Living Youth, Becoming Somebody:

*Life in Urban Dakar*

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Abstract:
In this thesis I wish to show how the category of youth in Africa is fraught with tension, and how this affects young men. Being a group that is in many ways at risk in our contemporary moment, it becomes important to understand what is at stake for young men in African cities. For many people in Dakar, the category of youth is a social position that is perceived as a period of stagnation, that it is difficult to transcend. Therefore I wish to show how young men cope with life in an urban landscape and social reality that does not offer many possibilities. Through an analysis of the extensive pirogue migration that took place all over Senegal in the years 2005-2008/09, and the practice of Baay Fall religiosity, I will show how young men imagine alternatives in a social environment where disappointment regarding what they perceive as a malfunctioning government and an unjust global system are prevalent. Imagining takes place in an interplay between objective structure and subjective agency, and therefore the socio-political context must be reviewed in order to grasp the background for the practices that form part of this thesis, as well as the aspirations of the young men involved. In the world today, ideals of consumption and accumulation loom large, and the global narratives of success reach every corner of the world. As such, it is important to understand how young people relate to their (imagined) participation in, or exclusion from, these pervasive, global images. I will show how young men in Dakar follow usual and alternative paths in the construction of themselves as modern subjects, and how this is linked to an ongoing globalization of desires and expectations.
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Introduction

“This hostile world, ponderous and aggressive because it fends off the colonized masses with all the harshness it is capable of, represents not merely a hell from which the swiftest flight possible is desirable, but also a paradise close at hand which is guarded by terrible watchdogs”.

(Fanon 1963: 41)

“In many ways, young Africans can be seen as searching for a narrative that provides a territory for the free play of their imagination”

(Diouf 2003: 6)

For some time now the students of Africa, anthropologists and other social scientists alike, have become increasingly aware of the need to focus more of their attention on the experiences of youth. This seems to follow from an assertion that the category of youth is often seen as a subversive element in the recent history of many countries on the African continent. Being involved in military coups, riots, looting and the like, there has been a growing fear of young people both within nation-states and on the international scene (Biaya 2000, Diouf 2003, Perry 2009). Young people, especially young men, are depicted as being a risk or being at risk (Vigh 2006: 33), normally focusing most attention on the former aspect. And to be sure, the study of youth and their predicaments in Africa cannot ignore the relevance of such views, as youth have been responsible for many acts of violence. However, as many are becoming keenly aware, the study of young men must also show how and why they are at risk in the contemporary world, and in what way they struggle for a sense of inclusion, or in some instances choose to opt out in favour of other options in the search for alternative measurements of value, than those found in the global narratives of success.

My focus in this thesis will be on how young men in Dakar, Senegal, cope with life, and engage creatively with their predicaments in situations influenced and structured by perceptions of marginalization and exclusion from the overhanging narratives of success found in the global world order of today. In other words: how do young men in Dakar create space for agency under the influence of neo-liberal, globally dispersed power structures? I wish to show how being young in Dakar must be viewed as linked to what Diouf coins “the globalization of desires and expectations”(Diouf 2003: 2), thus pointing to how the neo-liberal capitalist world order, based as it is on the creation of subjectivity and value through consumption, is a defining feature in the globalized world. As such, one must view the
production of subjectivity as a relation between the personal, the political and the moral (Werbner 2002).

Therefore, I wish to show how young men in Dakar navigate the social terrain (Vigh 2006), listening to the pervasive global narratives of success, either wishing to partake in them, or transcend them through the participation in alternative narrative constructions. I do this by focusing on the process of trying to leave Dakar by pirogue\(^1\) and the practice of Baay Fall religiosity. I view them both as contemporary phenomena that have shaped the experience of life for youth (and society) in Dakar, and they must therefore be analyzed in order to comprehend what is at stake for young men in this urban environment. This points to the importance of taking seriously the aspect of the imagination in the youths’ social navigation.

**Imagining Life**

My view of the imagination follows Appadurai’s insights on the matter, where the term is understood in ways of the French academic tradition (1996). Here the *imaginaire* becomes a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity (ibid.). Meaning that imagining has become part of “constructed landscapes of the collective aspiration” (Appadurai 1996: 31). It is a way to imagine how things are, and how they could be (Weiss 2009), through a “negotiation between individual agency and globally defined fields of possibilities” (Appadurai 1996: 31). One must focus on how young people engage creatively with their predicaments in the interplay between objective structure and subjective agency (Vigh 2006), and how they imagine alternatives. As such, the imagination becomes an important staging ground for action, as well as escape (Appadurai 1996).

I wish to show how the imaginings of young people in Dakar are important when it comes to constructing subjectivities in a social landscape that does not offer many options, and where the ideals of consumption are prevalent. At the same time youth cannot be understood as a fixed and stable category, but must rather be viewed as a process of social being and social becoming. (Christiansen, Utas & Vigh 2006: 11). “We need thus to look at the ways youth are positioned in society, to illuminate the ways the category of youth is socio-politically constructed, as well as the ways young people construct counter-positions and definitions” (ibid: 11). To grasp what this being and becoming in the contemporary world entails for young men in Dakar, it becomes important to understand the economic background and the

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\(^1\) Pirogue is the French name for the wooden boats that were used for the emigration. In what follows, I will also use this term.
events that have led to the globalization of the ideals of neoliberal capitalism and consumption.

**Having nothing is Being nothing**

My view of our contemporary moment will follow those theorists who claim that the defining feature of our times is consumption, being the “hallmark of our times” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001: 4), linking this to the expansion of neo-liberal capitalism. Of course, tracing consumption’s historical roots, one sees that it has been intertwined with those of capitalist production from its beginning (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001, Mintz, 1986), so neither its presence nor its reliance on global flows of people, goods and capital is anything new. However, today we are bombarded by images that not only are there to sell us various products, but they increasingly depict lifestyles, giving us certain narratives of what being valuable means.

[Consumption] is the factor, the principle, held to determine definitions of value, the construction of identities, and even shape the global “ecumene”¹. As such, tellingly, it is the invisible hand, or the Gucci-gloved fist, that animates the political impulses, the material imperatives, and the social forms of the Second Coming of Capitalism – of capitalism in its neoliberal, global manifestations (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001: 4).

Neoliberal capitalism is of course a continuation of earlier economic theory, thus following a notion that the rules of the market must prevail (hence Comaroff & Comaroff’s insinuating remark about the invisible hand) and that state policy should adhere to the free flow of capital over borders. Though from the era of Thatcher and Reagan in the early 1990’s, world economics took what retrospectively has been termed a neoliberal turn, where privatization of common goods was viewed as the solution to economies that found themselves in depletion (Harvey 2004). Also, through the cooperation of multinational corporations and nation-states, markets could be further extended, making commodities more readily available to a larger group of people (ibid.). Thus, liberal economics and the ideals of consumption are not new, but it is the intensity by which they flourish that is historically unprecedented (Hayward 2004). Globalization through market expansion and electronic media was viewed as a blessing for all, connecting our world in multiple ways that would benefit the masses (Appdurai 1996).

However, (…)”neoliberal rhetoric and euphoria on globalization must be countered with the

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³ Comaroff & Comaroff define “ecumene” as a region of persistent cultural interaction and exchange, following Kopytoff 1987: 10 & Hannerz 1989: 66

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reality of exclusion for all but an elite few” (Nyamnjoh 2006: 4). Many nations’ economies have indeed flourished under neoliberal policies, but the reality is often hidden behind the evaluation of national economic growth (Harvey 2004). While the middleclass is growing in many countries, and the world’s wealthiest are getting even wealthier, the situations for those living in poverty have, if anything, deteriorated (ibid.). Nation-states are, following the inception of neo-liberal politics, less in charge of the management of their economies, being tied up to international agreements that are largely predominated by various international institutions, such as the WB and WTO (ibid.). This is certainly the case for most African countries, when being caught up in the problematic situations of debt repayment, were induced into implementing structural adjustment programs. I will not go into further detail on the devastating effects of these programs, for the consequences are well documented elsewhere (see Harvey 2004, Ferguson 2006). My point is rather, that while much attention must be focused on the specific means by which such programs and institutions influence and dictate the world’s economy, the intricate system of global capital flows appear to many of us as complex and mysterious, hiding for the most part the uneven distributions of wealth.

For those of us raised in the high times of the implementation of neo-liberalism, the (modern) world appears to have become more unjust, more unequal, and more frightening. Thus, it follows from this that an important area of research should be focused on how people in the world today deal with and comprehend their position regarding the capitalist system. In other words, when starting from the point of view that we live in a world where the rules of capital prevail and where consumption in all its forms is a subjectivizing process, one must ask how young people in poorer parts of the world imagine their participation, or lack thereof, in the intricate global capital flows and the narratives of success that emanate from them. For as the anthropologist Donna Perry writes on the predicaments of youth in southern Senegal, “Poverty in the midst of globalization poses a cruel paradox for youths: media and markets introduce alluring commodities and lifestyles that are financially out of reach” (Perry 2009: 41). This relates to Appadurai’s term “mediascapes”, which refers both to the distribution of electronic media, the dissemination of information, and the images of the world they create (Appadurai 1996: 35). Being valuable is linked to being able to consume, and consumption has become a mode of expression, though it functions under the premise that it must exclude at least as many as it includes (Hayward 2004). "Under the current intensified globalization far more are invited to the neoliberal consumer banquet than there are places available” (Nyamnjoh 2006: 14). Thus I wish to show that for many young men in Dakar, living in the
Several points become relevant here, and must be illuminated. Firstly, I understand the global economy of desires in the way quoted in the beginning; a globalization of desires and expectations in the modern world. Whether one lives in Senegal, Norway, The United States or Japan, we are all told what qualifications and attributes are required to be successful. Although we might not receive, nor perceive, the messages the same way, we get the idea. Secondly, it is necessary to clarify how I understand the problematic word *modern* in this context, and here I will follow Ferguson and his book *Africa in the neoliberal world order*, where he gives elucidating and detailed explanations as to why one can and must speak of Africa as a category (2006), something many (for good reasons) have been wary of. Though my fieldwork was in Dakar and focus is on the lived experiences of young people in this urban environment, I sometimes speak of African youth, because this way of relating to life was important for my participants. This view of young people in Africa, based on a perception of common predicaments, is related to the concept of modernity, according to Ferguson (2006). Anthropologists have struggled with giving meaning to this highly elusive term for decades, mostly on the basis of trying to rid it of its evolutionist origins. Because the view has been that the west is ranked on top in a hierarchy of development, African countries have been relegated to the position of traditional, non-developed, non-modern others. The discriminatory, even racist underpinnings of such a view has led anthropologists to search for alternative definitions, often resulting in the view of multiple modernities existing side by side (Ferguson 2006). This view is linked to the need to historicize local cultural practices by showing that they are linked to slavery, colonization and capitalism, thus being not only connected to modern state formations, but also a prerequisite for modernity as such (ibid: 167). However, something is lost in this type of explanation, for although anthropologists have needed to deconstruct the view of Africans as having no history and thus no connection to modernity, Ferguson points to the crucial aspect of taking seriously how Africans understand their relation to the modern predicament (ibid.). Because:

…”to say that people live lives that are structured by a modern capitalist world system or that they inhabit a social landscape shaped by modernist projects does not imply that they enjoy conditions of life that they themselves would recognize as modern” (ibid: 168).

In fact, it is quite often the opposite, as many youth in Africa perceive their life as anything *but* modern (Vigh 2009). Thus I wish to show how my participants understand and relate to
their connections to the modern, global world, often incorporating the colonizing gaze of non-development, struggling to take a stance towards this view, either by demanding participation and inclusion, or by countering this view through religious practice. For they live in the all too real situation of marginal existence, and it will become clear that this position takes its toll on young people’s lives.

In his chapter on young men in Guinea-Bussau, in the book *Navigating youth, Generating Adulthood: Social Becoming in an African context*, Vigh shows how many youth find themselves in social moratorium (Vigh 2006: 47). “A key social feature of youth in Bissau is, as such, social death, that is, an absence of the possibility of a worthy life” (ibid: 45). In his introduction to the book *Le Sénégal des migration, Mobilités, identités et sociétés*, Momar-Coumba Diop, mentions this aspect, pointing to the Senegalese rapper Abdourahmane Sèye who calls himself “the cadaver”, and proclaims that when you have nothing, you are nothing, and it’s like you are dead (Diop 2008: 20). With this in mind, I wish to show in this thesis how young men in Dakar, by different means, deal with this social position of being caught in the category of youth and thus being socially irrelevant (dead).

**Being Wasted Youth**

“We want to study, they say. We want health care. We want well-nourished children. It is in these – quite specific – respects that they seek to Become like you.”

(Ferguson 2007: 169)

In his book *Wasted Lives: Modernity and it’s outcasts*, Zygmunt Bauman writes about how the contemporary world we live in is based on the premises that large parts of the world’s population must be systematically excluded for the wealthy (minority) to sustain their way of life (2004). Although we are inclined through different means to see migrants, refugees, and certain groups of (racialized) Others as leeching on to the affluent parts of the world, the wealthy may more accurately be seen as the true parasites, as their conspicuous consumption relegates more and more people, as well as innate objects to the position of waste (Bauman 2004). In the capitalist system some people must be redundant, insofar as their lives consist mostly of sustaining themselves by the mere minimum. These people are not part of the global images that promote the construction of subjectivity through consumption. Theirs is an

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4 Néew bi in Wolof
5 Here Ferguson is referring to a letter he uses a basis for his chapter on mimicry and membership, found on the bodies of two dead young boys who tried to escape Guinea by hiding in the landing gear of a plane going to Brussels.
existence at the margins of the culture of neo-liberalism, though their existence is a necessary prerequisite for the continuation of the upper echelons of the world’s population, being very often regarded at the same time as a threat to their way of life (ibid.). (...) “the superfluous are not just an alien body, but a cancerous growth gnawing at the healthy tissues of society and sworn enemies of ‘our way of life’ and ‘what we stand for’ (ibid: 41). It is a paradox, that whilst there is a view of the world today as being truly global and open, border surveillance, migration restrictions, and the fear of otherness appears to be increasing (Nyamnjoh 2006, Geshiere 2009). Pertaining to this, one must ask, as does Bauman, why we are so afraid of those lives that appear to be wasted. What is it with the superfluous body that arouses such fears and xenophobic attitudes in the affluent parts of the world? Much of the answer, according to Bauman, is to be found in the fact that we are all in a precarious position that might lead to the event of not being needed (2004). Following this view, many people in Western Europe perceive their eventual, precarious position as further threatened by migrants and other non-nationals (ibid.). This perception is further exacerbated by reports in the media on the negative aspects of immigration.

Following the notion that in the Fordist system, wage labor and welfare services were meant to guarantee the reproduction of the proletariat, Hardt and Negri introduce what they term the precariat, which they see as consisting of a large part of the wage laborers in today’s world (Hardt & Negri 2009). One must have an income to reproduce social life, but many people lack the means to gain access to the employment that is needed to earn money. And where such access does exist, it is often with a lack of guaranteed contracts, steady schedules and secure positions (ibid: 245). In the European context the emblematic space for the precarious worker is the poor metropolitan periphery (ibid: 245). In Senegal, as in many other African countries, this socio-economic position of being (the) precariat, pertains to most of the male population.

Like most big cities, Dakar has long been an important migrant destination (Minvielle, Diop, Niang 2005). Following ecological degradation and economic decline from the 1970’s, more and more people have moved to the capital from rural areas (ibid.). In the year 2000, about 24% of the total population lived in Dakar, comprising about 2.5 million people (ibid.). Although some areas are wealthier than others, many people in Dakar live in what they perceive as poverty. This is important, because when trying to give meaning to this complex

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6 Following Nyamnjoh Xenophobia means the intense dislike, hatred or fear of others that are perceived to be strangers (2006: 5).
term, one must understand how the people themselves perceive their situation. Surveys taken in the poorer parts of Dakar have indicated that from the point of view of the inhabitants, poverty is first and foremost felt by going without food (Minvielle, Diop, Niang 2005). Many families do go hungry, and this is largely due to an endemic unemployment rate (ibid.). It is estimated that about 42% of the male population in Senegal lack incomes, though this number is of course difficult to verify because of the fact that many work in the so-called informal sector (ibid.).

Coping with Life
Here the concept of coping with life becomes crucial, because that is perhaps one of the few options left for many people in impoverished parts of the world. Pertaining to this is the intricate salutary system in Senegal. Greeting acquaintances on the streets is regarded as extremely important, and the list of phrases people go through is extensive. As is often the case in post-colonies, native languages are intertwined and mixed with the language of the colonizing state. In the case of Senegal this is manifested through the combination of Wolof and French, and especially the young people use this “creolized” vernacular. Thus one very common way to greet others is with the French: *Ca va* (how is it going?), of which the common response in Senegal is *je me débrouille*, meaning I manage, I cope. Or sometimes the reply will be *Je vais bien, Senegalesement* (I am good, in a Senegalese way). When using the most common (informal) Wolof greeting *Na ’nga def* the answer will often be *Mangi fi rekk* meaning I am here only. These examples denote a certain view of life in negative terms. As will be illuminated in this thesis, many young people in Dakar feel like they have nothing in their country, and this perception of coping with life and merely existing is so profound that many experience their existence as being already (socially) dead.

This view of life has led analysts to take the expression *se débrouiller* more seriously, claiming that it is based on the socio-economic predicament of having to try to make money in the informal sector, of accepting low paying physical labor with construction, or stealing and begging to get by (Diop 2008, Mbodji 2008): in short, doing anything to survive. Linked to this is leaving the country by any means possible, legally, or illegally. One might view what is happening with youth in Dakar as *une culture de débrouillardise* (a culture of managing), thus pointing to the prevalence of this predicament (Diop 2008). In fact, Trond Waage’s informants in Cameroon use the same expression, leading him to conclude that *se débrouiller* expresses how they cope with everyday situations and challenges in the urban
social environment (2006: 62). “Je me débrouille signifies a shared way of interpreting challenging everyday survival situations in a culturally, ethnically and religiously heterogeneous society” (ibid: 61). Not only does this term come to stand for lived experience amongst youth in Senegal, but it appears to have the same significance in other parts of Africa as well, again pointing to the shared experience of perceived exclusion or inclusion on the global stage.

When life appears as wasted (or sacrificed) in the face of global capitalist powers, alternative paths towards the construction of life as valuable must be sought. In French the term se débrouiller connotes creativity, opportunism and resignation at the same time (Lovell 2006: 244). I will demonstrate that imaginings of escape, either in form of physically attempting to leave ones country in pursuit of a better life overseas (imagining Europe as an Eldorado), or through practices of religiosity that imagine alternative courses of action for becoming valuable and visible in today’s urban landscape of Dakar, include all these aspect creativity, opportunism and resignation.

**Rebellion and New Imaginings of Youth in Dakar**

When writing on youth in urban Africa, analysts are caught in the tensions of portraying life as filled with difficulty, marginalization and despair without getting caught up in a view that all is strictly miserable. At the same time, there is much discussion as to whether or not one can speak of youth as a group, as in “youth culture”. Here the argument is that depicting young people in these terms gives the view that they are a homogeneous group, without diversity or inherent contradictions (Christiansen, Utas & Vigh: 2006). As it relates to my study, this discussion is important in two ways. First, is the view mentioned above by Ferguson, that referring to Africa and African youth as categories, is relevant when it comes to larger issues of inclusion or exclusion on the global arena. Secondly, pertaining to Dakar, there are certain links between the experiences of youth as a whole, although the lives of youth as a group are of course highly heterogeneous. By this I mean that although there are different economic positions, religious inclinations and the like, they still share a socio-political context, based on the same historical roots. Therefore, I wish to give an overview of the forces that have led to the practices that form the basis of this thesis; emigration and Baay Fall religiosity, beginning with a short description of life after independence, though focusing mostly on the years after 1990.
Having been founded as a French colony, Senegal was constituted through the colonizing politics of assimilation (Holter & Skattum 2008). The view of the French was that although the Senegalese were considered inferior, they could develop into proper persons and citizens by following and imitating the French’ ways (ibid.). Thus, education was important, and the French forced children to go to French schools instead of the Islamic Koranic education they were used to, where they were to learn the colonizers’ language, as this was viewed as the most important step in assimilating the Senegalese (ibid.).

After the second world war until the 1970’s, many Senegalese migrated to France (Willems 2008, Diop 2008). It was mostly the elite of the country, who had already gone to good schools and been educated in the French system who left, forming on their return the intellectual and political elite in their home-country after independence (Willems 2008). Imagining in this way a better life for themselves through the intellectual myth incarnated in the Senghorian model (Havard 2001), as he was seen as a perfect example of the Senegalese intellectual. He was educated in the French scholastic tradition, and raised to power in the administration. Senghor was the first Senegalese president, and contrary to most of his contemporaries, he surrendered his power voluntarily in 1980 to Abdoulaye Diouf (Damou & Foucher 2004). However, his regime was not without frictions, as his socialist politics were based on a one-party state and authoritarian rule (ibid.). Thus people held high hopes when Diouf came to power, bringing with him the beginning of a multi-party state. However, according to analysts in Senegal, his regime brought with it even more corruption, and problems connected to a declining economy in the 1980’s, followed by the implementation of structural adjustment programs, caused disappointment for the Senegalese people (Dahou & Foucher: 2004). In fact during his electoral campaigns in 1988, Diouf supposedly became furious because he could not gain the support of the youth (Havard 2001). This made him exclaim that they should not forget he was the father of all the Senegalese (ibid: 75). The young people however were tired of this authoritarian discourse, thus further distancing themselves from Diouf (ibid: 75).

As mentioned previously, the 1990’s saw the decline in the economy for many countries, and this decade is retrospectively viewed as a period of diminishing hope, especially in Africa. In Dakar this manifested itself in a process of more focus on the individual, as the state proved incapable of attending to its citizen’s needs (Havard 2001), and family solidarity eroded largely due to the decline in the economy (Diop 2008). Frustrated youth were forced to find other measurements of value, as the former generations’ university educated success stories
were largely unavailable, and even responsible in the eyes of the youth for the deterioration of the country.

