ASR FORUM: HOMOPHOBIC AFRICA?

The Origins of Senegalese Homophobia: Discourses on Homosexuals and Transgender People in Colonial and Postcolonial Senegal

Babacar M'Baye

Abstract: This article traces the history of homosexual and transgender behavior in Senegal from colonial times to the contemporary period in order to demonstrate the flimsiness of the claims, made by many political and religious leaders and scholars, that homosexuality is "un-African." Such claims, which appear as reactions to neocolonialism and Western intervention in African affairs, usually are homophobic discourses that invoke patriotism, cultural difference, and morality in order to justify the subjugation of homosexual and gender nonconforming individuals (*goor-jiggens*) living in Senegal. In an attempt to understand the roots of Senegalese homophobia, the article analyzes several depictions of homosexuals and transgender people in contemporary Senegal and traces them to similar representations in European writings of the colonial period. As this approach reveals, homosexuals and transgender people in Senegal, from colonial times to the present, have been constructed as scapegoats, first of the French *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission) and then of Senegalese political and Islamic backlashes. Although they have always cohabited with the rest of the society, homosexuals and transgender people in Senegal have been treated largely as strangers in their own land. By analyzing the discourses of

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both French colonials and Senegalese, one finds a persistent binary opposing the West and Africa and denigrating sexual and gender variances and subcultures in Senegal as pathological European imports.

Résumé: Cet article retrace l'évolution historique des comportements homosexuels et transsexuels au Sénégal depuis les temps coloniaux jusqu'à aujourd'hui dans le but de démontrer la faiblesse des revendications faites par de nombreux leaders et intellectuels que "l'homosexualité n'est pas africaine." De telles déclarations, apparemment des réactions contre le néocolonialisme et l'intervention des pays occidentaux dans les affaires africaines, sont pour la plupart des discours homophobes qui font appel au patriotisme, aux différences culturelles, et à des valeurs morales bien-pensantes pour justifier l'assujettissement des homosexuels et ceux ne se conformant pas aux normes sexuelles actuelles (*goor-jiggens*) au Sénégal. Dans un effort de comprendre les racines de l'homophobie présente au Sénégal, cet article analyse plusieurs représentations d'homosexuels et de transsexuels dans le Sénégal d'aujourd'hui et les relie à des représentations similaires dans la littérature européenne pendant l'époque coloniale. Cette approche montre que les homosexuels et transsexuels au Sénégal ont été, depuis les temps coloniaux, construits comme des boucs émissaires, tout d'abord de la "mission civilisatrice" française et ensuite des protestations contre les islamistes et le gouvernement sénégalais. Bien qu'ils aient toujours cohabité avec le reste de la société, les homosexuels et transsexuels ont été traités largement comme des étrangers dans leur propre pays. En analysant les discours des colons français et des Sénégalais, on trouve une polarisation opposant l'occident a l'Afrique et caractérisant négativement les variances de genre et de sexualité ainsi que les cultures marginales au Sénégal comme des phénomènes importés d'Europe.

Key Words: homosexuality; homophobia; transgender; Senegal; colonial; postcolonial

Introduction

Since 2008, homosexuals and gender nonconforming people in Senegal have been the subjects of frequent vituperative attacks from Senegalese news personalities, political leaders, and Muslim religious figures who attribute their identities to the influence of dysfunctional Western practices and portray homosexuality as a nonindigenous and unnatural foreign import (see Afrol News 2013; Migraine-George 2003:45–46). Although this trend is part of the growing homophobia in many parts of Africa, its discourses are traceable to the late nineteenth century and colonial times, when many Europeans denounced African cultures in order to justify their "civilizing mission" (*mission civilisatrice*) on the continent.

In an attempt to understand the roots of this homophobia, this article analyzes the efforts of contemporary Senegalese leaders and colonial European writers to portray homosexuality as an "un-African" practice—a myth that not only reinforces homophobia but also conceals the crucial history of homosexual and transgender subcultures in Senegal. Searching for the origins of this homophobia, the article discusses excerpts from selected

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Western narratives written between 1898 and 1935 that make important references to homosexuality in Senegal. The article also analyzes some representative African narratives, including commentaries of a number of contemporary Senegalese intellectuals and leaders about homosexuality. All these narratives suggest the ambivalent situations that homosexual and transgender subcultures have faced in both colonial and postcolonial Senegal. On the one hand, they reflect the freedom (albeit a limited freedom) that these communities have had in the country. On the other hand, they reveal the isolation, condemnation, and prejudice that these communities have suffered since colonial times. Even if they have cohabited with mainstream society, homosexuals and transgender people in Senegal have been more rejected than accepted, and viewed by both Senegalese and Europeans as outcasts in debates in which ideas about sexuality and gender mirror unequal power relations between Africa and the West.

Homophobia in Contemporary Senegal

Like racism, sexism, ageism, xenophobia, and other forms of oppression, homophobia allows a particular group to have power and control over another group through the use of terror and intimidation. Suzanne Pharr suggests the connections among such kinds of oppression when she states that homophobia, "the irrational fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex,…calls up images of loss of freedom, verbal and physical violence and death" (1988:1). Like other forms of subjugation, homophobia cannot function without discourses or ideologies in which the cultures of an oppressed group are viewed as alien, different, and inferior to the customs of a dominant group. According to Stuart Hall, an ideology is "certain kind of [presumed] *knowledge* about a subject and certain attitudes towards it." A discourse "is a way of talking about and representing something. It produces knowledge that shapes perceptions and practice. It is part of the way in which power operates… [and] has consequences for both those who employ it and those who are 'subjected' to it" (1996:186,225). In Foucauldian terms, a "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it" (1980:101). Discourses and ideologies, in other words, are frameworks through which the hegemonic community knows, or thinks it knows, another group. Therefore, understanding homophobia requires us to focus not only on the truth or falsity of the hegemonic claims about the subjugated community, but also on how such assumptions empower the dominant group's attempt to control the oppressed group.

