Urban Youth and Senegalese Politics: Dakar 1988–1994

Mamadou Diouf

The extraordinary vitality of African youth in the political arena—the high visibility achieved by their spectacular demonstrations—is perceived as signifying that African societies have broken with the authoritarian enterprises inaugurated by the nationalist ruling classes. Youth has played a crucial role in the configuration of nationalist coalitions,[1] even if it has subsequently been swept aside through the invocation of African traditions that uphold rules of deference and submission between both social and generational juniors and seniors. The young have also been the first group in society to have manifested, in practical and often violent ways, hostility toward the reconstituted nationalist movement.

The young have produced a precocious reading of the nationalist movement's evolution, identifying the authoritarian drift of the postcolonial powers whose neocolonial economic and political orientations they denounce. This awareness seems to have been the basis for youth's resistance to the repression, *encadrement*,[2] and co-optation through which the state handles social movements.[3] Logics of exclusion based on tradition, like those of the postcolony's treatment of the young, render public space as an adult territory off limits to youth at the same time that it denies them a private space. As Claude Lefort remarks apropos of totalitarianism—defined as a regime in which power is not the object of open contestation, that is, a regime in which public space is devoid of exchange[4]—"the effect of the identification of power with society is that society enjoys no autonomy by 'right,' it is contained within power as 'private space' " (Habib and Mouchard 1993).

The correspondence underlined here is accentuated in the African contexts where the subordination of the young is conceived as a traditional imperative. In this essay, I analyze the social movements, in particular those led by young people (high school and university students, unemployed youth, members of political parties) that violently shook the Senegalese political scene at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. During this period youth marked their territory, painting the city walls throughout Dakar and its suburbs with representations that fashioned, in however hesitant a manner, a new way of being, of living—and a new rhythm. Their practices expressed a will to break with the historic memory that accompanied the nationalist generation's rise to power at the end of World War II.[5] It is this memory whose expressions, however rhetorical, still furnish the guidelines for the political discourse of consensus and unanimity and for public displays like commemorations as the convocations of memory and independence parades as institutional celebrations of the army and youth.

The sudden appearance of youth in politics is not exclusive to Senegal. Almost every West African country has experienced strikes resulting in a lost academic year (*année blanche*);[6] the most recent case being Nigeria in

The author is grateful to Molly Roth for translating this essay from French.

1. On the nationalist coalitions, see Anyang'Nyong'o 1992.
2. Deriving from *cadre* (frame), *encadrement* combines implications of state control and subjugation with those of spatial circumscription. The term *encadrement* will be used, as it does not have an adequate English translation. Trans.
3. For the francophone situations, see the studies and accounts of the Fédération des Etudiants d'Afrique Noir en France (FEANF): Diane 1990; Dieng 1986; Traoré 1984. On Senegalese students, see Bathily 1992.
4. On the notions of public and private space in totalitarian systems, see Lefort 1983: 53–60. In "Identité et Métissage Politiques," Compte-Rendu de la Séance du 20 février 1991 (*Feuille d'Information No. 16 of Groupe de Travail Cartes d'Identité*), J.-L. Amselle confirms that a group cannot exist socially unless it is able to achieve accreditation, emerging on the public scene through the recourse to spokespeople or proxies, thus creating its own public space.
5. On this subject, see Diouf 1989: 14–24.
6. An *année blanche* is an academic year that has not been officially completed because of the inability to organize year-end examinations and competitions, owing to strikes and the resulting insufficiency of completed class hours. The consequence is a universal repetition of the school year.

1987–88. The recourse to violence, the symbolics of purification by fire, the destruction of the places and monuments of postcolonial munificence—as if to deterritorialize its inscription in space—constitute common elements of the social movements led principally by youth. The project of uprooting the ruling elite's postcolonial style of legitimating itself is legible in numerous developments: the riots orchestrated by Malian students (5 April 1993),[7] the absence, in districts of Lagos and certain Nigerian cities, of any authority on the part of administrators and politicians and their reliance on "area boys";[8] and the crucial role played by "disaffected youth" in the armed struggles in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Richards 1995).

The mise-en-scène and the models for these violent demonstrations seem to have been images of rioting in South African townships and the intifada uprising in Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories, widely diffused through audiovisual media, as well as Hollywood films such as *Rambo* and *Terminator*. Regarding the diffusion and consumption of this culture of the riot, P. Richards writes: "Television does not, in any simple or unproblematic way, transcribe reality. More plausibly, it should be seen as a medium that enhances the scope of human image-making within the range of consumption of a mass audience" (ibid.: 2). This youth is heterogeneous and its manifestations, like the ways it inscribes itself on the urban landscape, are plural. The city, as the scene of its actions, poses numerous problems that the young take into account as actors. Postcolonial urban sociology is dominated by a paradigm in which the rural peasantry is regarded as the fundamental expression of indigenous Africa. As a consequence, the city has long been thought of exclusively in terms of the colonial ethnology of detribalization, rural exodus, and the loss of authentically African traits and values.[9] Before World War II, it was assumed that urban dwellers were rootless; having left their tribal homeland, they were supposed to have lost their traditional reference systems, qualities, and virtues. Colonial and postcolonial literature portray cities as sites of corruption, of moral, sexual, and social deviance, and as sites in which Africans lose their souls and their sense of community. Africans appropriated this colonial

7. For the Malian situation, refer to Diarrah 1993.

8. On the "area boys" Abubakar Momoh writes, "The area boys as a social category become preponderant, popularized and organised from about 1986 when the Structural Adjustment Programme took its full course. Hence today, any form of crime or criminal activity in the entire South-Western Nigeria is identifiable or traceable to the area boys. The area boys are the equivalent of 'Yanbaba' in Hausaland, they are also called *allaayes*, *Omo oni ile* (sons of the soil or landlords), 'street urchins,' 'government pickin,' 'untouchables,' or 'alright sir' " (see Momoh 1993: 28).