Writing on the predicaments of young people in Dakar in this period, the French anthropologist Havard focuses on two different aspects that together formed a movement called “Bul Faale”, being rap music and Senegalese wrestling (Havard 2001). I will follow him in his assertion that this movement constituted a rupture with the views and moral reasoning of the previous generation, further extending this to include the themes of this thesis, showing that migration and Baay Fall religiosity are continuations of, though also reactions to, the ethos of the Bul Faale movement.

Looking for new idols, the hip hop movement and wrestling came to the fore at the right time, speaking against the power in a language the young people could admire (Havard 2001). Through rap came the linkage to African Americans, and through their imagined participation on this global stage of aggressive masculinity, many youth found a voice of resistance. Rappers in Senegal started speaking against the system, attacking corruption and authoritarian rule (Havard 2001). At the same time they started mixing English with Wolof and French, thus symbolizing the idealization of the United States and African Americans (ibid.).

Wrestling had traditionally been a closed sport in Senegal, since the right to perform this art was handed down through family lineage and ethnic groups, but this changed with the Senegalese wrestler Tyson (Havard 2001). Since he could not find a job after finishing his studies and was very athletic, he decided to do sports (ibid.). Landing on wrestling, he struggled for inclusion, and made a place for himself in this traditional sphere (ibid.). His response to those that tried to stand in his way was _t’occupe pas_ (don’t bother) which came to be the slogan of the Bul Faale movement, standing for the act of turning your back to those who get in your way (Havard 2001, Havard 2004). As such, Tyson based his image on the self-made man, going alone against the system and the parents’ generation, focusing on his individual achievements. The link to values found in the moral economy of the United States again becomes clear.

As such, rap music and wrestling came to stand for the Bul Faale generations oppositional stance towards the former generations value system; where rap came to represent the critique of failed politics, deteriorating family cohesion and solidarity, and wrestling gave precedence to a view of the importance of the cultivation of the body, appearance and individual merits (Havard 2001). Both express the need to disengage from previous generations’ ways. Both
also manifest the linkage to more global imaginings, through the participation in the global dialogue of rap, and more orientation to the value of the individual over such categories as ethnicity, family and caste (ibid.).

In his book *Street dreams and Hip Hop barbershops, Global Fantasy in urban Tanzania*, Weiss shows how young men use rap music and symbols from the hip hop culture such as photos of famous rappers from the United States, to create a sense of inclusion in a global scene of alternative value production (2009). For the Bul Faale generation such global imaginings as participation in the hip hop movement and focus on the individual self-made man, formed the bases for an ethos of the realization of oneself through hard work. It became important for youth to create their own paths in life, something that is also manifested in the area of religion.

**Modou Modou – Finding New Measurements of Success**

Where it had previously been common for young people to follow their parents in religious orientation, during the 1990’s this changed drastically in Dakar (Havard 2001). Instead of choosing the Islamic brotherhood of their parents, many young people began to be attracted to alternative religious expressions (ibid.). Largely because of its economic success, according to Havard, the choice of the youth in the Bul Faale generation most commonly landed on Mouridisme (Havard: 2001, Havard, 2003). The Baay Fall is a subgroup of the Mourid brotherhood. They share the same historical roots and are based on Sufi practices in Islam.

The importance of this brotherhood in forming social life in Dakar will become clear, as I will show how it began in an era of anticolonial sentiment, and kept the need to instill in the disciples an anti-imperialist stance. At the same time throughout its history, the Mourid brotherhood has managed to remain influential, both through ties to the government, engagement of the youth, and economic prowess (O’Brien 2002). Being in charge of large parts of Senegal’s agricultural activities, they have always enjoyed a high position in society (ibid.). However, during the decline in the economy in the 1990’s, more and more Mourids became merchants (Babou 2003). It became common for Mourid traders to migrate to other countries, and in this period mostly to New York as seasonal workers, though some stayed permanently, resulting in Senegalese neighborhoods in Brooklyn (Havard 2004). Contrary to previous generations, these migrants were for the most part young, uneducated disciples (ibid.). Their success formed the basis of the term “Modou Modou”, which came to stand for
the successful migrant (see Diop 2008, Tall 2008). I will show how this image was significant in forming the basis of the later migration, and at the same time how the economic stature of the Mourid brotherhood is important in the imaginings of the disciples concerning alternative narratives.

Believing in Change

Leading up to the election in the year 2000, Abdolaye Wade was able to seize upon the desire for change amongst the young people. Through his slogan sofî (meaning change in Wolof), he won the support of the youth and also several of the grand marabouts in the Mouride brotherhood (Dahou & Foucher 2004). Students and other youth rallied for him to win, and when he became president of the country in 2000, many young people believed that Senegal was heading in a new direction, towards a brighter future with the possibility of gaining employment and securing better standards for themselves (Zeilig 2004). However, with the election of Wade, came the end of the Bul Faale movement as such.

Rap music is still important in Dakar, wrestling is gaining ever larger popularity, and the Mouride brotherhood is further expanding. However, the belief in hard work and self-realization is countered by the reality of more decline and diminishing possibilities. Authors writing for Politique Africain have pointed to the way Wade from the beginning carried out politics of even more authoritarian rule (Dahou & Foucher 2004), arresting oppositional journalists (Havard 2004), crashing down on student unions (Zeilig 2004), and adding no less than 39 ministers to the government (Dahou & Foucher 2004), thus raising suspicion towards even more extensive corruption. At the same time he was criticized for making deals with France and the United States (ibid.). His cooperation in the fight against terrorism even led to him being invited to meetings with the G8 (ibid.). He is seen as a valuable representative for francophone Africa in these settings, but in Senegal he is criticized for trying to please those responsible for funds, NGO’s and the international political community, turning his back to his own people (ibid.). Especially the youth, who rallied for him to win, are disappointed by his governance.

Some notes on Power

In our contemporary moment there is increasing focus on the individual, and ideals of accumulation and consumption are prevalent. It follows from this that the form of power we are subjected to, is one that seeks to control people’s ideas of what being valuable entails.
Building upon the works of Foucault, Hardt & Negri use his term *biopower* to explain how power functions in the modern world (2009). For the rule of power to be truly effective it must be incorporated into individual bodies, making the subject of this power control themselves after set ideals of behavior and conduct (Hardt & Negri 2009), and I would add, appearance. In this respect it is largely through different media that biopower is exercised, and this is important. However, biopower also works through administrative, economic and social arrangements, all of which hide the explicit elements and processes of control, and the unsettling inherent racism involved (Hardt & Negri 2009). The type of violence exercised by biopower is hardly perceptible, and thus difficult to counter. Which makes Mbembe speak of the *banality of power* in the postcolonial context, meaning that the mundane processes of control the colonized were exposed to made them appear as the “natural” ordering of things, thus rendering them difficult to question (2001). As such, Comaroff & Comaroff coin the term “the colonization of consciousness”, referring to the way the colonized were incorporated into a colonial and later postcolonial state (2002). State being both: “an institutional order of political regulation and a condition of being, a structure, and a predicament” (ibid: 494). This is important, because it points again to the way power is enforced through state structures and other “traditional” institutions of violence/control, though at the same time being a subtle control mechanism, enforced by multiple actors (as in multinational corporations, transnational organizations, and global capital in all its forms) but also an idea, an imagining as to what value might mean (ibid.). Of course, post colonies are subjected to a special form of control and governance, but we are all under the influence of biopower. Thus for Hardt & Negri: “ours is a time of: (…) an unlimited possessive individualism situated in a lifeworld of generalized insecurity and fear: an extraordinary mystification of a thoroughly capitalist society under the absolute rule of biopower” (2009: 240). Whether or not one is convinced by this somewhat dogmatic statement, it points to the prevalence of a sentiment that ours is a time of great instability, where the perception of lack of control over ones destiny is pervasive. It is in this social climate the most subtle mechanisms of control can prevail.

Power is not, however, some force that hovers above without meeting resistance. In fact, for Hardt & Negri the point is that power cannot exist without resistance, and neither can the bodies thus controlled (2009). Following Foucault they speak of: “biopower and biopolitics, whereby the former could be defined (rather crudely) as the power over life and the latter as the power of life to resist and determine an alternative production of subjectivity “(Hardt &
Negri 2009: 57). They claim that one of the faults of Foucault is that he fails to conceive properly of the *other to power*, landing always on an understanding close to resistance, without getting any further (ibid.). Thus for them, the flip side of power is an alternative production of subjectivity, leading them to the term *altermodernity* (ibid.). This term is important when it comes to understanding the social becoming of young men in Dakar, because altermodernity (…) “provides a strong notion of new values, new knowledges, and new practices; in short, altermodernity constitutes a dispositif for the production of subjectivity” (ibid: 115). I wish to show how these views of power and subjectivity are relevant when it comes to understanding the imaginings of young men in urban Dakar.

**Method**

This thesis is based on fieldwork in Dakar, the capital of Senegal, from February to July 2010. During my fieldwork, I lived in Dalifort, one of the poorest suburbs. Here most of the population are unemployed, and lack steady incomes. The buildings in the area are mostly made of wood and metal, as most of the homes are based on “irregular and spontaneous settlements”, meaning squatter type habitation (Minvielle, Diop, Niang 2005). Mortality rates due to diseases are high, as social services are mostly unexciting (ibid.). This environment brings with it many social problems, and violent crime has been a problem in the suburbs of Dakar, though Dalifort is not one of the most affected areas (ibid.).

When I first arrived in Dakar I stayed in one of the wealthier areas, but when the opportunity to stay in Dalifort came up, I decided that living here for the fieldwork period would allow me to gain better insight into the predicaments of youth in Dakar, as many do indeed live in poverty. While in Dalifort I shared a home with five young men, and this became an important entrance into this social environment. Three of the men’s mother, father, and sisters lived nearby, and they became my (host) family.

My goal when I left Norway was to study the extensive pirogue migration that took place all along Senegal’s coast, from the viewpoint of urban youth. The successful migrant has become a powerful symbol in the imagination of young people, and this is certainly the case in the capital. Though, as mentioned, in Dalifort most people lack incomes, and largely because of this, not many people here have tried to leave for Europe. As such my main area of investigation on this topic became a fishing community that was located in the vicinity.
Because of their experience on the ocean, the fishermen here were some of the main actors in the emigration process. Due to sensitive material, I have used a fictive name for this community. All names of people are, of course, changed as well.

My study took some unexpected turns, as is common in anthropology. The least expected, though highly formative of my project, was my contact with young, Baay Fall disciples in the Mourid brotherhood. In my neighborhood there were quite a few Baay Fall, and through contacts here, I was able to visit young men who belong to this group other places in Dakar, as well as in Touba, the Mourid holy city. As such one might say that I used a “multisited” approach to the field (Marcus 1998). This term usually refers to studies that encompass several countries, as in fieldwork on diaspora relationships. In my opinion this view is relevant here as well, because following these diverse paths through different topics, allowed me to better grasp what was at stake for young men in this urban landscape. I follow Olwig and Hastrup in their assertion that one must view the field as a set of relations, instead of a specific place (1997). This is linked to the heightened awareness in anthropology to rethink the field and ideas of locality (see Ferguson & Gupta 1997). Further this relates to the reflexive turn in anthropology, where the goal was to examine the anthropologist’s position in the field and implication in the social processes they were to study. I have tried to apply a reflexive method, both in the fieldwork process and in the reading and writing period that followed.

**Participants & Resonance**

Following Hastrup’s ideas in the book *A passage to anthropology*, I wish to call the people I engaged with during my fieldwork for “participants”, instead of the term most commonly employed in anthropology, “informants”. Because, in my view, they are (...) ”participants in a dialogue initiated by the ethnographer” (Hastrup 47: 1995). The word informant has many negative connotations, whereas participants denotes a co-operative project where the work of the different individuals in the fieldwork process are given more value. Because the space of encounter in fieldwork is shared between those being studied and the anthropologist (student), the reality thus experienced is formed by everyone present (Hastrup 1995). Thus “we have to abandon the use (...) of the term “informant” that construes the others as (verbal) pathways to separate worlds. In the newly discovered world between us and them, the illusion of distance is broken” (ibid: 25). In this respect the term “resonance”, as understood by Wikan becomes important (1992). The way I read the word resonance it is closely linked to empathy, being
the capability of understanding others by forging a common report on what being human is about, being sensitive to the predicaments of others. As such, the differences encountered in the fieldwork process between participants are overcome by our “shared human capacity of imagination” (Hasrup 1995: 12-13). In such a view everyone participates in the fieldwork process, and the space of engagement is created together.

Because men are overly represented in both Baay Fall religiosity and pirogue emigration, my participants were mostly young men from these groups. As mentioned, youth is not a stable category. My participants were between 18 and 35 years old, though all of them are, in many ways, youth. There is a crisis in masculinity many places in Africa (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001), as elsewhere, and to comprehend today’s social landscape, one must take the experiences of young men seriously. Of course, being a woman studying the predicaments of young men in Africa can be difficult, as entry to the field might not be easily obtained. However, because of my main participants and the young men I stayed with, I was able to maneuver the social terrain and make contact with various people.

Most of my participants were young men who had already tried to leave the country by pirogue. However, because the extensive migration of this sort affected all layers of society, my participants included students, people employed in the tourist industry, young unemployed men in Dalifort, and other places in Dakar. Also my participants consisted of families of men who had left, or tried to leave, an organization of mothers, and several Baay Fall. Both in Dakar and Touba I had the fortune to speak with Marabous, who are the religious leaders in the Mourid brotherhood.

**Interviews**

When I first arrived in Dakar I did structured interviews with representatives for two organizations that worked with the topic of illegal emigration. I also used the interview form, recording the conversations, when speaking to a marabou in Dakar, a woman who was part of a women’s organization, and for two of the conversations with young aspirational migrants. I also did a group interview, which was filmed.

Structured interviews can give depth to the experiential context, as they offer a more detailed description of the topic at hand. At the same time, “doing interviews” was a research method my participants could understand and relate to, as the meaning of participant observation is not always easy to understand. Furthermore, sitting with pen and paper during conversations
of the sort I participated in in Djabour, made the young men place me in the position of serious researcher. Because I am a European woman, in many ways I represent the possibility to leave Senegal. As such, I had to reflect over my position and how I presented myself.

The Baay Fall, however, did not appreciate me taking notes during conversations. Being skeptical towards intellectualism, the performance on my part of serious researcher did not fit the scene, and here my role was strictly that of participant observer. Also, being with this group I often felt that my role was that of "disciple-in-training". Whether I wanted it or not, my interest in the group was most often understood as religiously founded.

**Limitations**

Language was sometimes a challenge in the fieldwork process, as many of my participants do not speak French, and I do not know Wolof. Therefore, I had people who helped me with translation. However, the most significant limitation in this process has been the fact that not much written is on the Baay Fall. Concerning Mouridisme, the literature is more extensive, and in texts about the Mourids, there will often be a footnote about the Baay Fall. However, they are seldom made center of attention. Therefore, my analysis of this group is mostly based on comparison with the larger Mourid community, and the works of Xavier Audrain, who has written a Doctorate on the subject of Baay Fall subjectivity.

**Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is in two parts, instead of several chapters, part one pertaining to (illegal) emigration and part two Mouridisme and the Baay Fall movement. Of course any such construction of social life for youth as split in half, between those who desire escape and those that find solace in the practice of religiosity is made for analytical purposes. I will try to show that there are of course multiple realities and experiences.

**PART 1: Emigration and the Aspirations of Inclusion**

In the first part of my thesis focus is on the extensive boat migration that took place from Senegal in the years 2005-2008/09. Through an overview of the process of this migration through the story of one of the organizers of such trips, and young men who have tried to leave in this manner, I show how many people in Dakar seized the opportunity this emigration presented. Also, through the stories of young, un-employed men in the capital, I will show how youth in this urban environment imagine their participation in global narratives of
success. The work of organizations who wish to combat boat migration will also be reviewed, from the viewpoint of the young men.

**PART 2: Becoming through Believing: Mouridism & The Baay Fall Movement**

In part two of my thesis focus is on the practice of religiosity in an urban environment. The Baay Fall is a sub-group of the Mouride brotherhood. They share the same historical roots, based on the life and teachings of Cheikh Amadou Bamba. Though the Baay Fall divert from the Mourid ways in several aspects, and follow the example of Bamba’s most devoted disciple, Maam Cheikh Ibra Fall. I will show the historico-political context in which these two figures lived and preached, focusing also on the socio-economic relevance of the brotherhood in its inception (and today). By tracing the historical roots of the Mourids and linking this to the contemporary practice of religiosity, I wish to show that the Baay Fall offer an alternative route in youths social navigation.
Part 1: Emigration & the Aspirations of Inclusion

“Because migration, although a creative activity, also entails suffering, just as action often originates in suffering”

(Flusser 1920: 3)

Writing on migration, theorists have often focused on the so-called “Push & Pull “factors. This type of analysis is based on the view that certain socio-economic conditions favor distinct types of migration (Klute & Hahn 2007, Papastergiadis 2000). The view has been that the best way to understand migration patterns is to start with the factors that make people leave such as political instabilities and the economic situation in their home country, while also paying attention to their choice of destinations, which is then often based on the prospect of prosperity (Papastergiadis 2000).

However, one is becoming increasingly aware that this approach to contemporary migration is not adequate. In the book *The Culture of Migration*, Anthony Cohen gives an illuminating description as to why one must change perspective and rather speak of “Cultures of Migration” (2004). Arguing against the push-pull view, he claims that one must focus on the lived realities in the “would-be” migrants’ country of origin, highlighting that people do not migrate because they have to, but because they can (Cohen 2004: 19). Furthermore, his view is that migrants are not solitary social actors, but are intertwined in family and community relations that also have an impact on the migratory decisions and process (ibid.). However, his focus is mostly on migrants and their households, with much attention to the importance of financial remittances. While this is an important field of research, I follow the German anthropologists Klute and Hahn in their assertion that the view put forward by Cohen makes this culture of migration into a homogenous entity, where the focus is on continuity of migration choices, instead of change (2007). They propose a phenomenology of migration viewing it as a complex societal phenomenon (Klute & Hahn 2004: 16). At the same time they wish to bring attention to the economic aspects of migration where they seek to get beyond what they call a “deficiency –perspective” (ibid:18).
Following these theorists, I wish to show that although a focus on the historico-political context of migratory movements is important, and seeing the migrants as part of a social system imperative, none of these views are adequate. Senegal has long been a country of migration through the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the forced work imperatives of the colonial era (Diop 2008, Tall 2008). Both through such global historical links and through local practices, such as their extensive fishing activities, Senegal’s population has always been in movement. I wish to show that although there is some continuity in the migratory movements, most attention must be on rupture and change. The extensive boat migration from Senegal is of course linked to socio-economic conditions as described in the introduction, together with a political climate, where an increasing distrust of authority is prevalent.

However, what the theorists mentioned above fail to take into consideration is the importance of the imagination in the migratory process (Foquet 2008, Mbodji 2008). Thus I will argue that in the case of the pirogue migration in Dakar, one must further the perspective of a culture of migration to also include what was referred to in the introduction as “constructed landscapes of the collective imagination” (Appadurai 1996). Migration becomes a terrain where one can imagine a different life, and in respect to my own findings, a better future. Therefore, following Appadurai: “in today’s technological world where one has access to all kinds of different media; electronic mediation and mass migration impel and compel the work of the imagination” (ibid. : 4). The view of the importance of electronic media is also linked to what Sneath, Holbraad, Pedersen og Vigh coin the “technologies of the imagination” (2009), which I deduce to mean how technological innovations effect the imagination (Sneath, Holbraad & Vigh 2009). As such, I wish to show that the way people imagine alternative life trajectories is linked to media and the global images they manifest. Also, in the case of the pirogue migration from Dakar, one cannot ignore the importance of technology. Because the passage between Morocco and the Canary Islands is full of currents and considered, by even experienced fishermen to be an extremely dangerous undertaking, this route to Europe was not possible before the availability of the GPS navigation system (Willems 2008: 294). According to analysts working from Senegal this was the single most important aspect leading to the dramatic boat migration (Diop 2008, Willems 2008).

As mentioned there were many students who migrated to France in the 1970-80's. While one might say that these people migrated for the most part to be able to make something of themselves in their own country upon their return, today, in the imaginings of young men in Dakar, one has to leave to become somebody at all. At the same time the typical migrant from
Senegal has also changed; from that of the student, to the Mourid, uneducated disciple during the Buł Faale period of economic decline. Although most Mourids did not undertake this type of (pirogue) migration, because the marabous called it suicide and could not condone such activities (Bouilly 2008), one might say that it was a continuation of on the image of the Modou-Modou, where education was no longer a necessary prerequisite. Inherent in this is the term Barça ou Barzakh, which is used when speaking of this type of migration, meaning Barcelona or Death (see Willems, Diop, Fouquet 2008). This statement has come to stand for the desperation entailed in the imaginings of the youth, where social becoming is not only worth dying for, but only possible through a ritual death, as possibilities in the home country are meager, at best.

Because of the extent of the migration from Dakar to Spain, President Wade was given a substantial amount of money from the Spanish government for different developmental schemes in an attempt to stagnate the immigration influx (Willems 2008). Of these the most important was the plan REVA\(^7\) (ibid.). This plan consisted of making agriculture the most important engine for development in Senegal, through allocating youth to the rural areas, to work the terrain (Ba 2007). The governments wished to use the return to agriculture as a means to fight illegal emigration, rural exodus, un-employment and poverty (ibid.). Though for most of the young urbanites this plan did not appear rooted in reality. The youth in Dakar have no interest in agriculture, and often see this as “a tool for political propaganda from the authorities” (ibid: 18). It is not my intention, however, to go into detail on the developmental plans put in place to stop illegal immigration or reduce poverty in Senegal, though much could be written on the subject. Nonetheless, the participation by NGO’s, other organizations, and President Wade in the fight against emigration will be highlighted, from the viewpoint of the youth.