In recent years, homophobic discourses have become prevalent in Africa, especially in Uganda, where a group of local pastors and politicians joined several American preachers to launch an all-out war against homosexuals. Ugandan homophobia operates in a discourse that portrays homosexuals as social pariahs who will corrupt the "godly" nation unless they are eliminated. A bill introduced in Parliament by David Bahati (and now dubbed the "Anti-Homosexuality Bill") included the following provisions, as summarized

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by Jeff Sharlet in *Harper's* magazine: "up to three years in prison for failure to report a homosexual; seven years for 'promotion'; life imprisonment for a single homosexual act; and, for 'aggravated homosexuality' (which includes gay sex while HIV-positive, gay sex with a disabled person, or, if you're a recidivist, gay sex with anyone—marking the criminal as a 'serial offender'), death" (2010:36). Due to international uproar, threats of aid cutoffs from Western governments, and the mobilization of human rights and LGBTI groups worldwide, the "death penalty" provision was deleted and the bill was later tabled by the Ugandan Parliament. However, it was reintroduced in early 2012 and still carries extreme sanctions against those who practice, promote, or conceal homosexuality.

The Ugandan case has been interpreted largely in terms of the influence of U.S. homophobia in Africa. Kapya Kaoma writes that "the recent upsurge in politicized homophobia has been inspired by right-wing American evangelicals who have exported U.S.–style culture-war politics" (2012). He also notes, however, that "pejorative attitudes toward LGBTI people in Africa have long been widespread," and indeed, the exportation of fundamentalist American Christian politics cannot be considered the sole cause of the homophobic furor in Uganda. As Kristen Cheney argues, Uganda's campaign against same-sex relationships is also connected to a discourse about homosexuality "as the latest insidious Western colonial imposition that must be resisted"—a claim, she adds, that is also fueled by general anxiety about the society's "fertility rate" and the future of the "traditional family" (2010:30) as well as "myopia about contemporary circumstances that pose greater threats to children and family" (2012:80).

As in Uganda, homophobia in Senegal is connected to perceptions of same-sex relationships as Western neocolonial threats to the country's cultural, moral, and social equilibrium. Discursive power is similarly visible in Senegal, where homophobia has invigorated postcolonial discourses that establish binaries between Africa and the West as a means to justify the legal and social punishment of homosexuals and transgender people. Senegalese homophobia is buttressed by state-sanctioned discrimination. The Senegal Penal Code (article 319, par. 3) imposes a prison sentence of one to five years on people convicted of homosexual acts, accompanied by a fine of 100,000 to 1,500,000 CFA (US$200–3,000) (see Simon & Brooks 2009:4). This law places Senegal among the most homophobic nations in the world; according to Ignacio Saiz, Senegal's legal punishment of homosexuality is comparable to that of countries like Syria, Nicaragua, and Kuwait, which have also refused to accept sexual orientation as a human right (2004:58).

Endemic Senegalese homophobia has been prominently visible at least since February 2008 when an article in *Icône* magazine "about a supposed marriage between two homosexuals" provoked a "virulent campaign" in the country led by "imams, religious Muslim associations, journalists and male politicians known for their fundamentalist stances" against the supposed "'degradation of morality and disrespect for religious values'" (Bop 2008). As Codou Bop notes, the reaction followed the publication of an editorial

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entitled "Kaddu Gor" (the words of a man) in which the author laments the rise of homosexuality among Senegalese youth and a growing loss of moral values in the country (see Seneweb News 2008). As suggested in its title, the editorial also conveys the author's contempt for men implicitly classified as feminine and un-manly. "Kaddu Gor" also refers to the Wolof term *goor-jiggen* (sometimes written as *goordjiguène, goor-djiguène, gordjiguène, gor-djiguène, or gor-digen*), meaning "man-woman," "womanish," or "effeminate," as in the expression "Moom goór-jigeen la" (he is an effeminate man). As Geneviève N'Diaye-Corréard et al. show, these are all derogatory terms that are frequently used in Senegal to describe a homosexual, transgender, or transvestite man (2006:260), although most men who identify themselves as gender nonconforming use other terms such as *ibbis* (or *oubis*) and *yoos* (or *yauss*). Cheikh Niang writes that "broadly defined, *ibbis* tend to adopt feminine mannerisms and be less dominant in sexual interactions. *Yoos* are generally the insertive partner[s] during sex and do not consider themselves to be homosexuals" (2003:505). As one informant told Niang, "When someone says [*goor-jiggen*] in our presence, it makes us shiver. The term is like a siren sound that we expect to be followed by insults, blows, or stones thrown at us by out-of-control mobs" (2003:505). According to Achille Mbembe's (2006) paradigm of "phallocentric" power in postcolonial African nations, the use of the term is also a gesture of "phallocentrism"—an assertion of masculinity and authority that is evident most prominently in the "unrestrained license of government leaders to do as they please" and the association of "sovereignty" with "absolute, unrestrained, and unhindered pleasure" (Mbembe 2006).