9. Colonial novels and the urban sociology of the first two decades of independence are the best illustrations of this point of view. See Laye 1953 and Kane 1961.

representation in their statement that villagers are the "only" full-blooded "Africans" and village values the only authentic ones. The political hegemony of the rural world was reinforced by its demographic domination that, although progressively diminishing, survives in the ruling classes' regime of truth as the popular legitimation of their power. In view of the democratic, essentially urban-rooted contestation, and of the increased urban violence, they regard urban space as lacking both tradition and its logics of supervision and control.

In contrast to a highly legible rural territoriality, the city is a space of superimposed inscriptions and references that appeal to composite memories. The city asserts a cosmopolitan intermingling even as it organizes a geography of territories—simultaneously physical and identity-constituting spaces that continuously reconfigure allegiances, languages, and idioms. Urban territoriality defines itself in relation to a state geometry: the city is the seat of power, the terrain for expressing the imaginary of the ruling class and its ascendence. In this field, there are no possibilities other than confrontation and negotiation. The procedures employed are therefore those of circumvention and, more frequently, of feigned acquiescence and direct confrontation.

In view of the physical breakups and ideological fragmentation ensuing from the economic and political crises, African societies are experiencing major chasms through which new networks—economic, political, ethnic, women's, youth—are stealthily slipping through and enlarging their scope. These networks call for a variety of identity references such as locality, age, gender, common goals, and promotion of former school and university classmates. Their fluidity, flexibility, and often uncertain origin strongly affect social demands and political modes of intervention in the public and private spheres.

With the unity of the missionaries of modernity fizzling out, each of the segments appropriated a specific discourse. Thus, in addition to the physical decay of the space in which power is wielded and displayed is the fragmentation of the ruling social groups (government, unions, students, pupils, entrepreneurs). The reduced capacity of these groups to flaunt themselves and assert their dominance has thereby jeopardized the ability of the ruling class to reproduce itself. Thus the African crisis has paved the way for opening new spaces while promoting deep upheavals that could be briefly summed up as follows: several beliefs including those regarding the homogeneous nature of the urban world and the capacity of cities to construct a homogeneous culture against specificities are being challenged by the ongoing demographic changes. This is related to the demise of the "perception—heretofore unsuspected—of an elite with common interests

and values by an urban population that felt that it was a strong minority vis-à-vis the mass of networks."[10]

Thus a new generation emerged on the African political scene, a generation that came into existence in the wake of the foundational event for African nations, namely, independence. A combination of factors led to the invention by this generation of its own sociability which expressed itself in communal and religious enterprises.[11] These factors included the fact that, in addition to holding on tightly to reconstructed traditions mixed up with values of a global world, this new generation felt excluded from the postcolonial munificence and its sites of sociability (e.g., recognition, the rights to free speech, work, and education), and although a numerical majority, as youth, they were reduced to political silence. This youth is actually behind political violence, which ranges from urban riots to Islamic fundamentalist armies, and is spearheading armed conflicts and criminal actions of random violence, looting, and student strikes; it uses violence to express its disillusionment with the outcome of the restoration of democratic rule.

Assessing the Social Conditions

Dakar and its suburb Pikine contain 19 percent of the total population of Senegal and close to 50 percent of the urban population.[12] Dakar accounts for 46 percent of this population, Pikine-Guédiawaye 42 percent, and Rufisque Bargny 12 percent. The Dakar metropolitan area is the principal destination for migrants. It was calculated in 1976 that 51 percent of 630,000 migrants took up residence in Dakar (Antoine et al. 1992: 118).

The selective character of access to property and housing, one of the principal vectors of socialization and means of social differentiation, indicates the precarious situation of the young. The same figures prompted a research team to remark that "the young are under the control [in the total care] of their elders" (ibid.: 75). High unemployment rates profoundly affect the youth of Dakar and reinforce their status as dependents. Newspapers not controlled by the government daily portray a state incapable of assuring a decent quality of life and education for its students or offering them work. The figures published by *Le Témoin* are a case in point: 100,000 young people enter the job market every year and 4,000 among them have

10. OECD/ADB 1994: 6. In terms of the analysis of demographic issues, I benefited from being involved with the CINERGIE/CLUB SAHEL team, which conducted the WALTPS surveys.

11. See Kane 1990: 7–23; Marshall 1993; Otayek 1993; and Brenner 1993.

12. The data used in this chapter are drawn from the IFAN/ORSTROM team (Antoine et al.) 1992; Bocquier 1991; and Sènègal Ministère 1988.

advanced degrees (*Le Témoin* 134: 3). According to Bocquier, 45.2 percent of the employed population of Dakar are younger than thirty years old (Bocquier 1991: 55). This group includes only 15.6 percent apprentices in enterprises in the unregistered sector. He specifies that the unemployed who have never worked are clearly the youngest: 80.8 percent were younger than thirty.

Two component groups of Dakar area youth are markedly distinct. The members of one have been labeled social marginals (*encombrements humains*) by the official ideology.[13] This notion evokes social maladaptation, economic marginalization, and deviance. These social declassés by the regime's standards are equally products of the rural exodus, rejects from the school system, traveling merchants, and beggars. According to a clerk of the Dakar Tribunal,

> minors between 12 and 20 years are found every week of the calendar in the "lockup" for the most varied infractions. Some fist-fight or steal in the markets. Others, girls between 14 and 16 years, are "picked up" along the public thoroughfares. Still others are dedicated to itinerant begging on behalf of charlatan marabouts. Virtually all rural youth without qualifications who "come up" to the capital live in the poorer districts and congregate around the port, the markets, and the stations. (*Le Soleil* 1990: 18)

It is this population in particular that yields those labeled, on the one hand, as vandals and bullies by the militants of the reigning Parti Socialiste (PS) and, on the other, as thugs and mercenaries by the opposition in the wake of demonstrations or punitive expeditions by the PS.

The second group—school-leavers from the high schools, colleges, and universities—is better understood because of the large number of studies devoted to it.[14] The unemployed who have never worked are better educated than the actively employed; this category has more women than men (Antoine et al. 1992: 122). Since 1980, this situation has been aggravated by a generalized crisis of the school and university systems. A. Sylla observes: "A review of the state of the schools in 1990, with the diverse difficulties and problems they have had for a decade—the numerous protest movements and strikes that led to an *année blanche* in 1987–88—makes their future appear quite uncertain, particularly if the causes of distortion and dysfunction are not thoroughly eradicated" (1992: 379).