In the world today there seems to be a prevalent picture of an exodus of illegal immigrants coming to Western Europe from certain African and Eastern European countries. We are told by the media that these immigrants are arriving in droves, and the dominant picture depicted of these people is usually that of a threat to our economies and (valued) ways of life. At the same time, more and more European countries are tightening their borders in an attempt to control the situation (Nyamnjoh 2006). Also, right-wing political parties are gaining influence, which can to a large extent be linked to this view of immigration as a threat to

\(^7\) Retour Vers Agriculture (Return towards agriculture)
Europe, as many of these parties focus on combating illegal immigration as part of their political programs. Economic migrants of the type that are found in Dakar, are the most scrutinized by public opinion because they do not come from countries that are in war; they do not meet the UN’s requirements for obtaining refugee’s status. “That this obsession with policing the borders of perceived opportunities is shared by government authorities, immigration officials, the media and general public indicates the extent to which black African migrants are collectively unwelcome” (Nyamnjoh 2006: 14).

I clearly remember seeing the vivid pictures on the news some years ago of the big wooden boats arriving at the coastlines of Spain and Italy. The illegal immigration of this sort certainly helped form the image of an exodus of desperate Africans fleeing their country in mass numbers. The sight of these huge, colorful, wooden boats arriving on the coasts between the years 2005-2008, is something that profoundly touched many people in Europe, both those being afraid of the negative consequences that might be involved in such a process, and those seeing in this, human beings in their most desperate state. One was left wondering how anyone, no matter what kind of situation they were in, could be capable of trying to escape in this manner. Many of these people came from Senegal. And most of them were men (Willems, Diop 2008).

The Fishing Community of Djabour⁸

One of my main participants, Ousman, told me one day as we were sitting outside his house in the sandy streets of Dalifort (an everyday activity for the inhabitants of this area), that if I wanted to understand the process of the pirogue emigration I had to speak to the fishermen in Djabour, one of the places in Dakar where fishing is the main income for a large part of the community⁹. He knew one of the men who had organized the pirogue trips from this area, and promised to take me to see him.

We arrived in Djabour to find Baboucar in his house on the beach, which was, as so many houses in the poorer suburbs, a half-finished cement construction. Baboucar was eager to tell me everything about the activities that took place literally outside his doorstep, and that he, in

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⁸ The name has been changed.
⁹ According to analysts more than 15 % of the population in Senegal work in the fishing industry (Sall & Moland 2008, Schmitz 2008)
co-operation with a few other men, had been responsible for organizing. According to him, this is the part of Dakar where most of the boats bound for Europe departed. Following the initial journey from Djabour in 2005, more than a hundred pirogues left.

Its popularity as a point of departure, also for people from other parts of Dakar, was due to the fact that the men here know the ocean, having worked for generations as fishermen. According to Baboucar, over 90% of the men from this area have tried to leave in this manner. I have not been able to confirm whether or not this is accurate, but the fact remains that many people have left, causing an alteration in the composition of the community. Walking around this area, talking to people, it became clear that there are not many young men left, and most of the men who are there, have already tried to leave. Many have made it, but many more have returned or passed away at sea.

When I visited Djabour, we would often sit together and drink ataja\(^{10}\), discussing the reasons for and process of illegal emigration from Senegal. As we sat there Baboucar would continuously point out people walking on the beach and tell me their stories. Very often he would call out to them, and they would join us to talk to me about their situations. In a similar manner, when we took walks on the beach, we would often be greeted by men who wished to tell their stories. It was obvious from the start that Baboucar was somebody who was extremely capable in this environment, and had a high social position.

**The Organization of the Pirogue Migration**

Baboucar is what one calls in French a *passer*, meaning in this context the people who are responsible for finding candidates for the pirogue trips to Europe. He is 30 years old, and has a law degree from the University of Dakar. He finished his education six years ago, but does not see any possibility to get a job in his field of studies. He told me that when he had started his studies, President Wade had just been elected, and he had high hopes of landing a good position when he was finished. However, this is not how it went, and when the possibility of working with the *pirogiers* (the people who own the boats) became available, he jumped at the opportunity, seeing no other option for a better future. Baboucar has all the qualities necessary to be a good passeur, as he is very intelligent and knows many people, both in his area, and in other parts of Dakar.

\(^{10}\) Ataja is Senegalese tea.
The first time he arranged a trip he had difficulties finding people who wanted to go, as few had heard of the possibility, and were skeptical to his propositions. Baboucar had to look for people, both students he knew and other young men in the suburbs of Dakar, and convince them that it was a good idea. Sixty people left on this trip. The initial trip was successful and when they arrived in Spain, they called their families and friends to tell them that they were safe and already making money. After this, Baboucar’s efforts to gather people who wanted to go were minimal, as they continuously called him to hear if there were pirogues leaving. 2005 and 2006 were the years most pirogues left from Senegal, and from what I heard from the fishermen in Djabour, they had five departing every day. Furthermore, the pirogues got bigger, as the pirogiers saw the opportunity of making more money per trip. From this point onwards the pirogues carried around 150 people according to Baboucar, something that is confirmed by the pictures from the media in this period.

According to Baboucar, another passeur and two captains in Djabour, a pirogier can make about 45million cfa per trip, if each passenger pays 400000 and they are 140 people who leave. A pirogue costs about 4 mill cfa, the engines 1.5 mill each (there are normally two), GPS navigating system 1 mill, gasoline 1.5 mill, and food and water 1 mill. A price that is not fixed, but has to be included, is what they pay the police. As I have been told many times, nothing happens without the police’s knowledge, thus corruption appears to have been part of what made this system function. Baboucar highlighted that the pirogiers in this area did not make such large amounts of money, as the people from here normally pay less compared to other places in Dakar. Usually the passeurs and the captains who take the trip do so for free, because they also wish to go to Europe. Normally they are about five people on each boat who form the crew, two or three of whom are captains. They take care of the passengers, make food and bail out water that gets into the boat. These are also people who can swim. Many of the men who take the trip are not capable of swimming, which of course is an extra dangerous element. Baboucar has never taken the trip himself, because as he says, he was needed in Djabour. The money he earned by organizing the trips he used to send two of his brothers to Spain, where they are working as fishermen. They are the ones who take care of the family financially, consisting mostly of providing for their basic needs. Baboucar told me that before they left, the family

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11 Other sources confirm the significance of the success of the initial journeys concerning the escalation of the pirogue emigration (see Tall & Willems: 2008)
12 This is about 570.000 NOK. 1 million cfa is 12.700 NOK
ate once a day (something that is quite common for many families in Dakar), but now they have three meals. At the same time the brothers were paying for the construction of the half-finished building we were sitting in. He showed me several pictures of his brothers, saying: *ils sont fortes, ils ont vraiment fait grand choses la bas* (they are smart, they have really done well over there).

Baboucar is respected in his area. And although he has made money from organizing pirogue trips, and many he knows have not made it to Spain, and thus had their family’s economic situation deteriorate as a result, the people here seem to understand that it is part of the game, the price one must pay. When speaking of Baboucar, the other men always referred to him with respect. However when I asked about the main pirogier from Djabour and how he was viewed by the community, the feelings seemed to be more ambivalent. I was told that he was a clever man who had done well for himself, as he now owned thirteen houses for his large family (he had four wives). But he had fled Djabour, and now nobody knew where he lived.

**Criminal or Hero**

Extensive measures have been taken in co-operation between the Spanish and Senegalese governments to stagnate the arrival of illegal boat immigrants to Spain. The most important of these is the creation of FRONTEX\(^\text{13}\) which is based on surveillance measures put in place outside Spain and Senegal’s coast (Diop 2008), in the form of helicopters and boats, mostly concentrated on access to the Canary Islands (Willems 2008). The Sénégal government also cooperated with FRONTEX in what they called HERA, which was the process of identifying migrants who arrived in Spain, largely in order to be able to send them back (Willems 2008: 49). This information further facilitated the arrest of several of the organizers of pirogue trips in Senegal, and the Senegalese media reported several instances of captains, passeurs and pirogiers facing criminal charges (ibid.). The prevalent view in the media was that the organizers were somewhat unscrupulous characters in search of fast cash.

Of course, there is much money to be earned by being part of these illicit activities, as the above examples show. Also, there have been multiple examples of people who have organized such trips without skilled personnel, thus playing high stakes while risking young people’s lives (Diop 2008, Willems 2008). Willems points to the fact that the best captains were often the first to leave, seeing the trips as a challenge (2008). Because of this, there were

\(^{13}\) L’Agence européens pour la gestion opérationelle aux frontiers extérieures (Diop 2008: 21).
fewer who were skilled enough for the journey, and therefore the years 2008-2009 saw more accidents (ibid.).

A famous example in Senegal, repeated by the media, analysts and personally to me by participants, is of a trip where the captain navigated around on the ocean for five days, pretending to be on his way to Spain, only to arrive in Saly\textsuperscript{14}. When they arrived on the coast (of what the Captain said was Spain), the passengers were told to hide and stay away from the white people who were very skeptical towards Africans. After a few days of hiding in the bushes and scoping the terrain, they understood that they were still in Senegal! (see Willems 2008).

Some consequences of these types of trips are obvious, such as the risk of arrest, loss of money, or in the worst case loss of life. Problems upon returning in both economical and psychological terms are clearly an issue as well. But on the level of how this community viewed the pirogue migration and the people that were involved in the process, such as the passeurs and the captains, it never appeared to be with anything other than respect, and pride. This does not mean that Baboucar is not sometimes fearful of retribution, especially from men who do not come from his area. It will also become clear that there are many people in Dakar who have tried to combat the illegal emigration, thus pointing to how the rest of the society, the non-migrants, view this experience. However, for people in Djabour, and several other aspirational migrants I talked to, emigration appears to be seen as the best way to make something of oneself, and the lucky ones are those that manage to get away. In fact having or not having \textit{la chance} (luck) was very often the explanation given as to why some people made it, while others did not. Mostly the young men in this area seem to view Baboucar as a much appreciated facilitator, who is respected for his creative capabilities, and his entrepreneurialism, having seized the opportunity that illegal emigration presented.

\textbf{You have to try your Luck}

Oumar is one of the young men I met in Djabour. He is 32 years old, and has spent all of his life working as a fisherman, following in his father’s footsteps. He is the oldest brother in his family and has worked as a fisherman since he was around 12. As such, he has not had much schooling, as his parents’ generation did not see the necessity of this. However, for years the

\textsuperscript{14} Saly is located at the coast and is one of the main tourist spots by Dakar
fishing had not been good, and when he heard of the possibility to leave for Spain, he did not need much time to reflect on the matter, as he did not see any other option of earning an income. I came to find that Oumar’s story, both of his background and his trips to Europe, were “typical” for men in this area, as the same aspects were repeated to me several times. Thus, through his story, I wish to illuminate the migration process.

Oumar’s first journey was in 2006, and his whole family helped pay for the trip. The first time he tried they spent 6 days at sea, but had to turn around near Morocco because of bad weather. This however did not put him off, and at the next opportunity, he tried again. Again they were forced to turn around, but this time were stranded 11 days at sea because of the weather conditions. On this trip several people died of what appeared to be starvation and cold. He also explained that some people went crazy, screaming and saying strange things. When I asked him why this happened, he explained that there are many *djinn*\(^{15}\) at sea. He said that the huge fish they saw were scary, but the worst part was the spirits.

The third time Oumar tried, he made it all the way to Spain. However, when they got to the Canary Islands, they were held in detention for 40 days. When he was there they were thousands of people, many of whom were from Senegal and Gambia. Like so many others his dream of Europe was cut short by the fact that Senegal’s president was offered money from the Spanish government to return the Senegalese to their country. They were flown to Saint Louis (a town north in Senegal) where they were given 10000 cfa\(^{16}\) and a sandwich. The aspect of being held at the Canary Islands and returned to Senegal will be elaborated upon further in the section on President Wade. For now it is important to ask why these young men would try to leave so many times, when it is clear that these trips can be quite traumatic.

Most of the young men I spoke to in Djabour (and other places) had taken the trip at least twice. All of the fishermen said that they would gladly try again, if given the opportunity. According to my participants, they have nothing to lose, and only one option remains; you just have to try your luck! In the words of Oumar; *c’est comme le jeu “Russian Roulette”, tu l’est connais, n’est-ce pas? Tu dois jouer. Peut-être tu mors, peut-être tu vis, c’est comme ça, deh! Tu as la chance, ou pas*” (It’s like the game “Russian Roulette, you know it, right? You have to play. Maybe you die, maybe you live, it’s like that! You are lucky, or not). As this

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15 Spirits in the Muslim religion  
16 About 120 NOK
statement shows, emigration might be viewed by some as a game one is willing to risk, well aware that one’s life is at stake. But why would they risk their lives to leave?

To Become a Real Man

Fishermen in Djabour are used to spending 10-15 days at sea in search of fish, having to move further and further away, because of the deterioration in the environment caused by overfishing. According to my participants, this was due to the government’s privatization of the fishing industry, and agreements made between the Senegalese state and China. President Wade has, as mentioned in the introduction, made agreements with other countries and international organizations, and the privatization of the fishing industry is an important issue, both on the political agenda and in the eyes of people engaged in this line of work (Bouilly 2008). However, according to authors writing for Politique Africain, it is rather the augmentation in the number of fishermen that has caused the depletion in fish, more than political agreements (see Bouilly, Schmitz, Sall & Morand 2008), though these have been important as well. They point to the fact that many young people in Dakar, who are not raised as fishermen, turn to this line of work because there are not many options, thus contributing to the perceived crisis in the fishing industry (Sall & Morand 2008). Whatever the reason for today’s situation, it has led to the fishermen having to go further out on the ocean in their pursuit of revenues.

Thus the fishermen in Djabour are used to long intervals at sea, and from what my participants said, the idea of going all the way to Spain did not frighten them. Several of the young men I spoke to who were not in this line of work, said the prospect of being on the ocean in a boat for many days, was indeed very intimidating. Because the passage between Morocco and Spain is very difficult and dangerous due to heavy currents, this trip is more hazardous than normal expeditions; though lasting approximately the same time (or less) (see Willems 2008, Tall 2008). As such, one might say, it is seen as a completely different type of test, which is also exemplified by these men’s focus on the frightful aspects of the journey. Of course it is not only fishermen who leave, and neither are they the only ones for whom this voyage might be viewed as a test. However, to understand the implications of such a view, one must begin with fishermen.

Because of Senegal’s long coast, the country has always had a large fishing industry. Thus for centuries Senegalese fishermen have taken long journeys by boat (Haakonsen & Diaw 1991).
This is mostly what is called *peche artisanal* which is, put simply, fishing with wooden pirogues and nets (Sall & Morand 2008). Analysts have often focused on the migration expeditions of certain ethnic groups (see Haakonsen & Diaw 1991, Dahou 2008) and the long voyages they undertook in search of fish, and adventures. Focus has also been on how the practices of fishermen have been linked to globalization, both through trade and colonization, and in more recent times through the consequences of international agreements (see Seydou & Touré 2008, Schmitz 2008). Also focus has been on how Senegalese fishermen were hired on foreign industrial trawlers, thus facilitating their entry into Europe (see Sall & Morand 2008, Diop 2008). The use of technology and the implication this has had for the industry is also reviewed (see Willems 2008). Although all of these aspects are important, and some will be highlighted further, here I wish to regard the emigration as a process towards becoming a (real) man, through regarding it in terms of a ritual the young men undertake in their social navigation towards adulthood.

In his article *Imaginaires et migrations*, the psychologist Mamadou Mbodji (2008) writes that one must see the pirogue trips as a form of *rites des passage* where a man must survive this test in order to prove himself worthy in the eyes of others, comparing the recent emigration to earlier boat expeditions, and also to other rites in the *bois sacré* (the sacred forest). Such views of young men undergoing initiation rites where they are kept in seclusion from society before reentering the social arena as adults, has been an important part of anthropological studies on young men in Africa (see Turner 1969). Most of these, of course, build upon Turner and Van Genneps famous study of such rites (ibid.), where they explain how the adepts pass from childhood to the status of men, through three stages, consisting of a period of childhood, then liminality, and in the end, adulthood (ibid.). The liminal period is when the young men are normally kept in the forest where they learn how to be real men. It is often portrayed as a frightful time, and the adepts create a sense of community and belonging through their shared experience (ibid.). This liminal period might be compared to the boat trip, where the aspect of fear is prevalent, as the case of Oumar exemplified. According to Mbodji, the trip is a period of liminality, where the youth shed their identity as children, and hope to arrive as men (2008). The importance of taking the trip to Europe is so prevalent in Dakar, that it makes Mbodji speak of a categorization of these migrants as those that are on “the inside”, and share the (secret) experience of undertaking the dangerous trip, which places these men in a higher position than those who have not attempted the journey (2008).
However, I do not wish to overemphasize the view put forward by Mbodji that sees this type of migration as rites des passages. Because, following the French anthropologist Foquet, writing in the same book, this view often obscures the realities of the emigration process, placing the men in a static position linked to tradition, instead of seeing the quest for a better life and the imaginings and creativity young men in Dakar employ through their desire to escape (Foquet 2008). However, one cannot ignore the point that for these men emigrating by boat is not only the available means by which to escape, but appears to be a test of bravery and manhood as well. Also, following the anthropologist Trond Waage’s view in his study of young men in Cameroon, initiation rites fulfilled the role of imbuing the youth with rules for appropriate moral and social conduct, the basis of which have changed in today’s society, thus permanently altering the significance of such rites (Waage 2006). Initiation rites have not necessarily disappeared, but taken on different meanings (Lovell 2006), and in the urban landscape of Dakar, where the migrant has become the new figure of success (Foquet 2006), the dramatic boat trip might well be viewed as a contemporary form of a rite des passage. It is a dangerous path, taken in their social navigation towards an adulthood that is no longer guaranteed. Again with Mbodji: "In their eyes, to stay in their country, is to expose themselves to the worst kind of death. That’s why they prefer to die in the adventure, while trying to escape17" (...) Thus it becomes important to further explore what predicaments lead to their desire for migration.

A Family Affair

As the example of Oumar showed, it is common that the oldest son leaves. The explanation for this is that he is the one who has the main responsibility for taking care of his parents. When the oldest son cannot go, someone else will take his place. As shown, leaving by boat is a costly affair, even for the fishermen in Djbour who pay less. The most common way to pay for these trips, I was told, is that the extended family pools their resources to pay for a family member’s trip, expecting or at least hoping, to gain more in return.

One of the stories that touched me in all the adventurous tales told to me in Djabour (besides those of people who had lost their sons for good, of which there were quite a few), was that of a women named Amine. She is one of the many parents in Dakar who sold her home in order for her eldest son (who is 26) to take the trip, moving to a rented one room, which she now shared with her husband and four young children. Amine was a frail looking woman, with a

17 Mbodji 2008: 308 - My translation
sad expression on her face. Baboucar told me that she did not speak French (as many of the inhabitants in this area), and he wanted to be present in order to translate. Amine however asked him to leave, and her face lit up somewhat as she took out a photo album to show me pictures of her son. She spoke to me calmly in stuttering French, but seemed proud to be able to communicate, and glad that we shared the experience of not really mastering this foreign language perfectly. Her son was now in Italy, having entered this country illegally as well, because he could not find a job in Spain. His dream was to play football, and when he left, this was his plan. After a while he was able to gain a work permit and now plays football for the third division (he does not make any money from this), as well as working as a fisherman. His income is meager, and the small amount he is able to send on an irregular basis is not enough to help the family construct a new home, or cover basic needs.

Le Teranga – The importance of Solidarity

Solidarity is an important aspect of social life in Senegal. It has always been, according to most people I spoke to, the glue that holds society together. It is expected that one shares with the family, though this is often extended to also include those in one’s immediate vicinity who are in greater need than oneself. Le Teranga is a common term in Senegal, meaning hospitality, and is something the country is famous for. In my view one must understand this term as linked to solidarity, because being hospitable here implies sharing with others. Thus, in Senegal solidarity, as exemplified through the term Teranga, is seen as an important moral value. However, the focus on Teranga and the way it is externalized as the most important aspect of social life in Senegal appears, in my view, to be part of what one might term “obsessive talk”\(^ {18}\), meaning that people constantly refer to the importance of Teranga, because they know that it can no longer maintain the same function in society. It becomes, as such, a way for people to reason morally about important values in the face of certain paradoxes. Therefore, I wish to illuminate in which ways solidarity is seen as an important value in Dakar, but one which it is difficult to maintain in contemporary society.

There is an important hierarchical structure to family life in Senegal, with (of course) the father being the head of the house-hold and the eldest son having much responsibility compared to the other siblings. However, this is changing in pace with the country’s deteriorating economy. In today’s socio-economic context many families find themselves in a

\(^{18}\) Personal communication from Susanne Brandtstädt, 15.02.2010
situation where they do not have enough money to cover basic needs (Minvielle, Diop, Niang 2005). Fathers, who have been responsible for taking care of their children, and often several wives, are no longer able to do so to the same extent (Diop: 2008). Raising their children in a dignified manner has become a problem, and as such the father’s status has deteriorated (ibid.). In this respect, Moumar-Coumba Diop speaks of what he calls le père humilié, meaning that the father is no longer seen as the authority figure, raising the image of the mother in the everyday discourse of young people (ibid.: 18). The importance of the mother-son relationship will be explored later. However, this also points to the increased pressure on young men to find alternatives when it comes to fulfilling their part in the moral economy that is based on ideals of sharing and solidarity. Many of my participants explained that they felt inadequate and ashamed because they could not fulfill their obligations towards their family, which in Senegal, as many other countries, is an important aspect of what it means to be ”a real man”. Taking care of the family was given as one of the main reasons why the young men attempted to leave. However, I was often told that the obligations towards the family were tiresome, and therefore it becomes important to illuminate further what is at stake for the young men.

Devenir un Grand

In one of the families in my neighborhood, with whom I developed a good report, there was a situation one day that I feel illuminates the complex relationships between family members, and the predicaments of the sons. In this family there were 5 adult children, ranging from the age 19 to 28. Abib is 28 and the oldest son. He has three children of his own, though is not married (something that appears to be more and more common in Dakar). Abib is what is often called a Boy Dakar¹⁹, and his main income is through “making business”, which is how many young men get by. This is part of the informal economy that consists largely of buying and reselling items on the streets of Dakar. One might say that it is the socio-economic aspect of the term referred to in the introduction as une culture de débrouillardise, the experience of coping with life.

