *Dund Toubab* in a domain where the body is a central category, is sports. In most of the sports practiced in Senegal, people stress an increase in the mystical element (something that might be explained with the incredible mediatization of senegalese wrestling, *lamb ji*), and concomitantly also an increasing rationalization of the body, with more and better training skills, accompanying an increasing professionalization.

Senegalese society should be seen as a syncretic one, and not one on the verge of becoming rationalized in the western sense of the term, despite that people tend to see the «new» as something from «outside».

Despite the many possible critiques that the article of *Cohen et al* might arise, they point to some tendencies that can be confirmed in the field, and that somehow confirm that in Senegal the relation to the body is in fact changing. One of the axis of questionment of *Cohen et al* concerns aesthetics and sexuality.

Cohen et al have remarked four points, concerning this axis: (1) the westernization puts in place new practices of sexuality devoted to pleasure; (2) young people open themselves to these new practices, outside the framework of family and parents choices; (3) westernization puts in place a life of the couple centered in love games and sexual pleasure that put polygamy in question; (4) the body transforms into object of pleasure, and the rigor of appearances becomes more evident, there are new processes of competition, exclusion and stigmatization, especially in urban areas. [adapted from Cohen et al, p.5-6].

The ethnographic examples I will present next will confirm these tendencies but they show that this « change » is in fact a permanent negotiation, happening especially with youth.

I would like to add, though, another dimension that isn't present in *Cohen et al* which is the «mediatized body». The practices of senegalese youth concerning their body rely strongly in a projection of themselves in different media. Their relation to their bodies, their relatedness, are also marked by it, as is their sexuality. These instruments mediate a relation between self and body but more importantly they allow this youth to escape «boundedness» and «vigilance» (which can be seen as the basic experience of youth in Senegal, especially for women). ICTs multiply the possibilities of communication of groups once «protected» from outside interferences.

ICTs are then instruments of a «technicity of relatedness» of body to self and body to society, and shouldn't be excluded of considerations about sociability.

This «technicity» that today is present in the relations of people in Senegal shouldn't be considered as simply a natural consequence of globalization and ICTs availability. This technicity, which means that : to communicate with someone else one depends on a technology,

and mainly on a technology ; should be considered, especially in rural settings, against a different order of things, where communication should ideally occur in a controlled environment.

2. Transgressive Bodies

2.1. The «affaire» of the lesbians of Grand Yoff and morality online.

A recent internet story is a fresh illustration of how «technology» and «sexuality» occupy a considerable space in senegalese media, but also a reflex of how deeply the bodily lives of younger generations are under close social scrutiny.

The senegalese media-scape is made of scandals every now and then. These scandals, many related to sexual stories, seem to fit perfectly with the need of addressing the taboos Senegalese society has concerning the public discussion of «juvenile and women sexuality», «celibacy», «homosexuality». Previous scandals like “Sabar bou Graw”, “Goudi Town”, or «Oumou Sy» scandal, concerning the world of dance and fashion, had already shown how the public exhibition of the female body and sexuality are sensitive issues.

The attributions of what is private and what is public are quite clear, and frontiers crossed are frowned upon. Eroticism is not denied [cf. Nura Mustafa, 2006], but it has specific contexts where it is played out.

This new story, happened in 2011 in the popular neighborhood of *Grand Yoff*, is different, because it concerns young high-school students and is not connected to any specific trade where the body is a central category, like in dance. These are normal average girls, schoolgirls.

The «exclusive» was presented by the web portal www.senego.com, but was discussed widely by print press and digital press and to a less extent also by television.

The video in question shows some girls caressing the erogenous areas of their bodies for and between themselves, touching their breasts, their sexes, and masturbating using improvised dildos. The supposed authors of the video inhabit in the suburban area of *Grand Yoff*, not far from the international airport Leopold Sédar Senghor.

The images, captured by a cellphone, aren't clear, but the website classifies these girls «*lesbians*», pointing to the transgression as yet another example of the recurrence of such scandalous «depravity of values» and transgressive behavior daily purported by younger generations. This classification denounces not only that youth are experimenting with their bodies, and that their values are different from 'what's expected', but mostly making clear the inability to treat the matter impartially, or to understand how profoundly this is linked with new sexual expectations.

