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# Rural Emergings, Urban Imaginings: The Effect of Urbanization on Senegalese Ethnic Identity

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Rural Emergings, Urban Imaginings:  
The Effect of Urbanization on Senegalese Ethnic Identity

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*Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Independent Study Project.*

*To Maman Diallo, for embracing me as a daughter, and teaching me the true meaning of hospitality.*

*To Kate Chandler, for guiding me despite the distance, and teaching me the value contradictions, tensions, and messes.*

*To Mom and Babbi, for cultivating my curiosity and sense of adventure, and teaching me the joy of sacrifice.*

*And to all those I have met along the way.*

	Abstract.....	4
I.	Introduction.....	5
II.	Methodologies.....	14
III.	Findings and Discussion.....	19
	a. Uprooted.....	20
	b. Wolofization.....	23
	c. A New Identity? .....	27
	d. Growing New Roots.....	30
IV.	Conclusion.....	31
V.	Works Cited.....	34

## Abstract

For the past 40 years, Dakar has been the destination of Senegal's massive rural exodus, with millions of rural villagers flocking to the city in search of work and education. The rural exodus has produced a unique multi-ethnic environment, where villagers, traditions, cultures, and languages from across the country converge. Ironically, therefore, Dakar's landscape has been distinguished by the creation of an urban culture by a population of rural inhabitants. This paper examines the effects of urbanization on ethnic identity and affiliation, and further discusses the impact of Urban Wolof on personal identification among Dakar's citizens. It then demonstrates how this multiethnic environment contributes to the creation of a de-ethnicized, urban identity. In so doing, this paper develops a framework for how modern identity is constructed and how it evolves according to place.

## I. Introduction

Dakar is a city unlike any other – marked by its distinctive, lazily chaotic pace of life, its colorful and bustling streets, with men and women peddling peanuts to prayer mats, with songs by Chris Brown, Wiz Kid, and Wally Seck dissonantly joining car horns, cell phones, Brazilian soap operas, the muezzin’s call to prayer. The streets are characterized by paradoxes: western and traditional clothing, young and old, Mercedes and taxis and *car rapides*,<sup>1</sup> rap music and the kora.<sup>2</sup> At the core of these paradoxes lies the convergence of traditional and modern values and identities.

The whole country gravitates toward Dakar, and the city has thus become the key site for observing the *mélange* for cultures, traditions, and peoples. It is a site where Senegalese of numerous ethnicities merge together, amalgamate, even. In this ethnic mixture, traditional roots simultaneously fortify and weaken as new generations seek to assert their identities according to their heritage, their language, and their newly-created urban environment.

Dakar was founded in 1862 by French colonizers, soon replacing Saint Louis (in 1902) as the capital of French West Africa, and later of Senegal. In effect, at the heart of the creation of Dakar lied the desire to separate ‘rural Africans’ from ‘urban Europeans.’ The French colonial government established the Plateau, populated predominantly by white Europeans, as the center of administration and urban life, pushing Africans into the Médina and beyond. It physically segregated the city into two zones: the European

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<sup>1</sup> *Car Rapides* are beautifully adorned buses that offer the cheapest form of public transit in Dakar (among other Senegalese cities)

<sup>2</sup> The kora is a traditional string instrument, historically used by the *griots*, a caste of storytellers and keepers of oral tradition, and now incorporated into much modern Senegalese music.

“urban zone” and the African “non-urban zone,” thereby creating a sharp and official distinction between the modernizing, white, ‘truly urban,’ and the rural.<sup>3</sup> The city landscape was racialized and segregated; the urban areas became increasingly characterized by modernity, Westernization, and change, while the rural areas became hallmarks of tradition and cultural preservation. As Mamadou Diouf position in “Urban Youth and Senegalese Politics,”

Both colonial and postcolonial literature portrays cities as sites of corruption, or moral, sexual, and social deviance, and as sites where Africans lose their souls and sense of community. Africans appropriated this colonial 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 as reinforced by its demographic domination that, although 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.<sup>4</sup>

This binary positioning persists. Villages continue to be thought of as vaults of tradition; cities continue to be thought of as sites of modernization. The nature of ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ were then defined through their opposition to one another. As David Nelson argues, “Only with the advent of French social and cultural projects that classified Africans as ‘rural’ was the defining ‘urban’ character of Dakar constructed.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet even though the racialized colonial division between urban and rural space has fallen away as Africans have regained political control of urban centers, the

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<sup>3</sup> Catherine M. Appert. “Modernity, Remixed: Music as Memory in Rap Galsen” (Doctoral Thesis). University of California, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Mamadou Diouf. “Urban Youth and Senegalese Politics: Dakar 1988-1994.” *Cities and Citizenship*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999. 44-45.