Of course, making business is not a secure income, and Abib was not able to take care of the children by himself, and could not afford to marry their mother. She was very poor and could not afford to have the children living with her, thus the children lived with Abib’s mother and father, and it was them who took care of their daily needs, and often as well those of Abib.

¹⁹ A term that is often used in Dakar to describe someone who is extremely capable in the urban landscape.
The children share whatever income they have with the family, and it is expected that Abib gives his mother all the money he makes, to help with the upbringing of his children. One day when I was visiting and we were eating together, Abib came by, but was standing outside the gate, waiting to talk to one of his brothers. When the mother learned that he had been by, she became angry, and as happened a few times in such emotional situations, she talked to me about what was going on. She explained that he had been temporarily cast out of the family, meaning that he was not allowed to take his meals there anymore. The reason for this, she said, was that she had learned that he had made quite a bit of money one day, and instead of giving it to her, had gone to a party and bought new clothes. Abib was quite preoccupied with fashion, and was commonly seen sporting nice clothes. He also enjoyed going to parties, boasting often of his connections to semi-famous musicians who were part of the urban party scene. His mother said she was tired of him acting irresponsibly, and therefore had to make a point by denying him food. Although Abib is the oldest brother, the others would sometimes refer to him as Boy, and although it is expected, they never called him Grand.

When people talk amongst themselves in Senegal, it is quite common to hear them refer to each other as “Boy” or “Grand”, the meaning of which in the first term is clear, the other meaning being directly translated, “Big”. Grand might be used towards someone your own age, if you have much respect for them, though is most commonly used for those older than yourself. One might call these terms of endearment, as they are most often used between those who know each other, and are seldom meant in a disrespectful manner. However, Boy, when said angrily can sometimes refer to someone acting in an unacceptable manner, showing juvenile or morally sanctioned demeanors, as in the case of Abib.

Abib on the other hand would often complain about his difficulties in making money, and the fact that he had to give all of it to his mother. He told me several times that he wished he would have migrated when he had the chance (he had been propositioned to leave a few years ago, but chose not to, because of his children). One of his best friends had left, and was now living in Spain, where he made a lot of money, according to Abib. And when visiting Dakar a year ago, he had been shown much respect, and even Abib’s brothers had called him Grand.

**We have nothing here, nothing at all!**

As mentioned in the method section of this thesis, I had an opportunity to film a group conversation pertaining to migration. This was organized through one of the young men whom I knew from my neighborhood. The point of the conversation was to learn how young
men in a neighboring suburb viewed the illegal emigration. They were eight men from the age 22 to 31 who showed up to participate in the interview and all of them, had tried to leave the country. They looked like most young men in Senegal do, the youngest sporting Hip-Hop attire with flashy jeans and (baseball) caps. The conversations I had with participants were always quite informal, as I felt it was important to create an atmosphere where the men felt comfortable and could more easily express themselves (which was not so hard, as my imperfect French and minimal Wolof, made it obvious that I was not “better than them” or a representative of institutions of power, from which they felt excluded). But it did seem that when they first felt at ease, the conversations would eventually move on to themes such as Hip-Hop, where the young men would gladly share their knowledge of foreign musicians, somehow creating a link to the experience of being young in other countries. In other words, it seemed that Hip Hop often was a way to create a link between my participants and myself, forging in some ways a common report on what it is to be somebody in the global imaginings of success.

One by one the men shared their stories. What they all had in common, and sparked a heated debate in which everyone raised their voices to have their opinion heard, was the point, which was very often made by different people, that their country had nothing to offer them. One of the young men, Said, who had been sitting quietly with a very angry expression on his face, crouching in the chair, with his arms crossed, leaned forward in his seat, staring at me, saying angrily with his voice raised to the point of yelling: Common etre un homme ici? Dit-moi, j’envie de savoir! Ce n’est pas possible. On a rien, rien du tout! (How is one supposed to be a man here? Tell me, I want to know! It’s not possible. We have nothing here, nothing at all!) I was a little taken aback by his outburst, and said that I understood their predicaments. That my study had indeed very much opened my eyes to the situation of the youth in Senegal, and that I wished to learn more. He answered: On a pas besoin de la comprehension, on a besoin des solutions! (We do not need comprehension, we need solutions!) This young man appeared very angry indeed, as did so many others I had spoken to.

**Imagining Escape**

Several aspects of the examples given above must be further explicated. The importance of Hip Hop will be elaborated upon in the section on Imagining Europe. For now I wish to highlight the difficult predicaments young men find themselves in when trying to negotiate their positions in the family and community, through the example of Abib and Said. Abib has
children, and wishes to be able to take care of them by himself. He should be in a situation where he was married and creating his own household, though instead of being treated as a Grand and a father, he is still categorized as a youth. Family situations have altered in Senegal, and of course there are many reasons for this. Some have been discussed previously, such as the father’s deteriorating status, largely due to the decline in Senegal’s economy and high unemployment rates. Here it is important to note that marriage has become a distant prospect for many young men in Senegal (Dakar), and because getting married is an important part of becoming an adult, youth has become a category it is difficult to shed, and adulthood difficult to obtain.

“As decline has halted the flow of resources between generations and crippled the state’s ability to provide routes to social mobility, urban males have become locked in the social position of youth without the possibility of achieving adulthood” (Vigh 2006: 46).

Thus it becomes clear how solidarity between family members is difficult to sustain, and that this affects the young men. Linked to this is the statement by Said that Senegal has nothing to offer them. This was almost always the first response to my question as to why they aspired to migrate. Further comments about how Africa lacked development and was backwards, were commonplace. According to Fouquet many young people in Dakar think Senegal is a hopeless country that is caught in tradition, without the prospect of change (2008). This sentiment is also exemplified by Vigh, who claims that aspirational migrants in Guinea-Bissau see their lack of development and technological innovation as linked to being African (2009). Instead of seeing their predicaments as linked to colonialism and exploitation, they blame themselves, their country, and the continent (ibid.). As such, one must view migration, not only as a way to take care of the family, but as a way to escape what they perceive as a country that does not offer any routes of social navigation and has not fulfilled its promises of change and possibilities. This view will be elaborated upon in the section on imagining Europe. For now it is important to understand what options remain in the imaginations of the youth.

Foquet points to the fact that in Dakar, a life-project and a migratory-project seem to be the same thing. (Fouquet: 2008) In the imaginings of youth in Dakar, you are nobody if you have not left. This points to what Vigh terms the “meta-presence” of the migrant, referring to how young men are more valuable to others if they are not present (2009). Having migrated, and thus being able to send money home becomes the only way for these young men to participate in society. Without the feeling of dignity and being valuable, many youth see their existence in their country as useless, thus arriving at no other options but to leave, in any way possible.
(Mbojdi 2008). However, as mentioned, not everyone shares these men’s view of the emigration experience.

**Women's stakes in Masculine Migration**

- *Meeting the Mother, Mame Djallou*

On the beach one day I met a middle-aged woman named Mame Djallou, who was there in the afternoon selling jewelry. We sat down looking at her assortment of bracelets and necklaces, and she soon told me that she was part of an organization that was fighting illegal emigration. She explained that she and several other women in her neighborhood were working together to better their community and sensitize youth towards trying to do well in their own country, instead of leaving for Europe. Feeling at first that this might be a sales gimmick used to gain sympathy from tourists, I was a little skeptical towards her. However, as soon as I told her what my study was about, she offered her help, and agreed to meet me again for a longer conversation.

The next time we met, she told me her “story”. Mame Djallou is a woman of 57 who still works on the beach about 10 hours every day. She has two teenaged children, a son and a daughter, who are in school. When Mame Djallou told me anything about her children, emphasis would always be on the fact that neither have tried to leave the country. She was very proud that she had been able to take care of her children, so that they did not see the need to emigrate. Mame Djallou is from a polygamous marriage, which is quite common in Senegal. She was the first wife, and says she felt mistreated and ignored by her husband when he later married two more women. She stayed in the marriage several years with the other two, because she had small children, but eventually decided to leave. She explained that her husband had not been able to take care of the wives financially; emphasizing that polygamy was a selfish act, purely about the men’s needs. She told me that the main goal of the organization she was responsible for was combating polygamy, because of the implications it had on choices to emigrate. She told me that the wives are very jealous towards each other, and will create conflicts between the sons, by comparing them. If one wife’s son has emigrated and made it, and thus can afford to take better care of his mother, the other women will try to convince their sons to leave as well. This perspective on women’s participation in male emigration was repeated to me several times. It has been interpreted as one of the most important reasons why the young men choose to leave (Ba 2007).
Being a responsible son

Several authors have focused attention on the role of polygamy in the choices made concerning illegal emigration (see Ba 2007, Bouilly 2008, Schmitz 2008). As the examples above show, jealousy between the wives is often seen as one of the main reasons for male emigration. Writing for “Politique Africain”, Emmanuel Bouilly writes about what he calls une ethique de la responsabilité (an ethic of responsibility), which he sees as the core of the relationship between mothers and sons (2008). This ethic is based on the view in Senegalese society that it is the sons responsibility to take care of their mothers financially (as seen in the examples above). As mentioned previously, the mother-son relationship is highly valued in contemporary Senegal, where fathers are losing their former positions as authority figures. However, in polygamous households, mothers will often compare their sons to each other, and because of this there is a lot of competition between half-brothers (Bouilly 2008). “The young, unemployed (men) can no longer stay at home because of the gaze of the others, which becomes very probing in polygamous families where rivalry between half-brothers is the rule.” This is linked to the view of the lazy son, which is quite common in Senegal (Ba 2007). Many of my participants complained that they could not just sit at home, eating the family’s food, not being of any good, because everybody eventually saw them like that.

It is of significance how society views these young un-employed men, and how the mother-son relationship is implicated in the choices to leave. However, as I am more concerned about working from the men’s perspective, the question remains as to how they see themselves, and also how they understand the role played by their mothers.

Meeting the Organization

Mame Djallou took me to her neighborhood to show me the work her organization did there. Walking around the area, it became clear that she was a well-known and respected figure, as everyone was eager to greet her. She took me to several of the other women’s homes, showing me different projects the women were doing there to make money. Some made candies, by everyone donating fruit, and preparing them on the roof of a house. Others made sarongs with beautiful colors, and of course there were some who made jewelry as well, while one woman prepared breakfast in the morning, under the promise that everyone bought their morning meal from her. There was also another woman, Francis, who appeared to be an

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20 Ba 2007: 27 – My translation
important figure in the group, and she owed a small grocery store. Her story turned out to be very relevant, as her oldest son, Ismael, worked in the store for her, and she was quite explicit in her opinion about the importance of this. In her words, the organization had “saved him” from making the choice to emigrate. All the women I spoke to this day seemed proud of their accomplishments.

This was very much a women’s organization, and it appeared to be centered around Mame Djallou, who everyone called a strong and hard working woman. Always one step ahead, Mame Djallou asked me if I would like to be present at one of the organization’s meetings. I agreed, and we made arrangements for the following week. She said they usually met every other Saturday to discuss “entre femmes”, and wanted me to come and see. The gathering, however, turned out to be more than I had expected. The following Saturday I found myself in the middle of a meeting of which I did not understand much, because it was mostly in Wolof. But they did not discuss long before there was dancing, with me being the center of attention. It became clear that they saw me as representing a prospect for gaining access to NGO’s. Although I explained that I could not help them financially, they were obviously hoping that somehow I would. The importance of this will become clear, but for now I wish to turn to the story of Francis and her son Ismael.

I am Here. Ruined, you see?

When I came back to Mame Djallou’s house one evening to eat dinner, I walked past the store where Ismael worked, finding him there with two friends. We greeted each other, and as I was about to continue on my path, Ismael asked me to wait. Saying something to his friends in Wolof, they left us alone at the store. Being prepared for the “typical” marriage proposal, I was quite amazed when he explained that he wanted to tell me about his situation. He said that one day his mother had given him money so he could go on a trip to buy supplies for the store, and as he had been contemplating escape, he knew that his only option was to take this money and leave. Knowing that his mother would not agree to him leaving, he had to do it secretly. At this I interjected, saying that I found it odd that he had indeed tried to leave, because previously his mother had been so eager to tell me that they had convinced him not to go. At this he explained that after his return, his mother was furious, calling him an idiot and saying he was not responsible, having acted in this manner. He was also mad, claiming that he had just not been lucky, but that at the next chance, he would try again. He could not stay in Senegal, and he knew he could make it in Spain. He was serious about his threats, and after a while several of the women from the organization, including his mother and Mame Djallou,
had staged an intervention, coming to convince him not to go. In his words, they had ruined things for him. Now, it would be shameful to go, as he had been talked into promising that he would not. But he was angry, because he felt they had destroyed his opportunity to make something of himself. Now, he said, he was forced to work for his mother, not even making enough money to take care of himself, or save for a future (implying the prospect of getting married). He said that I must not listen too much to what these women said, because they did not know. They were there to make money for themselves, claiming good intentions, but not knowing what was best for the men. He told me “Je suis là, cassé, tu vois. Je ne suis même pas un homme ici, même pas ça, deh!” (I am here, ruined, you see. I’m not even a man here, not even that).

**Becoming a responsible man**

Emmanuel Bouilly’s main focus in his article is on the role played by mothers in the process of male emigration from Senegal (2008). He bases his study on the (then) largest women’s organization, which is located in Thiaroye, a different suburb of Dakar than where Mame Djallou lives. He is concerned with understanding how the women use the extensive media coverage of illegal pirogue emigration to gain access to NGO’s and to create a coherent identity for themselves in the community (Bouilly 2008). He points to the fact that there is an inherent paradox in the role these women play. As mentioned in the case of the importance of polygamy, the mothers are very often seen as the instigators when it comes to the choice of emigrating, though at the same time the women are working against illegal emigration (ibid.). His point is that the extreme media coverage of the dramatic emigration, following a trip to this organization by Ségolène Royal in September 2006, gave the women an opportunity to create a coherent identity as “the courageous mother”, blaming external events for the migration process (Bouilly 2008, see also Schmitz 2008). He says that in the process of gaining access to international media, they went from being “mothers of victims” (of illegal emigration), to “mothers as victims” (of illegal emigration), thus incorporating a western developmentalist discourse that might be seen as based on African women as being at the same time poor and oppressed, and independent actors and forces of development (Bouilly 2008). (…)”Victims of polygamy, un-employment rates, the crisis in the fishing industry and migration, and also engaged actors, courageous, devoted to the community, fighting against emigration.” Bouilly’s view is that these mothers certainly have much to gain from the image of the courageous mother. And of course, as France and other European countries wish

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21 Bouilly 2008: 28 – My translation
to find ways to stagnate the illegal emigration, there have been plenty of funds available (Bouilly 2008, see also Schmitz 2008).

As mentioned, it was quite obvious that Mame Djallou and her organization saw me as a possible representative for western NGO’s, and they seemed well aware of what might be at stake for them in our meeting each other. It is clear that the attention given to the organization mentioned by Bouilly and Schmitz, has been part of the proliferation of such organizations throughout Dakar. The relationship between these organizations and the women does appear as mutually beneficial for everyone, as the mothers find new ways of making money through access to NGOs. At the same time the western development organizations have the perfect image for gaining sympathy towards donors. It is much easier for people in the west to sympathize with the courageous African Mother, than the immigrant who attacks the European countries in such a dramatic way. Though the authors’ perspectives are highly relevant, and can by no means be ignored in the debate on illegal emigration from Senegal, it seems strange that the men receive so little focus. The illegal pirogue emigration was first and foremost a male activity. Taking care of the family is commonly seen as a male responsibility (though in reality the mothers do much of this work). Even in the polygamous households, it is the relationship between half-brothers, because of their mothers, that is problematic. So where do the young men stand in all this? From the perspective of Ismael it becomes clear that the women’s interference with the emigration process is by no means viewed as strictly positive. According to Bouilly, there are even contradictory sentiments towards the organization in the community he studies, as it is seen by many as quite successful and by others as strictly a means to make (easy) money (2008). He also shows that some believe that the mothers still try to convince their sons to leave, though playing the “developmentalist game” for the media and NGOs (ibid.). It does become apparent that, at least for some, this is a way for the women to make money, profiting from the young men’s experiences.

It seems that not even here, in the fight against illegal emigration, do the young men have much access to the debate. They are not the ones forming the agenda, nor the main participants in the organizations. It seems that this female organizing on behalf of the men is another means by which they are denied a voice, and an identity as responsible young men. Instead of being allowed the opportunity of being participating actors, they are bereaved autonomy and agency, and relegated to the position of spectators. Their actions, in the emigration process are seen, I would say, from the point of view of the western gaze, as foolish and detrimental to society and themselves. But there is much creativity and innovation
involved, which this view mostly ignores. When the mothers incorporate this view and further extend it, I would claim this further exacerbates these men’s low position in the community and family relationships they are part of.

The “Story” of President Wade

- Making Sons out of Citizens
A frequent theme in my conversations with the young men, who had already tried to make the journey to Spain, was the actions of Senegal’s president Abdolaye Wade. Some of the men who had unsuccessfully tried to escape were forced to return because the Captain of the boat had decided to turn around because of bad weather, as some of the previous examples showed. However, quite a few of the men got all the way to the Canary Islands, only to be held in a detention center. Here there were mostly Senegalese, but also quite a few from Gambia, as well as some from other west-African countries (see Willems 2008). In their words, some were held for a week to ten days, others as long as 40 days. Most of the times when they recounted this event, it was described as a horrible experience. Several statements, such as it being like a prison, filled with hundreds and hundreds of people, more arriving every day as the boats came in and were stopped, there not being enough food, and them barely getting to go out in fresh air at all, show the distress many felt about this situation. Once I was even told that the center held over a million people, crammed into a small space. There were never that many people held in these centers at the same time. In fact, according to Willems there was at the most (during 2006) 33000 migrants held in detention (Willems 2008, see also Diop 2008). But in my view, it points to the fact that these young men experienced this as traumatic.

Of those held in detention, 4600 Senegalese were sent back (Willems 2008), and the point is that every time I was told this story, president Wade’s actions would be compared to those of the Gambian president, who when asked to return his sons, had replied: “I have no sons”, thus not accepting the money offered, and leaving the Gambians to stay in Spain. Each time this was repeated to me with disdain, and anger concerning Wade, whilst the Gambian president’s actions were referred to with respect. On one occasion the story was relayed to me differently, were the Gambian president was supposed to have said: “Sons, I have no sons. I have citizens, and they remain in my country.”
When I was told these stories I merely took them as examples of the frustration the young people in Senegal feel towards their president, and his lack of fulfillment of his promises of 

sofi. As mentioned in the introduction, many of the young people in Senegal, especially many students, rallied for him to win, seeing finally new hope for their country in the political shift that was promised by Wade. The fact that he was offered money by the Spanish government if he returned the Senegalese was often highlighted, and suspicions were raised as to whether or not he had used the money for himself. Put in more blunt terms, everyone recalling this story claimed he had used the money for his re-election campaign, spending none of it to better the predicaments of the youth. In fact, the repatriated youth were supposedly told that they would receive 10000 euro each on their return, but instead got a sandwich and bus fare (Willems 2008). This situation ended in verbal confrontations between the youth and the president during the electoral campaigns in 2007, and Wade’s reaction was to claim he had never received the money, and it was made up by the opposition to tarnish his image (ibid.: 294).

Seeing how many times the story of being held in detention and returned to Senegal was told, and how my participants recalled it, focusing each time on the statement of the Gambian president about his sons, I came to believe that this story is about more than the obvious complaint over an incapable president. It seemed as though they somehow felt that this was a means by which the president bound them to being Senegalese, as the term “sons” can be seen as a link to territoriality. Being the sons of a country (through the sons of the country’s head of state, the president) links them firmly as belonging to Senegal. It is in many respects this belongingness they wish to escape. The youth in Dakar today are tired of empty promises, as is exemplified by the frequent statements by people that their county does not work, and has nothing to offer them. The authoritarian father figure played by Wade did nothing to improve the situation either. Diouf lost his vote of confidence in 1988, when he proclaimed a similar stance. Why would the youth of today, who see that the hardships have not lessened, and rather increased, be any less exasperated than they were in the beginnings of the Bul Faale generation? As mentioned, it appears that in contemporary Dakar, a young man is a valuable asset only in his absence. Thus President Wade’s actions not only seem to remind them of this, but also that there is no way to get out, no better life or Eldorado will be waiting for them, because they are and will always be from Senegal.
Imagining Europe

- Searching for Inclusion

“Movement is not just the experience of shifting from place to place, it is also linked to our ability to imagine an alternative” (Papastergiadis 2000: 11).

Fouquet speaks of the importance for the youth of being bien regardée (well regarded) and how this is linked to the image of the successful migrant, who has become, in the imagination of the youth in Dakar, the new figure of success (2008). It is common that the vacationing migrant receives much respect, especially from the younger members of society. Statements about the position of the young migrants, such as them always having nice clothes, and getting the best women, are commonplace (Foquet: 2008).

As mentioned, this view is linked to how young people perceive their own country. I was often told that we are lucky in Europe, because we do not need to share with each other. The fact that it is impossible to save money, as exemplified through the story of Ismael, and that many want to be part of the (global) consumerist society, as the story of Abib made clear, points to the moral paradoxes youth struggle with. Taking care of the family is often portrayed as the main reason why young men leave (see Tall 2008, Willems 2008, Diop 2008), and this is certainly an important factor, as the examples have shown. In my view, however, one cannot ignore the fact that these young men are also part of a globalized image of what being young is about, an image that is largely based on the ability and desire to consume (Hayward 2004). Abib knew very well what was expected of him, but did not always want to follow the norms his family imposed. The way the youth see it, the only way to raise oneself out of anonymity and make something of oneself, is through leaving the country in search of a better life (Foquet 2008). Although being able to take care of one’s family is important, the young migrants wish to leave their ordinary life behind, a life full of shame, boredom and disillusion (Mbodji 2008). Migration becomes a way for the youth to take their destiny in their own hands, and try to become somebody valuable and visible. Desiring escape becomes the only means by which they can imagine a better future. In the imagination of young people in Senegal, Europe has become a sort of Eldorado, where
dreams can come true. It stands out as a place where anything is possible, and the only true  
obstacle is getting there.