The consequences of this disastrous situation have been a fierce instructors' strike and a radicalization of the student movement, with a consider-

13. *Encombrements humains*, literally "social obstructions or clutter": see Collignon 1984.

14. See Bathily, Diouf, and Mbodj 1995, and Diop 1992: 431–77.

able increase in the number of university graduates out of work. The defeat of an operation by unemployed holders of master's degrees and the rising failure rate of students, and of unemployed university graduates, usher in new forms of struggle and new groups, for example, the movements of young members of Muslim religious brotherhoods, in the school and university milieux.

These two categories of Dakar area youth—students and social marginals—have always been a central preoccupation of the Senegalese state apparatus and the class that runs it. Since 1966, the Economic and Social Council has considered that the essential problem of the urban youth—whether an intellectual or a manual laborer, employed or unemployed—is that of his social equilibrium (Conseil Economique 1966).

The Senegalese state uses two logics associated with co-optation—repression and *encadrement*—and has consistently attempted to design solutions that integrate the young into the social hierarchy by institutional means, whether political, economic, and/or legal. These strategies have evolved over the years in the attempt to adapt themselves to the plural and multifaceted procedures adopted by the young.

Political Framing versus Mass Movements

There is extensive evidence that shows that the Senegalese state's handling of the youth question has been guided by a vision that, while being tied to the real, emerges more from the repertories of the imaginary and the ideological. Youth and the young are a key theme in the discursive project of nationalist ideology. Although the ideology itself is out of style, it still informs the Senegalese regime's interventions in the management of youth. It is based on the political harnessing of the "vital forces of the nation" and on traditional social values. The ideology of political framing and the extension of the state's domain provide the key references for political, economic, and social activity. This ideology blurs the distinction between the state and the holders of power, on the one hand, and the masses, on the other. It rests on the manipulation of traditions of submission to authority and to elders, thus circumscribing a social and political space from which youth is radically excluded. The monocentric orientation of power and the institutionalization of the de facto single party inspire the creation of public youth organizations.

These organizations are particularly directed at high school and university students and the more or less educated urban young. They have not enjoyed great success. The anti-imperialist trade union organizations were always capable of subverting spectacular demonstrations by the movements affiliated with power. Attempts at political institutionalization were designed to draw youth close to the party in power, and relied heavily on the Ministry of Youth and Sports with its exclusive preoccupation with advanced athletic competition and football (soccer). The failure of these attempts led to an intensification of oblique practices and militancy by the opposition parties, the majority of which were clandestine until political reforms in 1981, which removed restrictions on both the number and ideology of political parties and established integral multipartyism. It is at this stage that student organizations took up the task of spreading the messages of leftist groups, notably Marxists. This same alliance was the beginning of the fragmentation of the student organizations themselves, in the image of the political left, from which they had difficulties distancing themselves in a context of political liberalization.

The Senegalese government has always advocated a political reading of student demonstrations by interpreting student demands as the result of manipulation by opposition parties or outside forces, more precisely Maoist or communist parties or regimes.[15] As a consequence, since the violent student demonstrations in 1968, 1969, and 1971, the state has adopted operating procedures that oscillate between repression and corruption of the student leadership. However, the institution of integral multipartyism in 1981, in opening the public political arena to Marxist parties, provoked a mutation in the student movement: the extraordinary political diversity and confrontations between leftist factions progressively expelled high school and university students from the political scene. The students, in turn, progressively demobilized in order to devote themselves to better defending their standards of living and education—and not only against the regime, but increasingly against the teachers' unions and the opposition parties.[16] This tendency was intensified by the degradation of living and study conditions, with classroom overcrowding, increases in the failure rate, and the abolition of scholarships, grants, and the provision of books and educational materials. This effort to reorganize the student movement resulted in new practices adapted to organizational structures, new forms of struggle, and new modes of mobilization and intervention.

For the second group, those bypassed by the educational system—the unemployed, deviants, beggars, peddlars, informal sector apprentices—who constitute the vast majority of the youth population, the government

15. On the question of the political manipulation of student movements, refer to the interesting analyses of Bathily 1992 and the chapter "Le Syndicalisme Etudiant, Pluralisme et Revendication," in Diop 1992.

16. On the questions of the political and union recompositions of the movement of university and high school students, see Diop 1992.

has always reserved repressive treatment. This treatment has been legitimated by the persistence of the colonial ideology regarding public space and thoroughfares and the nationalist ideology's reading of the rural exodus and its baneful consequences. *Le Soleil* faithfully echoes the discursive complex of the regime:

> Senegalese society has known profound upheavals that occasionally have dramatic repercussions for familial structure. The Senegalese family forms a very important social group in a strongly hierarchical agrarian society. Today, with all order of change, the family has been completely transformed and, with it, parental authority is lax, indeed permissive, if not gone altogether. (*Le Soleil* 1990: 18)

The state assumes the right to substitute itself for parents who have abdicated their responsibilities and to restore traditional values fallen into disuse. With the same gesture, it expels the young marginals from its own space and from that circumscribed for tourism. The notion of "social marginals" permits the state to rank each deviant person according to its own norms or in reference to the traditions it manipulates and continuously reinvents to sustain the total alignment and *encadrement* of society.

The decline of parental authority has become a recurrent theme in political discourses on youth. It is amplified by recourse to marabouts and brotherhood hierarchies and references to the Qu'ran and to the ancestors. Discourses with a high moral tenor support and justify repressive handling of youth. This orientation was aggravated by the surge of "law and order" ideology at the beginning of the 1980s, an ideology that emanated from the ruling class and affected the entire society.

The failure of the policy of *encadrement* of the young by the party in power, the extremely low participation in government-sponsored youth organizations, and youth's extraordinary lack of interest in opposition parties have combined with the effects of the economic crisis to make the youth question the central political issue. Dakar area youth appear to have left the terrain of institutions and formal political organizations for agitational practices outside conventional public frameworks.