<sup>5</sup> David Nelson. “Defining the Urban: The Construction of French-Dominated Colonial Dakar, 1857-1940. *Historical Reflections*. 33.2 (Summer 2007) : 226.

dichotomy between urban and rural identification, created by colonists, while blurred, continues to play out today. The colonial legacies of Dakar’s urban planning can be seen in the ways Senegalese discuss the differences between an urbanite and a “*kaw-kaw*”, a “*Boy Dakar*” and a “*Come-In-Town*,” a “*Dakarois*” and a “*wacc bu bess*.”<sup>6</sup> Most, if not all, my interview subjects spoke of the stark, identifiable differences between these two groups. The two tend to have different clothing styles, different manners, different accents. Trying to tease out the nature of these differences, however, brings us to stereotyping, where interview subjects characterized villagers as rough-mannered – chewing loudly, spitting in the streets – and close-minded, and urbanites as more modern, more Occidental – emulators of European styles and characteristics.<sup>7</sup>

The most visible marker, however, is the clothing style. Through clothing, Senegalese are able to, in effect, read a person’s origins. As Mame Penda Diallo remarked, “Dakarois will dress like a Parisian...those who come from villages will dress...simply, in traditional fabrics.”<sup>8</sup> The difference in style grows out of a difference in spending habits – while Dakarois are known for spending readily, villagers tend to hold onto their money, for they came to the city with the express purpose to work. The contrasts between the two are reinforced through discourse and insults. Keba Mane recounted a story he had with a taxi driver after he attempted to barter for a much lower price; the taxi man, with the air of someone who considers themselves belonging to a

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<sup>6</sup> A *kaw-kaw* refers to someone from the interior of the country; *Boy Dakar* refers to “city boys,” those who know their way around the city, who are fluent in urban life, but does not necessarily indicate that they are born in Dakar; *come-in-town* offers another way to refer to a village migrant, however this name is often used in a pejorative manner; *Dakarois* refers to Dakar-born residents, and tends to imply a host of characteristics; *wacc bu bess* translates to the equivalent of “newly-arrived” and offers yet another way to refer to a rural migrant.

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting, and perhaps ironic, to note that Dakarois/urbanites continue to be viewed as more Western and more connected to the European world.

<sup>8</sup> “Les Dakarois s’habillent comme les Parisiens...et ceux qui viennent de l’interieur, ils s’habillent dans une manière très simples, avec les tissus traditionels, comme le wax.”

higher social class, began to call Keba a *come-in-town* as an insult, and which Keba took as a high offense. The division between the two is thought to be created and perpetuated by the Dakarois, stereotypically seen as “pretentious, as having a feeling of superiority towards people who are not born in Dakar.”<sup>9</sup>

This dichotomy is ironic, however, for Dakar’s population is almost entirely made up village migrants. It is commonly said that with Dakar’s population pausing at 3,500,000, 3,000,000 of those are coming from the village, and only 500,000 of those were born in Dakar.<sup>10</sup>

Villagers are flocking to Dakar mainly for school and for work. For several decades, Université Cheikh Anta Diop was the only university in all of Senegal, and today remains as the best university.<sup>11</sup> After finishing school, most graduates tend to stay and find work in Dakar, for it is one of the only locations in the country that hosts a wide variety of high-skilled jobs. For work in general, Dakar offers opportunities for those fleeing from rural poverty and diminishing crop returns. Today, young, especially, are attracted to Dakar as a gateway to the world at large, as a socket into global networks. As my informants claimed, most villagers arriving are of Wolof and Serer ethnicity, due to the ethnic populations of the surrounding area. In fact, the prototypical villager is a Serer, for they were the first to participate in the rural exodus.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Bouna Fall. Personal Interview. 3 May 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Benedict Bassenne. Personal Interview. 13 April 2016.

Statistically however, Dakar’s population statistically lies closer to 4,000,000. (Cheikh Guèye, et al. “Climactic Perturbation and Urbanization in Senegal.” *The Geographic Journal*. 173.1 (March 2007) : 88-92.)

<sup>11</sup> Mame Penda Diallo. Personal Interview. 20 April 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Nabou and Ndeye Sene. Personal Interview. 4 May 2016.

The rural exodus truly began in the 1970s and 1980s; due to a series of crippling droughts, farmers were forced to leave their villages in search of income. The rural exodus has continued, gaining speed and members exponentially, propelled by climate change that continues to devastate local agricultures. In 2013, Senegal's urbanization level was 45.2%, with 49.6% of the urban population in Greater Dakar.<sup>13</sup> About 65% of this urban population is under thirty years old.<sup>14</sup>

This massive growth in urban population, resulting in significant demographic pressure on limited urban space, has led to chaotic, unstructured urbanization, and an upsurge of shantytowns, created by city residents and not city planners. Rapid urbanization has left many without access to urban amenities and infrastructure, and overpopulation has also led to serious environmental concerns for citizens of the city and for land around the city.

