**Chapter 8**

**Cultural Festivals in Senegal:**

**Archives of Tradition, Mediations of Modernity**

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Cultural festivals in Senegal draw upon a wide variety of cultural traditions that are staged for an array of local, national and international audiences.[[1]](#footnote-1) Staging masquerades from sacred forests, dances from initiation rites, the skills of sheep-herding, the acrobatics of *capoeira*, and gigs by world music stars, cultural festivals are said to promote peace, development, and cultural *métissage*. The range of rationales proffered for these festivals is as wide-ranging as that of the cultural performances staged at them. Presented as a panacea against the ills of modernity, culture is framed as both source and resource in its staging in such festivals which function as mediations of modernity. Whilst many disciplines recognize the polyvalence of the term ‘culture’, it should be acknowledged that the colonial and postcolonial trajectories of its use in the French imperial nation-state and independent Senegal are particularly complex and controversial. Appropriating cultural performances for his politics of Negritude, President Léopold Sédar Senghor, turned ‘culture’ into a political instrument. As a result, says Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne, the very concept of ‘culture’ constitutes a controversial legacy of Senghor’s cultural policy (Diagne 2002).

Cultural performances staged at cultural festivals are usually presented as rooted in ‘tradition’, although these performances often owe their format to the spectacles staged at colonial exhibitions (Apter 2005). Senegalese cultural festivals can therefore be seen as repositories of a long history of cultural policy, starting with French colonization. Whilst this well-established origin in colonial relations is usually disavowed, organizers of cultural festivals make uninhibited use of cultural repertoires and deploy them whilst using a range of modernizing discourses to rationalise their postcolonial iterations. Acknowledging the colonial genealogy of cultural performances, this chapter demonstrates that the independent Senegalese state and its subjects have reclaimed the format of the colonial exhibit for a modernist agenda by deliberately forgetting the colonial origins of its cultural archive. The cultural performances presented at cultural festivals are, in fact, masquerades of modernity (De Jong 2007).

This argument should be situated within a wider debate on the transformation of cultural formats in postcolonial contexts. Cultural performances are increasingly commoditized by ethnic brokers in an attempt to access resources and achieve international recognition (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; cf. Peutz 2011). Whilst such a transformation of cultural sources into commodity resources is often deplored as a regrettable loss of authenticity, cultural performers often incorporate trajectories of commodification to create new, innovative forms of performance (De Jong 2013). In order to reach global audiences and achieve recognition, traditions are transformed into, new, hybrid, forms of cultural performance (De Jong 2009a). Here, I will suggest that in this process the cultural repertoire is transformed into an archive that cultural groups can mine for a range of modernizing strategies. Cultural performers reclaim their heritage for a cultural politics of recognition (De Jong and Rowlands 2007). Although there is a view that archives comprise of buildings and the materials contained within them (Zeitlyn 2012: 462), it has long been recognized that the body itself is the object of the archive (Sekula 1986). In her study on the archive and the repertoire, Diana Taylor defines the archive as consisting of supposedly enduring materials, and distinguishes it from the repertoire as consisting of embodied practice/knowledge (2003: 19). But she recognizes that the two do not constitute a binary and this opens up the possibility of thinking about the embodied legacy as archive. Here, I suggest that the cultural performances represented in Senegal’s cultural festivals constitute an archive that is used for various decolonial affordances (Basu and De Jong 2016).

**Colonial Roots of Restorative Nostalgia**

In an important article Michael Rowlands (2007) argues that French colonial policies of heritage conservation had their origins in the nineteenth-century French ‘crisis of memory’. In a context of widespread social upheavals as a result of industrialization, urbanization and demographic growth, French literature expressed a yearning for an ideal past and a nostalgic view of pre-industrial society (Terdiman 1993). Charged with a profound and disquieting sense of loss, nostalgia informed nineteenth-century social theory itself. When the German theorist Ferdinand Tönnies made his famous distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, he differentiated two forms of memory: whilst habit memory was transmitted in the close-knit communities of the provinces, modern memory was represented through monuments and ceremonies in Paris, the centre of modernity. Significantly, habit memory was believed to provide an antidote to the modern memory of the metropolis, incurably infatuated with an overdose of history. It is not hard to see how this distinction still informs our current debate on memory. Pierre Nora’s (1989) distinction between *lieux de mémoire* and *milieux de mémoire* literally reproduces the distinction made by Tönnies. Nora, too, has emphasized that realms of memory are increasingly undermined by history. Informed by a sense of loss, modernity engendered nostalgia for a lost communitarian society.

