

Ambiguous Masculinities: Gender and Sexual Transgression in Contemporary Dance Works by Senegalese Men

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In mid-January 2016, a photo of the rising Senegalese pop star Wally Ballago Seck, adorned in red skinny jeans, a black peacoat with a thick fur trim, and a pink handbag, circulated the Internet (see Timera 2016). The seemingly innocent photo of the young star sparked a widespread and severe outcry in the context of an ongoing masculinity crisis. Suturing a Senegalese male celebrity and an accessory perceived as feminine—the handbag—the photo unleashed rampant fear that the widely admired Seck was promoting homosexuality, or worse, that he was homosexual.¹ Public figures including Seck’s friend, the musician Baba Hamdy, participated in the outcry, claiming in an open letter that “it serves nothing to defend the indefensible [sic] ... in my humble opinion, we have to straighten out Waly” (Soidri 2016).² On January 30, Seck publicly reaffirmed his mutually constitutive heterosexuality, masculinity, Muslim identity, and national belonging in an act meant to assuage concerned fans.³ In front of nearly two thousand audience members at the expansive Grand Théâtre National in Dakar, wearing a blue boubou⁴ with gold embroidery, a clear indication of his Muslim identity, Seck destroyed the pink handbag with a pair of scissors to resounding cheers and applause (see Leral.net 2016). Following a heartfelt apology and declaration of his love for Senegal, un-coincidentally staged at the national theater, this instance performatively undid the unacceptable yoking of Senegaleseness and homosexuality invoked by the photo.

L'affaire sac-à-main, or the handbag case, as it came to be known, is part of a series of instances over the past decade in Senegal in which gender or sexual transgressions are forced into public discourse, thereby catalyzing a widespread oppositional response in protection of “Senegaleseness” or “Africanness.” Rising Islamic fundamentalism, the internationalization of Western human rights agendas, and dire economic conditions are a few of the factors that have contributed to the current anti-homosexual backlash in Senegal (Coly 2013; M’Baye 2013). However, *L'affaire sac-à-main* is not the full story. A few months following this event, a handful of Senegalese male choreographers, all of whom identify as Muslim, offered performances that present the Muslim Senegalese male body in ways that allow for effeminacy and homoeroticism. Hardo Kâ’s *Dieu, le diable et moi* (2016), which premiered at the annual Festival Duo-Solo Danse in Saint-Louis in the north of Senegal, Mamadou Dieng and Thierno Diédhiou’s *Laabu Bal* (2016), and Bamba Diagne’s *Gualankor* (2016), both created and performed at Andréya Ouamba’s Ateliers Expériences et Corps (AEx-Corps) workshop in Dakar, offered ambiguous assemblages of masculinity that disrupt the

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coherency of the response to the handbag case.⁵ At the same time, they denied (Kà), omitted (Dieng and Diédhiou), or obscured (Diagne) any perspective in favor of minoritarian gender and sexual subject positions in their verbal articulations of their work in rehearsals and public discussions.

I suggest that this discrepancy between verbal framing and staged performance signals the potentiality of contemporary dance to serve as a platform where nonconforming sexualities and gender expressions may be constructed and performed. As a liminal space forged through entangled local and global spheres, contemporary dance exists both within and outside the public domain where Wally Seck's photo circulated and where logocentric discourse is compulsorily heterosexist. Possibilities other than what is accepted verbally briefly materialize through carefully choreographed, intentionally ambiguous bodily enactments. These enactments contain the potential for spectators to consider subjectivities that are widely disavowed outside the theater and to alter their perceptions of them, as Susan Manning's conceptualization of cross-viewing helps to delineate (Manning 2004). To some extent, the masculinities embodied in these performances mirror the multiple interpretative lenses staged by pioneering men in modern dance in 1930s United States, a time of heightened crackdowns on gay bars and drag balls and increased legislation prohibiting the representation of homosexuality. Julia Foulkes describes the "undercurrent" or "allusion" of homosexuality beneath the veneer of virile masculinity—a necessary means toward legitimizing male dancers—in the work of Ted Shawn, José Limón, and Lester Horton (Foulkes 2002, 80). Drawing on Foulkes, Manning (2004), and others, this article attempts to unpack the tensions between enunciation and choreography, intention and interpretation, as it elaborates on the ways in which artists creatively negotiate oftentimes contradictory sets of expectations at the interstices of the local and the global.

The purpose of this article is not to make claims about the sexuality of any choreographer I discuss. Likewise, I do not wish to perpetuate representations of, in the words of Kwame Otu, "the single story of homophobic Africa" (Otu 2017, 144). Rather, I aim to examine the ways in which conventional masculinity and heteronormativity are deconstructed through choreography and what this might contribute to understandings of how gender and sexuality are imagined in Senegal outside of dominant culture. In a country where homosexuality is criminalized, and homophobic sentiment is currently the only permissible response to public displays of gender or sexual alterity, contemporary dance offers a medium through which alternative viewpoints may be recognized even if not explicitly intended.

Research Methods

Research for this article was primarily carried out over a nine-month residency in Dakar in 2016, and follow-up interviews with the artists were conducted in 2018,⁶ though my involvement with contemporary dance in Senegal extends back several years. I was first introduced to contemporary dance in Dakar upon stumbling into an AEx-Corps workshop in 2010 while rehearsing with another group in the same cultural center. This led to my participation in four subsequent AEx-Corps workshops between 2010 and 2012, in which I danced alongside Kà and Diagne, among others. In 2016, I participated in dance workshops in Dakar and at École des Sables and observed when participation was not possible. I conducted approximately eighty interviews with artists and arts administrators and collected written and digital materials from various archives. I was present throughout the six-week AEx-Corps workshop as a participant in group discussions and technique classes and served as invited choreographer Reggie Wilson's English-French translator. I traveled with Ouamba and others to Saint-Louis just weeks after the culminating AEx-Corps performance to attend Festival Duo-Solo Danse.⁷

Despite longstanding relationships with my interlocutors and despite my embodied familiarity with contemporary dance in Senegal, I am vigilant to the fundamental limitations of my understanding

given the inevitable blind spots that my whiteness and US passport entail. Following the tenets of critical performance ethnography delineated by D. Soyini Madison, who draws heavily on Dwight Conquergood, I attend to my own role in the production of knowledge and strive to enact the hermeneutics of experience, copresence, humility, and proximity that characterizes Conquergood's conceptualization of "coperformative witnessing" (Madison 2012; Conquergood 2002). Rather than attempting objectivity, coperformative witnessing takes proximity as "an epistemological point of departure and return" (Conquergood 2002, 149). My analyses are premised on my long-standing involvement with contemporary dance in Senegal but are not meant to be understood as totalizing accounts of the choreography. Given the undergirding local-global entanglement central to the art form, and the dynamic movements of variously situated participants, audiences, funding structures, and flows of capital it entails, transmitting a singular message is not possible nor the goal of any choreographer discussed. Rather, they are attracted to contemporary dance in part for its multiple meaning-making capacity and they recognize the potentiality of playing with the boundaries of legibility for diverse spectators, tenets encapsulated by the often-heard phrases across dance studios in Senegal: *ouverture*, or openness, and *danser autrement*, or dancing otherwise. I aim to offer a perspective—shaped as much by my deep engagement with the artists and the sociocultural context in which they work as by my differentiated social, cultural, and educational background—that may or may not be shared while elaborating on how contemporary dance specifically allows for antihegemonic viewpoints in tightly constrained places.