Inscribing themselves in heterodox practices (*buissonières*), youth have set about promoting new solidarities and producing new parameters, confronting the state, parents, and educators—or simply ignoring them. They invest their energies in reconstructing urban spaces and practices, challenging the state and municipality's authority over certain districts and their power to name streets and police them. Certain segments assign themselves the role of guardians of Muslim morality to justify their "combing" operations and punitive expeditions against addicts, drunks, and thieves. Since 1988, *Le Soleil* daily relates the occasionally fatal incidents between "youth gangs" and "thieves or delinquents." In certain parts of Dakar's working-class suburb, Pikine-Guédiawaye, youth gangs organize "moral cleansing" operations in zones reputed to be "places of prostitution, bars, and crime."[17] The young thus become key players in political struggles and the driving force of urban social movements.

Political Idioms: Violence and Heterodox Practices

This section concentrates on the imaginary of the social movement that launched an assault on the ruling class and the history of its dominance as inscribed in urban space with sticks and stones (the electoral riots of 1988), violent pogroms against the Moors (Senegalo-Mauritanian conflict of 1989), and mural painting and clean-up operations (1990), clearing a path through the city and redefining the spaces and logics of sociability and public places.[18] These expressions were in no way violent ruptures, they attest to the long accumulation of heterodox practices (*buissonière*) that led the young to organize themselves in an autonomous and noninstitutional manner.

The essential characteristic of the crisis of the 1980s is the defiant attitude of the young toward political, economic, social, and cultural institutions. This attitude was manifested in the tendency to create autonomous organizations with strong religious or ethnic connotations, often centered on common origin, region, or locale. This movement affected every segment of the young, rural as well as urban. Two new structures accurately reflect the new tendencies in the urban areas: the Cultural and Athletic Associations (Associations Culturelles et Sportives) and the new coordination between movements of high school students and university students.

Cultural and athletic associations. These associations promote a cultural, social, and athletic life of great intensity. They organize diverse activities such as clean-up operations and vacation classes for children. Faced with the temptations of the neighborhood political leadership to appropriate public playgrounds and to control the fire hydrants, and especially in the wake of trash collecting operations, the young increasingly engage in tests of strength against established public institutions (electricity, water, and transportation companies). Some of these associations are now experi-

17. On the geography of the bars and the violent relations in these troubled areas, see the excellent analysis and eyewitness account of Werner 1994.
18. For the mural paintings and their geography, see Monde 1991; and, for an initial analysis, see Niane, Savané, and Diop 1991.

menting with public libraries and professional training centers. The appearance of the Groupement d'Intérêt Economique (GIE) and *Petites et Moyennes Enterprises* (PME) attests to the evolution of a strongly economic orientation of some associations whose goal is increasing employment among the young.

Through their organizational structures, these far more democratic organizations escape the clientelist logics and the prebendal modalities that have continuously enervated the logics of political integration. They create fissures in which the young elaborate strategies of cooperation and confrontation with the state. In this way, they obtain better results in accomplishing projects and managing communal equipment. Involved with the emergence of a new social conscience and highly critical of governmental plans, the cultural and athletic associations are confronted with the resistance of political entrepreneurs who face the erosion of the effectiveness of their mercenary support. The associations have fostered the progressive dissolution of the logics of centralization and the submission of social actors to the power of the state.

The neighborhood focus of cultural and athletic associations signifies, to a certain extent, the search for a territorial inscription that defies a colonial and postcolonial spatial and institutional arrangement that emphasizes both the symbols of the colony (the builders of the colonial empire) and of the nation (the fathers of the nation). Renaming streets after local figures (football players or marabouts) in the Médina or in Gueule Tapée/Fann-Hock in the place of letters of the alphabet attempts to erase a certain memory. It also unveils self-definitional procedures that create the categories of a new sociability, distinct from those produced by the nation and the ethnic group. Finally, it attacks the state's modalities of management and dismemberment of urban space. The groups that have been founded in the course of the movement have produced private local memories, selecting their own past, their own "founding fathers," and etching their own signs on the sand and the stele. The new constellations of stars (those who have streets named for them) reveal a reconstruction of the past that is a socially revealing elaboration of the present and includes the ubiquitous absence of women being commemorated by this male-dominated movement.

One of the most spectacular forms of this new dynamic was the success of the Cairo '86 operation, which made it possible to put the generous financial contributions of the public, and particularly the young, at the disposal of the national football team to finance its participation in the Africa Cup. The elimination of the national team and Senegal's exclusion from participation in the African competition for more than fifteen years, as well as the rumors of embezzlement, had provoked a collective hysteria.

The year 1986 seemed to mark a turning point in the modes of expression of the young, first by resisting municipal recruitment for the *set weec* or *Augias* community service operations (1987),[19] and then by the progressive appropriation of certain governmental functions.

For example, in various neighborhoods they set up "militias for self-defense and the security of property and the tranquillity of peaceful citizens in the 'hottest' quarters of Dakar."[20] In 1989, the youth of the Médina organized "lynching parties" in the caves of the Corniche along the ocean;[21] these were directed against the thieves and addicts who are blamed for the reign of insecurity in the district bordering on this zone. The raids were designed to compensate for inadequate policing. In 1990 in the same quarter, following a morning assault on a muezzin, fundamentalist youth gangs launched a reprisal operation. Numerous bars and night clubs were burned. In September and October 1993, to fight against the nuisances and accidents caused by collective taxis, the residents bordering Valmy and Petersen streets in the center of Dakar blockaded them and then demanded the governor issue a decree forbidding the circulation of the vehicles, more specifically collective taxis, whose drivers systematically disregard traffic rules.

High school and university student movements. The newest conjuncture of crisis (increasing failure rate, eroding infrastructure, discontinued scholarships) and the democratic opening found new forms of struggle at the heart of the movement of high school and university students. The movements developed an expertise that rendered their leadership less vulnerable to the maneuvers of the authorities through the adoption of a rotating leadership. Their daily submission of negotiations to the sanction of the general assembly imposes a logic more of permanent confrontation than compromise. One of the student movement's most interesting successes is its skill in using the independent press to mobilize public opinion in its support and against the government.