The restorative nostalgia that emerged in nineteenth-century Europe informed the colonial project of heritage restoration. Presumed to inhabit pristine *milieux de mémoire*, the colonized were to be saved from modernity and its onslaught on communitarian life. Indeed, as Rowlands (2007) argues, nostalgia for a lost African civilization informed French initiatives to restore the mud architecture of Djenné in 1907. Such nostalgia was not restricted to forms of architecture, but also included civilizations and customs. Although *assimilation* was the official aim of French colonial policy, amongst colonial administrators and anthropologists many advocated protecting local cultures and mentalities (Wilder 2005: 71). In the African colony, this nostalgic longing for a pure, putatively authentic civilization, informed a colonial policy that reified presumed pristine mentalities in regimes of belonging (Mamdani 1996).

In the fashionable negrophilia that ruled Paris in the interwar period, African civilization was imagined as a panacea for Europe’s decadent civilization. Marcel Griaule—who led the ethnographic expedition, the Mission Dakar-Djibouti—imagined Africa ‘as a pure state of humanity from which modern civilisation has deviated’ (Jules-Rosette 1998: 11). This nostalgic longing for the vanishing primitive was adopted in unexpected circles in metropolitan France. Engaged in close conversations with anthropologists, African *évolués* adopted the nostalgic view of Africa as the land of primeval civilization (Clifford 1988; Jules-Rosette 1998). Students from the colonies who sought to articulate their difference within the Empire, studied their native societies through the colonial library (Mudimbe 1988). Intrigued by French ethnography’s recognition of African civilizations, Léopold Senghor incorporated the nostalgia of French anthropology into his utopian vision of a *Civilisation de l’Universel*. Given that Senghor’s Negritude philosophy shaped Senegalese cultural politics, it is not hard to see why the imperialist nostalgia that informed Senghor’s vision was widely disseminated in Senegal.

However, the discursive decolonial reclamation of African civilization was preceded by its practical appropriation in the colonial context of world exhibitions. The paradoxes of patrimonialization had their origins in the racist appreciation of exotic performances in a nineteenth-century imperialist context. In a transnational public sphere of nationalist rivalry, cultural performances from the colonies were staged for national publics and provided the format for representations of the other. In his study of FESTAC ’77, Apter (2005) suggests that the format of postcolonial festivals can be traced to performances of ‘indigenous’ dance at colonial exhibitions. European empires demonstrated the fruits of their *mission civilisatrice* to the wider world at such exhibitions at which ‘natives’ were invited to present their arts and crafts (Mitchell 1991; Bennett 2004). Even though the cultural production of the ‘natives’ at colonial exhibitions was transformed into spectacle, it was nonetheless deemed to have an educational benefit. In fact, the successful popularization of anthropology relied on these performances at colonial exhibitions (Coombes 1994). Straddling the boundaries between education and entertainment, colonial exhibitions staged African dances to disseminate anthropological knowledge. These entangled histories of anthropology, cultural performance and the ‘exhibitionary complex’ were not suddenly disentangled at the dawn of independence, but remained intimately intertwined, especially in Senghor’s Senegal.

**Cultural Production and Colonial Education**

This entanglement of discipline and dissemination of knowledge through education and entertainment was not restricted to a metropolitan milieu. In its formation of an indigenous class of government clerks in colonial Africa, the colonial administration saw a purpose in instructing the colonized in their ‘native’ culture in order to prevent their uprooting. At the prestigious École Normale Supérieure William Ponty, which provided the highest level of education available in French West Africa, education aimed ambivalently at both *assimilation* and instruction in ‘native culture’ (De Jong and Quinn 2014). The educational policy of the school included programmes to inculcate ‘traditional’ values in order to prevent alienation and political dissonance amongst the students, at risk of becoming *déraciné*. In the 1930s and 1940s the school programme required that students spend considerable time on research papers describing some aspect of African culture. For these so-called *cahiers* (or *devoirs de vacances*), students had to research an aspect of their culture when visiting their home village. This research was subsequently used in the production of plays based on indigenous traditions, histories, legends, and folktales (Sabatier 1978; Cohen 2012). Auto-ethnography provided a moral mooring for students at risk of being ‘deracinated’ (*déracinement*). These exercises are likely to have contributed significantly to the formation of a colonial subjectivity. After graduating, many *Pontins* became teachers or low-ranking clerks in the colonial administration. As *évolués*, they wholeheartedly embraced the task of civilizing the colonial subjects. Since a majority of them were employed in the education of ‘natives’, auto-ethnography became a form of colonial subjectivation shared by the African elite and the indigenous population. As some *Pontins* assumed pivotal functions in the government and administration of independent Senegal, the *cahiers* programme also informed the cultural policy of independent Senegal.