Sexual Citizenship in Senegalese Law and the Public Sphere

Across the African continent, queer subjectivities are a contested site through which culture, nationality, and Western imperialism are debated. For a variety of reasons—diverting attention away from dire social and economic issues in the poststructural adjustment period or casting themselves as guardians of "Africanness" to counter the spread of "gay internationalism"—African state and religious leaders have increasingly cast sexual minorities as scapegoats for their countries' ills through policy and public rhetoric (Coly 2013; M'Baye 2013; Tamale 2013).⁸ Over the past decade, many Senegalese subjects have been increasingly excluded from full citizenship rights based on their sexuality, or any possible indication of it. Article 319 of the Penal Code imposes a prison sentence of one to five years as well as a fine of 100,000 to 1,500,000 CFA (US \$200–\$3,000) to anyone convicted of an "act against nature" with an individual of the same sex. Although the policy was introduced in 1962, it was rarely enforced until recently. In 2008, the Senegalese tabloid magazine *Icône* published a series of photos of a supposedly gay wedding, forcing homosexuality into public discourse and instigating an unprecedented level of homophobic violence in the country that continues today (Kassé 2013, 263). Days following the February 2008 *Icône* publication, ten people who appeared in the photos were arrested for "undermining decency and natural marriage" (Bop 2014, 3). Since then, a number of men have been arrested and subjected to unfair trials due to alleged sexual relations with other men, often based on dubious evidence such as the existence of condoms and lubricant in their homes (Amnesty International 2010; Brice 2015).

Increased surveillance, discrimination, and violence enacted upon sexual minorities has led to a widespread policy of discretion. Underlying this compulsory discretion, those I spoke with expressed a range of sentiments from acceptance to deep frustration. The artists I interviewed span lower and middle classes and range in age from midtwenties to midforties. As they take part in a cosmopolitan art form that demands transnational border crossing and intensive work with non-Senegalese artists, many of whom openly identify as LGBTQ+, their perspectives are not taken to be representative of the Senegalese population broadly. Generally, they accept LGBTQ dispositions elsewhere and acknowledge the existence of homosexuality in Senegal but warn against public displays of affection between people of the same sex. Referring to the strict overarching moral ideology in Senegal, one artist described *une réalité ici* (a reality here) that differs from elsewhere, including elsewhere in Africa and overseas. Public displays of same sex desire could

quickly result in dissemination via social media and be followed by violence and exclusion from the family and social group. In other words, being labeled *goor-jigeen* is likely to result in social death.

In the Wolof language, the term *goor-jigeen*, which literally translates to “man-woman,” denotes biologically male subjects who cross-dress, behave effeminately, or who have sex with men. Colonial-era travel documents and oral histories describe *goor-jigeens* as sought after as the best conversationalists and best dancers, as holding specialized roles as mediators between ancestors and the living during *ndoepe*⁹ rituals, and as having significantly shaped the electoral victory of President Léopold Sédar Senghor (M’Baye 2013, 121–22; Kassé 2013, 263). Today the term connotes homosexuality and is largely pejorative. Those I interviewed around the age of forty or older often spoke with nostalgia about the respected roles of *goor-jigeens* in a number of social events in their youth, while the younger generation tended to express disdain with the perceived importation of homosexuality from the West. Blatant homophobic rhetoric and violence, as well as forced discretion, are disrupted through contemporary choreography that deconstructs gender and sexual normativity. The ongoing “unprecedented homophobic hysteria” (Coly 2013, 27) in Senegal, as it interfaces with an experimental global art form, sets the scene in which these choreographers work.

Entangled Spaces: Festival Duo-Solo Danse and AEx-Corps

Festival Duo-Solo Danse and AEx-Corps epitomize the uneven intersection of the local and the global in which contemporary dance in Senegal is situated. Both events promote African artists and help to establish local artistic milieus as an antidote to the longstanding tendency to relocate overseas. At the same time, they rely heavily on financial resources from European and American organizations. Audiences are comprised of local artists and residents, expats, and choreographers who travel from as far as the United States. Attending to the positioning of contemporary dance in this entangled space in which multivalent expectations, ideologies, and values rub up against one another, provides an instrumental framework for my analyses. The artists’ creative negotiations of this uneven terrain attest to the discrepancies between how they frame their work verbally and how they perform their bodies in necessarily ambiguous ways.

Alioune Diagne established Festival Duo-Solo Danse in 2008 in his birthplace of Saint-Louis, a city in the north of Senegal approximately sixty miles south of the Mauritanian border. The only annual contemporary dance festival in Senegal, it aims to bring artists of different generations together and to establish Saint-Louis as a viable site of artistic production. Whereas artists of an older generation had the advantage of significant state support, those coming of age today face a drastically different and much more challenging situation that relies heavily on resources from outside Senegal (Kringelbach 2014). Diagne hopes that by bringing artists together, they can work to find solutions to change the current structure while providing the younger generation opportunities to better understand the local lineage that their work builds upon. Though typically international in scope, the 2016 edition featured exclusively Senegalese companies due to a decreased budget. That year, Diagne took advantage of the opportunity to promote more young Senegalese artists while consolidating the burgeoning local arts scene as a concrete way to dissuade artists from fleeing Senegal for Europe and the United States (A. Diagne 2016).