However, as mentioned, going to Europe is also a way to escape the scrutinizing gaze of the  
others, especially the family. While being viewed as the most important symbols of success  
for some, the migrants are viewed by others as foolish. According to Foquet, when migrants  
come to Dakar for vacation, they are often called Toubab\textsuperscript{22}, and made fun of  
because they act like Europeans (2008). This, he claims must be understood as a mechanism  
for social control, because those who have not migrated wish to partake in the economic  
prosperity of those who have made it in Europe (ibid.). By calling them Europeans, they  
claim that the migrants have forgotten their roots and neglect the moral responsibility of  
solidarity (ibid.). Again, this points to how Teranga has become obsessive talk. The parents’  
generation tries to hold the young people to moral values that are difficult to maintain, and  
that the youth do not necessarily want to be part of. Ever since the Bul Faale generations’  
focus on the individual, many young people in Dakar have started imagining other  
measurements of value, than those of their parents.

For many young men, this is linked to such global images as the Hip Hop movement. As  
mentioned in the introduction, African Americans are the main actors in this global theater  
of masculinity, and have long been role models for the youth of Dakar. Participation in the  
Hip Hop movement becomes a way for youth to imagine resistance and possibilities. However,  
one cannot ignore the relevance of the commercialization of this image which we see so  
clearly today. Hip-Hop artists are seen flaunting expensive clothes, luxury cars and, of course,  
blingbling\textsuperscript{23}.

As such, Weiss writes about young men in Arusha and their feeling of exclusion from the  
global neo-liberal world order. His focus is on how these young men use Hip-Hop as a means  
to gain access to a world from which they know they are excluded. (2009). They incorporate  
the signs and symbols of the Hip-Hop culture into their everyday lives, imagining at the same  
time their inclusion in the global world of consumption and success (ibid.). They desire the  
goods they see exist other places and in many ways it is their unattainability that makes them  
so attractive (ibid.). Linked to this is what he coins “aspirational consumption” (ibid.: 169).  
Thus the link to my participants becomes clear. Many of them also aspire to become part of

\textsuperscript{22} Common name for white people in Senegal

\textsuperscript{23} Popular name for the expensive jewelry used in the Hip Hop culture.
the consumerist society, and Hip-Hop is very often the discourse through which these dreams and imaginings are most obvious.

Most people in Senegal have (at least minimal) access to the internet. And there should be no doubt about the impact such media have on young people’s imaginations, both in positive and negative terms. Just as the young men in Arusha and Dakar use Hip Hop images as ways of imagining inclusion, they also become powerful symbols of exclusion. As such Weiss focuses on the importance of the aspect of pain (2009). In Appadurai’s words, imagining is not always a positive activity, because it implies being aware that there exists different possible life trajectories (1996), possibilities that for many youth in Dakar seem at the same time unavailable, but in some ways attainable with the prospect of migration. However, again with Weiss: (…)”pain becomes a generative form of subjectification, that is, a constructive means of generating a subjectivity (…) with which to confront the world” (Weiss 2009: 126). As such he speaks of a world-wide community of affliction, which is accessible through imagined participation in the world of Hip-Hop (ibid.). The wealthy, African American rappers become powerful symbol of success and opposition. However, such globalized images often move into local repertoires of irony, anger and resistance (Appadurai 1996: 7), as the example of the rapper “the cadaver” made clear.

Again, this is similar to Appadurai’s term, constructed landscapes of collective imagination, which is further linked to what he coins “a community of sentiment”, meaning a point when a group starts to imagine and feel things together (Appadurai 1996: 8). “They are communities in themselves but always communities for themselves capable of moving from shared imagination to collective action” (ibid.: 8). By imagining alternatives, and linking their predicament to other groups that share (imagined) pain, young men in Dakar construct themselves as modern, global subjects. Through the type of mass migration that took place in Senegal, youth can be seen as demanding inclusion in the global world order. For as in the quote in the beginning of this chapter, action often originates in suffering. Thus (imagined) collective suffering can become powerful collective action. And for several reasons, that have become clear, Europe stands out as the favored destination. Perhaps for many the reason with the strongest emotional appeal lies in the words of Mbadji: “For most of the candidates, Europe owes them reparation. Because in their view, it is to a large degree because of Europe, and the role it played on the African continent, that they can no longer survive at home”.

\[\text{24} \text{ Mbadji 2008: 31 – My translation}\]
Leaving is having *la chance*, and Europe is the land of opportunity. The perception, and reality in many cases, is that staying in their country will lead to them remaining youth, Senegalese youth, African youth, without possibility of becoming “un Grand”
Part 2: Becoming through Believing: Mouridism & the Baay Fall Movement

“The religious present restores their dignity and speaks to them of a future that already exists. Religious movements are attractive not only because they offer modes of being and belonging, but also because they construct new imaginations of the community and the individual”

(Diouf 2003: 7)

When seeking to understand youth culture in Senegal and the imaginings that many young people employ to cope with their life situations, it is important to consider the role of religion and the different experiences and practices of religiosity that are prevalent here, as religion forms a large part of everyday experience for most people. Olivier Roy writes in his book *Globalized Islam* (2004), that when trying to understand the contemporary practices of Islam, it is important to grasp the difference between religion and religiosity, claiming that there is a tendency in the world today towards more individualized religious practice (Roy 2004). “A personal and emotional experience leads directly to the truth. Discursiveness is rejected in favor of feeling” (ibid: 29). This type of individualized path towards religion is what one might call religiosity, and is, I will argue, to a large extent what one finds in Dakar today.

Although focus on the religious community one belongs to is strong, there is much flexibility in the choices people make as to which group one wishes to belong to, and how one wants to express a religious belongingness (Audrain 2004). For many (of my participants) this is linked to a personal calling towards a specific religious community/group.

In the midst of a global order that in many respects seems to dictate what it means to be successful through powerful narratives and images of migration and consumption, many young people in Senegal, as elsewhere, are participants in alternative movements based on religious teachings and practices. Roy is concerned with what he coins neo-fundamentalism, which is a radicalized Islam in search of a global Muslim community (Roy: 2004). "These Muslims do not identify with any given nation-state, and are more concerned with imposing Islamic norms among Muslim societies and minorities and fighting to reconstruct a universal Muslim community, or Ummah” (ibid: 2). Although he argues that Islam is highly heterogeneous, and cannot be linked to any specific place or practice, his concern is still with
neo-fundamentalism and most of his examples are taken from the Arabic world and diasporic communities in the west. As such, he further argues that one must also look to links between Islam, neo-fundamentalism, other New-Age religious practices and left-wing political sentiment, arguing that what they have in common is a frustration over the globally dispersed power structures that are at play in the world today (Roy 2004). In this way, the feelings of exasperation that might be understood to be at the core of fundamentalist expressions are created by modernity, and shared by other globally dispersed voices of dissent (ibid.), though claiming in many instances traditional roots (Diouf 2003, Biaya 2000). However fruitful his analysis of a globally, modernized Islam might be for the study of the upsurge of fundamentalist orientations, it still points to the fact that much of the images one has in the west of Islam and youth are linked to a fear of the growth of fundamentalist groups. This view is further extended by reports in the media, where one often hears stories of youth who are raised in Europe or the U.S, and are none the less attracted to and inducted into terrorist organizations and activities.

Interestingly, few studies are explicitly concerned with other forms of youthful religious practice, especially when it comes to Islam, and this is certainly true in the case of studies on youth in Africa. This is also linked to the fact that different forms of Christianity are prevalent in most parts of the continent (see, Lovell 2004, White 2004). However the fact remains that there is little focus on the religious practices of youth in Africa. Although this trend is changing somewhat, as “one is beginning to see the importance of born-again Christian movements and sects and the reform-minded efforts of indigenous Muslims” (Diouf 2004: 7) and how these effect young people. Following Diouf and Van Dijk, Christiansen, Utas and Vigh argue that such religious movements can be seen as youthful gestures of self-creation, being spaces for youth to critically examine former generations’ moral discourses and traditional practices (2004). Wheiss is also concerned with youth and religion in his study on Hip-Hop, where he shows how this movement is linked to religiosity in Tanzania (Weiss 2009). Through this focus he indicates how youth express ambivalence towards the neo-liberal order of self-fashioning through creatively engaging with Hip-Hop and religiosity to express problems connected to moralism and consumerism (ibid.). Again in the words of Diouf:

Strongly rooted in the ideology of renascence (rebirth, born again) in every sense of the term, both as purification and as a return to origins, these movements address themselves to, are strongly dominated by, and mostly are composed of young people” (2004: 7 ).
Senegal is a country where over 90% of the population adhere to Islam (Quinn & Quinn: 2003, O’Brien 2002), very often belonging to one of the three Sufi brotherhoods (tariqas\(^{25}\)) that exist here (O’Brien 2002, Babou 2003). Two of these originated in other countries, while Mouridism traces its roots within Senegal\(^{26}\) (O’Brien 1975). It is estimated that about one third of Senegal’s population belong to this group (Babou2003), and it is growing in size, especially as many youth are attracted to this form of religious teaching and practice. Today religious movements and orientations, mostly based on Sufi principles, form an important part in shaping youthful experience in Senegal. Sufism is known as the mystic and esoteric part of Islam, the animating spirit of the Islamic tradition (Chittick 2000: 3). According to Chittick one might view the Koran as divided into three themes, being submission (Islam), faith (iman), and doing the beautiful (ihsan). All three are important, but taking as its highest principle the concept of love, the Sufi’s place most value in doing the beautiful (ibid: 3), which of course makes a non-violent stance crucial to their beliefs. In this complex, thousand year old religious practice, I wish to narrow in on this concept of “doing the beautiful”, showing that my participants base their practice of Sufism on exactly this; doing (or trying to do) the beautiful. Throughout history there has been considerable controversy concerning Sufi practice, and there still is. Therefore I will attempt to show how the people who are not part of this group view the young disciples.

Mouridism is based on the teachings of Cheikh Amadou Bamba and his jihad of the soul which consisted in its beginning of a peaceful resistance against the French, through educating the people to become something different than imitations of the French and the elite aristocracy (Babou: 2003). Historically it is a very important brotherhood, as it was founded as a response to the colonial system that was put in place by the French, giving the Senegalese people hope and a national hero in what was to be the beginning of French colonial reign (O’Brien 1975). “Mouridism was a refuge for the “wretched of the earth” and a hope for a society administered by a foreign power whose project was to disintegrate all traditional structures” (Thiam 2005: 6).

My argument is that today Mouridism, and especially its sub-group the Baay Fall, give hope to many young people in Senegal in what is often perceived as a hopeless situation, bringing with it elements that give young people alternatives when it comes to creating “modern”

\(^{25}\) According Babou brotherhood is not the accurate translation of the word tariqa. The latter means path, and the author claims that it implies a much stronger bond than mere fraternity (Babou 2002: 151). However, he still uses the English term, and so will I in what follows.

\(^{26}\) The other two are Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya (O’Brien 2002)
identities. Through following the unorthodox ways of the Baay Fall, displaced youth find a place they can belong, as this group offers a space of solidarity other than that of the family, paving a way for alternative identity constructions (Audrain 2004) in the face of contemporary global power relations. At the same time, through elaborating upon certain aspects of the religious teachings, it is also possible for youth to make money through following the Baay Fall, which, I will argue, is an important explanation for the skepticism with which it is met by other members of society. Many young people convert to Mouridism, often severing the links to their families’ Muslim background (Audrian 2004). This is certainly true for the Baay Fall, where youth often become part of this group against their parents’ wishes (ibid.).

Through a focus on the aspect of work and the rhetoric used by members of the Baay Fall and its leaders, it is my intention to show that this brotherhood can be seen as offering an alternative success narrative to that which is found in the story of Europe as Eldorado, where the imagining of becoming somebody valuable is linked to the now well-known phrase Barça ou Barsakh27.

**Picturing Mouridism**

Mouridism is today the largest brotherhood in Senegal, and its popularity is most obvious and highly visible in the holy city of Touba. However, the influence of Mouridism in the capital Dakar is far-reaching and the number of disciples is growing here as well (Havard 2004, Havard 2001). The images and symbols employed by members of this group are everywhere, and it is impossible not to notice them, though it might be difficult to understand what they mean.

The first time I was in Dakar, I was amazed by all the pictures of what I then, quite ignorantly, thought were somewhat spooky characters painted on buildings, and on laminated photos in most taxies or around young men’s necks. All over the place you see paintings of different men, always quite old, usually only of their face and head covered in cloth. Especially one such painting is commonplace, and it consists of the full body of a man, all covered in white cloth, very skinny and frail looking, only his eyes showing, giving him an eerie appearance. I have seen this picture in the homes of several people, painted straight on the wall, as well as on buildings and worn as necklaces. In contrast to this picture is another

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27 Barcelona or death
man, also shown most often in full length, who is dressed in a dark robe, standing tall and strong, his hair in dreadlocks, and a wooden club in his hand. The former is a picture of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, the founder of the Mouride brotherhood, the latter of Maam Cheikh Ibra Fall; who’s life and devoted following of Amadou Bamba forms the basis of the Baay Fall’s beliefs.

These photos and paintings are not the only references to the Mourid brotherhood to be found in Dakar. On the buses are written texts such as: Touba, or Serign Touba referring to the holy Mourid city, or just Alhamdulillah (meaning Thank you God). Religious music is played on radios everywhere, and even without understanding much or any of the language, one picks up words that are repeated like Chieck Amadou Bamba and Maam Fall,” referring to the brotherhoods’ leading figures. Although down-town Dakar is animated in the evenings by the sounds of discothèques and bars, playing Hip-Hop music, reggae or the typical Wolof music mbalaax, in the suburbs there is a completely different sound. Here you can hear the religious chants of ecstatic people, as young men (and some women) gather together in the evenings to sing and dance in praise of their spiritual leaders and God, accompanied by the rhythmic and somewhat hypnotic sound of drums. The music performed is called Zikroula and these types of gatherings were often called nayabinghi by my participants, the meaning of which only became clear when I started to understand the brotherhoods’ perceived links to the Rastafari movement.

All of this, I will show, are manifestations of the influence of the Mourid brotherhood, and the lived experience of belonging to this group. I became interested in learning more about what all of this meant some time before I myself lived in one of the poorest suburbs, and through my participation in everyday life there came to experience firsthand what this kind of belonging might mean and feel like for the people involved. However, in the beginning of my trip I received somewhat evasive answers to the questions I posed about certain pictures in taxis or on the walls. People would just answer “that’s a picture of my marabout”. Further questions on the topic such as ”what is a marabout”, ”which Muslim group are you a part of” and ”why do you have a picture in your taxi or around your neck”, I would only receive short answers; ”a religious leader”, ”I am Mourid” and the most fascinating I felt was the answer to why they wear these types of pictures as necklaces, which most commonly was c’est fling, meaning it’s style (stylish). These responses did not seem complete, and as such did not satisfy my curiosity, and I was puzzled as to why my questions were not met with the same enthusiasm as when I asked questions about the political system or illegal emigration. Later I
came to understand that most white people do not usually ask questions about this, and it seemed that “we” were somehow excluded from being part of this knowledge. Thus I was left with my unanswered questions and wondered what kind of value these images might have for the people who carried them on their bodies in such an explicit fashion? What kind of imaginings did they express? To answer these questions and understand how this is linked to youth’s religiosity, I will follow O’Brien in his focus on the occupation of Wolof territory in the colonial history of Senegal.

The colonization of Wolof society

According to O’Brien, in one of the most influential books on Mouridism: *The Mourides of Senegal* (1975), it is important to understand how the Wolof masses were gradually dislocated from their traditional ways of life, both when it came to structural organization and beliefs, and how this constituted a crisis in society that led to the proliferation of Mouridism. The forces driving this dislocation were French colonizers and militant Muslim puritans (ibid.). By the end of the 19th century both were very powerful, and had gained much influence in the Wolof society (ibid.).

This process was not peaceful, and many battles were fought between those who held power, referred to by O’Brien as the pagan, warrior aristocracy, and the French and Muslim invaders (O’Brien 1975). This warrior aristocracy was led by the famous warlord, Lat Dior, and they kept their power and economic stature through slave-trade, semi-nomadic pastoralism and bounty gathered in warfare (ibid.). The aristocracy also kept their authority through a warrior class of slave origins, the *tyeddo*, who fought their battles against the invading forces (ibid.).

Lat Dior is legendary throughout Senegal for being the Wolof leader who offered the most resistance towards colonial rule, as he fought the French to the end of his life, which was in the famous battle of 1886 (O’Brien 1975, 1971). This was the last defeat of the Wolof army by French colonizers. The dislocation of traditional organization came to a peak with the death of the warlord, as this constituted the end of such warlordism (O’Brien 1975). O’Brien points to the fact that the French also abolished slavery in the beginning of their colonial reign, in 1848 in the coastal areas, and in 1905 throughout the country, which meant that the aristocracy could no longer make money from slave-trade. As such, there was a mass of

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28 Wolof is the largest ethnic group in Senegal, comprising about 30% of the population (O’Brien 2002)
The discussion on the role played by the Wolof aristocracy and the Muslim leaders in the colonial history of Senegal, is of course, too extensive to portray adequately here. However the aspects mentioned above; the displacement of many people during the colonization process, and the resistance towards French colonial rule, are important when it comes to the contemporary practice of the Mourid and Baay Fall. Therefore, I wish to turn to the role of Mouridisme in the opposition towards the colonial powers.

**Becoming Mourid**

Twice when I was walking along the busy streets of Dakar with one of my participants, Ousman, who came from Casamance, the southern part of Senegal, he met old acquaintances from his hometown. They spoke to each other a while in Jola, the most common language in this region, before we continued on our path through the city. On one of the occasions, after saying goodbye, Ousman laughed and said that they had lost their language; they no longer spoke proper Jola. I asked him why he thought that was so, and he said that’s what often happens. They had stayed several years in Dakar, and had “become Wolof”. He then turned towards me, and exclaimed that he had heard that they had even turned Mourid!

There are different views and opinions concerning the Wolof influence in Senegal. As Ousman is from a part of the country that has a history of confrontations with the government, and those in power are often Wolof, he most likely has several reasons to be critical. However, there appears to be more of a consensus regarding the importance of the Mourid brotherhood in spreading Wolof heritage throughout the country. O’Brien points to what he terms: "a Wolofication by the sacred" (O’Brien 2002: 148), referring to the role of religion in the Wolofication process, as Cheick Amadou Bamba was of Wolof origin. Even people, who are not Mourid, seem to appreciate the role played by the founders of this brotherhood in spreading Sufi values and fighting colonialism.

Today, the religious leaders in the brotherhood, the marabous, who are descendants of Bamba, sometimes write in Arabic, but speak only Wolof amongst themselves and to their disciples (O’Brien 2002). The marabous in the Mourid brotherhood are critical towards the implementation of French education in the colonial period (ibid.), and today there are hardly
any French schools in Touba, as education is based on the Koran. Viewing the French (influence) as the main adversary because of their assimilating politics, the defenders of Wolof values are in a position where they do not meet much resistance, according to O’Brien (2002).

The two main protagonists in the history of the Mourid brotherhood are, as stated, Cheick Amadou Bamba and Maam Cheikh Ibra Fall. To understand the contemporary importance of this religious organization one must look to its historical roots, focusing on the relationship between these two, and the political environment in which they lived. The way they are portrayed in the photos and paintings one sees of them in Dakar is by many explicitly linked to their different demeanors and roles within the brotherhood. Bamba in white represents the spiritual aspect of Mouridism, while Fall, dressed in black, represents the materiality of it all, the earthly and mundane aspects of Mouridism, being the one that stood for the organization of the brotherhood in its inception. According to O’Brien, they were at the right place at the right time, responding to the crisis in their society with a new religious orientation and socio-economic organization (1975).

**Founding Mouridism**

- **Cheikh Amadou Bamba**

Cheikh Amadou Bamba was from a renowned family, where he was raised in the Sufi brotherhood *Qadiriyya*, which originated in Baghdad and spread throughout the Muslim world (Babou 2003). Though this brotherhood is based on Sufi principles, its practice is what Babou calls a “moderate esotericism with respect for orthodox rituals and worship” (ibid: 313). According to Babou: “(the Quadiriyya) rejects the extreme mysticism of the ascetics who shun societal life and place spiritual perfection over formal worship” (ibid: 313). Cheikh Amadou Bamba spent his whole life reading the Koran and Sufi texts (Babou 2002). He was drawn to the inherent mysticism in Sufism and believed in the importance of asceticism and rejection of worldly power, thus disagreeing with some of the practices he was taught. In the Qadiriyya brotherhood emphasis is placed on the importance of following religious teachers *Shaikh’s* and learning the Koran while “maintaining a pure soul, giving charity, adopting good manners in society, and being merciful, patient and magnanimous” (Babou 2003: 313) As will become clear, these moral values are still relevant in the contemporary practice of the
followers of Cheikh Amadou Bamba. However, I will show that the rejection of worldly power and principles of asceticism are more important for the Baay Fall than the Mourides.

For many of Bamba’s Muslim contemporaries the most important focus of religious teachings was on learning the Qur’an by heart. According to Babou, these Muslim teachers were complacent with the aristocracy because they also wanted wealth and prestige, competing with each other instead of seeking true knowledge (Babou 2003). Bamba, on the other hand, sought to counter the Muslim teachings of his day, through a system of education based on the principle of cultivating the soul (ibid). Bamba saw knowledge without practice as worthless (ibid), and wished to create a system of Islamic education that could be a response to the crisis in his society (O’Brien 1975). As such, more than just learning the holy book, he endeavored to teach appropriate behavior and conduct, forging the character of his disciples (Babou 2003: 316). He is seen as a charismatic ascetic and the most important advocate for peaceful resistance against the French (O’Brien 1975). For him, it was important to fight the French at an ideological level, in a discreet, peaceful manner, (ibid: 22). He proposed a jihad of the soul where education of the people would be the weapon with which to fight the French (and the Muslim puritans) (Babou: 2002).