But the training programmes at Ponty also influenced cultural production for the entertainment industry in the metropolis itself. After completing his studies at the École Normale Supérieure William Ponty in 1943, the Guinean student Fodéba Keita went on to have a successful career as a choreographer in metropolitan Paris. The choreographies of his *Ballets Africains* drew on innovative combinations of African dance and European theatrical techniques. This was a time of real experimentation, but also an important moment in the codification of traditional performance and in that respect the importance of the *Ballets Africains* can hardly be overestimated. In the 1950s, the *Ballets Africains* toured North and South America, the Middle East, and Europe. In their choreographies a performance genre emerged that was celebrated from Paris to New York and (Cohen 2012: 12). Cohen draws our attention to the fact that its influence was not limited to the metropolis, but included French West Africa. For instance, when the *Ballets Africains* performed in Dakar in 1956-57, future President Senghor was delighted and when Senegal acquired its independence, Senghor drew upon the expertise of *Ballets Africains* dancers in his professionalization of Senegal’s *Ballet National*. In imitation of the successful shows staged by the *Ballets Africains* in 1950s Paris, the National Ballet’s performances were made up of theatrical *tableaux vivants* of rural life. Senegal’s National Ballet thus committed itself to representing African tradition in the ‘ethnographic present’ (Castaldi 2006: 64). This commitment can be seen in the repertoire of Senegal’s National Ballet, which was often inspired by dances and rhythms from Casamance, and frequently incorporated masquerade traditions from this region. In drawing upon the masquerades from a region considered backwards in comparison to cosmopolitan Dakar, the National Ballet continued an established format of exoticizing entertainment for cosmopolitan audiences (Neveu Kringelbach 2013a).

When Senegal achieved its political independence and Senghor became its first President, the poet-president lavished a large proportion of the national budget on the arts (Snipe 1998). Supporting the École Nationale des Beaux Arts, the Manufacture Sénégalaise des Arts Décoratifs and the Ballet National du Sénégal, the cultural policy of the new nation sustained a wide range of arts in order to disseminate Senghor’s ideals of Negritude. In search of *l’âme nègre* [the black soul], the new arts sought to express an African essence Senghor thought characteristic of *l’homme noir* [the black man]. For example, in the context of the artistic production of the École de Dakar many artists sought inspiration in African traditions and abundantly represented practices they identified as tradition. Senegalese artists drew upon the continent’s canonical sculptural traditions to develop a new, modernist African aesthetic (Harney 2004: 156). And just like the early twentieth-century *arts primitifs* that had been celebrated as major African achievements, this work was now exhibited at the *Festival mondial des arts nègres* (1966). Thus Senegal’s modern cultural production revolved around a paradox in the conception of Negritude and its application in Senegal’s cultural politics: reproducing a ‘primitive’ essence as the apogee of African civilization, in its quest for global recognition, Senegal’s cultural production always referenced ‘the primitive’.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Cultural production in post-independent Senegal was a showcase for Senghor’s philosophy of Negritude. The utopian vision of Negritude imagined that African civilization should develop and open itself to the world (*la Francophonie* in particular), whilst remaining rooted in an African spirit. African culture should contribute to an evolving *Civilisation de l’Universel* through a cultural dialogue aptly captured by the adage *ouverture et enracinement* [openness and rootedness]. Since alienation was to be prevented—reminiscent of the colonial fear of *déracinement* [uprooting]—Senghor’s philosophy was often associated with a *retour aux sources* [return to the source] Today this motto is often embraced during the so-called *semaines culturelles* [cultural weeks] or *journées culturelles* [cultural days] as they are often staged in Senegalese villages. Meant to motivate urban migrants to return to their village of origin, these cultural festivals provide entertainment for the migrants whilst they spend their summer holiday *au village*. After a supposedly alienating sojourn in the city, the migrants return to the village to quench themselves at the sources of tradition. The programmes of such festivals include the performance of cultural traditions by way of affirmation of the cultural identity of the villagers, and as panacea for the cultural alienation of the migrants. In this sense, the *semaines culturelles* are remarkably reminiscent of the *cahiers* programme at the École Normale Supérieure William Ponty. As we noticed above, during the summer holidays students based at this colonial institution were sent home to their native villages in order to record native traditions. The sojourns in the village were meant to restore the students’ rootedness in traditional culture (Conteh-Morgan 1994: 51). Today, this logic seems to be repeated in the *semaine culturelle* when the village stages its traditions for the uprooted migrants. Because this colonial notion of culture was deeply indebted to a nostalgic vision of African civilization, Senegal’s national culture credits ‘tradition’ with restorative potential. Ever since Senghor invoked tradition as the essence of *l’homme noir*, an immersion in ‘tradition’ has been held to have a healing effect on the alienating aspects of modern life (De Jong 1999).