Yet even the 2016 edition did not escape international influence and interest. All performances took place at the French Institute of Saint-Louis. The festival was primarily supported by the French Institute, the French, Spanish, and Dutch Embassies in Dakar, and audiences included both locals and foreigners, such as me. Dancers from Dakar and those from various African countries studying at École des Sables joined Saint-Louis locals for the festival, as did expats from Europe and the United States. Not only did audiences congregate at performances, but performers and several audience members lodged in cabins on a cruise ship. There, they shared meals prepared by local

volunteers, socialized late into the night at the ship's bar, and participated in afternoon discussions over tea about the previous night's performances, facilitated by local art critics. The festival successfully brings disparate communities together, a component that Diagne takes pride in. At the same time, he is embarrassed by the lack of local financial support for the festival. Following nine years requesting state support, the 2016 edition was the first time that the Senegalese Cultural Ministry contributed, with a mere seven hundred euros.

Approximately four hours south of Saint-Louis, in the capital city of Dakar, dancers from across the African continent congregate for six weeks each year to create new works under the guidance of Andréya Ouamba and an invited international choreographer. Ouamba, who relocated to Dakar from his native Congo Brazzaville during the civil war there in 1999, is an established choreographer and the director of Compagnie 1er Temps. He established Ateliers Expérience et Corps, or AEx-Corps, in 2008 to provide intensive contemporary dance training for local and foreign dancers, partially in response to his own difficulties finding dancers for his choreography due to their tendency to stay abroad following international tours. Eventually, he realized that the dearth of choreographers in Senegal was an issue of greater import than the dancers' lack of training. He explains, "People must invent. And for those who invent, we must accompany them. We must drive them" (Ouamba 2016). Since 2012, AEx-Corps has functioned as a creative residency workshop. For the first three weeks, Ouamba guides the artists in their creative processes and facilitates showings and group discussions. For the second three weeks, an invited choreographer, usually from the United States, teaches morning workshops and attends the dancers' rehearsals in the afternoons to offer individualized feedback. From early on in the 2016 edition, Ouamba emphasized what he considers the crux of contemporary dance: its capacity for difference, to imagine alternatives, to relay a message or theme in an unfamiliar way. Or, as he states, "*danser autrement*": to dance otherwise, defines contemporary dance.

AEx-Corps mirrors Festival Duo-Solo Danse and other sites of contemporary dance on the continent in which different subject positions come together along asymmetrical power relations. Not only do young choreographers from disparate African countries work together with Ouamba and an international choreographer, but the workshop is supported by non-African organizations. Primarily funded by the French Institute of Dakar, AEx-Corps has also received significant contributions from the French Institute of Paris, the Spanish and U.S. Embassies in Senegal, and U.S.-based organizations, including New York Live Arts and the Africa Contemporary Arts Consortium. The latter organizations typically cover the costs for an invited choreographer from the United States to travel to Dakar and teach for three weeks. In 2016, Reggie Wilson, a longtime collaborator and friend of Ouamba's, returned to teach at AEx-Corps for the second time. He offered technique classes centered around his own blending of postmodern and African diasporic techniques followed by composition courses that focused on basic choreographic tools, including the use of space, movement, and time. He described his objective as facilitating the choreographers to "make the work that they want to make because it's the work that they want to do, not because it'll sell to a foreign audience" (Wilson 2016). The dancers included four Senegalese and one each from Côte d'Ivoire, Congo Brazzaville, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. While each of their works merits critical attention, I focus specifically on two works by Senegalese men that center on themes of Senegalese masculinity.

These entanglements, as people and resources from various geographic, socioeconomic, cultural, generational, racial, gendered, and sexual positions come together, are the very structures through which contemporary dance in Africa emerged and thrives, albeit not without complication. I expand on perspectives taken up by Nadine Sieveking and Hélène Neveu Kringelbach who deliberately forefront the artists themselves without mitigating the immense power of Europe in their writing on contemporary dance in West Africa. Throughout her monograph on dance in Dakar, Kringelbach highlights Senegalese citizens' conscious "appropriating and creatively refashioning globalized practices" (Kringelbach 2013, 2). In her writing on contemporary dance in Burkina

Faso, Sieveking attests to African artists' self-reflexivity and critical perspectives that inform their choreography, perspectives that find a home in the globalized artistic circuit, whereas at home they might be censored (Sieveking 2013). My use of entanglement as an analytical framework is indebted to Sarah Nuttall, who conceptualizes entanglement as intersections of identities, spaces, and histories typically thought of as separate, as well as sets of social relationships that are "complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also impl[y] a human foldedness" (Nuttall 2009, 1). Entanglement also recalls Achille Mbembe's use of the term in his theorization of the postcolony. For Mbembe, entanglement describes the age of the postcolony "made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another" (Mbembe 2001, 14). Following Nuttall and Mbembe, I use entanglement not only to capture the interrelatedness of local and global entities but also the palimpsestic nature of contemporary dance, informed by multiple, overlapping dance lineages across time and space. I posit this entanglement as a precondition for the construction of ambiguous masculinities that contain the capacity for erotic transgressions. As the following portraits demonstrate, contemporary choreographers in Senegal are situated at the interstices of these interlocking social realities that make (un)available oftentimes contradictory sets of choreographic choices and discourses within which to frame their work.

Hardo Kâ's *Dieu, le diable et moi* (God, the devil and me)

Hardo Kâ is a choreographer based in Diamniadio, an expanding city on the outskirts of Dakar's suburbs, where he codirects the company Yeel Art with his wife Gnagna Gueye. In addition to creating his own body of internationally touring work, he has danced in works by Heddy Maalem (France/Algeria), Olivier Dubois (France), and others. Following his role in Dubois's *Souls* (2013), Dubois invited Kâ to an artistic residency at Ballet du Nord in Roubaix, France, where he continued work on his solo, *Dieu, le diable et moi* (God, the devil and me). Kâ premiered an early version of the piece at Festival Duo-Solo Danse in June 2016, prior to his residency in Roubaix.

Kâ captivated local and international audiences on the first night of the festival with his commanding movement vocabulary combined with sexually explicit gestures and an effeminate costume. Holding a green light beneath his chin on an otherwise dark stage, Kâ begins by preaching to the audience in the Wolof language. Inspired by an old man he witnessed preaching on the streets of Dakar, Kâ uses hyperbolic language to describe the exquisite nature of God and heaven. The light flicks off and his speech ends as abruptly as it began. Stage lights just barely illuminate Kâ as he turns his back to the audience and faces unevenly hung mirrors on the rear curtain. Wearing only a beige fur coat and black underwear, he watches himself in the mirrors, which not only fragment the audience's viewing of his front side, but also invoke layers of signification: Kâ explains that mirrors are a symbol of the devil according to Islamic thought, and he is equally intrigued by the vanity of looking at one's reflection (Kâ 2018). He repetitively contracts and expands his torso, curving his upper back and folding his arms toward his chest. Inspired by the ubiquitous gesture of bowing in submission that characterizes various rituals of worship, this rocking motion sets the movement foundation for the piece. His feet and ankles maintain a released quality as one arm reaches outward again and again, pulling his body off balance. A pulsing beat underlying an electronic music track, composed by Moroccan artist Youness Aboulakoul and inspired by Moroccan Gnawa music, heightens the tense atmosphere, propelling his movement to accelerate and expand. Gradually, his gestures develop into more full-bodied folds and extensions, arching and circling his torso, displacing and shifting his weight, rotating his legs percussively in a manner that recalls the local *sabar* dance. Audience members groaned audibly in admiration as his dancing appeared increasingly risky and as he maintained incredible control over his moving body and expertly maneuvered his heavy fur coat.