As many observers have noted, then, homophobic logic involves appeals to both masculinity and morality and, as in Uganda, is used as a tool for diverting public attention from dire social and economic conditions. This has been particularly true during the past decade when the promises of the country's former president, Abdoulaye Wade (2000–2011), of better wages, improved living conditions, and freedom were largely unfulfilled (see Gueye 2011:29). A significant part of the country's desperation was displaced onto homosexuals and transgender people as many Senegalese retreated into antihomosexual moralistic discourses as a means to appease their rage against a regime that had left the country in shambles. Alfred Inis Ndiaye, in a study of religious movements in Senegal, notes a "process of re-appropriation and restoration of [traditional] values" among university students who have latched on to athletics, culture, and religious fervor as ways of palliating the political fragmentation and economic scarcity in the country (2007:122–23). The moral argument helps the leaders shift the focus away from their state's failed policies and allows them to blame subcultures, such as those of homosexuals and transgender people, as the harbingers of decadence in their country. Such a strategy, of course, places blame on people who are themselves victims of failed national policies as well as of the inequalities in development that persist between Africa and the Western world.

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Such a discursive representation of homosexuality as immorality and corruption of ethical values is also part of the "internalist" versus "externalist" binary that has recently prevailed in many African nations (not only Uganda and Senegal, but also, prominently, Zambia and Liberia) where political leaders, with the support of U.S. Christian conservatives, have promoted the idea that "homosexuality is un-African" (Ahlberg & Kulane 2011:36). Niels Teunis writes that "in recent years, several African presidents have openly spoken out against homosexuals, starting with Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe in 1995 and, more recently, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya. Every single one of these men claim[s] that homosexuality is totally un-African. It is an import of the colonial period, a corruption of a pure Africa" (2001:174–75). As Marina Ahlberg and Asli Kulane point out, right-wing U.S. clergy and political activists "exploit the politics of post-colonial identity" by encouraging nationalist discourses that "reject Western influences" (2011:325) and portray gender-nonconforming individuals as malevolent influences undermining Africa's moral superiority to the West. Such a portrayal of homosexuality is paradoxical, of course, because it is a culturally pragmatic ideology that merely reverses the Eurocentric portrayal of the Third World as inferior to the West. As Stuart Hall says, "societies are ranked and around which powerful positive and negative feelings cluster. (For example, 'the West' = developed = *good* = desirable; or the 'non-West' = under-developed = bad = undesirable)" (1996:186).

Such an ideology, or "West" versus "the Rest" binary, views increased sexual freedom in Senegal as evidence of Western cultural neocolonialism. This is evident, for example, in Ousmane Sembène's 1973 film *Xala*, in which the political and moral corruption of postindependence Dakar is equated with and depicted as sexual dysfunction. As Laura Mulvey says, the physical impotence of the film's protagonist, El'Hadji, represents "Sembène's juxtaposition of the psychosexual with the socioeconomic," and the film as a whole portrays "the sexual as the point of fissure, or weakness, in the system of economic fetishism" (1993:61,62). A particular embodiment of this "point of fissure" is the character of a male-to-female transgender person who serves drinks and cigars to a group of corrupt leaders attending El'Hadji's wedding to his third wife. She hands a cigar to another wealthy guest, who asks "friend, how do you say 'weekend' in English?" The transgender person responds "weekend," and then says "shit!" as she walks away. The basis for Sembène's spoof of the Western heritage is the familiar conflation of gender nonconformity with Western decadence: the association of assimilated and corrupt Senegalese leaders who indulge in reckless flirtations, adultery, alcoholism, and meaningless conversations with a gender-variant person whose knowledge of English is limited to these two words.

The populist association between Africa's internal problems and the imposition of decadent Western mores has created an unprecedented backlash against Senegalese homosexuals and transgender people. On May 4, 2009, the BBC reported that "the body of a man believed to be homosexual

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has twice been dug up from a Muslim cemetery in Senegal." The threats of violence sustained by the homosexual and transgender community come not only from other citizens, but also from officers of the law. According to a 2010 Amnesty International Report entitled "Senegal: Land of Impunity," nine Senegalese men who were arrested in 2009 "faced harassment, arbitrary arrest, torture and unfair trial[s] because of their suspected engagement in consensual same-sex sexual relationships." These men "had been tortured and subjected to homophobic attacks and remarks by the police officers that questioned them and by the prison officers where they were imprisoned" (2010:19). One of the detainees described his ordeal:

> The torture began in the flat where we were arrested. A police officer asked us if we were goordjiguen. We said no, but the police officers accused us of lying and then took it in turns to slap me. They also hit me on the head and back with their truncheons. Then they told us to kneel down and fold our arms. We were in a circle, with two police officers inside the circle and the other three outside. For at least two hours, until 11 pm, they punched us, hit us with their truncheons and kicked us. Blows rained down on our bodies. While they hit us, they insulted us and called us queers and goordjiguen: "You have no shame, men like you, we are going to take you away. You are going to regret being goordjiguen before you even get to court." The interrogations were punctuated by blows to the head and body. The police officers who questioned us told us to confess we were gay. Then they handcuffed us together in pairs and took us to the police station.
>
> As we left the building, there was a crowd of bystanders, who insulted us and threw stones at us. (2010:19)