Although necessarily sketchy, this genealogy has, I hope, convincingly demonstrated that Senegal’s cultural policy has roots in the education and entertainment of metropolitan audiences at colonial exhibitions and other venues for the communication of imperialist achievements. Spanning the French imperial nation-state, the performance of tradition was from its inception aimed at remuneration and recognition, combining pecuniary motives with a search for *l’âme nègre*. In the transnational context of the French imperial nation-state, the performance of culture amounted to an ‘extraversion’ of tradition in colonial forms of display (Bayart 2000). The mimesis of such colonial forms of display took on dramatic proportions in the first decades after Independence: Senghor’s *Festival mondial des arts nègres* (1966) and Nigeria’s Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC ’77) celebrated African independence. Even though these Pan-African festivals may have been indebted for their format to imperial spectacle, Apter signals that they ‘inverted the conventions of imperial expositions by transforming the gaze of othering into one of collective self-apprehension’ (Apter 2005: 4). Today, Senegal’s national culture still seeks remuneration and recognition for the performance of its ‘traditions’ in cultural festivals. Even though the cultural traditions performed during cultural festivals are presented in a format fit for both home and foreign audiences (Mark 1994), the ‘original’ traditions are represented in formats developed in a history of imperialist spectacle. Because the French imperial nation-state attributed a moral purpose to cultural traditions by rooting subjects in their ‘native’ culture, it should not surprise us that such ‘traditions’ are still credited with moral value today.

**Mediations of Modernity**

One of the consequences of urbanization is that Senegal’s social life has, since the 1950s, seen a dramatic increase in the number of civic associations focused on the village of birth of migrants. Whilst some of these associations emerged in the neighbourhoods of rapidly growing cities like Dakar and incorporated the migrants in their cities of destination, others were established in villages in order to mitigate the effects of migration. In her study of the social organization of soccer, Susann Baller (2010) has demonstrated how such associations were founded to serve various social purposes. Gradually the number of activities covered by these associations expanded, including the organization of sports, the foundation of libraries, theatre groups, summer schools, and the cleaning of the neighbourhood. As such organizations of youth had the potential to channel protest, the Senegalese state sought to control them and by the early 1970s registered these organizations as *Associations Sportives et Culturelles*. Their primary purpose was to facilitate the participation of the neighbourhood’s football team in the local, regional and national soccer competitions (*navétanes*), organized by national structures that the state also tried to control. Partly as a result of the state’s intervention, ASCs started to support theatre groups that performed a genre of popular theatre which had its origins in the theatrical tradition initiated by the Ecole Normale Supérieure William Ponty, for the teachers trained there had by then assumed pivotal positions in villages across the AOF (Baller 2010: 289-314; Jézéquel 1999; Mbaye 1976). As Baller demonstrates, the theatrical plays performed by the ASCs sometimes aired local concerns as they were conceived by the players as an *éducation populaire* (Baller 2010: 291). In addition to these theatrical expressions of political concerns, ASCs often channelled civic concerns, for instance when they took a leading role in the well-known *Set Setal* movement (Diouf 1992; 1996).