While the number of people looking for employment is growing exponentially, the number of employers is not expanding at nearly the same rate, if at all. Many rural migrants often come to work with no idea of what jobs await them, and end up turning to the informal sector, selling peanuts or Nescafe, doing laundry, working as *apprentis*, washing cars.<sup>15</sup> These jobs offer no benefits and meager earnings. The informal sector has thus exploded in recent years, and now accounts for upwards of 60% of urban employment.<sup>16</sup> Because of its soft division of labor, women find more and more

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<sup>13</sup> Cheikh Gueye, et al. "Dakar, Touba and the Senegalese cities network produced by climate change." *Science Direct*. 13 (2015) : 95-102.

<sup>14</sup> Suzanne Schled. "Youth Cosmopolitanism : Clothing, the City and Globalization in Dakar, Senegal." *City & Society*. 19.2 (2007) : 232-253.

<sup>15</sup> An *apprenti* is a boy, typically coming from rural areas, who works on the *car rapides* collecting bus fares. He can usually be seen hanging precariously off of the back of the truck.

<sup>16</sup> Ioana Liane Georgescu. "Rural-urban migration, the solidarity-based economy and informal governance in Dakar, Senegal" (Mount Holyoke College Senior Thesis). Spring 2012.

opportunities on the streets, offering them more and more financial self-sufficiency, while men, due to increasing levels of unemployment and decreasing means for providing for their families, find their dominant societal position weakened. With the city's high cost of living, urban life proves an empty promise for thousands of migrants trying to escape rural poverty.

The result of the rural exodus is three-fold: first, it has drained the villages of young men aged 15-35, thereby affecting social patterns and modes of production; second, it has pushed the city to its limit, with new, chaotic neighborhoods, quickly constructed, and lacking adequate infrastructure (hospitals, banks, garbage systems, local government representation, etc.) – urbanization that is too rapid to support the health and safety of the growing population; third, it has ruptured identity, with massive populations finding themselves removed from their traditional roots, from their villages which served as the pillar of community and self.

While the literature on Senegalese labor migration focuses on the causes of rural-urban movement, the effects of movement on rural areas, and the implications of movement on urbanization and infrastructure, this paper will discuss the third result, largely left unresearched, namely, the way in which the rural exodus has transformed and fractured traditional identity structures. It will discuss how life in the city impacts ethnic identification, and how Dakar's unique ethnic mix contributes to the creation of a new Senegalese urban identity.

Rapid urbanization poses serious challenges to health and community, with significant social, economic, and environmental implications. But what about its' implications on the individual?

I am fascinated by how ethnic identity is transformed by the structure and culture of the city. Do ethnic identity and familial identities fall away in the space of the city? Or do they grow stronger? Once in Dakar, do villagers hold onto their rural ideologies, or do they adapt to a new set of urban ideologies, shedding their ethnic identity at the city gate? Do ethnic identities originating from the rural areas, the so-called seats of tradition, contrast to those from urban areas, where modernization is believed to break down systems of values and social networks? In fact, *does* urbanization break down previous social structures? Or do rural immigrants generate rural ideologies that set their communities apart and recreate rural social stratification? How do interactions between urbanites and villagers alter or cement individual and ethnic identities?

What is the significance of the fact that Dakar, as a distinctly urban environment, is made up almost entirely of people originating from rural areas? In Dakar's unique mix of rural and urban, local and global, tradition and modernity, and a variety of ethnicities, does a new urban identity emerge? How do Dakarois choose to define their identity, separate from those of their ancestors? Are urban identity and ethnicity mutually exclusive? Is ethnicity being phased out to make way for a new urban identity – is it holding on, surviving, or slowly falling away, to the realm of tradition? What does this mean for ethnic identity now, and in the future?

To answer these questions, I chose to study two groups of individuals living in Dakar, those born in the villages, having come to Dakar for work or education (a majority of the urban population), and those born and raised in Dakar, comparing how villagers conceive of their ethnic and social identity, and how it is affected following their move to Dakar, and how Dakarais conceive of their own ethnic and social identity and create new urban identities. This comparison offers us measurable insight into the effect of city life on one's individual and group identity.

Ethnic identity, although a contested subject in social science scholarship, is incredibly relevant to Senegalese daily life. As an informant exclaimed, "Everyone knows everyone else's ethnicity!"<sup>17</sup> Ethnic identity is revealed in the first encounter. In the rapid back-and-forth greetings exchanged among strangers, family names, often indicating ethnic group, are quickly asked for and readily shared. This is due to the phenomenon of "joking cousins" where groups of family names, typically of different ethnic groups, are connected in a joking relationship.