Throughout Africa, homophobia has also flourished with the explicit or tacit support of Muslim clerics. In *Allah Made Us: Sexual Outlaws in an Islamic African City* (2009), Rudolph Pell Gaudio describes a passage from the *New Nigerian*, a government-owned newspaper, which argues that ridding the state of Kano of *yan dandu* (men who talk like women) and *karuwai* (prostitutes) would "boost morals," "check vices," create "the social conditions necessary for the full implementation of Shari'a," improve "public morality along Islamic lines," and bring about "justice and prosperity for all" (2009:24). In Senegal, too, some Muslim leaders have encouraged public reactions of contempt, repudiation, and violence toward homosexuals. The Senegalese Islamic journal *Djamra*, for example, which has been published since 1978 by an organization with the same name, "is concerned primarily with moral and educational issues" including "prostitution, alcoholism, drug problems and homosexuality," all of which "are interpreted as the result of secularism and decadent Western influences" (Evers, Rosander, & Westerlung 1999:93).[1] Following the release of the nine homosexual men in April 2009 (after the Dakar Appeal Court overturned their conviction), a group of Muslim leaders founded an organization called the "Front islamique pour la défense des valeurs éthiques" (Islamic front for the defense of moral values) and

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denounced their liberation as "une attaque contre l'islam" (an attack against Islam) (see *Jeune Afrique* 2009). Later, "an *Imam* [leader] of the association urged Muslims to kill homosexuals" (*Jeune Afrique* 2009), while representatives of twenty Islamic associations expressed anger at what they perceived as France's interference in their country's affair (see also Agence de Presse Sénégalaise 2009). Commenting on the "emotion" and "preoccupation" that then French president Nicholas Sarkozy expressed when the nine Senegalese men were condemned to eight years in prison, Djibo Kâ, a former minister of Senegal, stated, similarly, that the question of homosexuality is not simply a "matter of rights" but also "an issue of morals and ethics," and that, for example, it is impossible for a country with a 95 percent Muslim population to accept homosexual marriage (quoted in Gaye 2009).[2] In a speech delivered on January 10, 2009, Madické Niang, a former Foreign Affairs Minister of Senegal, announced similarly that the Senegalese government could never legalize same-sex marriage or "accept" relationships that go against nature. Such a policy, he said, would lead to an uproar among fundamentalists and serious consequences in a country where the practice is inconsistent with local realities (quoted in Sock 2009).[3]

Homophobia in the French Colonies

In several late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western narratives about Senegal, the authors describe encounters with homosexuals and transgender people. These texts—which are in many ways biased and contradictory—nevertheless help us restore the erased history of these subcultures. They are contradictory because while some describe homosexuals and transgendered people as perverts and pederasts, others portray homosexuality as a European imposition and Africa as otherwise untouched by homosexuality. For instance, as discussed below, while Armand Corre recognized the prevalence of homosexuality among Foulah people of Senegal in 1894, Oswald Durand denied the existence of homosexuality among Foulah people of French Guinea in 1929. This duality suggests both the ambivalence and the single-mindedness of Europeans. Whether the notion of indigenous homosexuality in Africa was accepted or denied, either position could be used to support the general notion of Africans as culturally backward and/or morally deficient. Whatever their perception, the European writers had the same purpose: to support the colonialist policing of sexual behavior in the African colonies and the moral authority of the colonial administration's civilizing mission.

Armand Corre (1894)

Armand Corre's *L'ethnographie criminelle* (1894) depicts the nudity and sexual license of late nineteenth-century populations in Saint-Louis, Senegal, as an African tradition that is alien to European sensibilities, arguing that the colonial African should not be judged like a European

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because the two individuals do not have the same *éducation morale* (moral education) (1894:9). By opposing African and European moralities, Corre supported the French colonial administration's construction of such a dichotomy as a reason for "civilizing" Africans. Alice Conklin notes that "before the French coined the term 'civilization' in the 1770s" in order "to reflect French achievements in the moral and scientific realms," they "used the term 'police' [*un people policé*] to describe the contrast between European societies and barbaric ones" (1997:262). As V. Y. Mudimbe argues, Western colonizers had "the paradoxical task of teaching Africans how to read their otherness" (1988:166), preventing Africans from establishing themselves "as subjects" of their own destiny who could take responsibility for the "invention" of their past and "the conditions for modernizing their societies" (1988:167).

Corre writes reprovingly about the sexual behaviors of French soldiers in Senegal, although he is sympathetic to the needs of young men who are far from home, their families and girlfriends, who cannot be expected to display "une retenue et une sagesse de moines" (the deportment and wisdom of nuns) (1894:34). Nevertheless, Corre condemns the corrupting influence of the local population, which he views as a threat to the colonial soldiers' manhood and probity and as undermining to the French civilizing mission and its cult of domesticity. Describing the lifestyle of the French military men in Africa, he writes that "soldiers exchange mutual and ignoble services, or, if they do not get the consent of an indigenous person, take them by force, to the detriment of our moral influence" (1894:34). In a footnote to this comment Corre adds another observation: "I have seen a post where, in a group of five soldiers, three had a relationship in which a young corporal fulfilled the role of the wife, while the fourth member, a homesick Breton, masturbated to his death" (1894:34).[4] Clearly some of this may or may not have been true, since at least part of the story (the notion of masturbating to death) must have been false. But it is perhaps the fantastical elements of the story that are the most telling, since this quite florid tale of sexual license (homosexual acts among the troops and even violent rape committed against the local population) is viewed in terms of the corrupting influence of the Africans. According to Corre's idealized vision, it is the soldiers who must be shielded from the decadence of the African colonies in order to behave as extensions of an immaculate and pristine *métropole*.