To accomplish this task, Bamba started many settlements where followers would learn from the guidance of a designated Shaikh, as his message was that one must learn from an enlightened person and put the teacher over one’s parents (Babou 2003), following practices in the Quadiriyya brotherhood. This was because he saw the parents as educators of the body and the teacher’s as educators of the substance of humanity, which was the spirit (ibid: 322). The French were very suspicious of the growth of Bamba’s followers, as they feared he would start a holy war. Therefore they sent him twice in exile, once to Gabon (1895-1902), and the other to Mauritania (1903-1907). The colonizers where afraid of what they saw as a growing army under Bamba’s control, capable of subverting their power (O’Brien 1971). However, O’Brien also points to the ambivalence with which Bamba regarded the French. He saw them as un-devoted infidels, but at the same time found some gratitude in the mental space they created for him through captivity (O’Brien 1975). For it was while in exile that Bamba wrote most of his texts, popularly estimated to be 7 tons²⁹ written throughout his life. 41 volumes have been published, although most of the texts are said to have been thrown at sea by the French.

²⁹ All the Mourid and Baay Fall disciples I spoke to, related Bambas voluminous writing in tons. Why they laid focus on the weight, I have not been able to find out. However, the library in Touba is full of Bambas texts.
His time in exile is the basis of many myths reverently told by his disciples to this day. According to these stories, he was placed in front of a lion that was meant to kill him, but the beast lay down before him instead. He was made to denounce his belief in Allah on a boat with other Muslim leaders. One by one they disclaimed their God, but Bamba did not. In anger the French told him that he was not allowed to pray on the boat, and if he did not pray he would displease his God, putting him in a difficult dilemma. On this Bamba threw his praying mat on the ocean, stepped unto it, and prayed.

The stories told about Bamba and the way they are recited today will form part of my analysis of the importance of this religious rhetoric in forming an imagining of an alternative construction of subjectivity for youth in the urban landscape of Dakar. The Mourids are very proud of the accomplishments of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, and place much importance both on his voluminous writing, and his resistance towards the colonial powers. Therefore, I wish to show that it is not only the ideas and moral reasoning of Mouridism that is important when it comes to the practices of religiosity today, but also the anti-imperialism implied in the historical context.

For many of his followers, Cheikh Amadou Bamba was unlike any Sufi Saint and rather more like Allah himself (O’Brien 1975). Still today disciples say that Allah is Cheikh Amadou Bamba, and Bamba is equally Allah, calling him Serigne Touba, referring to the holy Muslim city he founded. But Cheikh Amadou Bamba did not want attention, and found the adoration of his followers tiring. He wanted to write, and was not too concerned with the organization of the brotherhood, which he left to Shaikh Ibra Fall (O’Brien 1975).

Although the Baay Fall and the Mourids both trace their roots to Cheikh Amadou Bamba, the former, as mentioned, consider the founder’s devoted disciple to be their most important example to follow. Thus to grasp the inherent difference between the ways of the Baay Fall and the larger Mourid community, it is important to turn to the “founder” of Baay Fallism, Maam Cheikh Ibra Fall.

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30 In fact, the name Serign Touba was given to Cheikh Amadou Bamba because he founded the holy city of Touba. Now every Khalife – general (the highest representative and most important marabou in the Mouride brotherhood) is an ancestor of the founder of Mouridism, and is called by the same name (Audrain 2002)
Beginning the Baay Fall

- Cheikh Ibra Fall and the Unorthodox Baay Fall behavior

Maam Cheikh Ibra Fall was from the warrior aristocracy. Therefore his appearance was that of the tyeddo warband, with a brightly colored robe and leather belt, his hair in long dreadlocks, and a wooden club in hand (O’Brien 1975: 43). As other Tyeddo, he found himself in a situation where he had to find new ways of living after the end of warlordism (ibid.). O’Brien claims that he was a skilled entrepreneur who knew how to take advantage of the predicament of his time (ibid.), though disciples today see in him an example of pure devotion, and would probably not agree with a characteristic of him as seeking personal gain from his following of Bamba.

In 1886 Fall arrived at the Muslim school of Amadou Bamba (O’Brien 1975). Today Baay Fall tell the story as one of the many miraculous happenings in the life of the founder of Mouridism and Cheikh Ibra Fall. They say that he smelled a distinct scent in a dream in which he dreamt he was to find a great marabout to whom he must submit. He searched many places, meeting several important Muslim teachers, but when he came to the humble quarters of Bamba, he recognized the scent and immediately knew that he had found his marabout.

He removed all his clothes, crawled to the saint, prostrated himself and pledged his allegiance in a manner which today is standard for a Mouride disciple:”I submit to you in this world and the next. All you order me I will do. Everything you forbid me I will abstain from doing” (O’Brien 1975: 44). He declared that he would not pray, because he would not have the time and it was humiliating for a man of honor, he would not fast because that would impede his work. Instead he would fill the role of devoted disciple, living a life resembling that of the slave (ibid.).

Fall began to grow food for the disciples, staying with them and taking care of their needs (O’Brien 1975). According to O’Brien, his contemporaries called him Bamba’s madman, and many did not appreciate his eccentric ways (ibid.). Fall demanded subservient behavior from everyone towards the saint, and would reprimand those he felt were out of line. The other disciples grew tired of him, and told the Saint to choose his madman or them (ibid.). Bamba chose the devoted former Tyeddo warrior, and left with him and two other disciples to form a new establishment (O’Brien 1971). The settlement they started here became a refuge for those escaping French authority, and those displaced from their former positions as slaves and warriors (‘Brien 1971, 1975). I will show how this aspect of the first settlements is important,
linking this to contemporary religious belongingness. First, however, I will turn to the Baay Fall behavior.

**Baay Fall unorthodoxy**

Today Baay Fall follow the example of Cheikh Ibra Fall, both when it comes to his absolute devotion and submission towards his marabou, his eccentric practice of Islam, and his appearance. Following in his footsteps they claim that they do not need to pray or fast, as they are exempt from these Muslim norms, causing much stir in the rest of the Muslim community. It is common practice that Muslims must follow the five pillars of Islam, and praying five times a day is considered the most important. The explicit reason why the Baay Fall do not have to abide by these rules, is that they should work hard in service of their marabous and the Baay Fall community, and thus do not have the time. The marabous, in return, take spiritual responsibility for the disciples, praying in their place. The reason given as to why they do not need to fast appears highly relevant in the socio-economic context of Dakar. They say that every meal they cannot afford to eat is seen by Allah and the Serign Touba as a sacrifice, and as long as one does not complain when going without food, it is seen as equal to the act of fasting (Audrain 2004).

**Looking like a real Baay Fall**

As mentioned Cheikh Ibra Fall’s appearance was that of the typical Tyeddo warrior, and also here the Baay Fall follow his example. They usually wear baggy, colorful clothes, made of a patchwork of materials in different patterns and colors. The Baay Fall attire is called *njaxaas* which means mixture, and they believe this mix of elements gives protection against evil forces. According to O’Brien, Cheikh Ibra Fall only had one robe, and whenever he got a hole in it, he would just sew on a patch from different materials, resulting in the colorful clothing the Baay Fall are known for wearing (O’Brien 1971).

Normally Baay Fall have dreadlocks and walk barefooted. Even in the middle of the city it is common to see them walk around without shoes. I remember the first time I engaged with some Baay Fall, who were walking around Dakar in this manner. It was a scorching hot day and I was walking from the university on my way to catch a car rapide to get back home to the suburb. As is common when one meets Baay Fall in the city, they came over to ask for a

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31 The “Car rapide” is a small colorful bus, that is painted with different texts, such as “Touba”, Serign Touba”, etc, see “Picturing Mouridism”. These buses drive around downtown, an also carry passengers to and from the suburbs.
contribution to the Serign Touba. I stood there a while talking to them, when I suddenly noticed their feet. I was shocked, and asked them why they were walking around like this, sure that their feet must be burning. They smiled, and said they had to suffer. That the Baay Fall must know the misery in life, seeking God and working for their marabouts without concern for themselves. In the holy city Touba, one is encouraged to walk without shoes at the temple area, and this, I was told, is to be reminded to be humble, and feel pain without complaining.

The use of gris-gris, which are leather bands with verses of the Koran inside, that are blessed by marabouts, is extensive in Senegal. While it is not my intention to go into detail on this practice, nor to review the beliefs historical roots, it is important to note that the Baay Fall, as a group, are known for their use of gris-gris, and it is common to see them wear several such leather bands around their necks (others mostly use them around their waist). I was often told that the mysterious ways of the Baay Fall were not possible to understand for an outsider. The only way to really understand what being Baay Fall is about, is to be part of it. I came to experience that this was in many ways true, and as an outsider, my knowledge about the mystical ways of the Baay Fall largely derives from statements about them and attitudes towards them, though of course also through their own statements and actions. However, I do think it is important to focus attention on how they are viewed by the community, as the aspect of being *mal regardée* (badly regarded) (Fouquet 2008) might also be seen as a source of power.

**Baay Fall Controversy**

I cannot recall hearing much talk of Touba during my first stay in Senegal, however, perhaps this was because I did not listen well enough. Regardless of the reason for my lack of understanding of the importance of Touba, I did not consider going there, and I never thought much about it before I started learning about Mouridism. Though it did seem that after I started the path towards understanding the Baay Fall and the Mourid brotherhood, the thought of Touba kept coming closer, until one day I decided that I would like to go, if someone could accompany me. My main Baay Fall participants, Pape and Abdo, were excited and wanted to take me, as they had not been there for some time themselves. My family however, was not pleased. Although Pape and Abdo were well liked, my family was already suspicious that they had been poisoning my food to get me to follow them. I heard it said several times that Baay Fall tried to poison Europeans so they would leave their comfortable life in Europe and convert. The reason I was given as to why they would want to do this was because they
wished to trick them into giving their money to the marabouts so they could add more gold to the holy mosque. This was exactly the discussion I brought upon my family when I wished to go to Touba. They were distressed, and accusations were raised against Pape, Abdo and the rest of their compound that they had already "taken me". It was often said of the Baay Fall that that is what they do; "ils te prennent comme ca, si tu fait pas l’attention. Ils te prennent la tete les Baay Fall" (They take you like that if you don’t pay attention. The Baay Fall will take your head). The conclusion of the matter, after long discussions, was that my family could let me go.

These types of accusations about the use of mysterious powers are quite common in Senegal, and the Baay Fall as a group are often linked to such practices because of their connections to powerful marabouts. The Baay Fall themselves believe strongly in evil forces, and thus their perceived connection to such poisoning practices are perhaps not unfounded. But in my opinion, it mostly points to the way other people in society view the young disciples. There is much controversy surrounding the Baay Fall, and I often heard people make derogatory remarks. Views of the Baay Fall as being an annoyance and even delinquents are commonplace (Audrain 2002). One statement that was repeated to me several times was that one should not say Baay Fall, but rather Baay Faux, meaning that they were fakes (see also Audrain 2004). At the same time I was often told that if I wished to see real Baay Fall, I should go to Touba. The meaning of this will be discussed later, but to understand why there is so much controversy surrounding their presence in the urban landscape, it is not enough to understand their unorthodox ways, though this is a large part of it. In my view one must also look at the Baay Fall practice of madial. For every Mourid holiday the Baay Fall are supposed to go out on the streets to ask for contributions for the Serign Touba. According to Cheikh Ibra Fall one should take to the streets with a bowl (calabas) before the holy celebrations to ask the community for donations, which is the performance of madial, as circumscribed by Fall (O’Brien 1971). This is common practice, and I was told by several Baay Fall that it is humiliating, but that it should be, so one learns from the experience. However, today some beg money all the time, causing much stir and annoyance. Walking along the streets of Dakar, one is sure to come across some Baay Fall who wish to ask for money, as the above example showed. With their unique exterior one can spot them from a distance, and several times when I walked with people who were not Baay Fall, they would try to avoid running into them. However, the Baay Fall I spoke to who did ask for donations, were proud of the hard work they did on the streets for the Serign Touba, and claimed that they sent most of the money to
their marabouts. In fact, because it is humiliating, I was told it is more valuable, since it teaches one to be humble and have respect, traits I came to understand are very important. It is important to note that it is only a small part of the Baay Fall who beg on the streets on a regular basis, and some Baay Fall I spoke to said that it was not appropriate behavior. Thus it becomes clear that there is a discrepancy between what people say about them and how they perceive themselves. There are also contradictory elements within the group. It does appear, however, that their presence in the urban landscape is a problem for many people and comments about them taking people’s money to buy alcohol and marijuana were commonplace. In fact, most Baay Fall I met did smoke marijuana, though none of them drank alcohol.

Through these examples it becomes clear that being Baay Fall is clearly distinguished from other orientations in Islam, diverse as these are. As mentioned, criticism is raised against this group for not following Muslim norms, and even being fake (Audrain: 2002, 2004). The young disciples I spoke to countered this criticism by stating that others could not understand, because they did not see the truth. When I asked Baay Fall why they thought their group was growing, they would say something along the lines of: because it is the right time, people are tired of lies, and have started to understand that they are being lied to. Amadou Bamba was supposed to have said that it was not for his generation or the one after to understand, but those coming after that. Thus they believe they are on the right path, and justify their lax practice of the sharia by their strong belief in Allah. According to Audrain, one of the reasons why they say they do not need to pray, is because they think about God all the time (Audrain 2004). Through their hard work, they are guaranteed a place in paradise. Therefore, it is important to understand the place of work in the Baay Fall imagining.

Creating Community, in times of Displacement

After serving Cheikh Amadou Bamba loyally for years, Cheikh Ibra Fall was released from his service, and Bamba told him that he should go and settle in Saint Louis, which was then the capital of Senegal (O’Brien 1971). On his way, three people declared their submission to him, and thus made him a Shaikh (ibid.). These disciples came with him and his following grew rapidly in Saint Louis, attracting many of the poorer people and those displaced from their former positions (ibid.).
He created the working Daara, which was an Islamic school. However, instead of learning the Koran, the disciples worked the land. Here Fall organized agricultural work, teaching the former warriors basic skills in self-sufficient communities where he appropriated part of the produce (O’Brien 1971). In some ways this replaced the former military service, and thus kept the warriors from humiliation, as agriculture in itself was not a respectful way to make a living for such men (O’Brien 1975). However, the religious aspect of doing this work made it a valuable activity. Many did not have much schooling and could not read Arabic, thus finding in the working Daara a way to praise God and Amadou Bamba through hard-work and the singing of Mourid texts in the evenings (O’Brien 1971).

Work is a central theme in Mouridism, and is seen as something one must always strive for and appreciate. The work should furthermore not be performed for one’s own interest, but rather for the benefit of a marabou or sheikh, in service of the religious community. O’Brien points to the link between the importance of hard work in Mouridism and the protestant work ethic of Weber, which is based on the idea of salvation through agricultural work (1975, 2002). The resemblance should not be overstated, but it is clear that this was a system that was based on the premise that the disciples should work hard, and would in return receive the promise of paradise. In the case of the Baay Fall, this principle has always been taken most seriously, as they were used for the construction of the Mosque in Touba and much of the railway, carrying the heavy stones on their backs, and have always done the hardest physical labor (O’Brien 2002, 1971). This makes Audrian speak of le mystique du travail (the work mystic) of the Baay Fall, referring to the fact that for them work is everything, and replaces all other formal worship (Adrian 2002). Today they claim that one should stay for a period at Daaras outside of Touba working the land, serving the child disciples who are there to learn the Koran. This work ethic is linked to being a real Baay fall, and will be elaborated on further in the section on the holy city. For now it is important to understand how the Daaras might function in the urban landscape where agriculture is no longer an option.

**Urban Dahiras**

From the days of Bamba and Fall, the Mourid and Baay Fall disciples have worked in agricultural units, giving a part of their produce to their marabou (O’Brien 1971, 1975). Although these types of Daaras still exist and function in certain areas of Senegal, and

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Name of the urban version (Babou 2003)
especially in Touba, this form of social organization has taken on another meaning in the urban environment. Babou points to the increasing migration towards the capital in the 1970’s following the deterioration of agricultural opportunities, export restrictions, and a general decline in the economy, to explain the proliferation of urban dahiras in Dakar today (Babou 2002). The Mourid migrants who first came to Dakar did not know French and were unfamiliar with city life (ibid.). As such, there was a need for them to create a sense of belonging in an unknown environment (ibid.), as is common in urban migration.

In the article *Functions et activité des dahiras mourides urbains*, Diop writes about the Mourid students’ dahiras and how they also function as places of political mobilization (Diop 1986). While Babou focuses on the creation of dahiras for migrants in New York, and the importance such organizations had for the Mourid traders in diaspora (2002), ever since the beginning of the Modou Modou discussed in the introduction. Though these aspects of the dahiras are important, and will be reviewed in the part on Imagining Touba, the point is that the main purpose of a dahir, besides being a sort of prayer circle (Babou 2002) and a place for education in the Mourid and Baay Fall beliefs, is first and foremost a space for creating a sense of belonging and solidarity in a social landscape where family members are no longer capable, to the same extent, of creating security (Audrain 2002, 2004). I wish to show how the dahiras might be viewed as this type of alternative belonging for the Baay Fall, through an example from my participants in Dalifort.

**The practice of religiosity in an urban environment**

One evening (in Dalifort), Abdo and Pape, invited me to meet some of their friends. I eagerly joined them to a backyard of a house, where I was amazed to find a group of men dressed in Baay Fall clothes moving around in a circle, singing with all the might of their lungs. They all covered one ear with their hand; resembling artists in recording studios, and one man appeared to be in charge, leading the others in the chorus. I was asked to remove my shoes, and put a Muslim style scarf on my head, and was led by a woman towards the indoor area. Pape came over and said that I should stay there with the women, making sure that I had a spot where I could sit and follow their movements. Sitting there, listening to the sound of what seemed to me to be these men pouring their soul out in unison to God, it hit me that this was the same sound I so often heard in the evenings in Dalifort.
After they had finished, some gathered in groups with the women to discuss the teachings of Amadou Bamba, or practice some Arabic prayers, while Pape and a few others came over to me. We sat and talked about religion and the practice of the Baay Fall. Usually when I met new people in Senegal, they were very eager to make my acquaintance, but here nobody seemed to notice me much, or find it strange that I was present. Later, when I commented on this to Pape, he explained that they did not care; since I was there, it meant that the Serign Touba had summoned me. And as Baay Fall they were always happy when somebody wanted to learn about their ways, especially white people.

After this night, I came back every Sunday to participate in their dahira, and sometimes went with them to larger chants on Fridays and Saturdays, which I came to learn is how this form of religiosity is practiced in the urban landscape. Every Sunday, they gathered at Abdo’s mother’s house at seven, to chant the khassäid (Amadou Bamba’s religious poems) in praise of Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Maam Cheikh Ibra Fall. Music is an important part of being Bay Fall, and according to several of the Baay Fall I spoke to, it was through participating in chants that they first became attracted to this form of religiosity. They call the act of chanting this way (performing) Zikr, through zikroula music. Normally it is the dahiras who organize such events, either in smaller groups, as the above example showed, or through larger arrangements. As mentioned in the part on picturing Mouridism, the sound of this music is heard throughout Dalifort most nights of the week. Often the younger Baay Fall in the neighborhood met on weekdays and sang all night, much to the disliking of many of the other residents. For them it is a way to give praise without having to follow prescribed religious practice. It is important to note again the fact that with Amadou Bamba, came an Islamic practice that was mostly based on Wolof tradition and language. As such, it is possible for youth who do not have an education or have not attended Koranic school, and thus do not know Arabic, to be Muslim. They can learn the rules of religion and the practice of religiosity by belonging to a dahira, where they also find solidarity and support amongst their Baay Fall brothers.

Abdo – Becoming Baay Fall

Abdo is a Dawrin which means that he is in charge of the dahira in Dalifort, which consists of thirty young men. Abdo gains respect, even from those who are not Baay Fall for his position as a Dawrin. Abdo is raised Tijaniyya, and his parents were not pleased when he decided to
become Baay Fall. He had an accident when he was about 20, and was in a lot of pain for a long time. During his suffering he was very confused, and did not understand why Allah had put him in this situation. He is the oldest son in his family, and as such much depended on him and his ability to finish his studies at the university. He was away from school a long time though, and did not know if he would be able to return. At the end of his healing period, he had a dream that he was supposed to go to Khelcom, which is the agricultural area connected to the holy city, to serve the Serign Touba. He told his parents what had happened, and left. He pledged his allegiance to his marabou of choice (the one he had also dreamt about), and became Baay Fall. For seven years he stayed in Khelcom, growing food for the Daaras there with the other Baay Fall, chanting in the nights, and spending time in Touba. His parents were concerned that he was throwing away his life, and that they would never see him again. After the seven years, his marabou informed him that his service was over and that he should go back, start a family and become a Dawrin. He also told him to follow his artistic talents and start making clothes for a living, giving him some money to start a business. He of course followed his marabou’s guidance, and after a while when his business went well, and he was married to a good woman, his parents accepted his choice. But their fears were not unfounded, as many young men do indeed sever the ties to their families to become Baay Fall.

According to Audrain, young people convert to Baay Fallism to prove to their families that they can cope with life without their help (Audrain 2002, 2004), and I also found this to be significant. Many of my participants who were not Baay Fall often complained that they felt ashamed for having to rely on their parents to feed them and take care of them, when they should be capable of seeing to their own needs. On several occasions I heard Pape and other Baay Fall say that now they ate their meals with their brothers, and their families no longer had to worry about them. Now that they were on the right path, they could always depend on their marabou and brothers for help.