What does the video contain in itself? Between the excitement of the transgressive behavior, the revelation of the nude body, and the erotic discovery, what are we exactly seeing? True lesbians or curious girls playing their sexuality in a exploration of their bodies? There is no information of a love relationship accompanying the caresses. The public opinion is bound to consider lesbianism solely through the filter of the played sexuality among girls, excluding other relevant dimensions of what it is to be a lesbian, relatedness and affections. If we are in the face of lesbians or not we cannot know it just by looking at this video.

Besides the girls playing their sexuality another active participant opens the situation to the whole of society, and that is the cellphone. What is its role in the evolution of the situation? Why have the girls decided to film their actions ? Isn't it that there is a certain *mise en scène* precisely because the cellphone is registering? A *participant camera* or a performance in the media eye? The cellphone actually seems to create the story, assuming itself as a provoking

element from within and not a simple instrument. Without it there is no story. The sexuality is “played” as in a pornographic film. The girls clearly consume this type of film as it seems to be the case with the majority of the members of their generation. In this particular instance the actors are these once anonymous amateur girls, seeing themselves through the media eye they have improvised, one can only conjecture why.

One could probably speculate on a projection of the self in the media as an urge to validate their own images as sexual beings.

I would like, though, to underline how the cellphone is nowadays an omnipresent element in senegalese social interactions, especially amongst youth. Furthermore cellphones are more and more a tool for representing the world, with its capabilities to film and photograph, and should be considered as full part of our contemporary relatedness, mediated by technicity. This technicity is a sort of antithesis to the ideological «veiled body» part of the religious framework of moral life and virtues in Senegal.

They introduce this new sort of materiality to dimensions of life that are considered to be a privilege of married life, but are here exploited by the girls with a curiosity that isn't validated by any moral discourse, and hence seen as a foreign element (and by extension a Western way of relating body and self). This materiality poses, on the other hand, the question of intimacy and privacy.

I would like now to present the threads that first publicized the story. The arguments presented underline the moral danger well pointed by Mamadou Diouf and are straightforward judgments about the «improper» (or transgressive) behavior of the girls. Using expressions like the «fall of women», «moral decay», «crisis in authority», ICTs emerge as a justification for the problematic sexuality. Note how in each of the four titles they're always present in different

forms, «under the eye of a camera», «lands on cellphones», «landed in the net» and finally «the auteurs evoke the absence of parents and the arrival of new technologies», revealing an *ethos* that associates closely the rise of ICTs and the «depravity of values».

Note also that the subject has generated an immense curiosity, shown by the “Top 4” of www.senego.com portal in 25-05-2012 with 4 pieces all concerning the video. We can actually read these four “news” as a single thread. I'll leave here only the titles : a) [*Senego Exclusive*] *senegalese lesbian girls filmed as they give themselves to pornographic actions*¹¹ ;b) *Lesbians of Grand Yoff: the film of the lesbians lands on cellphones*¹². c) *Lesbians of Grand Yoff: how the video has landed in the «net»?*¹³ d) *The Affaire of the lesbians of Grand Yoff: the auteurs evoke the absence of parents and the arrival of new technologies*¹⁴.

There is a follow up on these news, new details come by and corrections are made in the following weeks. There are also, depending on the website presenting the information, many different titles. Seneweb News, the most visited online portal in Senegal, presents the girls has a «gang of lesbians». The connotations with crime are quite indicative of the way we ought to see their practices according to the website, transgressive, criminal, unacceptable. They also add that Anna L., the «chief of the gang», is an “*habitué*” in Dakars nightlife and goes around celebrities, and that she is not exactly lesbian as she also has boyfriends, meaning that she is bi-sexual (but not using explicitly the term). A news in the same portal dating from the 6th of June presents the information on a police investigation and tells us that 5 men have been indicted for privacy invasion, by making the video available on the Internet.

11 http://actu-senegalaise.senego.com/exclusivit-senego-vido-des-filles-sngalaises-lesbiennes-filme-se-livres-des-actes-pornographique_18124.html

12 http://actu-senegalaise.senego.com/lesbiennes-de-grand-yoff-le-film-du-partouze-atterrit-dans-les-tlphones-portables_18402.html

13 http://actu-senegalaise.senego.com/affaire-des-lesbiennes-de-grand-yoff-comment-la-vido-est-arrive-sur-la-toile_18237.html

14 http://actu-senegalaise.senego.com/affaires-des-lesbiennes-de-grand-yoff-les-auteurs-evoquent-la-demission-des-parents-et-larrivee-des-nouvelles-technologies_18526.html

Tele-media also didn't let the situation escape, fortunately doing a somehow more serious type of journalistic work. TFM (Tele Futurs Media), one month after the video has circled the Internet and cellphones around the country, has managed to talk to two of the girls in the video. The girls explain how their life has changed and how now they're obliged to stay put in their houses, unable to leave because of the unforgiving public eye. The moment they played for the video, they say, the thought of the video ending up on the Internet hasn't crossed their minds. The «event» of this video is an intricate set of moral judgments that are directly pointed to the idea senegalese society seems to make of both juvenile sexuality outside of marriage and about the *web*. This idea is not only an idea made about the possibilities given by a technology but especially an appreciation of the openness brought by it. I can't resist summing up the morality in the news in one single text.