Somewhat paradoxically, Corre's narrative is important to the contemporary debate not only because it reveals the victimization of the colonized population, but also because it suggests that prostitution and homosexuality in colonial Senegal were, in fact, not exclusively imposed by the colonizers. For instance, he scrutinizes the sexual mores of the Creole of Saint-Louis, Senegal, who were known as the *signares*, populations that derived from open marriages between European traders and local African women. When, upon the intervention of the clergy and colonial administrators, such unions became uncommon, new forms of relationships developed between

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whites and blacks, including nonprocreative sex and v*ices contre nature* (vices against nature) (i.e., homosexuality and transgender behavior) (1894:56). He writes, "In Saint-Louis, I saw black men dressed and behaving like women, who, I was told, work as prostitutes. At Boké, I saw near a foulah prince, a griot, whose lascivious dance reflect[ed] the intimate role that he plays in the royal home." He is careful to add that "pederastic behaviors did not originate from Muslim societies. The expression which is used in the wolof language to identify them is recent, and does not exist in most African idioms" (1894:80).[5]

Yet Corre's denial of the indigenousness of these subcultures reads as a flimsy afterthought, and his reference to a Wolof term (which is probably *goor-jiggen*) weakens his case. This subculture of the *goor-jiggen* and the *griot* has in fact left indelible marks in contemporary Senegalese society where gender bending and alternative sexualities have existed for centuries. Similar subcultures have existed in other parts of Africa. Simon Ottenberg notes the occurrence of "sex reversal and sexual ambiguities of some masquerades" in Yoruba popular theater, in which men are allowed "to act out some aspects of homosexual wishes and tendencies" (1982:181). Likewise, Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe (1998) suggest the existence of other gender nonconforming communities, such as the Hausa *yan daudu* of contemporary Nigeria, the Mossi *Soronés* of early twentieth-century Burkina Faso, the *lagredis* of eighteenth-century Ouidah (in current Benin), and analogous societies in Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Liberia. The *goor-jiggen* subculture in colonial Senegal was part of these communities that deserve scholarly attention. Ignoring this subculture is tantamount to burying an integral part of African history and culture.

Louis Fiaux (1908) and Joseph Grasset (1912)

An early homophobic European narrative is Joseph Grasset's *Traité élémentaire de physiopathologie clinique* (1912), which represents homosexuality and gender variance as diseases of perverted individuals and criminals. Discussing what he calls "inversions sexuelles" (sexual inversions), Grasset argues that homosexuals (*contràre Sexualempfindung*) (1912:209) are also guilty of perversions such as "bestiality, necrophilia, scatophilia" and pedophilia (1912:4).[6] Grasset's statements reflect the teachings of early twentieth-century French medical and legal texts that viewed homosexuality, or "pederasty," as the practices of promiscuous and poor youth. In *Un nouveau régime des mœurs: Abolition de la police des moeurs* (1908), Louis Fiaux mocks homosexuals as feminized, androgynous individuals and refers to a French law, passed on June 28, 1904, that applied to juvenile offenders who had committed serious acts such as murder, theft—or homosexuality (1908:330).

In their representations of homosexuals as effeminate and disordered, Grasset and Fiaux reflected the influence of French scientific discourse that, in the late nineteenth century, initiated the psychiatric pathologizing of homosexuals and transgender people. Describing this discourse,

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Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, writes that "homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy into a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (1980:43). As Foucault suggests in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, the association of unconventional behavior with "perversion," "crime," or "insanity" also served as a "judgment of guilt" (1977:17,20,21). Such homophobia contradicted the contributions France had made in human rights struggles by being the first modern nation to decriminalize sodomy in its Penal Code of 1791 and Napoleonic Code of 1810 (see Martin 2011:217; Gunther 2009:6).

The pathologizing of homosexuality in France stemmed from two sources: the French medical proscriptions against nonprocreative sex and the nationalist-colonialist *mission civilisatrice*. As Sylvie Chaperon explains, for the most part, nineteenth-century French doctors encouraged "une contention des pulsions" (a restraint of passions) and recommended that "la sexualité reste ordonnée à la procreation" (sexuality be used for procreation only) (2002:56). French soldiers in particular were punished for alleged pederasty (Martin 2011:260), which threatened the vigorous image of a masculine, exclusive, and pristine nation that France created in order to control women and colonial territories, both of which were perceived as corrupt. In this vein, Bill Marshall argues that "French misogyny and homophobia are in part explained by this fear of contagion" which is expressed in the image of "a country without encounters or hybridity [*métissage*]" (2005:3). Nevertheless, "the [French] empire was also a place where some people experimented with new religious and gender identities not possible in France" (Conklin, Fishman, & Robert Zaretsky 2011:93). In an attempt to prevent such disclosure of identities from producing anxieties in the colonies, many French colonial writers depicted homosexuality and gender variance as lifestyles that weakened France's *mission civilisatrice* in Africa.