Nevertheless, the students have to a certain extent deserted the terrain of partisan political militancy—at least this no longer exclusively determines

19. *Set weec* and *Augias* were voluntarist clean-up operations, e.g., cleaning streets and planting trees, organized by the Office of the Mayor and the youth branch of the ruling PS party. As such, they were official events and partisan expressions and were markedly unsuccessful in comparison to the community-organized and controlled *Set/Setal* operations. *Set weec* is a generic Wolof term expressing the centrality of investments of human energy as opposed to the capital and technological investments that only developed countries can afford. *Augias* derives from the Augean stables of Herculean legend and, thus, French high culture.

20. The daily reading of *Le Soleil* provides a striking example.

21. Corniche is the designation for the area of the cliffs that run along the seashore on the western side of the Dakar peninsula and contain numerous caves.

their union practices. They have set up coordinating committees (Coordination of Senegalese High School Students and Coordination of Dakar University Students), whose flexibility is testimony to their independence. They present themselves "as rejects of the state, marginalized by civil society, or simply as pawns in the hands of the parties on the political chessboard" (Bathily 1992: 51). The students mounted an intransigent defense of their demands, above all in the context of the massive unemployment of graduates. The slow restructuring of the student movement, its disarticulation from politics *stricto sensu*, has resulted in repeated strikes and the imposition of long and humiliating negotiations on the government. The regime's exasperation has led to a constant and massive utilization of repression. Beginning with the 1987–88 school year, the confrontation led to an *année blanche* and the total paralysis of the Senegalese educational system, with the exception of the private schools, attended by children of the elite.

***Sopi:* Violence and political disillusionment.** The context is also that of Abdou Diouf's succession to Senegal's first president, Leopold Sédar Senghor, in 1981 and the difficult democratic transition and contested elections of 1983, at a highly unfavorable economic conjuncture. The state had been progressively disengaging from the sectors of health, education, and sanitation. Public services and public and parapublic institutions "trimmed the fat," and impoverishment ensued. At the same time, the government reinstated the municipal statute of the city of Dakar (1983), which involved the financial disengagement of the state from local structures. In its juridical translation, this returned the administration of public space to the local population, through the intermediary of its elected representatives.

The inefficiency of repression and corruption, the disqualification of social and political intermediaries (parents, teachers' union, marabouts), and the interference of the student demonstrations that began in 1987 with campaigning for the 1988 presidential and legislative election forced the government to negotiate with leaders of youth groups, who obtained concessions that had never before been accorded to social actors. The president of the Republic was obliged to give them an audience after they had repeatedly refused to negotiate with school and university authorities (Diop and Diouf 1990).

In the difficult context of an electoral campaign, the student movement was able to link up with the *Sopi* movement without fear of manipulation.[22]

22. *Sopi* means change in Wolof, the dominant language in Senegal. It is the slogan of the

They filled the streets with their own slogans, which they combined with slogans of the opposition party that had been recast as democratic demands. Their resistance and their autonomy vis-à-vis the political parties were interpreted as "revenge on the state and civil society."

The historic fabric of the electoral and postelectoral violence and the founding events of *Set/Setal* is woven from the threads of the school and university crises, the *année blanche* being the catalyst for a series of strikes, demonstrations, and riots in which students, unemployed youth, and marginals attacked urban symbols and the signs of power in the Plateau at the beginning of 1990, before the clean-up operations.[23] The violent assaults against alcohol sales in the Médina and on the fringes of the Plateau together with the operations against the social marginals (robbers, drug addicts, alcoholics) of the Corniche attest to the same movement, in its "moral" and political aspects. The authors of the first work on the movement indicate very clearly this interweaving of motivations:[24]

> The urban riots known as *Sopi* begin with the advance campaigning for the campaign and elections of February 1988. The announcement of the election results provoked violent riots that shook the principal cities of Senegal for days. The principal authors of the violence, destruction, and resistance to the forces of order were the young: high school and university students and social marginals. February '88 to April '89. Senegalese youth made a dramatic appearance on the political scene. Nobody expected them but they couldn't have cared less. Fear of the future expressed itself in a formidable destructive rage. Between throwing stones a 17-year-old *lycée* student spits out, "We are going to tear everything down in order to rebuild." Hot air? We shall see. Since July 1990, the juvenile violence has passed over into a sort of dense madness that remains an enigma. Under the eyes of transfixed adults, the erstwhile Mauritanian-hunters, groups of young people put into practice their new credo: order and cleanliness. The most horrible city on the continent, the most infested with squatters and traffic jams is cleaned from top to bottom. Public parks that were no more than sordid urinals are restored to their original role, rehabilitated and beautified. (Niane, Savané, and Diop 1991: foreword)

Parti Démocratique Sénégalais (PDS), the principal opposition party whose leader, Abdoulaye Wade, is the principal rival of President Abdou Diouf. This slogan symbolizes the fight against the regime of the party in power, the Parti Socialiste (PS).

23. The Plateau is the affluent downtown Dakar area where European residences were formerly located.

24. For more details, refer to chapter 12, "Les Emeutes de Février-Mars 1988," in Diop and Diouf 1990: 335–54.

Sopi was the expression of the brutal irruption of these social categories into the tête-à-tête between political parties. It marked the failure of attempts to institutionalize models of political action and definitively consecrated youth as the "accursed share" of Senegalese society. Both the violence of the clashes and the youth of those confronting the forces of order were surprising. It was recorded in the photographic coverage of *Le Soleil*, accompanied by the following account: "Throughout the day yesterday, Dakar was in an uproar. Cars set on fire and overturned, stores ransacked, gas stations in flames" (*Le Soleil* 1988a: 11–13).

The principal targets of the young rioters were symbols of the state: the center of the civil administration of greater Dakar was torched; eighty of the public transit company's buses and numerous telephone booths were damaged; government and administration cars were attacked and set on fire (*Le Soleil* 1988b); these "Black Monday" rioters attacked the homes of militants and individuals close to PS power (Diop and Diouf 1990: 337).