Eventually, Kâ turns to face the audience. The music dissolves into a sustained tone layered on top of a recording of an Arabic-language religious text. Breathing heavily, Kâ licks his lips and bends his



Photo 1. *Hardo Kâ, Dieu, le diable et moi*. Photo courtesy of Antoine Tempé.

knees deeply. He gazes seductively at the audience as he plays with his jacket, an adornment equally or more conventionally feminine than Wally Seck's handbag, slipping it on and off. He undulates his bare body, gyrates and circles his pelvis, and wiggles his fingers over his chest, torso, and groin. The lighting, reflecting his sweat, accentuates his toned musculature, revealing the physical labor undertaken to achieve his athletic physique. He appears to objectify himself by embodying the long-standing trope of topless, titillating black African dancing men, a commodity produced through the bodily labor that he highlights. As he repeatedly covers and reveals his body, he seems to allude to the tension between closeting and exposing. In continuity with the previous section in which his back was to the audience, covering his expressive front side yet revealing it in a disjointed manner through the use of mirrors, a dialectic of covering and revealing, hiding and exposing, plays out over the course of his solo.

I left this absorbing performance completely enthralled, delighted at what I interpreted to be putting pressure on enforced closeting in Senegal. I had known Kâ for several years, and this solo seemed to be a departure from his conservative and religious values that he'd made known in conversations during previous choreography workshops, particularly around the topic of nudity onstage. The next morning, I joined Kâ, who was already surrounded by several other festival participants and audience members pressing him with questions about his piece over breakfast on the ship. My enthusiasm turned to bewilderment as I listened to him matter-of-factly explain that everyone has a good and bad side, that we all have internal urges to behave in immoral ways, and that we must consistently do our best to resist such temptations. He spoke of a feminine side within himself that he must resist; more specifically, he explained how he portrayed femininity and homosexuality in the solo to denounce this allegedly universal urge to behave in contrast to "nature." He described a Manichean world of good and bad, moral and immoral, or, as the title of his solo states, of God and the devil.

When I finally had the opportunity to interview Kâ two years after the premiere, it quickly became apparent that his ideas for the piece were far more complex than he let on to this group of festival attendees. Sitting under a tree on the mosaic patio behind his house where he rehearses daily, he explained that *Dieu, le diable et moi* is part of a diptych, following *Dieu et moi*. He decided to create

another piece that not only portrays his relationship with God but includes the duality of God and the devil because “the devil is also a part of me and I feel his strength inside me” (Kâ 2018). He described this ever-present “devil” as temptation, as negative energy, as the side of himself that he does not present publicly but feels strongly when alone. He links the devil inside to his feminine side:

You are a man, but inside of you there is a woman. You are a woman, inside there is a man. But you, you don’t want this, you ignore it, and you only show the feminine part, or if you are a man you only show the [masculine] part. . . . It’s not true. You have both. And me in *Dieu, le diable et moi*, I wanted to make the audience feel that this person is a man but also a woman. It’s God but also it’s the devil. (Kâ 2018)

By linking his feminine side with the devil, he, to some extent, aligns his perspective with the prerogative of the state. However, rather than merely disavowing his feminine/devil side as he did at the festival, he explained that by *not* showing this publicly, he is not being true to himself. The expectation that people perform binary gender as it coincides with biological sex inevitably requires repressing another side or sides of oneself, and this has emotional repercussions, Kâ explained. Kâ often takes inspiration from what he sees on the streets of Dakar, particularly “*le fou*,” or the crazy. He finds an admirable honesty in dispossessed individuals who do not abide by gendered norms in terms of clothing nor behavior, thereby providing a counterpoint to the otherwise strict adherence to gendered norms in Senegalese society. Kâ references *le fou* in *Dieu, le diable et moi* through his opening sermon, based on someone he heard preaching on the street, and by wearing a feminine fur coat. Broadly, Kâ’s statements reveal a tension between his desire to show all of himself publicly and the need to cohere to societal expectations. This tension is depicted onstage through fragmented mirrors, a costume that alternately covers and reveals, and his play with lighting versus darkness. Kâ takes advantage of the greater freedoms afforded artists, while his offstage, public utterances at the festival necessarily abide by the rules that govern public life in present-day Senegal.

Mamadou Dieng and Thierno Diédhiou’s *Laabu Bal* (Natural Spring)

In 2014, Mamadou Dieng and Thierno Diédhiou, two dancers in their midtwenties from the suburbs of Dakar, found themselves paired in a provocative duet in German choreographer Helge Letonja’s *BOXOM*. This was their first time performing in a major international contemporary dance work, following years of performing with local neo-traditional and hip-hop groups respectively and having trained in various forms at École des Sables. Choreographed within the framework of Letonja’s Bremen-based Steptext Dance Project, *BOXOM* brought West African and European dancers together and was constructed during residencies at École des Sables and in Bremen.¹⁰ The creative process sparked the dancers’ interest in creating a new duet. Dieng and Diédhiou set out to question a concept of purity (*abé* in Wolof) as it is conceived and highly valued in Senegalese culture, inflected by Muslim doctrine. *Laabu Bal*, the title of their work, is a Wolof phrase meaning a natural spring. For those proficient in Wolof, the title elicits images of water and its natural purification properties. The image is especially resonant within the Muslim context of Dakar, where the practice of absolution, or purifying oneself with water, is highly visible. Their creative process involved recorded conversations with (male) friends about their perspectives on purity, particularly an idea of mental rather than material purity. For instance, purity of mind signifies auto-referentiality and a lack of judgment of others, a standard, they explain, that is difficult, even impossible, to maintain.