Oswald Durand (1929)

In an article, titled "Mœurs et Institutions d'une Famille Peule du Cercle de Pita," published in a 1929 issue of *Bulletin du comité d'études historiques et scientifiques de l'Afrique occidentale française* (a journal about Africa published by a group of colonial French bureaucrats and scholars), Oswald Durand, an administrator in colonial French Guinea in the late nineteenth century, wrote that "lesbian practices have no adepts here.... Homosexuality does not exist in Foutah; Coranic law forbids it and recommends that those guilty of it be put to death by strangulation; the bodies of homosexuals must be burned and thrown at sea" (1929:75).[7] According to Rudolph Gaudio, this notion of homosexuality as "un-African" also was promoted by Sir Richard Burton, who claimed that "the negro race is mostly untainted by sodomy and tribadism" (2009:185). Thus, as Gaudio argues, the colonists enacted "labor, educational and housing policies that presumed (and imposed)

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the translatability of European notions of gender and sexuality in African settings, such as the cultural ideal of the male breadwinner and female home-maker" (2009:185). In this sense, homophobic discourse enabled colonists to support the cult of domesticity that was part of their *mission civilisatrice*, or what Conklin describes as their dream of "liberating [Africans] from political tyranny and superstition" (1997:16). In practice, the *mission civilisatrice* thrived on tyranny since it tolerated the immolation of Senegalese homosexuals in the colonies based on the claim that France was abiding by the Shari'a laws and morals of the local Muslim leaders. Thus, the colonial discourse about the un-Africanness of homosexuality was a deceptive mythology that France used to support homophobic violence that was outlawed in its own *métropole*.

Durand's representation of same-sex relations as un-African was in fact paradoxical, since he suggested that the Muslim Foulah people tolerated female prostitution. He describes Pita village girls, adolescent females, and older women prostitutes who lived together and suffered the *mésestime* (low regard) of their neighbors as well as a growing number of Pita *marchandes d'amours* (love traders) who conducted their business with the complicity of their *griot* husbands and madams (1929:75–76). Yet Durand downplays this subculture by arguing that prostitution was nonexistent in Foutah twenty years earlier, suggesting that the practice had been brought to Africa by Europeans. His grief over the loss of an unsoiled Foutah virtually writes this society out of modernity by establishing an essential difference between Africa and the rest of the world. According to this binary, Africa is a pure, unchanging continent rather than a land full of hybrid and evolving civilizations; it is a continent, as Mbembe writes, "not only perpetually caught and imagined within a web of difference and absolute otherness," but also made "to epitomize the intractable, the mute, the abject" (2005:7). By participating in this removal of Africa from modernity, and reinforcing the subjective binaries between Western, urban, and developed societies and non-Western, rural, and "underdeveloped" civilizations, Durand places Africa in the "non-Western" camp by denying the existence of indigenous homosexuality in Foutah and imposing a condition of "otherness" as a means of asserting the colonial administration's moral authority in its empire. Durand's references to homosexuality reveal not sameness between Africans and Europeans, but essential differences between them.

Geoffrey Gorer (1935)

Geoffrey Gorer's *Africa Dances* (1935) is another narrative that represents homosexuality as a practice that Europeans brought to colonial Africa. Gorer was a British ethnographer who traveled to Senegal in 1934 in the company of Francois Feral Benga, a Senegalese Wolof dancer who lived in Paris in the 1930s. Benga, who wanted to go to West Africa "to study the native dances and if possible bring back [to Paris] a black ballet" (Gorer 1935:15), hired Gorer as his English interpreter in British West Africa. The

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result of the collaboration is Gorer's travel account, which provides us with key references to homosexuality and transvestism in colonial Dakar, Senegal, in 1934. Referring to the pervasiveness of these subcultures in the city, Gorer writes, "It is said that homosexuality is recent among the Wolof, at any rate in any frequency; but it now receives, and has for some years received, such extremely august and almost publicly exhibited patronage that pathics are a common sight.... This phase is usually transitory, finishing with the departure of the European who has been keeping the boy; but a certain number from taste, interest, or for economic reasons continue their practices and there is now quite a large pederastic society" (1935:36). Gorer's description of homosexuality in colonial Dakar as pederasty that Senegalese learned from Europeans reflects an "internalist" versus "externalist" dichotomy. By representing Senegalese homosexuals as "pathics" and members of "a large pederastic society," Gorer also reinforces European pathologizing of these individuals.

Despite its homophobia, Gorer's narrative is an important text in the context of current claims about the "un-Africanness" of homosexuality, since it suggests the presence in 1930s Dakar of homosexuals and transgender people who cohabited with the rest of a society that was predominantly Muslim. Gorer notes, "They are called in Wolof men-women, gor-digen, and do their best to deserve the epithet by their mannerisms, their dress and their make-up; some even dress their hair like women. They do not suffer in any way socially, though the Mohammedans refuse them religious burial; on the contrary they are sought after as the best conversationalists and the best dancers" (1935:36). As the statement suggests, Senegalese Muslims were ambivalent in regard to homosexual and transgender people. By ensuring that homosexuals did "not suffer in any way socially," the Muslims in colonial Dakar revealed a limited degree of openness toward these sexual and gender identities even if homosexual activity is considered a sin. Thomas G. Spear writes that "the Algerian anthropologist Malek Chebel reminds us that, while the Coran may unambiguously condemn male homosexuality (and never evoke that between women), the absolute separation of sexes in Arabo-moslem culture generally leads to a 'monogamous and monosexual' adolescence, and a certain sexual openness…" (1998:197). Chebel called this state of homosociality that was generally accepted by Islam a "'gestuelle imprégnée de douceur de vivre et de détente'" (Spear 1998:197), meaning "a body language full of the sweetness of life and relaxation."

It is undeniable, however, that Islamic culture is generally homophobic, and this is visible in Gorer's representation of how African Muslims in colonial Senegal perceived homosexual and transgender people as individuals who indulged in fetishism and frivolity.