The riots were the consequence of the logic of verbal excesses surrounding the Electoral Code and the partisan position of the administration, denounced by the opposition, and the threats directed at certain opposition leaders. The firm will of the opposition parties, including the recourse to violence, to bar the way to any attempt at electoral fraud, intimidation of PS women, and the closing of schools and universities by the Minister of the Interior all heightened the tension. It was in this "very tense context" that "the Senegalese state let loose in the street a fraction of the young submitted to difficult living and study conditions and to an uncertain future where they joined the ranks of the young unemployed" (ibid.).

The incumbent president Abdou Diouf used pejorative and degrading terms to characterize the youth or one of its component parts—it has never been made clear which—as "unwholesome pseudo-youth." Youth responded to this insult with a total condemnation of the state and the ruling PS and massive support for the *Sopi* convoys of the electoral campaign. In the same spirit, they attacked and disrupted electoral meetings of the PS and affiliated movements.

A fringe of the urban youth organized the postelectoral riots. The interviews obtained by a journalist from a French radio station during the event give a fairly exact impression of the attitude of this group (*Tropic FM* 1988). These young people were generally between eleven and eighteen or nineteen years old. They expressed their total refusal to play the classic political game through their violence and in a language of explosive virulence—a language that not only rebelled against politics but even more surely against so-called traditional values. And, even as they clothed themselves in the discourse of the opposition symbolized by the *Sopi* slogan, they

twisted the meaning and preached physical confrontation with the state, a state that, according to their terms, is a regime of robbers divested of its historical legitimacy and its function as principal actor in the building of the nation.

In fact, the irruption of youth into the political arena in such violent modalities establishes an investment in the present and the refusal of the deferment imposed by the nationalist historicity of the ruling class. The state's response to the social movements culminated with the declaration of a state of emergency and the deployment of police throughout Dakar, the goal being to isolate the Plateau and control the strategic points of access to this area along Avenue Malick Sy. The poorer neighborhoods, particularly the Médina, the HLM (Habitations à Loyer Modéré)-subsidized housing development district, and Colobane, were left to the young rebels and to the opposition.

The violence of youth's intervention attests to the furious response to the ongoing attempts at *encadrement* and authoritarianism. The revolt constituted a total refusal of the places assigned to youth not only by political power—first single-party rule and then multiparty democracy—but also, and throughout the revolt, by a tradition whose imperatives of submission to elders are endlessly repeated in radio and television broadcasts as a *crises de valeur* (in French) and an "abdication by parents of the education of children" (in the national languages).

To defuse the crisis that followed the elections, President Abdou Diouf committed his new five-year term to improving the conditions of youth. The constant oscillation in the discourse of the ruling class between a negative pole and a positive pole testifies to its ambivalence toward the practices of the young and its inability to take them in hand, as much in a social and economic register as in an ideological one. The violence seems to have been the sign of enormous distress, profound anguish, and fear in the face of a blocked future and a more and more unequal division of power and riches in a society in crisis.

The profound and lasting disruption by youth and urban marginals of the implementation of the mechanisms for the democratic transition since 1983 (symbolized by *Sopi*) inaugurated a new era: the refusal to allow the institutions established by the new ruling class to direct the process of democratizing Senegalese society. It illustrated the expansive struggles for democracy and, above all, the demand for dialogue, for a hearing without reference to legitimation, henceforth to be backed up by violence on the part of social adults who refused the role of social junior, which no longer offered any benefits in a changing society.

After the state's severe response to the electoral riots and the arrest and

subsequent release of the principal opposition leaders, the negotiations of the opposition's most representative fractions and the politicking of *La Table Ronde* discredited the option of a change of political regime.[25] Thus was achieved the unlikely accession of the *Sopi* leaders to power. The controversies within and between the opposition parties and the regime's expert management of the postelectoral crises led to sectors of the opposition (PDS and PIT) joining the government in 1991. The stability of the political configuration, combined with the renewal of structural adjustment programs without political danger to the regime, definitively pushed certain political actors to take shortcuts to achieving a voice; theirs was a discourse refractory to postcolonial sociability and its logics of compromise and accommodation.[26]

The disappointment of the youth in the insignificant role that they were accorded in the postelectoral discussions found a violent outlet during the Senegalo-Mauritanian crisis, provoked by a scuffle between pastoralists and agriculturalists on the banks of the Senegal river. Dakar was the scene for the explosion of a murderous and irrational rage against the Moors. Dozens were mutilated or had their throats slit after Senegalese in certain Mauritanian towns met the same treatment. Youth unleashed an unheard-of violence and threw itself body and soul into campaigns of vengeance that were amplified by more or less fanciful rumors. Mauritanian-owned stores were looted. It required the intervention of the army, rounding up Mauritanians and repatriating them, to put an end to the torrent of violence and hatred.

This extraordinary murderous fury in a society proud of its hospitality (*teranga*) and pacifism seems to have surprised the Senegalese themselves. And, as if to purify themselves, the young threw themselves into the assault against filth, garbage heaps, and stagnant water, following the torrential rains of September 1990. The moral aspect of the movement is reconstructed in this commentary by a young leader: "This massive rain is a sign of purification, so we must clear our neighborhoods, rid them of their recent memory, and of existential dramas of all kinds" (Diallo 1993: 211).

***Set/Setal:* From the political arena to community territory and space.** In its most widely accepted definition, *Set/Setal* is the mobilization of human effort for the purpose of cleansing in the sense of sanitation and hygiene, but also in the moral sense of the fight against corruption, prostitution, and delinquency. The movement's primary concern was to rehabilitate local surroundings and remove garbage and filth. It also undertook to embellish these sites, sometimes naming them, often marking them with steles and monuments to bear witness by recalling moments or figures from local history or appealing to the private memories of families or youth associations. *Set/Setal* is clearly a youth movement and a local movement (in opposition to national movements and even to parties and urban sections of parties), that is to say, one centered on the neighborhood. It is a specific response to the accelerated degradation of the urban infrastructure and to the virtual absence of residential garbage collection in the poorer districts, and increasingly in the Plateau, because of the strained relations between the private garbage collection company and the new municipal administration. The new city hall's lack of technical capabilities and financial means lasted until the creation of a new semipublic, semiprivate garbage collection company. The state's desertion of public service and the municipal authority's inability to replace it had plagued Dakar with a repulsive filthiness. Furthermore, political reconfigurations and feuding within the new municipal administration, as well as within the central government, led to conflicts that were accentuated by the recomposition of the ruling class after the legislative and presidential elections of 1983 and again in 1988.[27]

These elements of political crisis were constantly renewed, both through the election of leaders for the majority Socialist Party (PS) and through the regular elections. The ways that violent pitched battles or the riots were brutally dispersed by the forces of order testify to the crisis between 1983 and 1990. And *Sopi* was the rallying cry and banner of these years; it expressed the debasement of political standards, the rise of a new, totally postcolonial generation, and a "crisis of values" intensified by the liberal effect, which resulted from structural adjustment programs and multiparty rule.