*The «shameless» girls in a world resembling Sodoma where parents don't do their jobs anymore and ICTs are ubiquitous, where taboos have been trashed and young girls can give themselves to unnatural acts of homosexuality using their bodies as professionals of pornography. In spite of that, people rejoice themselves with the rare product of young senegalese girls from 16 to 20 years old gangbang. The new attitude of these "youngsters" is seen through the eye of a cellphone, where everything is naked now and part of a business. And, on the other hand, it is the internet the source of the mimetism as this clearly is not a practice "of Senegal", but something from «outside».*¹⁵

Some of my interviewees, and other people I know, also came upon the video. The video was not shown in televisions and most people will have actually seen it in cellphones where it is exchanged through *bluetooth*. My interviewees that stated to have seen the video in the cellphone

15 This is adapted from the expressions used in the four mentioned newspieces.

also expressed a certain "fear" for their images being on the *web* and being used to less proper ends.

In what concerns me here, what should be pointed out through the unveiling of this situation is less whether or not this should be considered as homosexuality, and how is it that this is considered scandalous in Senegal, than the way the morality of senegalese society is exerted, its logic, and the way it has included ICTs and its appropriation as a moral danger to what is considered to be the proper society.

This situation also points out to what are cellphones today and how they have blurred the boundaries of public and private lives of people, and also to the generational conflict present in today's Senegal with youth relatedness at its core.

2.2. Pornography: "If you watch you'll feel pleasure" or "You feel eager to have a husband"?

"If you watch it you feel pleasure". Penda Dér, a young timid female of 17 years old, says this in the course of our interview. She is talking about pornography, that watching it is pleasurable. She is not the talkative nor the assertive type, not someone that easily constructs an argument defending this or that way of doing things, as others I have found. But here she's not hiding what she is living, at least part of it, and she easily asserts this dimension normally left unspoken.

She hides from her parents and family, that she is used to watch pornography with her friends in the school computer, in a *Lycée* just for girls in Saint Louis. She is in *classe de 5ème*. She has practiced the *mbaraan* even though she says she doesn't anymore. She seems to be pulled to live

more than her narrow imposed limits allow her to and that's probably why her dream job is to become an air hostess.

Her cellphone was also confiscated by her father, she is not sure why, but she says "maybe he has heard something", meaning that she knows that he might have some reasons to do it.

Watching pornography or practicing *mbaraan* are both transgressive actions, the first of which seems to have become vulgarized with the advent of internet connections, and the online abundance of porn, and especially important in Senegal, the vulgarization of cellphones through which people exchange, buy or sell porn videos. Transgression is more often than not difficult to prove, but rumors circulate like wildfire.

Young people in general, excluding those with a comfortable economic situation which are a minority, don't have access to computers for themselves. A computer is not a «personal instrument» for senegalese youth, a «place» to store personal data, information and media preferences, even though that logic might also take place when possible. A computer is used in public, in cybercafés, in schools, in the house of friends. The grand majority of the girls interviewed in the public Lycée where Penda studies uses the computer in school and has no access to it outside of it, be it because they cannot spare the pocket money to go to a cyber café, or because going to a cyber café is «making a detour» instead of heading back home. Most of them upon leaving school will still have house chores to accomplish. The question of «free time» is a very important one to pose because, for most girls, there is hardly any free time from the commissions asked, the house chores to accomplish, and homework for school.

Although many among these girls has already come in contact with pornography, only some admit to watching it on a regular basis, and most of them say they watch it on someone

else's phone, or in the computer with others. Among the girls no one admitted to watch pornography for pleasure and in an individual setting.

This is of course due to its transgressive character, making it a boundary to be crossed accompanied by others. This is also why i was amazed by the assumption of Penda, a timid girl, that naturally admits to feel pleasure when she watches it, because "*not much is said about pleasure and enjoyment – certainly not female pleasure*" [Arnfred, 2004, p.59]. I was most struck by her sincerity, quite rare.