Today, most Mourid disciples are organized in dahiras and Havard points to the proliferation of such organizations in the recent years to show that the brotherhood is growing fast in Dakar (2001). The ethos of hard work was, as mentioned, something that captured the Bul Faale generation of the 1990’s. Thus one might also view in the brotherhoods expansion a correlation between the ethos of the Bul Faale and the work ethic of Mouridism, something that is even more evident in Baay Fall and their mystique du travail. Though the work is not done on fields, but rather with other jobs, or making business (see part 1), the disciples still work in service of their marabou. Every member gives money to the dahira, where the Dawrin
will redistribute it amongst those who are in need, and give a part to their marabou. They organize chants, and celebrations for important religious festivities and meet on a regular basis to discuss and chant the Khassâïds. On some occasions the group’s marabou will be present to speak to the young disciples, as will become clear in the part on the holy leaders. Following Babou, one might view a dahir as: “an institution where the core values of the brotherhood, such as fraternity, discipline, hard work, humility and sharing, are preserved and reproduced” (2002: 168).

Thus the proliferation of urban dahiras in Dakar today is an example of the expansion of the Mourid brotherhood. One sees more and more dahiras in the suburbs or connected to the university (Havard 2001), and this points to the ongoing mouridisation of the youth (Havard 2003). This is further exemplified by the appropriation of Mourid symbols by young people, such as the laminated photos, Mourid texts on buses, and the popularity of the Baay Fall attire and appearance. Havard points to the fact that earlier scholars predicted a decline in this form of religious practice due to increasing urbanization, western education and penetration of capitalist relations, but that this is not at all the case in contemporary Senegalese society (Havard 2001). From the urban dahiras beginning in the 1940’s until today, they have functioned as a way to preserve group cohesion and rebuild communal solidarity (ibid.). “The dahiras was first conceived as a sort of prayer circle where disciples from the same town or neighborhood would meet on a weekly basis to read the Koran, chant Amadu Bamba’s religious poems and socialize” (Babou 2002: 154). This is still true, as the previous examples show. Solidarity between the disciples as expressed through belonging to a Dai’ra is important, but what might being Baay Fall mean to those individuals who seek solace in this practice of religiosity?

**Becoming Somebody, Being Baay Fall**

“Some of them saw in it (Baay Fallism) only a means to an identity construction, a fashion phenomenon, all these young people that pretended to be Baay Fall and who practiced the rules of this religion, with more or less seriousness. But he held on to it hard, it meant more to him than simply belief. It was a path to security, a hope in life, both present life on earth and in the future, another place, and surely better”

(Gavron 2008: 17)

Alioune is a young man of 17 years who lived in the same house as I did during my stay in Dakar. The young men I stayed with had taken him in and he now lived there as their little
They would often give him some money for breakfast, and some of his other meals were taken, together with us, at the young men’s family’s house. In return he helped them wash clothes and run errands, which is common for young men when staying with older family members. Alioune had a history of delinquency behind him, having been involved with what the others termed bad people. For several years, from about 12 to 16, he had helped some older boys sell marijuana in the neighborhood, and rumors had it that they had also been responsible for some of the many muggings in the area. Living on the street he knew the neighborhood well, and gained some respect from the others for being a real ”Boy Dalifort”, though they often made fun of him and treated him more like a boy than an equal.

When asked why they had chosen to help Alioune, the other men would answer that he had been exposed to many problems and had a rough time, but that he was a good person and deserved a chance. One of the young men, Mahmoud, who is a Mourid, said that the Serign Touba wanted them to take care of each other, and show sympathy towards others, and it was their duty to help. He would often say that Alioune was a hard worker, and was not like so many other young men in the neighborhood. Alioune quit school at 12 and lived on the streets, as he did not have parents to take care of him. Today he is a self-proclaimed Baay Fall and he goes to religious chants almost every evening. On several occasions the other men made fun of Alioune, pointing to the fact that he hardly spoke any French, and that he did not know any Arabic prayers. Only Mahmoud is a Mourid, none of them are Baay Fall. They would sometimes laugh at the fact that Alioune went to chants, calling him Baay Faux. When I myself started going to chants in the neighborhood, Alioune said to the others that I could understand, even if they could not. Again, this points to the unity felt by participating in these practices.

One evening, talking to Alioune and Mahmoud, Alioune explained that the brothers had helped him and he was grateful to have a place to stay, but it was the Baay Fall that had shown him the right path in life. After he joined them, he no longer sought what he had earlier. He did not need money, but he would continue his new-found business of repairing bicycles for people in the neighborhood, something that did not pay much, but according to Alioune was at least honest. At the same time he was able to go to the other Baay Fall for help when there was no income. He now found joy in the “simple-life” and did not need anything but the chants and a roof over his head.
Being Better– Becoming Valuable

I spent a lot of time with Pape, Abdo and four more Baay Fall in my neighborhood, but also went with them to meet Baay Fall other places in Dakar, often to socialize, drink café Touba\textsuperscript{33} and discuss, or to participate in chants at different locations. It was especially one group of Baay Fall who lived in Diamelaye, which is located (as so many places in Dakar) by the ocean. The beach is like most others, animated in the evenings by young men doing sports, some training for the popular Senegalese wrestling, others playing soccer. Here you also find Baay Fall, walking the beach, talking to people, playing drums and chanting. As well as asking tourists and others for donations.

The first time I met this group of young men in Diamelaye we were led there by a friend of Pape. Having walked through the sandy streets in the heat for some time, we arrived at their residence to find five young men sitting in a small room, drinking café Touba and listening to Baay Fall music. When I first met them, they were skeptical towards my presence. One of the men who is a (nursing) student, bluntly asked me what I was doing there and I explained that I was in Senegal to do research for my master thesis. My answer did not satisfy him though, and he further asked how I was planning to do this anthropological research project. He wanted to know if I was going to be nice and charm them into sharing their stories with me. Then write about the black man and his primitive beliefs. Not knowing what to say, I simply responded that Yes, minus the last part, that was sort of my plan. All the young men started laughing, and although it was funny, the atmosphere was tense a while after this. But when I was offered a cup of café Touba, and drank it the right way, meaning taking a few sips and passing it to the person next to me, and could show that I did have some knowledge of Mouridism, the situation seemed to change. Suddenly everybody was conversing, and we stayed there several hours.

None of the young men had jobs, and they struggled hard for a meager income. Two of them asked for donations from people on the beach and streets. They all said that the situation in Senegal was hopeless, and even the student knew that he probably would not find a job after he finished his education. However, their focus was on what it meant for them to be Baay Fall, and how it was very positive that so many young people today belong to this group. For them it was important to highlight how we in the west have misunderstood, and think we are

\textsuperscript{33} Café Touba is the special coffea of the Mourids. The taste is somewhat bitter, and it is said that this liquid was given to Cheikh Amadou Bamba by the French as poison to kill him. But he changed the content with his powers, and when he drank it, it did not harm him
happy with all our gadgets and belongings of all sorts. They were eager to have me explain how we could be content in life when our belief in God is so weak. These young men even spoke to me of pornography, saying that it was our narcissistic ways and also our lack of respect for women that led us to such sinful behavior. They explained to me the importance of controlling the *nafs*, meaning the animal impulses and desires of all sorts (Babou 2003, Audrain 2004). They said that in the west we appeared not to be capable of this. At which point one of the men interjected saying: *Ah! Et vous nous ditez primitives!* (And you call us primitive!) They perceived the west as decadent in contrast to their way of life. Cheick Amadou Bamba had freed them from the need to have all the things that the French sought, and had showed them that it was best to live a simple life (based on the ideals of the ascetic). Every time I came back they would talk about how Africa was better than what they perceived as the west.

It was always very important for the Baay Fall I met to educate me about their norms and way of life, explaining the importance of their views in today’s society, relating this always to the history and practice of the Mourids and Baay Fall. For the most part they were pleased by my curiosity, and I spent much time attempting to learn how they perceived their religiosity and explained their predicaments. My presence among them was explained to me as a message to them from the Serign Touba to reach a fellow human with his words.

I was often struck by the fact that many seemed to feel that although I am educated and have had the experience of travelling and thus having the opportunity perhaps to critically examine more aspects of our globally inter-connected world, that I am lacking knowledge and need their help to see the truth. Young men, often much younger than me, would lecture me on behavioral norms which one should live by. They often treated me as though I was inferior to them because I lacked their religious knowledge and understanding. They would tell me stories of the miraculous powers of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, saying always that one cannot really understand if one is not in it completely. Sometimes they would go on about the unjust situation in the world, with me playing the role of a representative of the West, explicitly saying things such as: *Vous vous croyez mieux que nous, mais vous avez maltraité le monde, et on vie dans les consequences. L’intellectualisme n’est rien si on manque Dieu* (you think you are better than us, but you have mistreated the world, and we live in the consequences. Intellectualism is nothing, if you don’t have God).
As highlighted in part one, many young people in Senegal do not feel that there is anything for them in their country. Job opportunities are scarce, getting an education is difficult in the public schools, and private schools are expensive. Even with education, one is by no means guaranteed to find work. Many young men find themselves in a situation where they feel they have no purpose in life, no reason to be; living wasted lives. On several occasions my participants who were not Baay Fall, would say to me in moments when they were caught by despair, that if they did not exist, no-one would care. I never heard a Baay Fall speak like this. Although one might say with some certainty that most people do sometimes feel superfluous, even in more affluent parts of the world than Senegal, it is extremely important for the Baay Fall to be positive. They would often tell me that a Baay Fall does not complain, does not ask for more than that which one needs to survive, does not feel jealousy towards others, and should not speak negatively. Being a good person is the most important aspect of being Baay Fall, something that is stated often by members of the group. Humility, respect and solidarity were the behavioral aspects most often mentioned, but one should be honest and true, kind and sharing, not occupy one-self with the business of others, put one-self last, and not seek worldly pleasures. It is important to insert that no Baay Fall I spoke to believes that anyone can fulfill at all times these behavioral demands, as no human is perfect. According to them, only Muhammed and Cheikh Amadou Bamba were, and Cheikh Ibra Fall tried his best to be. Therefore, as one can merely be human, one can only strive for perfection, well aware that this is a life-long project.

Zair Ak Batine

Spending time with the Baay Fall, I came to understand that the inherent symbolism of the founders’ different appearance held great importance, in many respects. The black and white attire not only stood for Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Maam Cheikh Ibra Fall’s different roles in the Mouride brotherhood, but was linked to a Sufi phrase commonly used by the Baay Fall Zair ak Batine, the meaning of which was explained to me as that which is spiritual (Batine) and that which belongs to this world (Zair). Often when speaking of the difference between Africa and the west, they would say Zair ak Batine, sometimes smiling, but most often with disdain. They explained to me that the west had everything technological in the world, while they in Africa had everything spiritual. They said we had created so much of value in our part of the world, most often using airplanes and computers as examples.
In another article than the ones previously sited, Henrik Vigh writes about how young aspirational migrants in Guinea-Bissau perceive themselves as in a lower position than the west (2009). Building upon the work of Ferguson, he further argues that his informants find themselves in an abject position, where instead of finding hope, they find humiliation, having experienced decades of decline in their country (ibid.). Vigh’s informants link their own predicament to being black, saying that blacks could never invent all the technology that the whites are responsible for (ibid.), reiterating the perceptions of my participants in part one. They are well aware of the things that are available in other countries, other places than their own, and equally aware of the fact that they are not easily available, if at all, for them (ibid.).

”Every manifestation of a technology (...) – societal or otherwise- comes to accentuate the fact that mastery over the world resides elsewhere in other places and other people” (ibid: 103). They thus see technology as progress and their own lack of technological innovation as proof of their societal incompetence (ibid.). Instead of seeing themselves as inhabiting a history of exploitation, they understand themselves to be producers and bearers of decline and destruction (ibid: 101). They do not fit into the success narratives that structure many aspects of contemporary life, and find themselves excluded from the neo-liberal order. Vigh’s informants also use the airplane as an example of the technological innovation of the west, and when speaking of the way they relate to this symbol of progress, Vigh says:”Departing from a world of peace and plenty it lands, twice weekly, in the midst of the deeply impoverished and politically unstable city, and becomes a visiting symbol of the socio-political Other” (ibid: 103). Further, he argues, based on Barth (1969) that (...)”most aspects of technology (...) become directly related to progress and thus to contra-identificatory mechanisms (ibid: 103), showing that this is connected to his informant’s perception of themselves in negative terms. Having always to compare themselves and see themselves in relation to what they perceive as a superior Other, knowing that they are excluded from the success narratives they see through such powerful symbols of mobility and freedom as is the airplane.

As mentioned in the introduction to part one of this thesis, technology is important when it comes to ways of imagining one’s position in the global world-order. In this respect, a comparison to Vigh’s informants is necessary, as the Baay Fall clearly use the same reference points when relating to their own situations. However, they use the picture of mastery over the material world to imagine themselves as better than the west. This becomes clear when focusing on the moral aspects of the phrase Zair ak Batine highlighted by Audrain, who writes
that Zair represents the illusions of temporal life (Audrain 2004). For his Baay Fall informants, this implies the influences of "fake realities" on the person, which constitute desire, materialism, and corporal pleasure (ibid.). While they say Batine means to know the esoteric aspects of the divine revelation, meaning to know the truth of God inside one-self (ibid.). Audrain explained this as an inner searching, and highlights how the Baay Fall seek to find their own path to God through understanding their actions, affections and emotions, and trying to improve themselves (ibid.). In this way they create their own subjectivity through religiosity (ibid.). Following Foucault, Audrain views this as “the techniques of the self”, which constitutes a work of the self on itself, in the subjectivizing process (ibid.). In the contemporary religious movements, focus is on the individual, though most often with an eye to changing society, a change that might only be possible, through changing oneself (Fratani & Péclard 2002). For the Baay Fall this seems to be linked to becoming and being better than the west (and the rest), through being a real Baay Fall.

Going to the Holy City

- The Real Baay Fall of Touba

"It is not possible to plan to go to Touba. You are either called, and leave almost immediately, or you are not called, and never go. Many people in Senegal have never been to the holy city. It is up to the Serign Touba. It’s just like that.” – Abdo

The dahiras in Dakar are, as mentioned, places where the Baay Fall meet to chant, discuss and be with their brothers. However, the practice and experience of the Baay Fall is different in the urban environment of the capital from the dry, agricultural area with the golden mosque of Touba. Here the ideal life of a Baay Fall consists of staying at the estate of a marabou or shaikh permanently or for a period, working the land and serving the marabou.

Two stories can serve to illustrate the experience of Baay Fallisme in Touba. First, it is the western converts to this religious practice. While in Touba I was often told that there were some French people who lived there as Baay Fall, doing the madial on the streets with the others when required, and working the land for their marabou. I did not get a chance to meet any of them, but the significance here is the way they were referred to. When speaking of
these toubabs (white people) it was with what seemed like great respect and awe. Also, while in Touba, I got to know a young Baay Fall named Muhammed, who had spent much of his life in France, where he was raised. He came to Dakar when he was 15, and thus spoke French fluently. By the time he was 20 he had become Baay Fall and now lived in Dakar. However, he had decided to stay a few years in Touba with his marabou, working at the daaras in Khelcom, to become, as he said, a real Baay Fall. What struck me with Muhammed, was that he refused to speak French. Pape had to translate everything he said. I thought it was odd at first, but he explained that he did not want to speak the language of the colonizers, because he was Baay Fall. When I commented upon this later, the Baay Fall we stayed with agreed, saying that many people felt that way here. They had everything they needed in Touba, and had no desire for anything else, thus did not need other languages either.

The relevance of the converts to this religious practice and the refusal of French will become clear later; for now I will focus on the Baay Fall experience in Touba. As mentioned, Abdo felt he had been called by the Serign Touba to go and work at Khelcom, as did Muhammed. Working at Khelcom consists of cultivating the land and taking care of the child disciples who are there to learn the Koran. This work is of the highest value because it is what Amadou Bamba termed “the only work without sin” (O’Brien 2002). In the urban environment of Dakar, the young disciples find ways to make money, often with the help of their marabous, as the example of Abdo showed. However, working at Khelcom stands in a special position, and when people who were not Baay Fall criticized their behavior and called them fake, they would often add that there are many real Baay Fall, in Touba and Khelcom. Time and again I was told that the real Baay Fall reside in Touba and work the soil.

In fact, Audrain writes about what he coins khelcomisation (2002), which I interpret to mean the desire to work in service of the marabouts in Touba. However, it goes beyond mere desire, because the concretization of this desire is sought at Khelcom where the young disciples are needed to participate in agricultural activities (Audrain 2002). This fact is important, because the president (though sympathetic to the Mourids) proclaimed his plan Reva, as mentioned in part one, without managing to capture the enthusiasm of the youth. While Baay Fall are proud to work with agriculture at Khelcom and see this as the greatest honor and most respectable activity there is (Audrain 2002); they see no need to labor for the government, which, as it has become clear, has been a disappointment to the young people.
Audrain focuses on the efforts made in Senegal to create an alternative development through the ideas of Khelcomisation (2002), as promoted in the plan Reva, and this is noteworthy. Though what is most significant here, is what this might mean for the youth who want to believe in change, but are met by empty promises. Many have lost hope and no longer regard their parents’ generation and their success symbols as adequate, as discussed in the introduction. As such, Khelcom comes to symbolize the act of believing in change through hard work (Audrain 2002), though countering the ideals of the Bul Faale generation, which were based on the belief in education and the prospect of gaining employment through trusting the state’s capability of creating options for young people (Havard 2001, 2003). For the Baay Fall the distrust of political sentiment is explicitly centered on what they see as the postcolonial state’s imitation of the French and western ways (Audrain 2002, 2004). They would rather work in service of God and the Serign Touba, which gives them meaning and value, and the belief that change might actually be possible, through their own engagement and labor. In the words of Audrain: “Through participating in a social system that gives an original and innovative notion of work, they express their aversion towards the contemporary functioning of society” (Audrain 2002: 99) For Audrain, being Baay Fall is about participating in an alternative moral economy (Audrain 2004), where working in the service of Chiekh Amadou Bamba brings positive development to the country, while giving the youth alternatives in the construction of new subjectivities, that counter humiliation and irrelevance, reconstructing wasted lives into something not only valuable, but better than the neoliberal ideals they are surrounded by.

“In God’s Design nothing can be redundant- even if the feeble human mind thinks it to be so and the sinful nature of humans prompts them to behave as if it were. In the Divine Chain of Being, nothing is redundant, whatever humans may do to make it so” (Bauman 2004: 95).

The Baay Fall are needed at Khelcom and the larger Mourid community respects them for their hard work and devotion there (Audrain 2002). They become valuable, visible, and are not redundant. However, it is through giving one’s life to a marabou that the young Baay Fall disciples free themselves. Thus to understand the subjectivizing process entailed in becoming and being Baay Fall, one must look to the role of the marabouts.

**Meeting the Marabou**

While in Dakar I was fortunate enough to get an interview with one of the grand marabous there. Pape accompanied me to this interview, and I was promised that I could ask all the
questions I sought answers to. I was intrigued by the prospect of meeting such an important figure. After we had waited outside for some time, we were met by a disciple of the marabou, who welcomed us and led us up to the Marabous’ office. This saint is a religious leader who is also a director of a large company in Senegal. Entering his office, I was amazed at its appearance. Having attended the University in Dakar for a short period of time, and visited some important people in the city I was accustomed to large and extravagant offices, often furnished with massive wooden (mahogany) desks and beautiful decor. This office was not at all like the ones I had seen before. The saint was sitting in his suit (they often wear Muslim clothing) behind a simple wooden desk working with something on his computer. He had two wooden shelves that were filled with papers and no artwork except a big poster of a marabou on his wall. He asked us to sit down on chairs in front of the desk (instead of on the floor which is common practice when in the presence of marabous) and immediately said that he was very grateful that I wished to learn more about Mouridism and the Baay Fall.

He told me that he had nearly 3000 Baay Fall disciples and that he had helped almost all of them either with money for their education or with the means to start some sort of business. Today many of them had become quite successful. He explained that his job as their marabou was to help his followers, both with money, moral support and religious questions. Each person who is a Mouride should give money to their marabou that they then redistribute to their followers and also use to help with the further construction of the holy city of Touba.

While we were talking the disciple laid a mat on the floor and brought in a bowl of food that he placed on top of it. He walked around in the office with his back bent and his eyes to the floor, the typical Baay Fall posture when in the presence of their marabou. After he had put everything in place, the saint told us to stay and eat with him. I felt honored by this, as I knew that it is not common to eat together with the holy leaders. We all sat down on the mat and the disciple gave us water to wash our hands. There was a big bowl of rice, salad and a roasted chicken. In Senegal everyone eats out of the same bowl, everyone ”owning” the portion of food that is right in front of them. If there is a woman present, she is expected to divide the meat and serve the others. The saint looked at me and asked if I would do them the honor of taking this responsibility. I divided up the meat and took great care to do it the same way as I had seen it been done by the women in my house. We ate, drank some café Touba, talked some more and prepared to leave. The saint told me again that he was honored to have made my acquaintance, adding that most white people were in Senegal to party, and are not usually interested in learning about the Mourid and Baay Fall. Pape had been quiet most of the time.
The Role of the Marabous

The large weekend chants in Dakar are, as mentioned, organized by different dahiras, and often their marabou will come and speak to them before they start. Here they will tell the disciples how they should live their life, and from what I have experienced myself, much focus is placed on controlling the nafs. Once when a grand marabou was visiting Dalifort, in connection to a chant that was being organized, I saw young people gather together on the ground in front of the podium hours before the marabou was supposed to speak. They eagerly awaited his message, and even Alioune who could hardly sit still, waited patiently for the big event. When he finally came, he spent over two hours talking to the young people about making the right choices. He focused a lot of his speech on saying that the youth of Senegal had to stop dreaming of Europe and realize that they had to work hard in their own country to make it, thus referring again to le mystique de travail.

Although there is some controversy concerning the stature of the marabous in Senegal (O’Brien 2002), most people seem to accept their position, and have great respect for the holy leaders. In their presence you feel that you are dealing with someone who has great power. Indeed, the marabous are very powerful in many ways. Their political influence is far-reaching, both in regards to ties to the government, and by the fact that they often have thousands of disciples who heed to their commands. However, according to my Baay Fall participants, the true power of the marabous lies in their Baraka, or mystical powers. I was often told that when there is extra work that needs to be done, like construction on the holy mosque, the marabous will make a request for help, and disciples will arrive by the tens of thousands, most of whom are Baay Fall.