Whilst urban ASCs offer urban residents a sense of belonging to an urban neighbourhood and a channel for a political engagement ‘from below’, the rural equivalents of these associations take it upon themselves to offer migrants the possibility to quench themselves at the roots of their culture. Cultural festivals organized by ASCs have proliferated since the 1980s as occasions to cement relations between the village and its migrants.[[3]](#footnote-3) Scheduled during the summer holidays when migrants have the opportunity to return to their village of origin, cultural festivals offer platforms for the mediation of modernity for both migrants and the inhabitants of the village. I will now focus on a particular case study to explore how such mediation occurs in the context of a cultural festival.

That cultural festivals are platforms for the articulation of modern subjectivities became clear to me when I attended the fourth edition of the *Festival international de culture et développement de Thilogne* in 2004. Thilogne, a town of around 5,000 inhabitants in the region of Matam, is mostly inhabited by Haalpulaar. The festival was held for the first time in 1998 and has since been celebrated on a biennial basis. The festival is organized by the Thilogne Development Association (TAD), an international association of migrants (*ressortissants)* from Thilogne, founded in 1978. With branches in France, Italy, Ivory Coast, Gabon, and the United States, it connects migrants living abroad and the national capital Dakar, with the branch of the home town in Thilogne. From the start TAD’s main aims were to offer its members assistance during their stay abroad and to further the development of Thilogne. With contributions from the various branches, TAD has facilitated the construction of primary schools and drinking water infrastructure in the home town (Kane 2001).[[4]](#footnote-4) In 1998, TAD decided to launch a biennial festival as another channel for its development initiatives (Kane 2010). The festival was also meant to facilitate the communication and communion of migrants by coordinating their return at a particular moment in the year at which the children born in diaspora could visit their parents’ home village and learn about its ancestral traditions. Whilst ostensibly serving the economic development of the village, the festival therefore also functions as a channel for the incorporation of its diasporic youth into the world-wide community of Thilogne *ressortissants*. Although the aim of the association is to incorporate youth born in diaspora in this transnational community, Kane notes that this youth often has little interest in being incorporated (2001: 106). Thus the cultural festival faces a complex, even contradictory challenge of transmitting Thilogne’s cultural heritage to an unwilling audience of international migrants whilst simultaneously serving a ‘development’ agenda. As an initiative of older generations of Thilogne’s inhabitants and migrants, the cultural festival has as its aim to incorporate the younger members of its diaspora.

Some of the contradictions inherent in the cultural festival as a mediation of modernity emerged starkly on the first day of the festival which was attended by both local and national politicians. During the official opening, each of the politicians took the opportunity to enhance their profile and emphasize their achievements for the community of Thilogne. It was remarkable that all politicians, save one, did so in French, a language spoken by many inhabitants, but not all, and certainly not by most women. Nonetheless, it was a woman politician from Thilogne who voiced a call for more infrastructural support from the national government for the town. This clearly corroborated what sociologist Kane has already observed: Thilogne Development Association has replaced the state in providing local infrastructural development and apparently also provides a platform for the articulation of local concerns to the national public. As the festival was reported in most national newspapers, some of the issues raised at the festival were indeed conveyed to a national public. However, since the discussion was held in French and attended by men only, as a mediation of politics the festival excluded a large part of the TAD membership. Whilst the cultural festival mediates political matters of wider concern, it does so within the confines of a male-dominated public sphere.

The exclusion of women became even more obvious during the debates about themes selected for the 2004 festival: the primary education of girls and the literacy programmes for women. The theme was topical as it had recently been established that the educational level of girls in Thilogne was well below the national average. But to my surprise, speakers were all male and they all spoke in French. Whilst some of them raised pertinent questions and clearly favoured higher levels of education for their daughters and wives, the most popular speaker was a local Muslim cleric who spoke in Pulaar and conveyed the most conservative stance on women’s education. His point of view was that higher levels of teenage pregnancy were best prevented by marrying off girls at an early age, irrespective of the consequences for their education. Few women and hardly any girls attended this meeting as they were busy with domestic chores. As an occasion to promote development policies for local women and girls, the festival was clearly not very inclusive. Nonetheless, even if the development of Thilogne was the principal aim of the cultural festival, it was clear that TAD did not restrict itself to local agendas. For instance, in the 2014 edition of the festival local youth was organized in order to stage a march for peace in Casamance, Senegal’s southernmost region where a separatist movement wages an armed struggle for political independence. By taking such an open stance on such a controversial issue the festival firmly inserts Thilogne into the national public sphere, but in various respects it does so at the expense of excluding part of its population.