She adds, "*dafay def dara ci sama yaaram*", meaning that seeing pornography "does make something in my body". The specific relation i am trying to follow here is the relation of youth to their bodies, and with the body in public, among peers at least. On another interview with a girl in a village she tells me something similar. While watching pornography in her cellphone, with her close friends, one of them asks her if she feels anything. She says no. The friend tells her that she finds it herself exciting, and that she ought to feel something, because "*Dafa nékh*" ("It's enjoying")

Penda also tells further in our interview that her life is not easy, she gives the example of sitting with her parents and if some hotter scene comes by the television, she has to leave. That is not something for kids. I've seen this in context, in extended family context, but I've also remarked how this tendency is disappearing. Television, and Senegal has many foreign channels, is so erotic oriented that it would be a nightmare to watch a film changing the channel every five minutes. So people tend to let the control down. It is very difficult to ascertain the individual reactions to erotic scenes, wherever they might be found.

The stimuli are there, the erotic is present. As the first story of the «lesbians of Grand Yoff», and Penda's words reinforce, this is far away from being an epiphenomenon. The relation of senegalese youth with their bodies is a constant negotiation though.

Another girl, M T Mbodj, who has never went to french school, but has frequented a Koranic school, also expresses the same thing as Penda but in a different way. For her, when watching pornography "one wants to quickly be married". She lives in Hydrobase neighbourhood in Saint Louis, the same city of Penda, and her father is a monogamous fisherman. M T Mbodj doesn't know how to read or write, and she doesn't use a cellphone nor has she ever used the internet. But she watches pornography in her friends cellphones and they told her that watching it makes them wonder of having a husband.

The same eagerness to explore sexuality and pleasure is taken back to the normative. One is concerned with what is happening in the body, the other with the normative context where furthering the activity is possible.

These antagonistic tendencies found in response to erotic stimuli tell the story of the changes in sociability occurring in Senegal. ICTs are a part of it in the sense that they multiply the occurrence of situations where the sexual element is present and shared among youth.

Penda is not only assuming that she watches pornography, she is assuming that she has a body and that that body is there and it feels things, that it has a life, it has desire, it manifests itself.

The space created by ICTs is a space of a certain autonomy, even if an imaginary one because of its detachment from "immediate" social consequences, it is a space where desire and affects are possible and not constrained.

These curious reactions are heightened in my perception as the «body», as a sexually active entity, is a matter absent in most of the conversations of people in Senegal. People talk about bodies and body parts when they hurt and need cure or rest. It seems to me that young people have started to feel differently not just by being more and more conscious about their bodies, but also by wanting to make use of them, in what might be seen as a political claim for difference, for experiment with transgression. ICTs represent the perfect refuge to take first steps.

Conclusion

The two ethnographic examples here provided are just a small drop in the pond, of how youth have appropriated information and communication technologies as a means of self-reflection, and by doing so make sense of their own expectations and those upon them.

As 'traditional' education, in the domestic environment, is one where the body is covered with a veil of values of decency (*kersa*), secrecy (*sutura*), and sexual life and autonomy are to be held with patience (*muñ*). ICTs provide for spaces of autonomy where verbalizing the materiality of desire or the conscious search for pleasure isn't 'so wrong'. They're also the space that escapes the boundedness of the domestic, the school, the neighborhood, where social relations are imposed through kinship, affinity, or authority of elders, in a social environment of permanent vigilance.

Youth are then able to explore new forms of relatedness with friends and people they get involved with.

Because of constraints of space I was forced to leave out other telling examples of this exploration of sense and connection. To explore doesn't mean to leave behind, and youth continues to assert their allegiance to social and religious values.

This threading of new ways though is on a thin line between what should be kept private and the public matter as the juvenile exploration of the 'lesbians of Grand Yoff' shows, and self-exploration can easily turn to social nightmare when these young girls touch the patriarchal sacredness of women's sexuality, empowered by themselves and without the validation of men or society.

This 'coming out' is source of tensions as the generation of parents of today's youth see the values of their children as a threat to the world they know as *Cosaan*, and feel the *Toubab* (the whites, the westerners) gain ground in youths' expectations of life which are now globalized. *Dund Toubab* (living like the whites) is the expression used to try to make sense of the 'foreign' element in the lives of this 'daring' youth.

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