> The people, nearly always women, who have the faculty of going into a clairvoyant trance [,] are known among the Wolof as m'Deup; the dances during which these revelations are obtained have the same name. Men are

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> occasionally m'Deup, but they are looked down on as debauchees and effeminate. (1935:44–45)

The Wolof people's representation of male participants of "m'Deup" (sometimes spelled *Ndoep*) as "debauchees and effeminate" could have derived from their perception of these individuals as people who attempt to subvert the morality and order of their Muslim societies. Wolof Muslims stamped the label of effeminacy on these men because they perceived them as transgressors of their religion. In so doing, however, these Muslims ignored the important role that homosexuals and transgender people play in Wolof culture as mediators between ancestors and the living.

Other Transgressions of the Gender Binary in African Cultures

Alluding to the divine status of so-called goor-jiggens, Charles Béart writes, "there are *ngor-digen* that somewhat remind us of shamanism; these men are dressed like men, but with a feminine flair, and have feminine demeanor; dressed and walking like women, they lead the female processions to the *tam-tam* [drumming] or *faux-lion* [fake lion] ceremonies" (1955:549).[8] The participation of goor-jiggens in the *tam-tam* and *faux-lion* ceremonies attests to the important symbolic role they play in Senegalese traditions and cultural rituals as mediators between genders who provide society with the harmony that guarantees prosperity. Yet goor-jiggens' participation in the *Ndoep* ceremony is more than cultural or symbolic because it has a practical religious meaning. Having both male and female characteristics, goor-jiggens possess a dualistic gender and sexual identity that gives them a double vision and self, and access to the traditional Wolof *Ndoep* deities. This dualism is apparent in the classic television drama entitled *Opération Khambe* that was produced in 1980 by the pioneer Senegalese theater troupe called Daaray Kocc. Near the end of the play there is a *Ndoep* ceremony in which a group of men dressed as women dance and sing alongside the female worshippers. The presence of transgendered male dancers in this holy ceremony suggests the acceptance of fluid gender identity in traditional African religions. In *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, Ifi Amadiume develops the ideas of "male-daughter" and "female-husbands" to describe similar situations in which traditional Igbo women "acted as family head," a concept that the Igbo articulate with "the genderless expression *di-bu-no*" (1987:90). Likewise, a goor-jiggen is a "male-daughter" of the *Ndoep* gods and goddesses who possesses a fluid identity that disrupts the rigid binary between masculinity and femininity for the sake of social harmony.

Such a transgression of the gender binary was common in traditional African societies where men and women could sometimes assume the identity of the opposite sex. Amadiume writes about "Eze Agba, the priest of Idemili's shrine," who "must not pass his loin-cloth between his legs as men normally do, but wear it like a shirt or wrapper" (1987:x). Denis Pierre de Pedrals writes similarly about the Balouba depiction of "*Mouhoungou*, the protector

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of hunters, as a bisexed deity" and of "the god *Kamoukilima mikelo*, the guardian of warriors and the spirit whose name signifies, 'the one who does not fear arrows', as a two-faced figure who is masculine on one side and feminine on the other" (1950:179).[9] A similar portrayal of the transgender shamans is found in ceremonies of Ibibio male brotherhoods in which, as Charles Le Cœur argues (1932:105), the ultramasculinity of the participants does not prevent them from asking transvestites to join their solemn rituals. A similar transgression of gender binary is apparent in the prominent transgender activity in Senegalese culture that occurs during the Islamic holiday of Tamkharit (*Ashura* in Arabic). This is a day when Senegalese men and women (and boys and girls) are allowed to dress in the clothes and adopt the mannerism of the opposite sex or gender. By allowing people to switch and emulate variant gender identities during Tamkharit, Senegalese culture opens a space that could lead to full acceptance of gender nonconforming people.

In Senegalese society goor-jiggens have made tremendous contributions in fashion, popular culture, and other areas that have helped to modernize the country. According to Agence de Presse Sénégalaise, "next to the *griotte* families, the 'gor djiguènes' (homosexuals or transvestites) were the first makeup and hairdressing professionals of Senegal (2003); they participate in baptizing and wedding ceremonies and other events and count the *diri yankés* (distinguished ladies) among their clients.[10] Likewise for most of the twentieth century, goor-jiggens have intermingled with wealthy individuals, businesspersons, and political leaders in Senegal. By interacting with such individuals, they became a recognizable community in both pre- and postindependence Senegal and made vital contributions to the country's modernity and development. Studying these contributions will help to reinscribe the neglected experiences of Senegal's homosexuals and transgender people in their country's history.

Conclusion

The narratives of selected Western authors suggest that while homosexuality and transgenderism clearly existed in colonial Senegalese societies, the writers' perceptions of these cultures—either condemnation of the behaviors and customs that they perceived or else denial that such behaviors and customs existed at all—are relevant to present-day discussions about homosexuality in Africa. Through their insistence on either the indigenousness or the "un-Africanness" of homosexuality, Western writers such as Armand Corre, Joseph Grasset, Louis Fiaux, Oswald Durand, and Geoffrey Gorer established an "external" versus "internal" binary that has produced the homophobia we see today. It has remained alive, for instance, in the tendency of contemporary Senegalese Muslims and political leaders to depict homosexuality as an immoral practice that is not indigenous to Senegal. Therefore, it is not *homosexuality* but rather *homophobia* that was a colonial imposition. Such colonial homophobia produced the denial of the Africanness of

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homosexuality that we see in contemporary Senegal, which erases and silences the important contributions that homosexual and transgender subcultures have made to the nation's history. Not only do these contributions remain unacknowledged, but homosexuality also is illegal in Senegal and homosexuals and transgender people continue to face isolation, denigration, prejudice, violence, and other forms of oppression. Such injustices will prevail in Senegal as long as homosexuality continues to be viewed as an unnatural and punishable identity in the nation.