Interestingly, within the context of the festival the process of mediation promoted by the organizers very much depends on modern means of communication. For instance, the organization had hired the Senegalese Radio and Television service (RTS) to record the festival in order to produce a video for dissemination in the Thilogne diaspora. The resulting video was to be sold to the members of TAD abroad. Those migrants who could not attend the festival could thus be provided with a resume of the festival. In this video, the newly built stadium in which the festival was staged figured prominently, communicating to the migrants that Thilogne has its own state of the art stadium, complete with electric lighting. Thus the festival provides a forum for the organizers and the entire community to mediate professional images of Thilogne’s modernity via national television, to the national public, and with video, to Thilogne’s *ressortissants* abroad. The festival thereby sustains the sociality and solidarity of a transnational community by communicating and asserting its modernity.

However, it is important to emphasize that the conception of modernity performed at this cultural festival was undeniably a local one. This was conveyed very clearly in terms of the musical programme staged at the local stadium, which included Haalpulaar icons like Demba Dia, a national star with local roots, alongside local rappers copying global stars. But even if many bands mimicked a global genre of rap music, some played distinctly Senegalese popular music using acoustic instruments that celebrated a sense of locality (and were referred to in the national newspapers as ‘groupes folkloriques’). It seems justified to suggest that the programme staged bands that played a distinctly local genre of music alongside local rappers in a deliberate attempt to present local genres as equivalent in value to global rap music. However, the most important star at the festival did not require any more global recognition than he had already obtained: Baaba Maal’s performance sealed the significance of the Thilogne cultural festival. On the last night of the event, the songs of this Haalpulaar artist could be heard for miles across the plains of the Senegal River, asserting the global reach of Thilogne’s modernity.

**Repertoires of Tradition**

If the festival promotes an image of Thilogne’s modernity by emphasizing its development achievements, individual youth use the festival as a platform to convey their own modern subjectivities. Dressed in t-shirts with pictures of Tupac or NME, Thilogne’s youth demonstrated its global musical tastes. Alternatively, they conveyed admiration for international soccer players like David Beckham, or national players like El Hadj Diouf and Henri Camara, displaying their preferences on their sleeves. Some communicated controversial political affiliations by wearing t-shirts with the effigy of Osama Bin Laden (at the time not yet eliminated by US special forces) against a backdrop of the WTC towers on fire. Although some wore formal suits, US black popular culture provided more inspiration than the formal dress codes associated with French civilization. Although some girls could be seen wearing trousers at night, during the daytime they invariably wore *boubous* or *ensembles* (a hand-tailored skirt and top made of the same *bassin* or *wax*). Conveying a sense of a plural African modernity, dress choices also conformed to local standards of female modesty in keeping with ‘global’, Muslim standards.

Alongside proclamations of Thilogne’s modernity, the festival also staged cultural performances to articulate the town’s traditional, hierarchical structure. This section will explore how the cultural festival as a genre of cultural performance has been appropriated to claim global membership by serving as both channel of modernity as well as ‘archive’ of tradition. To demonstrate this, a brief sketch of Thilogne’s social organization is required. Although populated almost exclusively by Haalpulaar speakers, Thilogne’s social structure is complex and notably hierarchical. Polities of Fuuta Toro, the region in which Thilogne is situated, have their origins in an Islamic revolution whereby a class of Muslim clerics (*toroobe*) assumed hegemony, ending the rule of pagan Fulbe. Although their hegemonic position was curtailed by French colonization, the social structure of a tripartite hierarchical system of different estates in which the *toroobe* dominated has remained in place even after decolonization. In this system the *toroobe*, alongside other land owners, constitute the freeborn, whilst slaves attach themselves to families of the freeborn in positions of inferiority. The second estate, or intermediate category of men of skills (*nyeenybe*), comprises various kinds of artisans who offer their skills to *toroobe* in exchange for rewards (Dilley 2004). Whilst none of these distinctions are today recognized by the national government, they continue to be observed in day-to-day interactions in Fuuta Toro (as well as amongst its migrants wherever they live in diaspora). Interestingly, although cultural festivals are mediations of modernity, they also seem to articulate the hierarchical distinctions typical of society in Fuuta Toro.