As such, the image that frightened the colonizers, the army under Cheikh Amadou Bamba’s control, becomes again quite vivid, as the Baay Fall proudly show up and participate in such events. In fact, one of the most influential marabous for urban youth is seen on a video on YouTube, wearing military clothing, singing the praise of Allah and the founding fathers.

34 The Serign Touba wanted you to know all of this. Not many people get to meet a marabou like this!
while surrounded by hundreds of Baay Fall, dressed in white robes. This man, Serigne Modou Kara Mbacké, is called the marabou of the youth, and he has made a point out of taking in young people that are especially marginalized and neglected, largely because of delinquency, orphanage or general problems adjusting to society (Audrain 2004). As such he has a special place with the Baay Fall in Dakar, and of all the marabous I heard of, no one was spoken of so reverently as Modou Kara. He started a movement called MMUD: Mouvement Mondial pour l’Unicité de Dieu (Global movement for the unity of God) (Havard 2003, Audrain 2004) and his activities through this organization and his presentation in the music video does make one think of an army, fighting what the Sufis term: le jihad al nafs (Audrain 2004), what one might translate; the holy war on materialism (of all sorts). This of course is the same as Amadou Bamba’s jihad of the soul. This image of an army of hard working disciples has led analysts to conclude that the maraboutic system is highly exploitative, even based on the earlier versions of enslavement. However, “A vision of the world imposes itself with its imaginary of justice and power, often using the idiom of war to express its position in regard to other vision of the world (…)” (Fratani & Péclard 2002: 12).

Most of the marabous are not like the one I met in Dakar, however, but rather more like the one I met in Touba who is very wealthy. Seeing expensive cars in the holy city is quite common, and the marabous often live in large estates (O’Brien 2004, 1971). According to O’Brien: “the disciples, many of whom are illiterate and do not understand the subtleties of the mystic theology, see the Baraka exclusively in the form of beautiful cars, and large homes” (…) (O’Brien 2002: 183). Trying to nuance his statement, he proclaims that this might be somewhat erroneous, as the disciples mostly view the Baraka as routinized, because these powers are hereditary, though landing again on paradise being for the Mourids a version of the life of the holy leaders (ibid.). My perception of the importance of the inherent mysticism of the Baay Fall extends beyond such a view, as I have tried to show. Therefore, it is useful to view the disciple’s understanding of maraboutic wealth with another gaze, than does O’Brien. However, the paradox remains that the Baay Fall believe in the simple life, though even they have some wealthy spiritual leaders. At the same time they commit themselves completely, giving the perception of exploitation.

Being without and feeling excluded from the system, without hope of climbing any financial ladder, is of importance to the young men I met in Senegal. Through their stories one is able

35 According Audrain in an article in Politique Africain, Modou Karahas visited prisons, proclaiming that most of the inmates were his disciples, causing some controversy (Audrain: 2004).
to see what alternatives young men employ in the search to be successful. Thus, one must ask of the Baay Fall: is it only hope they gain in their immense belief in Allah and the Serign Touba? Certainly they also receive a more direct aid from their marabous as well, as my conversation with the saint shows. But what does all this mean to them, and how exactly does the disciple-marabou relation work?

Submissive Liberation

One of the most important differences between the Baay Fall and the larger Mourid community lies in the disciple/marabou relationship. Where both believe in the importance of having an intermediary between humans and God, the Baay Fall submit completely to their marabous (O’Brien 2002, Audrain 2002, 2004). It is common in Sufi practice to believe in the necessity of submitting to a holy leader, as became clear in the part on Amadou Bamba. Because no human is perfect, one must learn from a shaikh, and this the Baay Fall take to the extreme. In the act of njébbel, which is giving one’s life to a holy leader, the Baay Fall follow the actions of Cheikh Ibra Fall, prostrating themselves and pledging their allegiance to their marabou. They must follow the orders (ndiggel) of the latter blindly and without exception (Audrain 2004). However severe this might seem, Audrain points out that it takes more the form of advice, where the intention is the participation on behalf of the marabou in the transformation of the character of the disciple, leading him towards spiritual perfection (Audrain 2002: 13). This submission on the part of the disciples has, as mentioned, caused confusion, because of its perceived potential for exploitation. The statements by Baay Fall have not helped the matter either, because they are known for highlighting their total and extreme submissive acts. “I did what my marabou told me”, was something my participants would often say when describing certain important life decisions. Also, when the marabous order people to come help them, the Baay Fall are proud to proclaim that they will leave anything they are doing, and go to Touba as fast as they can, by any means possible. For the marabou this means free labor, both in these situations and those when the Baay Fall live in (working) daaras. At the same time the Baay Fall say that the reason why they do anything the marabou demands is solely for the promise of paradise. As the example of my meeting with the marabou shows, they are obliged to help their disciples financially as well, and therefore it is more than a promise of the here-after they receive. According to O’Brien in his later works, the act of submission for the Mourids is not as strict as it used to be (2002). However, he
writes that the more marginalized people are the more they submit, “the orphans and social outcasts are often among those disciples who are most devoted to their spiritual leader” (O’Brien 2002: 199). This description suits the case of the Baay Fall well, as many of the disciples fit into such a categorization, though one does not have to be an orphan (or delinquent) to feel cast out of society and the global economy of desire as a young man in Dakar. Again in the book *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood, Social Becoming in African context*, Vigh writes about how it is possible for youth to seek patronage through religious or political affiliation (2006). “As resources decrease, young men are thus increasingly dependent on finding an entry into patrimonial networks in order to secure themselves a way out of the social moratorium” (ibid: 49). While this seems to be true for the Baay Fall as well, Vigh still points to the exploitative nature of such relations. It is not possible to claim that there is never an element of abuse in such relationships, for one cannot know for sure.

However, the submission to a marabou is completely voluntary, as became clear through the example of Abdo, and while the marabou cannot exit this relationship, the disciples are free to leave whenever they wish, and can thereafter choose to replace the marabou with whomever they please (O’Brien 2002). This is important because it shows that here, in the act of njébbel, the young men make their own choice, following their own will and desires (Audrain 2004). This brings me to what Audrain terms “the paradox of submissive liberation”, the puzzling aspect of the act of submission (2002, 2004). According to Audrain, the Baay Fall liberate themselves through completelysubmitting and handing their life over to another person (ibid.). In a social context where there are not many options, the young men are seldom in a position where they can decide for themselves and make a real choice. Becoming Baay Fall is as such a positive submission (Audrain 2004), and claiming it might be seen as a way to become visible and valuable in a society and global reality where young African men are perceived as almost completely invisible and without value.

As mentioned, Baay Fall wear a certain type of clothes and have dreadlocks, while most other Muslims (in Senegal) keep their hair very short and neat, and many young people sport the flashy attire of the Hip Hop generation. However, not all Baay Fall dress like this36, though not being occupied with fashion (through consumption) is important. The Baay Fall “look” might facilitate for some the performance of a religious identity in their pursuit of financial

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36 Because of his highly marginalized disciples, Modou Kara made an ndiggel (order) that his followers should cut their hair, and stop wearing Baay Fall clothes, so they would be better viewed by society (Audrain 2004).
gain, though I find it more valid to follow Audrain again in his analysis of the Baay Fall appearance. According to him, it is another step in an emancipatory project, where the adornment of the Baay Fall attire is mostly used by new converts (though several of my participants also dressed like this) to show their distinction from the rest of society (Audrain 2002). It becomes, as for the Bul Faale generation, a way to turn their back to society, telling them to “t’occupe pas” (don’t bother), through choosing their own paths in life. It is a way to escape certain pre-destinations, as they are given through religious affiliation, ethnic groups or family heritage of all sorts (Audrain 2004). Audrain points to the fact that surviving under a malfunctioning regime, and in a world where they are not highly valued, implies that young men in Senegal are already subjugated (2004). They would rather choose for themselves, than be dominated against their will (Audrain 2004). Thus through completely submitting, they gain autonomy, being (for once) in charge of their destiny (ibid.). Submitting oneself in order to find oneself, to become valuable, visible and capable appears therefore to be what is sought in the disciple/marabou relation, as well as the promise of paradise.

**Imagining Touba**

"The Senegalese children who needed a sign, who needed models, had found the perfect one in the person of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba. How could one dream better? A man serene and pure, who had the courage to defy the colonial power? A simple man, from the people, who had walked on water (...), who came back from prison, from an island, from where nobody yet had returned alive? Certainly there was in these narratives, these fairytales almost, the ideal material for creating a national hero" (Gavron 2008: 29)

One night when I was at a chant in Touba, my Baay Fall participants pointed out a young man to me, referring to him as the football player. I went over to this man and engaged him in conversation, asking first why they called him by such a name. He laughed and explained that he had been a great soccer player. He had much talent for his young age, and everyone knew he would go very far. However, that is not what happened. Instead he decided to give it all up, and move to Touba where he resided permanently in a daara with his marabou and other Baay Fall. He abandoned the dream to play soccer and married a girl the marabou chose and started a family. After we had talked for some time, it became clear that he had received considerable criticism concerning his choice, and his parents no longer spoke to him. People
had called him stupid, though he said that he did not regret it, claiming that it saved his life. Earlier he had been occupied with women, money and the dream to one day go to Europe to play there, but now he saw that he had been on the wrong path, living in a sinful manner and not respecting his true calling. He thought it was sad that he lost contact with his parents, but that his real family was the Baay Fall. The others spoke of him with awe and respect, saying that he was proof of the powerful Truth that resides in Touba.

Analysts working on the Islamic religious practice of youth in our contemporary moment have often focused on the term “re-islamization”, meaning the upsurge of Islamic orientations amongst young people. These orientations are based on a re-moralization of society, where a focus on changing oneself into responsible moral subjects is the goal (Fratani & Péclard 2004). All over the world religious orientations and affiliations are taking root with the youth (Biaya 2000), and these inclinations towards religiosity are, as mentioned, largely individualized. In the case of the Baay Fall it becomes a way for youth to take their destiny in their own hands, to create their own paths in life and to construct their own identities vis-a-vis tradition and in the face of an ongoing globalization of desires and expectations (Audrain 2004), largely driven by market forces. Through following paths already found in the moral economy, consisting of an adoration of God and Islam, but living these out in the unorthodox way of the Baay Fall, these young people find a way to become who they want to be, making their own subjectivity as moral subjects through new imaginations (ibid.). As such, Audrain highlights that they do not seek emancipation from Islam, but through it.

Such re-islamization is often linked to the search for authenticity, the quest for retracing one’s roots. Following Mbembe, Audrain writes how this constitutes a re-écriture de soi (a re-writing of the self), which is linked to the techniques of the self, mentioned previously. These processes are seen on an individual level through the Baay Falls effort to become their own subjects, and on the level of society through reclaiming their history. It becomes a way to purify themselves, through their individual comportment and on a societal level through ridding themselves of external influences (Audrain 2004). The search for authentic belonging often leads to ideas of auchtochtony (Geshiere 2009), where one group defines itself in opposition to another, who is seen as less worthy because of perceived foreignness. I do not believe this to be the case for the Baay Fall or larger mourid community. Here it appears that this re-writing of oneself stands in opposition to the imperial world order and global economy of desire, not necessarily to other groups in the country. Though the politics of the wolofication process are, as mentioned, complicated, the religious aspect appears to be more
linked to ideas of an authentic “African-ness” and resistance towards the western hegemonic ideals. Believing in change through focus on one’s own history and roots is often at the core of contemporary religious movements (Audrain 2004, Fratani & Péclard 2004). It becomes part of a search for belonging, based on countering the view of Africans as inferior. Through claiming their (colonial) history, they recuperate the place of the black man, for whom Bamba became the savoir; rescuing him from being lost through assimilating politics (Audrain 2002, 2004). By focusing so much on narrating the history of the Mourid brotherhood, the Baay Fall disciples can be seen as reclaiming their self-respect, a self-respect that is in peril because of colonial reign, imperial contemporary world ordering, and failed national politics.

This brings me to the case of the marabous’ Baraka. Instead of viewing the wealth of the holy leaders as paradoxical when it comes to the Baay Fall’s beliefs, I find it more fruitful to regard them as powerful symbols of Senegalese success. Whether or not the Baay Fall wish to partake in this luxury I do not think is relevant. Rather it is the way the marabous come to symbolize an alternative being in the world (Audrain 2004), where their wealth represents the possibility of making something of oneself and one’s country, without following the circumscribed paths laid down by imperial powers and capitalist consumption.

While my participants in part one imagined inclusion on the global arena of consumption, where Europe comes to stand for possibility and change; the successful migrant being the ideal, the Mourids and Baay Fall imagine Touba as the most important reference point. As such it is the devoted disciple who comes to stand for success in the imaginations of many youth in Dakar. Being (for the most part) from the most marginalized positions in society, it is not mostly Baay Fall who migrate (though some of course do), however, as mentioned, the larger Mourid community has many people living in diaspora. For these disciples, the modou modou and the students for the most part, as for the Baay Fall who work at Khelcom, keeping their link to Touba through participation in dahiras and daaras becomes a way to always remain firmly linked to their roots. O’Brien claims that the Mourid community’s focus on trade from the 1990’s shows their capability of adjusting to new socio-economic situations (2002). While this is certainly true, I think these practices must also be viewed as ways to create and be part of an alternative economy, one that is based on principles of solidarity and the prosperity of Touba, instead of the ideals of consumption that rule the world.

With this view in mind, I wish to return to the European converts to Baay Fallism. While it is common that people who do not belong to this group regard the converts with unease,
claiming that they have been poisoned to follow the Baay Fall, the latter view them with respect, focusing often on the fact that they speak Wolof and participate in all the Baay Fall activities. The way I see it, for the people who are not Baay Fall, it appears illogical that white people should give up their wealth to join this group. For the Baay Fall, however, it is, again, proof of the truth and value of their beliefs. These toubabs become powerful symbols of the Baay Fall’s anti-imperialist stance, showing that the right path is indeed the one they are on.

In the influential book *The Wretched of the Earth*, (1963), Fanon analyses the African predicament on the eve of independence. He explicitly writes that his revolutionary ideas are directed at Africans who need to take responsibility and make the right choices, not at white people. However, he says that the latter are invited to read his book if they wish, though the message is not for them. I believe this to be relevant when it comes to the Baay Fall. Although their ideas are meant to promote a positive Senegalese identity, they are pleased if white people wish to learn, as my meeting with the marabou exemplified, and join them in the fight for resurrection.

Through the participation in movements such as Baay Fallisme, young people imagine the possibility of resistance through alternatives. With its basis in the moral economy of Mouridism where the focus was from the beginning on countering the ideals of Empire through education in Islam, young men find a space for an alternative production of subjectivity (Audrain 2002, 2004). Both Mouridism and Baay Fallisme might be understood, in my view, as potential movements of altermodernity. Being involved in an economy that in many ways strays from the capitalist norms and places most value on the premise of solidarity, and being advocates for an alternative definition of value, they produce alternative success narratives, which further makes possible the construction of alternative subjectivities (Audrain 2002, 2004). I am not claiming that these forms of religiosity are as such movements of altermodernity following the specificities of the definition given by Hardt & Negri (2009). However, I claim that they have the potential to become powerful forces of altermodernity, as they subvert existing notions of value and imagine links to other movements of (black) resistance. Working for change on the biopolitical terrain through the construction of themselves as new moral subjects in their country, they also imagine links to such movements as the Rastafari. In fact, an imagined connection to this arena of black resistance was explicitly explained by many to be at the core of the contemporary Baay Fall experience. I do not wish to compare these movements in detail, but some resemblances are worth illuminating. Of course, the Baay Fall appearance is similar to the Rastas and so is their use of
marijuana, but more importantly is the Baay Fall performance of Zikr, which was described by some of my participants as “Nayabinghi”. Historically this term means death to the white man, but today stands for the rasta’s chanting, and the fight against Babylon; the system of injustice and confusion.

For ideas of resistance to be defined as altermodernity movements, they must extend beyond a focus on traditional roots and uprising, to encompass other similar sentiments, creating as such (powerful) global voices of dissent. The Baay Fall often say that while the rastas have Haile Selaisse, they have Cheikh Amadou Bamba, pointing to the common history of anticolonialism inherent in both. At the same time, Modou Kara’s MMUD might be viewed as the desire for participation in the search for the Ummah, or global Muslim community. In all this is the wish to counter biopower on the terrain of individual bodies, fighting to resurrect an idealized Africa in the midst of contemporary power relations. As such, the Baay Fall are forming from their marginal position an alternative construction of a modern subjectivity, where personal worth outweighs the importance of individual growth (Audrain 2004). Where being mal regardée (badly regarded), is none the less a way to be seen, to become visible, to take a stand against their subjugated position, through imagining Touba and global resistance.

37 According to Chevannes, this phrase started because of a misunderstanding made by a journalist in the Jamaica Times, who claimed that Haile Selaisse had founded a movement by this name (1994)
What I have tried to show in this thesis, is that social navigation for youth in Dakar is a process that is fraught with tension. In a social landscape that does not offer many possibilities, the experience of merely coping with life is prevalent. Social becoming is not guaranteed, and youth are forced to find alternative courses of action in their pursuit of better futures.

Largely because the perception was that their parents’ generation had let them down, the former symbols of success based on the value of education, started losing their worth in the Bul Faale generation. In a social reality where solidarity and sharing became difficult to maintain, Havard shows how an increasing focus on individuals and their accomplishments formed the basis of alternative success narratives, based on such images as the self-made man. However, the belief in hard work was countered by a social environment of diminishing hope. Being tired of empty promises and authoritarian style discourse from those in charge, the youth no longer trust the government to take care of their needs and create opportunities. After believing in change through the election of Wade, though not having their hopes for better times fulfilled, young people in Dakar have been further pushed towards seeking alternatives. The point is that what my participants have in common is the search for alternative definitions of value. They seek other values than those found in the moral economy of their parents’ generation, though many struggle with moral paradoxes, concerning their wish to be meaningful to those around them and their desire to stand on their own.

Both aspirational migrants and Baay Fall disciples must be understood as engaging in a quest for self-definition, in my opinion. It is a re-écriture de soi (a re-writing of the self), where the goal is to counter humiliation and find self-respect. Whether this process is sought through focus on one’s authentic roots, or through imagining links to global voices of dissent, the rewriting of oneself is an important part of contemporary youth culture in African countries, where the definition of value has largely been given through an external gaze. As such, the need for alternative imaginings finds expression in the shared pain of being African youth. For many this common predicament leads to (imagined) participation on a global stage of affliction where the perceived oppression of young African, Americans males become powerful symbols through the Hip-Hop movement. While for others, it is through such
common roots as the fight against colonialism that a staging ground for action is sought. These perceptions of suffering are of course linked, and share the need to find one’s own voice in the fight against external influences, and biopower in all its forms.

Having been brought up in a (post) colonial Africa, where the post is indeed an elusive concept, many of my participants understand their predicaments in relation to what they see as unjust politics governed by a malfunctioning regime, and biased international sentiment. In my view both the process of pirogue migration and the practice of Baay Fall religiosity must be understood as linked to what has been termed throughout “the globalization of desires and expectations”. The young men involved in these contemporary practices are part of a global world where the economy of desire is based on the ability to consume and accumulate. Because their reactions towards this global success narrative is not the same, I have chosen to use their different versions of being in the world as a way to grasp what is at stake for young men in an urban environment, where coping with life is filled with creativity, opportunism and resignation. “Being both actors, as well as acted upon they are resisting the social death of a gerontophallic post-colonial Africa by forcing open social spaces, navigating both the usual and alternative paths trying to secure decent lives for themselves” (Christiansen, Utas & Vigh 2006: 21). I have tried to show how young men in Dakar navigate the social terrain, negotiating a place in their quest to define themselves as modern subjects.

Comaroff & Comaroff point to a crisis in masculinity, which is felt all over the world, in all layers of society (2001). However, as I have tried to show in this thesis, the crisis is reaching unprecedented heights on the African continent. Here many (young) men find themselves caught in a youth category, which is perceived as a prolongation of a period of social irrelevance. While the famous song “forever young” captures the desires of many adults in the “West”, where youth is idealized as something to be sought all the way till one is in ones 40’s. In Africa, it takes on a sinister quality, because here many young men are caught in this position of being (always) youth, without possibility of becoming un Grand.

Although I have used the word youth throughout and tried to show how this category is complex and filled with diverse meanings and sentiments, there is one more aspect that must be granted space. In the words of Comaroff and Comaroff: “While, in much of the late-twentieth-century English speaking world, young white persons are teenagers, their black counterparts are youth, adolescents with an attitude. And most often, if not always, male” (2000: 16). Because, as mentioned in the introduction, the view has been that young African
males are a risk in the contemporary world, the youth category becomes an inherently fraught concept, indeed. However, being adolescents with an attitude might be a valuable asset in a fight on a global terrain of injustice, where the anger felt might be best understood as linked to the perception of exclusion from the global narratives of success, and the impossibility of sustaining themselves in their country. For as the quote in the beginning of this chapter states so clearly, young Africans are searching for a territory for the free play of their imaginations. What my participants have in common is the need to define their own set of values and become valuable and visible in a world that is often blind to their social realities. The world is a hostile place, and our neoliberal predicament makes the feeling of lack over ones destiny pervasive. None of us can escape being bombarded by images that seek to define what being valuable entails.

Because the western world is the main investor in the global economy of desire that reverberates throughout the world, it becomes important to grasp how young people in Africa engage with these global success narratives. For as I have tried to show in this thesis, the globalized ideals of worth and value represent not merely a paradise close at hand, but also a hell from which the swiftest flight possible is desirable. Until the unjust situation in the world is changed, the imaginings of young people in Africa will continue to relate to their subjugated position, and the question is not if their desires and imaginings will find expression, and force themselves upon the global terrain, but how, in what form, and with how much anger involved.
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