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Notes

1. A particularly ugly homophobic strain in postcolonial Senegalese culture is the false equivalence that some commentators make between homosexuality and pedophilia. In a 2011 article entitled "Au secours! l'homosexualité gagne du terrain au Sénégal et notre progéniture est exposée" ("Help! Homosexuality is gaining ground in Senegal and our children are exposed to it") (Senetoile News 2011), a Senegalese reporter describes young men's performance of the Goana and Youza, two dance crazes that took over Dakar's nightclubs in 2011, as "pederasty." "It is clear that pederasty and lesbianism, which used be to profane practices found in good societies, are now accepted and almost legalized in our country. The religious leaders know about this; yet they remain silent." (Entendons par là que, la pédérastie et le lesbianisme, considérés comme des pratiques profanes dans certaines bonnes sociétés, sont aujourd'hui acceptés et presque légalisés sous nos cieux. Les religieux sont au courant, mais ne disent rien.)

   Further complicating the situation, however, is the assumed association, both within and outside of Africa, between homosexuality and so-called sex tourism. According to Niels Teunis, "many western European anthropologists have assured me that homosexuality does not exist in Africa or caters to Western

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visitors only" (2001:175). Paulla Ebron's essay "Traffic in Men" quotes a press release in which the Gambian president, Yaya Jammeh, blames Western tourists for bringing to his country "moral woes" such as "prostitution" and "drugs" (1997:223). There is a widespread belief, as well, that a growing number of tourists engage in pedophilia.

2. "De ce point de vue, il est nécessaire de 'comprendre la réaction occidentale. Mais il faut aussi que l'Occident nous comprenne', a affirmé le leader du Renouveau selon qui la question de l'homosexualité 'n'est pas simplement un problème de droit', mais aussi 'un problème de moral et d'éthique.'"

   "'Donc, je les comprends mais qu'ils nous comprennent aussi', a encore lancé Djibo Kâ. 'Pour le secrétaire général de l'URD,…envisager de tolérer un seul instant des mariages entre homosexuels dans une société à 95 % musulmane et aux traditions respectueuses de la dignité de l'homme, 'n'est pas possible au Sénégal pour le moment.'" See Gaye (2009).
3. "Chaque pays a ses réalités sociales et la communauté internationale doit tenir compte de différences et ne doit pas nous imposer de légaliser les relations contre nature. Nous ne saurions l'accepter…. Il y a des intégristes qui se soulèveront et les conséquences seront beaucoup plus dramatiques car cela ne va pas avec nos réalités."
4. "Les autres se rendent de mutuels et ignobles services 1 ou, s'ils n'obtiennent de bon gré les faveurs de quelque indigène, les prennent par force, au grand détriment de notre influence morale"…. "J'ai vu un poste où, sur cinq soldats, trois formaient un ménage dans lequel un jeune caporal remplissait le rôle de femme, et un quatrième, Breton nostalgique, se tua par la masturbation."
5. J'ai rencontré à Saint-Louis des noirs, parés à la manière des femmes et en affectant les allures, qu'on m'a dit faire métier de leur prostitution. A Boké, j'ai vu, auprès d'un prince foulah, un griot, dont les danses lascives traduisaient bien le rôle plus intime qu'il devait remplir en la maison de l'altesse. Les habitudes de pédérastie ne sortent pas des milieux musulmans. Dans le langage wolof, l'expression pour les désigner serait de date récente, et elle n'existerait pas dans la plupart des idiomes africains."
6. "On peut encore nommer ici la bestialité, la nécrophilie, la scatophilie"…. Ces derniers types conduisent aux homosexuels ou invertis (*contràre Sexualempfindung*), uranisme, pédérastie, sophisme, androgynie.... "
7. "Les méthodes lesbiennes n'ont aucune Adepte.... L'homosexualité n'existe pas au Foutah ; la loi coranique l'a d'ailleurs prohibée et prévoit pour les coupables la peine de mort par strangulation; les corps des homosexuels doivent en outre être brûlés et leurs cendres jetées à la mer."
8. "Le problème des ngor-digen wolofs est plus complexe. Il y a des tapèt qui sont des homosexuels tout à fait semblables à leurs correspondants européens et assez souvent en rapport avec eux dans les escales où ceux-ci sont représentés, mais il y a des ngor-digen qui font quelque peu penser au chamanisme, habillés en hommes mais de façons féminines, ayant des gestes féminins, voire habillés en femmes et conduisant en se déhanchant les femmes pour les tam-tam de fanal ou de faux-lion."
9. "Aux yeux des Balouba encore, le génie protecteur des chasseurs : Mouhoungou est bisexué. De même le génie Kamoukilima mikelo, protecteur des guerriers et dont le nom signifie 'celui qui ne craint pas les flèches', est représenté par une statuette à double face, masculine d'un côté, féminine de l'autre."

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10. "A coté de ces familles griottes, il y avait les 'gor djiguènes' (homosexuels ou travestis) qui étaient les premiers professionnels du maquillage et de la coiffure dans le pays. Ils étaient sollicités pour les cérémonies de baptême, mariage et autres. Ils étaient très en vogue et tenaient boutique à domicile. Toutefois, se faire coiffer par un 'gor djiguène' était un peu mal vu pour des raisons religieuses. Mais les 'gor djiguènes' étaient plus sollicités par les 'diri yankés' (grandes dames) qui ramenaient de l'étranger des produits de beauté, des trousses de maquillage, ainsi que les premiers postiches et chignons."

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