Set/Setal possesses historical antecedents for its sanitation and human investment themes, and a genealogy that goes back to the nationalist and voluntarist episode of the first decade of the Senegalese postcolony. These activities were designated as *set weec*, the generic term for human investments, or the *Augias* operations (Monde 1991: 7–8). The *Augias* operations had always been an occasion for the ruling class to affirm its munificence, its incontestable power, and its authority over a population hemmed in on all sides by political *encadrement*. They were the affirmation, at the local level, of the strength of the party in power, of its articulation with the legitimacies of localities and districts, and the expression of the centrality of clientelist constructions and their languages in Senegalese political tra-

25. *La Table Ronde* was the Senegalese formula for managing political differences following the electoral riots, which brought together leaders from all the political parties.

26. See, on this subject, Diouf 1992.

27. On all these questions, refer to Diop and Diouf 1990.

jectories. They provided proofs of magnanimity and a reaffirmation of the rule of the nationalists and their heirs.

These practices in the city demand an interrogation of the current political stakes in urban management, that of the worlds of work and of leisure, as well as in the history of the city and the traces left on it by social actors. The morphology of a city, its representation and production, effectively signify the trajectories of the individual and collective lives that unfold there. Does the context of the 1980s and 1990s, marked by the policies of structural adjustment, adequately explain the dynamics of which *Set/Setal* seems to be the most complete expression? Can we identify relationships between the stylistics of power and the style of *Set/Setal*? The logics induced by *Sopi* and the incomplete character of the process of democratizing Senegalese society are developments which proceeded hand in hand with the disengagement of the state and the appeal to continuously reformulated ethnic, religious, and regional identities. Can *Set/Setal* be read as a strategic syncretism, capable of creating an alternative space for social relations? Does it favor a redefinition of relationships among the state ruling class and the youth? Or is it simply a new tactic by Senegalese youth in the search for a fixed point of reference, as well as a referential matrix in which to ground itself within a changing urban landscape? *Set/Setal* expresses a harsh critique of the world of adults and politicians by the vast majority of youth. It is an attempt to overcome youth's dependent position and the lack of attention from the adults who provide for them:

> *Set/Setal* is in the hearts and souls of all young people. If people think that going *Set/Setal* is simply sweeping the streets and painting the walls, they are mistaken because there are people paid to do that. You can't make street-sweepers out of every one of us. The authorities haven't understood a thing. They don't know how to listen. To do *Set/Setal*, is to rid ourselves of this colonial heritage that regulates our way of being, of conceptualizing things. *Set/Setal* is an absolute obligation to find a way out and this necessity to express new concepts in a new language, in this struggle for life. (Diallo 1993: 213)

Whatever the case, taking charge of clean-up and beautification required financial resources that the youth groups obtained either through the organization of public music and dance parties and demonstrations or through the more or less forced solicitation of motorists. According to one of the leaders of these groups, in the HLM district, "The money gathered from the masses, that is to say door to door and by stopping vehicles, was solely designed to make the public participate in our activities, to be independent of the administration and the politicians" (ibid.: 211).

The expression of urban malaise and the malaise of youth has never been experienced in Senegal in such plural and original forms, in this constant oscillation between violence, creativity, and practicality (*la débrouille*). The educated youth sustain their activities through the uncompromising political struggle to rid Senegal of the PS regime that "prevents us from having a future." During the 1993 elections, the same procedures were again taken up by youth in a different context. The entire political class adopted a consensual political code. Foreign observers were present for the first time to monitor the elections and prevent the PS from manipulating the voting. One of the Senegalese opposition's long-standing demands was thus met.

The youth's enthusiastic engagement in the cause of deposing the head of state, however, did not translate into a massive voter registration. As in 1988, they followed the electoral processions of the opposition, especially M. A. Wade, in large numbers. Students constituted the subgroup of youth that was most engaged in the electoral battle of 1993, in contrast to 1988 when they were less involved than unemployed and uneducated youth. To achieve their objective, the defeat of Diouf and the PS, students organized campus debates and created movements such as La Jeunesse pour l'Alternance (JPA) and Coordination Laye Espoir (CLE).[28] In contrast to the university students, high school students, and especially those from the *lycées*, demonstrated violently against the regime. The repression against them was ferocious, most notably on 11 February 1993, when Dakar *lycéens* clashed with the Mobile Intervention Group riot squad of the Senegalese police.

Despite recurrent violence since the elections of 1988, which is, from this point on, the privileged form of expression for youth, the emergence of a tradition of self-reliance on the margin of all systems (educational, economic, parental) is overriding attempts to change the regime through elections. The desertion of the political and of political modes of expression has been the outcome of the crises of *Sopi*, confirmed by *Set/Setal*, and this explains perhaps the absence of drama in the 1993 elections.

The failure of *Sopi* has had contradictory consequences for the political behavior of Senegalese youth, notably affecting their political voice (*parole*). The most spectacular factor in this evolution is the utter refusal of postcolonial sociability and its logics of compromise and accommodation. The study of the success of this refusal is responsible for Senegal's reputation

28. *La Jeunesse pour l'Alternance* means Youth for Alternation (rotation of political leadership). "Laye" is the diminutive for Abdoulaye, referring to Abdoulaye Wade, and *espoir* is hope (salvation).

in West Africa scholarship.[29] This dissonance presupposes plural modes of expression, plural strategies, and above all, new readings of the city—more precisely a counterhistory to nationalist fictions and fables of the radical alterity of African desires, needs, and practices. The dissonance between the style and the discourse of the ruling class, the ruses of democratic opening, and the living conditions of a population on the road to marginalization and impoverishment, provoked the activation and redeployment of powerful new symbolics drawn from both Senegalese nationalism and the globalism made possible by African world music and its Western references.