During the festival in Thilogne, performances of tradition were staged on several occasions: there was a display of traditional wrestling, a performance of circumcised boys singing circumcision songs, a dance by Lawbe women, a performance of a traditional rite of passage by young women, and a performance of sheep-herding by Fulbe herders. An entire repertoire of embodied performances was thus enacted for the audience to admire. It is significant that each of these performances was staged by children, women, or members of specialist skill groups, or ‘castes’. The Lawbe, for instance, constitute a social category of which the men are expected to exercise the skill of woodworking, whilst the women are attributed special knowledge of the domains of sexual reproduction and erotic know-how. This is one reason why Lawbe women are expected to excel in dance, an activity considered ‘un-Islamic’ and befitting lower-status categories. Their performance at the festival thus reinforced notions about their (dis)reputed mastery of their bodies. This embodied performance conveyed the sense of a social structure, whereby the subordinate social groups are invited to perform social roles that dominant social groups condemn as not in keeping with Muslim standards. But the public performance of morally hazardous roles was not confined to this particular status group, as Thilogne’s young women were allowed to perform the traditional rite of passage of Thiayde. Although certain forms of courtship would today certainly be condemned as not in line with Islamic standards, the performance of the Thiayde by young women was certainly highly appreciated. Historically, the Thiayde was a competition between young women from different neighbourhoods, who would compose praise songs to honour themselves, and sing diatribes to shame their competitors, with the aim of attracting as many husbands from their own neighbourhood, and possibly from others, whilst also preventing young men from their neighbourhood from marrying elsewhere. At the festival of Thilogne women re-enacted this competition within the stadium for a mixed audience. As Kane argues, this carefully choreographed re-enactment of ritual competition for husbands is a tradition re-invented for the purpose of the festival. Moreover, he suggests: ‘It is striking to observe that the cultural practices being performed during the festivals tend to be of little relevance to contemporary village life’ (2010: 14). He is correct, of course, that the Thiayde is no longer performed in its current format. Kane also suggests that Thiayde has evolved into a form of ritual competition between girls for future husbands that is today performed around matches played by youths at the soccer pitch. It is clear, then, that the cultural festival provides an occasion for the staging of a local *repertoire* of embodied performances as they have been enacted in the past—without acknowledgement of their contemporary iterations.

In her study on the archive and the repertoire, Diana Taylor defines the archive as consisting of supposedly enduring materials, and distinguishes it from the repertoire as consisting of embodied practice/knowledge (2003: 19). In that sense, I would like to suggest, it is possible to conceive of the cultural festival of Thilogne as the representation of a local repertoire of embodied performances. But we should also acknowledge that the repertoire is selective and clearly attributed to categories of the local population that are seen as not bearing responsibility for the transmission of values associated with the Qur’an. In fact, I would suggest that at the festival the repertoire is defined as that which is opposed to Islam, but can nonetheless be transmitted within the context of the festival as constituting the ‘roots’ that migrants have come to learn about. As the repertoire is framed by the festival as ‘tradition’ or ‘roots’, it enables the festival participants to conceptualize these traditions as *not* contemporary. As Taylor astutely observes, ‘the tendency has been to banish the repertoire to the past’ (2003: 21).