In spite of their in-depth research process, the artists struggled to clearly articulate their perspective on (im)purity during discussions throughout the six-week workshop. They claimed that Senegalese standards of purity are impossible to maintain but also asserted that their piece denounces impure thinking. While they never mentioned sexuality, it is fair to infer that the Muslim Senegalese notion

of purity they interrogated also signifies heterosexuality and gender conformity. In her work on Senegalese wrestling and masculinity, Irene Peano offers a definition and analysis of purity as it relates to ideas of masculinity. Wrestling, or *lutte avec frappe*, is an immensely popular sport in Senegal as well as a “privileged site through which maleness is expressed and staged” (Peano 2007, 38). Good wrestlers are imagined through discourses of masculine purity, referring to control over the abstinent male body without disruption from outside the body or nation. Peano writes that this idea of purity is not fully actualized in the wrestling arena, but rather exists alongside and through contaminations and blurrings. Auto-referentiality is disrupted in wrestling though “active incorporations of the ‘outside,’” including engagement with Euro-American models (for example, famous wrestlers have taken nicknames including *Tyson* and *Mohammed Ali*). Further, wrestling matches rely on women to show their appreciation by adorning wrestlers with loincloths, as well as on female griots to recite their names and genealogies during matches (Peano 2007, 42). Peano’s analysis of Senegalese masculine purity is useful in my discussion of *Laabu Bal*, as both wrestling and this contemporary dance piece are performative duets between male bodies, centered on physical contact. Both deny or omit the possibility of homoeroticism from their performances, though the prevalence of physical contact instantiates speculation of homoerotic intimacy. Just as Peano identifies the paradoxes and incongruities through which masculine purity is imagined versus its embodiment in the wrestling arena, the statements the dancers made during their creative process are somewhat incongruous with the resulting performance.

The dancers generated movement for *Laabu Bal* around the idea of “trying to be pure, to get rid of what is bad in you,” as they explained during a showing early in the workshop. This resulted in physical agitation that diminishes as they come into contact and take care of one another. The dancers begin on opposite corners of the stage, facing away from each other, seemingly possessed by a relentless urge to move as the lights come up. A sudden forward thrust of Dieng’s pelvis pulls him off-center as his back arches and he falls to his knees, his arms dangling. Meanwhile, Diédhiou twitches, shrugs, and wiggles without pause. In individual movement styles, their bodies repeatedly propel into unstoppable motion until they eventually come together. A moment of quiet abruptly interrupts their constant movement: Dieng lies prone on the floor and Diédhiou lies on top of him, straddling his pelvis, his torso covering Dieng’s. The tense atmosphere that accumulated for the first ten minutes of the work collapses in a collective sigh of relief as they momentarily lie still. After a few breaths, Diédhiou slowly rises to standing, takes hold of Dieng’s hips and pulls him up to stand in front of him, their pelvises touching. Diédhiou’s hands linger around Dieng’s hips as they stand in stillness for a few breaths. This moment, and several others in which the dancers carry one another or lean against each other, fully supporting the other’s weight, are performed with immense care and connection. The final image contrasts with the opening of the piece, as the dancers stand shoulder to shoulder, peacefully gazing outward toward the audience. Distance and agitation give way to proximity and calm through what registers as an intimate connection between the two male bodies.

Just as purity in the wrestling arena is “contaminated” by the men’s reliance on women and Euro-American models, Dieng and Diédhiou’s staging of purity is “contaminated” by the work’s portrayal of homoerotic intimacy, tied to Euro-American dance forms and a postmodern ethos. This contradiction between stated intention and outcome, though less obvious than that of *Kâ*, is the result of multilayered blurrings of cultures, forms, and ideologies. Their choreography stems from their participation in Letonja’s *BOXOM* in which they perform a lustful, overtly sexual duet that centers movement principles from contact improvisation.¹¹ In *Laabu Bal*, the dancers drew directly from this movement vocabulary, conveying intimate same-sex care as an antidote to distress. In order for Dieng and Diédhiou to implicitly claim that *Laabu Bal* is not homoerotic, they adhere to a logic that underlies the practice of contact improvisation and the broader postmodern ethos out of which it emerged, which emphasizes the body as a vessel for movement divorced from social meaning. Contact improvisation takes up an egalitarian principal of supposedly “ungendered” bodies whose movements are inspired by purely physical impulses such as momentum,



Photo 2. Mamadou Dieng and Thierno Diédhiou in Laabu Bal. Photo courtesy of Élise Fitte-Duval.

breath, and weight. Cynthia Novack posits that the idea in contact improvisation of the body as not gendered “enables the perception of interaction as not sexual” (Novack 1990, 163). Foster builds on this to assert that contact improvisation’s purported democracy of body parts, all of which function primarily as momentum-creating surfaces, discourages engagement with the logics of sexual desire (Foster 2001, 182). Dieng and Diédhiou reiterate the underlying ideology of contact improvisation by omitting sexuality from discussions throughout their rehearsal process and denying its presence when others bring it up. Mobilizing a dance form stemming from 1970s United States ironically allows them to disavow representations of homosexuality, while anti-homosexual discourse in Senegal largely rests on the claim that homosexuality is an imported practice from the West. A process of selective borrowing and conditional acceptability emerges in which Western dance forms and choreographers, with their varied gender and sexual identities, are accepted and drawn upon, but as soon as the Senegalese choreographers claim authorship, these assimilated forms can only be discussed in ungendered, asexualized terms. Regardless of their neglect of sexual desire in their verbal statements, the intimate physical contact in *Laabu Bal* is easily perceived as sexual. They offer assemblages of soft, caring masculinities that depart drastically from ubiquitous representations of heteronormative masculinity in the public domain. While they are careful not to make their heterosexuality and conventional masculinity suspect in verbal statements about their work, their performance renders homoerotic encounter part and parcel of “pure” masculinity.

Recuperating *le sac-à-main* in Bamba Diagne’s *Gualankor* (Difficulty)

Four months following the release of the photo of Wally Seck with his “feminine” handbag, Bamba Diagne visualized an alternative outcome to *l’affaire sac-à-main*. Frustrated by the unchanging, restrictive homophobic rhetoric that the case resurfaced, Diagne recuperated the destroyed handbag in his solo, *Gualankor*, the Wolof word for “difficulty.” His second attempt at choreography, *Gualankor* followed his duet, *La Contrainte* (*The Constraint*), also commissioned by AEx-Corps in 2014. *Gualankor* picks up Diagne’s interrogations from two years prior into the constrictive nature of the predominant moral ideology in Senegal. Whereas *La Contrainte* was broad in its conceptual inquiry but pointed in its transgressive representations, featuring men in women’s clothing

and exaggerated phalluses, *Gualankor* remained vague throughout the process and performance. Early in the workshop, Diagne spoke of his desire to question experiences related to cultural taboos, sexuality, and freedom in Senegal. Yet, he had difficulty articulating more specifically what aspect(s) of lived experience and cultural taboos he desired to question, as well as his own perspective. Throughout the workshop, Wilson and Ouamba pushed him to be more specific, as his inability to articulate exactly what he was denouncing and why led his choreography to be just as vague.