If political strategy requires an identification, the production of different references proves indispensable in order for those excluded from the political arena, those who express themselves in *Set/Setal*, to act and think as different kinds of political subjects. The action that aimed at shaking the foundations of the nationalist memory went hand in hand with a new treatment of space that celebrates local memory. *Set/Setal* expresses the proliferation of new idioms that rest principally on a refusal of traditional political action and assesses new forms and practices of citizenship. These idioms were not accounted for by African nationalist ideologies, which forcefully argued for cultural restoration, including gender and age hierarchies. *Set/Setal* presents itself as an indigenous appropriation of the city. The human investment, the rehabilitation of neighborhoods, and the murals express a political challenge by the youth and their demand that the political class rethink its actions and its modes of intervention. Through a radical refutation of the modes of political framing, the young have enunciated a new sociability, contradictory to the norms that have presided over the postcolonial compromise.

Multiple paradoxes characterize the situation today. After its association with the government of President Abdou Diouf, the PDS is again in the opposition.[30] It is allied with a religious movement, the Moustachidines wal moustachidati. This religious association is led not by a fundamentalist leader but by Moustapha Sy, a young Tijani marabout who is today in prison for allegedly threatening the security of the state. The Ligue Démocratique Mouvement pour le Parti de Travail, another opposition party, rejoined the government after the 1993 elections. Currency was devalued despite salaries having been reduced by 15 percent to prevent it. The disenchantment has become so widespread that the unions are unable to mobilize their militants.

This young marabout leads the Moustachidines wal moustachidati and symbolizes the opposition to the regime and its politics. His supporters inaugurate novel forms of expression and resistance, such as challenging judicial authorities. They chant religious poetry instead of responding to questions, thus thwarting the judicial ritual.[31] The young strike a violent blow against the languages of power through the production of synthetic idioms whose elements are borrowed from distant and heterogeneous worlds. They are in the process of creating an urban culture, detached from the colonial and nationalist memories. From the violence of 1987 and 1988 to the flourishing heterodox style (*buissonière*) of *Set/Setal*, Senegalese youth express the impossibility of authoritarianism in the period of structural adjustment. And if the murals are the iconographic index of multiple ruptures, can't one discern their history lessons? Has a cultural projection that remodels the imaginary and historical conscience of the generation of independence already come to ill through technocracy and adjustment?

The murals, like *mbalax* (a form of popular music),[32] express the mobilization of new idioms to capture novel situations. One can support the hypothesis that the *Set/Setal* movement and its accompanying signs are the indices of a dynamism that was thought to have been suffocated by autocracy and the pervasive mediocrity of an unrealized "democracy of the educated," incapable of managing economic and social crises. The assumption of responsibility for the reconversion of space and its cleansing, as well as the reclaiming of indistinct territories and renaming of streets, have been the vectors for the reintroduction of an excluded youth into a space and a struggle over the city. The youth assumed responsibilities that encroached on the prerogatives of public authority and insisted that accounts be settled. Their actions signify the recuperation of a power that founds and legitimates new discourses of identity. Inasmuch as these orientations are highly local, they are multiple and, therefore, capable of leading to sectarianisms that impede social cohesion.

In the same way, by intervening directly in the organization of space, *Set/Setal* called into question the subdivision of living spaces in the old *lebu*

29. Refer to D. C. O'Brien 1971, 1975, and 1978. See also Copans 1980 and Coulon 1981.

30. In the period from 1991 to 1993, PDS leaders were members of the government. After the 1993 elections the PDS rejoined the opposition in an alliance with several parties uncompromisingly opposed to the PS (MSU, AJ, etc.), provoked in part by the arrest and detainment of Abdoulaye Wade, and joined in convening a national conference on the model of the democratic conferences being held in a number of West African states. Despite the recent radicalism of its stance, the PDS rejoined the government of President Abdou Diouf in March 1995, deserting its previous allies and provoking a crisis within the Senegalese opposition.

31. See Coulibaly 1993.

32. *Mbalax* is a Senegalese contribution to world music, diffused worldwide by Youssou N'Dour, Ismail Lo, and other musicians.

quarters of the Plateau—reexamining the spaces set aside not only for work but for innovation (*la débrouille*) and/or delinquency, spaces for which the city alone offers such diverse possibilities. Each time that the state "unloads" a space, its pretensions to rule are diminished; the liberated space becomes a territory for invention, for dissidence, and for dissonance.

The neighborhood is substituted for the national territory as the canvas for elaborating the symbolic and the imaginary. Discursive and iconographic fables register a local memory that proclaims itself as such against the nationalist memory. This contestation also translates into commemorations and festive demonstrations, of which the music and dance parties and celebrations (*furël*) are the most obvious signs of the invention of new traditions. To the theatricality of power is opposed the theater of the street, whose young actors and directors invent scenes and texts by drawing on a global repertoire. And, paradoxically, it is along this trajectory that traditional celebrations and games have been rediscovered and re-created, after the state had worn itself out promoting them in vain, in order (it was said) to restore traditional morality.

At stake is the relationship between the national memory and local memories. The new urban order is being elaborated through democratic innovation and the crises that today rock the African postcolonies. Through protests, clean-up campaigns, murals, and memorials, the imaginary and the conscience of the young and marginal of Dakar, who have become a social movement, mark their possession of urban spaces to oppose the state—its official nationalist history and its economic policies in the era of structural adjustment.

At stake here is a form of citizenship that disavows the biases of tradition and challenges authoritarianism, two outstanding features of the African postcolonial states.[33] Through their cold rejection of the modalities of membership in the nation, the youth are redefining the spaces of legal citizenship and erasing their nationalistic attributes and referents, thereby questioning the state's authority to define citizenship (Berlant 1993).

33. See Mbembe and Roitman 1995 and Devisch 1995.

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