The cultural performances staged at many cultural festivals are framed as ‘traditions’ that define a de-historicized cultural essence which, in the context of the festival is attributed to the performers. For instance, sheep-herding by Fulbe herders was one of the most spectacular performances at the cultural festival of Thilogne that enabled the audience to understand itself as ‘developed’ by distancing itself from the alleged timelessness of ‘tradition’. Performing one at a time, four Fulbe herdsmen ran at high speed across the pitch, circumventing the public sitting there. Every herd of sheep faithfully followed its herdsman. This was a spectacular sight and the public responded enthusiastically to the spectacle of running sheep. The excitement reached its climax when one of the herds stormed into a row of seated women, who took to their feet in fear, and, shouting loudly, dragged their plastic chairs with them in search of security. Here, the distinction between the ‘uncivilized’, pagan Fulbe, and the ‘civilized’, Muslim toroobe was graphically drawn into relief, as a contamination of these categories dramatically unfolded on the soccer pitch. The public laughed, in a way Bakhtin would have understood as a carnivalesque ‘inversion’ of the status hierarchy. After the show, the MC who gave a running commentary on the performance, concluded with pomp: ‘La culture Peul est magnifique! C’est la seule culture qui ne s’est pas transformée. C’est à dire qu’elle est authentique, qu’elle est vraie!’ [Fulani culture is magnificent. It is the only culture that has not been transformed. That means it is authentic, it is true!]. The comments suggest that in the context of the festival the Fulani herdsmen embodied a cultural essence for a public whose return to Thilogne had served their initiation into local culture and, through the distancing of spectacle had yet been able affirm its modernity. The cultural festival of Thilogne archives cultural performances associated with an archaic social structure, to enable a nostalgic longing for lost cultural essences.

**Conclusion**

In his critical analysis of the spectacle, Guy Debord (1983) states that a spectacle is not an image but a series of social relationships mediated by images. Mediating social relations, a cultural festival too, inevitably transforms the relationship between performers and spectators (Barber 1997; De Jong 2014). At the cultural festival of Thilogne all the performances were staged by children, women, or the members of specialist skill groups. The staging of the repertoire was thus attributed to subordinate social categories. The festival re-enacted the hierarchical social structure of estates for a public that embodied a modern subjectivity. Re-enacting the order of estates in a contemporary spectacle, the festival of Thilogne thus resembles other festivals at which the social structure is celebrated in a form that re-enacts forms of hierarchy and their historical development (De Jong 2009b).

The cultural festival of Thilogne constitutes a representation of a cultural repertoire that is transmitted through embodied performance. Situating itself in national and transnational public spheres, the festival mediates modernity through the transmission of performed embodiment. But this mediation has never been a one-way process only, whereby the modern originates in the metropolis and is gratefully received in the province. In fact, it is due to the appropriation of the colonial format that the festival works so successfully for the community of Thilogne. For instance, as mentioned above, the RTS produced a video of the festival which was distributed amongst the members of Thilogne’s diaspora. For migrants who were unable to travel to Thilogne, this video demonstrated that Thilogne, too, like other cities and towns around the world, had successfully staged a festival. The migrants were thus assured that their financial and moral contributions to TAD had been used appropriately as the video testified to the town’s modern development. The mediations that the cultural festival enabled were directed towards its own, transnational public sphere.

In the postcolonial festivals of Pan-African self-assertion, the performance format adopted for the representation of venerated African traditions owed much to formats established at the colonial exhibitions. Cultural production in the Third World emerged in an economy of the sign in which tradition stood for ‘authenticity’ and this has not fundamentally changed (Murphy 2012a). Cultural festivals in Senegal follow Negritude’s logic of framing traditions in a modernist format to demand recognition for the contribution that African culture has made to the history of humankind. Appropriating this format of imperialist cultural production, Negritude has valued the transformation and translation of culture through cultural exchange as epitomized in Senghor’s adage *ouverture et enracinement*. The concept of culture employed in today’s festivals is the same and is constituted by a repertoire of embodied performances. Like so many communities in Senegal, Thilogne’s transnational association has appropriated the festival as a platform for staging an ‘African’ self to an audience of villagers and international migrants. Tapping a repertoire of embodied performances, the town has successfully appropriated the colonial format as a technology for archiving itself.

1. The research for this article was conducted during a year of fieldwork in 2004-05. I would like to thank the inhabitants of Thilogne for their hospitality and Idrissa Kane in particular, for his assistance with the research in Thilogne. I am grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council for funding this research and the University of East Anglia for granting me research leave. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Scholarship on Senegal’s cultural policy has appreciated Senghor’s tremendous effort in the production of a national culture, but also reflects the earlier criticism of Negritude voiced by Frantz Fanon. According to Castaldi, Negritude reproduced a nostalgic view of African culture by privileging the representation of a primitivizing ‘tradition’ (Castaldi 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. On the role of migrant associations in the management of relations between villagers and migrants amongst the Jola, see also Foucher (2002b) and Lambert (2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Abdoulaye Kane, a sociologist from Thilogne, has studied the social organization of this transnational association in detail. See Kane (2001 and 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)