His ambiguity, both vocally and choreographically, reveals the limitations of working within the very intolerant ideologies that he aims to critique in his work. It indexes the caution that artists necessarily employ in framing their work, more so than it indicates his lack of conceptual clarity. Just as Ayo A. Coly, following Obioma Nnaemeka, recognizes the “nervous conditions” of African female authors who are cognizant of the powerful gaze of male critics, often resulting in the use of ambiguity in their novels and their framing of them, choreographers, too, use ambiguity as a survival strategy (Coly 2010, 55). It wasn’t until I conducted an interview with him that Diagne spoke in explicit terms of his perspective:

I told myself through my piece I will try to question [the handbag case]. Because we say the bag he was wearing was for women and he was advocating homosexuality. You see? Real homosexuals are inside their houses. Every neighborhood has homosexuals and no one says anything. They are hidden, and Wally could have said *voilà*. This hypocrisy... People know that really every neighborhood has homosexuals. [The piece is] just to question why we don’t say anything yet create all this noise over Wally. (B. Diagne 2016)

For Diagne, the Wally Seck incident is one of several instances of public figures bearing the burden of moral scapegoating. He describes a discrepancy between a silent tolerance of homosexuality at the level of the neighborhood in contradiction to widespread outcry when a transgression is carried out by a celebrity. Like Kâ and others I spoke with during my field work, Diagne spoke with nostalgia about the central role of *goor-jigeens* at baptisms, marriages, and other events in his childhood, roles that are no longer possible. He discussed his frustration with the current conservative social landscape that enforces closeting and allows for one of two options: silent tolerance or public bashing. Diagne also hints at the unrealized potentiality for a public figure like Seck to affirm the identities of closeted homosexuals. He spoke of the possibility for homosexuals to stop hiding themselves because of Seck’s gesture toward them, a possibility foreclosed by Seck’s destruction of the bag. *Gualankor* imagines this possibility had it come to fruition.

Diagne begins quietly, with a tenderness rarely seen on Senegalese male dancers. Dressed in loose linen clothing, he timidly steps onto the upper left corner of the stage, his gaze down. He unhurriedly saunters back and forth across the upper left quadrant of the stage before eventually looking up as if realizing for the first time that others are watching. Without urgency, his movement gradually becomes increasingly dynamic as he ripples through his torso and arms and folds his joints to create angles in his body. As his focus shifts from internal to external, his movement accelerates, and he adorns his body one by one with five handbags that lay toward the rear of the stage. By the time all five bags are slung across his shoulders, his focus is directed outward and his movement is expansive and dynamic. He emits a sense of pleasure that contrasts his timidity in the opening section. Diagne subtly imagines an alternative possibility to the publicly dramatized Seck case: whereas Seck destroyed the bag to reaffirm his heterosexuality, enabling him to recuperate his respectable national identity and Muslim faith, Diagne multiplies the bag and ties it to notions of pleasure and freedom imagined through the male body.



Photo 3. Bamba Diagne in Gualankor. Photo courtesy of Élise Fitte-Duval.

Contemporary Dance, Masculinity, and Effeminacy

Contemporary dance in Senegal follows multiple genealogies of dance practices, both local and global, and the shifting terms of gender and sexuality that these have entailed. Although present-day global contemporary dance tends to elucidate various sexual identities and desires, early modern dance in the United States strategically presented itself as a “chaste dancing” (Foster 2001, 150), while postmodern dance centered physical movement mechanics of purportedly ungendered bodies. Early men in modern dance in the United States, including Ted Shawn, José Limón, and Lester Horton, carefully choreographed works that displayed virile masculinity as a mechanism to legitimize male dancers and dispel the association between dancing men and effeminacy. At a time of severe anti-homosexual policy and rhetoric, they subliminally alluded to ideal male homosexuality for audience members positioned to understand this undercurrent, particularly other gay men (Foulkes 2002, 80). In a similar vein, early contemporary dance companies in Senegal, most prominently Jant-bi, the resident company of École des Sables established in 1998, showcased hypermasculinity in works for all-male casts. Although proving the legitimacy of men in dance was not as

urgent in turn-of-the-twenty-first-century Senegal as it was in 1930s United States, powerful male bodies similarly catalyzed the legitimization of the new and contested experimental concert dance form. Just as Julia Foulkes, Susan Foster, and others illustrate the undercurrent of homosexual desire in works by Ted Shawn and his Men Dancers, it may be argued that early Jant-bi works offered glimpses of homosexual meaning underneath their foregrounding of heterosexual masculine prowess.

The artists I discuss in this article are entangled in these variously situated temporal, geographic, and sociocultural contexts. They take part in a global art form that values critical interrogation of gender and sexuality, yet live and work in a society in which gender and sexual expression has become increasingly constrained. Following the model set by Jant-bi and other early contemporary dance companies in Senegal, they to some extent must adhere to normative masculine performatives in order to continue claiming legitimacy for the marginalized art form, yet have increased freedom to push these conventions. At the same time, the artists are not entirely circumscribed by the various expectations that land on their bodies. They exhibit significant agency in the creation of performances that investigate issues of personal interest and concern, all of which coalesce around what they perceive as the dishonesty, impossibility, and hypocrisy associated with sexual policing of Senegalese male bodies. These works take part in a longstanding pattern of seemingly contradictory representations of sexuality and masculinity, as concert dance interfaces with its immediate sociocultural context as well as with variously positioned audience members. To some extent, they signal a reversal of the representations of male dancing bodies that Ted Shawn, Jant-bi, and others performed: whereas their precedents consolidated the male dancing body through the elimination of effeminacy in favor of virile masculinity, the artists I discuss here enact effeminacy and homoeroticism even as they disavow or ignore sexual minoritarian subject positions in their public utterances. The concert dance stage, with its claim to “high art,” enables these transgressions to register as viable, in continuity with the choreographic proficiency and esteem ascribed to artists selected to perform at these venues. Although I do not wish to perpetuate the division between “high” and “low” art, there was certainly a collective sense of respect toward performers at both venues, which contrasts with public dance practices in which dancers’ social status is often suspect. For instance, Anthony Shay describes the role of the scandalous, effeminate, and sexually ambiguous dance performances by public male entertainers across the Islamic world as respectable masculinity’s other. Male public performers from ancient Greece and Rome to present-day Afghanistan and Egypt have endured low social status as well as the stigma of effeminacy, which congealed to produce “the marginalized low-Other against which polite society and proper masculinity are measured and evaluated” (Shay 2014, 7). Whereas public male performers’ effeminacy operated as proper masculinity’s other, and whereas early men in modern dance further parsed out proper masculinity and effeminacy as oppositional even as they created a haven for homosexuality, contemporary male choreographers in Senegal gesture toward a broader understanding of what constitutes viable masculinity to include effeminacy and homoeroticism.

The works examined in this article alongside the current sexual policing in Senegal illustrate the coexistence of multiple masculinities and a paradigm of heteronormativity, of nonnormative gender compartments and claims to Senegaleseness and Muslim faith. In her essay “Ousmane Sembene’s Hall of Men: (En)Gendering Everyday Heroism,” Karen Lindo draws attention to the multiplicity of masculinities in the prolific Senegalese cinematographer’s later films. Lindo shows how *Faat Kiné* (2000) and *Moolade* (2004) disrupt the “false solidarity and unidimensional representation of a purported singular African masculinity” (Lindo 2010, 112). In her analysis, it becomes apparent that the overarching framework of patriarchy discourages sightings of masculinities outside of a longstanding “singular African masculinity” (Lindo 2010, 112). Yet, patriarchy and masculinity must be distinguished, as the former implies atemporal and normalized male domination, and the latter, “behavioral patterns that are local and fluctuate over time” (Lindo 2010, 112). Just as Sembene’s films show that patriarchy and novel articulations of masculinities coexist, the artists’ choreography and their public verbal framing of it show how a paradigm of heteronormativity and multiple

embodiments of masculinities coexist. The regulatory heteronormative moral structure of contemporary Senegal, as well as the cultural forgetting of indigenous gender and sexual positionalities it requires, is maintained through their words but disrupted by their performances. As in Sembene's films, the artists demonstrate that plurality and heterogeneity are intrinsic to gender and sexual expression in Senegal. These works, which too easily could be considered as merely conforming to the transgressive nature of Euro-American contemporary dance, recuperate previous eras when gender and sexual fluidity were widely accepted in Senegal. As noted above, Kâ and Diagne have memories of the visibility and specialized roles ascribed to *goor-jigeens*, of which they speak fondly. Their performances offer insights into knowledge other than what is readily available in present-day Senegal, other than the current reality of sexual policing. They offer otherwise possibilities.

Performing Otherwise Possibilities

Contemporary choreographers in Senegal and elsewhere debate the definition of contemporary dance as well as the value of attempting to define it. This debate resonates with SanSan Kwan's meditation on the multiple references invoked by "contemporary dance" across and within various contexts. Issues arise as artists and others reckon with the aesthetic markers of what constitutes "contemporary dance" in concert and popular dance settings and the term's temporal signification (Kwan 2017). Without firmly landing on any shared definition, choreographers in Senegal broadly describe contemporary dance as *danser autrement* or dancing otherwise. "Otherwise" indexes the form's embrace of the unfamiliar and its resistance to fixed forms, structures, and linear narratives. "Otherwise" describes the intention behind long hours of improvisational exercises in the dance studio that seek to uncover existing yet dormant possibilities through the moving body. Dancing otherwise ruptures the known, thereby disrupting forces of power and normativity. In the words of Ashon T. Crawley, "otherwise is a word that names plurality as its core operation, otherwise bespeaks the ongoingness of possibility, of things existing other than what is given, what is known, what is grasped" (Crawley 2017, 24). Taking "Blackpentecostalism" as his subject of inquiry, Crawley posits detection of "possibility otherwise" as a means to disrupt current configurations of power and inequity. In a similar vein, Clare Croft states, "as we explore the world and our bodies' potential through dancing, we can bump against and refuse the limitations embedded in the spaces in which we learn to move... We can trust what dancing itself teaches: that cultivating the capacity to imagine otherwise is at the heart of any queer project" (Croft 2017, 26).

Contemporary choreographers in Senegal and elsewhere dance otherwise in performances that go against the grain, that, to quote Croft again, "play with the edges of visibility and legibility" (Croft 2017, 9). Whereas the purpose of Wally Seck's destruction of the bag was unmistakable, my (mis) interpretation of *Dieu, le diable et moi* and my sightings of homosexuality and effeminacy in *Laabu Bal* and *Gualankor* indicate the potentiality of contemporary dance to transcend singular meaning-making capacity. Drawing on Susan Manning's conceptualization of cross-viewing, or the possibility for spectators to alter their perspectives of moving bodies through glimpses of social positions different from their own, the potentiality of the ambiguous masculinities performed on contemporary dance stages can be better understood (Manning 2004, xvi). Manning conceptualizes cross-viewing in the context of twentieth-century modern dance in the United States, as concert dance performances provided spaces where perceptions of racialized and sexual bodies were constructed and reconstructed by newly diverse audiences in tandem with social changes outside the theater. While contemporary Senegal encompasses a drastically different social environment than twentieth-century United States, the entangled spaces of Festival Duo-Solo Danse and AEx-Corps enable multiple vantage points to rub up against each other and produce alternative viewpoints. The diverse audiences made up of wide-ranging national, generational, racial, and gender positions render these performances cultural arenas in which "spectators negotiate their simultaneous habitation of multiple and overlapping social formations" (Manning 2001, 405). The layers of possible

meaning combined with the multiplicity of social identities in the audience instantiates a cultural space in which otherwise perspectives, including those unspeakable in and outside the theater, are within reach.

Kâ, Dieng, Diédhiou, and Diagne describe being drawn to contemporary dance because of the freedom and openness of the form. Diagne considers the contemporary dance stage a liminal space existing within, yet apart from, the public sphere where the photo of Wally Seck circulated. “It’s more than freedom,” he says of contemporary dance.

It is contemporary dance that manages to express things, a lot of things. Through dance, through your body, you can express many, many, many things... I can even wear earrings, I can, you see. It’s art. I have the right, have the freedom to express myself. For me, it’s through art that I express myself. I’m a little shy, you see. (B. Diagne 2018)

Diagne is adamant about the possibilities and freedoms that contemporary dance, the body, and art broadly allow for. He finds full expression onstage, where he considers gender transgressions acceptable in contrast to his self-described timidity off the stage, where performativity of the self is highly regulated. Likewise, Dieng describes contemporary dance as a form through which he expresses himself better than he is capable of with words, particularly in the non-native languages he is expected to speak as a transnationally circulating artist. He states, “I don’t know how to speak. I get by with French, I manage a little English, but when I dance, you will understand me better. I can speak many languages through the body that I cannot speak through the mouth” (Dieng 2016). Dieng’s moving body, cultivated through years of intensive *sabar*, neo-traditional, and contemporary dance training, affords wide-ranging expression when words fail him.

Kâ considers it the responsibility of artists broadly to provoke discussion and the exchange of ideas, and contemporary dance a particularly privileged arena in which to do so. When I told Kâ, with some reservation, that I had interpreted the piece as valorizing sexual and gender minorities, particularly the act of cross-dressing, he was elated. He laughed. This was not his intention, but he never intended for everyone to arrive at the same meaning. He said:

A performance must have multiple meanings . . . and ideas. Afterwards, it [creates] discussion! When it [creates] discussion, there is something you keep. We must create discussions. ‘It’s homosexual, it’s not homosexual,’ people say yeah, it’s good, it’s not good, we discuss! We exchange! After you leave with something in your head. [It’s] Open. (Kâ 2018)

Kâ, and others, use the freedom of the contemporary dance stage to express, to make audiences feel, what is too dangerous to say aloud. He believes that artists carry the unique responsibility of expressing what cannot be stated unequivocally, of going against the grain rather than upholding the status quo, and of provoking discussions that extend beyond the artistic event itself.

Dieu, le diable et moi, *Laabu Bal*, and *Gualankor* participate in a global constellation of expressive cultural works by black artists that imagine otherwise possibilities from the violent realities of black life, intersecting with heteropatriarchy and increasing religious conservatism. The contemporary dance stage serves as a platform for self-expression disallowed from everyday life. Within the time-space of a performance, artists make alternative corporealities momentarily permissible. They instantiate an exception to the rules that govern public space in Senegal. Their performances congeal images of Muslim African men with queerness, subjectivities widely considered to be in polar opposition.¹² By witnessing these momentary enactments of nonnormative corporeality, spectators have the opportunity to alter their perceptions of what makes a body masculine and another

feminine, one normal and another queer, and how these perceptions intersect with assumptions about race and religion (Manning 2004, xvii).

Conclusion

As intertexts alongside other performances at these venues, the three performances examined in this article disrupt the coherency of the response to Wally Seck and his handbag four months earlier. Besides affording diverse audiences the possibility to witness assemblages that diverge from the only speakable option in the public sphere of contemporary Senegal, they also unsettle representations of black African masculinity that circulate globally and that rely on ideas of Africa as always already severely homophobic and patriarchal (Coly 2013; Otu 2017). The choreographers' ambiguity recalls Édouard Glissant's theorization of opacity in distinction from transparency. Whereas transparency undergirds processes of understanding people and ideas in Western thought, opacity, or that which cannot be reduced, offers a paradigm of relation outside of duality (Glissant 2003, 189–94). Glissant urges us to “agree to the right to opacity” rather than attempt to fix others into existing frameworks that inevitably lead to reduction, duality, and hierarchy (Glissant 2003, 190). Contemporary choreographers in Senegal deploy opacity, ambiguity, or resistance to transparency as they negotiate their positionality where disparate expectations, ideologies, and values meet in asymmetrical relations. They creatively employ disidentificatory tactics to do the work they want to do and secure performance opportunities without reaffirming the heteronormative logic of the state nor reiterating longstanding stereotypes of their racialized and gendered bodies.

At the same time, their tactics—their careful management of their bodies on stage and their words in public forums—might offer insights into the ways in which sexual minoritarian subjects survive in hostile environments. Can ambiguity operate as a survival strategy off the stage? Might the ways in which these artists play with the boundaries of legibility mirror quotidian acts of staving off encroaching social death? Or, is it only from my privileged position as a white cisgender spectator and researcher that I can fathom such a connection? Is it only within the contained realm of the transnational contemporary dance stage that such critical perspectives are allowed expression at all?

Notes

1. For Seck and the Senegalese public that responded to the photo, it is unclear to what extent the concept of “homosexuality” refers to sexual object choice and to what extent it refers to effeminate performatives. Throughout this article, I use the term “homosexuality” as my Senegalese interlocutors invoked it and suggest that the term does not clearly distinguish between sexual object choice and quotidian performatives of nonnormative gender comportment.

2. Translated from the French language by the author. All interviews drawn upon in this article were conducted in the French language and translated to English by the author.

3. Following theories in performance and gender studies, I use the term “masculinity” throughout this article to denote a repertoire of reiterated behaviors, gestures, dress, ways of speaking, and other bodily codes that collectively elicit conceptions of “man” or “manliness” for a specific public. These idioms are not stable but fluctuate over time and across cultures, and may be performed by all bodies, regardless of biological sex or gender identity.

4. A boubou is a long, loose-fitting garment typically worn by men in West Africa during Muslim services and holidays.

5. I use the concept of “assemblages” as Jasbir K. Puar conceptualizes it in *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007). Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Puar posits assemblages as a move away from intersectionality and identity politics. Assemblages are collections of multiplicities, affective conglomerations, or interwoven forces that merge and dissipate over time, space, and bodies. Whereas intersectional identities are premised upon stable and separable identities, assemblages

encapsulate the constant movement that precedes positioning. I find “assemblage” to be a useful concept in considering the novel and fleeting enactments of unconventional masculinities with their affective resonances staged by the choreographers examined in this article (Puar 2007, 211–14).

6. Following research in 2016 and 2018, I consulted with each of the four artists whom I focus on in this article just prior to final submission of the manuscript in 2019, and they confirmed their consent that I publish this work. Due to the sensitive nature of the topics discussed here, it was important to me that they not only consented to our interviews a few years back, but that they understand how I analyze and represent their work here.

7. This study was submitted for review with the International Review Board at Northwestern University and was deemed “Not Human Research.” Research for this article was supported by a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad fellowship as well as by Northwestern University.

8. Joseph Massad conceptualizes the “gay international” as the universalization of gay rights and the discourses that produce this work by organizations, including the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) (Massad 2002).

9. *Ndoep* ceremonies are therapeutic events that utilize the force of a group, communication with spirits, and animal sacrifice to cure individuals suffering from mental illness (*folie*) (Seck and Sarr 1997, 269).

10. Dancers were from Germany, Senegal, Togo, Cameroun, Israel, Ivory Coast, and Zimbabwe/Britain.

11. Based on my viewing of a video recording of the piece that the dancers shared with me.

12. Jasbir K. Puar writes about the purported irreconcilability between queerness and Islam based on media representations of Muslims following September 11 (Puar 2007).

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