Upon sharing last names, two strangers can determine whether or not they are 'cousins.' If they are (e.g., a Fall and a Gueye), they often begin a series of jokes and playful insults (such as, "You spend all your time eating, eating, eating! And can even go so far as, "You are my slave!"). Senegalese believe that the culture of 'joking cousins' contributes to social cohesion, eases any possible tension between ethnic groups, and creates solidarity and unification among the population. In fact, one cannot get angry during the exchange of teasing insults, for if he does, he brings bad luck upon himself.

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<sup>17</sup> *"Tout le monde connait l'ethnie de l'autre!"*

Senegalese identity is made up of a variety of factors – ethnicity, ancestry, religion, caste, etc. – each with its own importance and significance. Of course, the more layers you peel back, the more complex and multitudinous identity becomes. Nevertheless, traditionally, ethnicity and family lineage proved to be the most significant identifier, and presently, ethnicity continues to prove an incredibly significant marker in day-to-day interactions.

Research on the effects of the rural exodus on Senegalese communities and identities is incredibly timely, as Dakar’s population pushes capacity, as its borders expand toward Rufisque. This research has the potential to delineate where ethnic and urban Senegalese identities stand, and where they are going as the city continues to evolve.

In addition, this body of research presents contributions to the field of identity studies. Social scientists now largely agree that identity is constructed. This work explores *how* identity is constructed – what factors play a role? how does identity change and evolve, and according to what? As Rogers Brubaker, one of the leading scholars on ethnic and national identity, encourages in “Beyond ‘Identity,’” identity research should now help to specify “how – and when – people identify themselves, perceive others, experience the world and interpret their predicaments in racial, ethnic or national rather than other terms. They can help specify how ‘groupness’ can ‘crystallize’ in some situations while remaining latent and merely potential in others. And they can help link macro-level outcomes with micro-level processes.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper. “Beyond ‘Identity.’” *Theory and Society*. 29.1 (Feb. 2000). 1.

Through the exploration of how urbanization fortifies ethnic identification among rural migrants and dismantles ethnic identification among its young city-born citizens, this body of works hopes to do just that.

## II. Methodologies

My research has centered on formal and informal interviews of two groups of subjects: 1. Rural villagers now living in Dakar, both newly arrived and well-installed, in order to study the transition from rural to urban life, and the traditional understandings of individual and ethnic identities; 2. Urban Dakarois, in order to see how city-born Senegalese view villagers and their impact on city life, and how Dakarois understand their own urbanized identity. Due to time, language, and resource restraints, I was able to conduct eleven interviews.

I approached interviews as my main source of information, under the assumption that the best way to understand a nexus of identities and values is through conversation and human-based interaction. This posed a challenge: How can I try to capture identity? How do I research it? How do I ask informants about it? How do I leave my own presuppositions and hypotheses at the door? Perhaps the greatest difficulty regarding identity is that one's own identity seems to be the most unclear, vague, evanescent. And thus, how can I expect my interview subjects to describe to me the changes within their own personal identity, within their own ethnic identity and their connection to their roots?

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Thus, instead of asking questions directed at identification, I asked about behaviors, attitudes, values, social ties, language, clothing, profession.

Thanks to ideas proposed by Derrida and Foucault, many researchers have come to acknowledge that individuals construct identity and social reality through discourse, and that the identity that is presented in conversation tends to serve some discursive goal. Depending on the context, people call upon various facets of their identity, showing and concealing different aspects. Identity is thus situationally-framed and fluid. In addition, identity tends to be constructed through the creation of oppositional groupings between an imagined “we” and “them.” The result being that the distinctions created between identity groups, say urban and rural, may seem much more discrete than they actually are.

Due to this discursive nature, my role as a researcher came necessarily into question – my informants’ responses, subconscious or not, were inextricably shaped by how they saw me and what they thought I would want to hear. In trying to interrogate the identities of others, my own was brought into question. Eline Versluys captured the effects of this dynamic researcher-informant relationship that I found greatly applied to my experiences as well : “Here my role as a researcher was important, the consequence of which is a co-construction of meaning rather than a neutral representation of the informants’ opinions.”<sup>19</sup>

Identity, in the Senegalese contexts (as in many others), is multilayered and multifaceted, made up of ethnicity, family lineage, religion, education, caste, age, and place of birth, among others. I would like to propose a definition of identity, summarized by Rogers Brubaker, that shapes this research’s understanding of the term:

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<sup>19</sup> Versluys, Eline. “Multilingualism and the City: The Construction of Urban Identities in Dakar (Senegal).” *City & Society*. 20.2 (2008) : 283.

Understood as a core aspect of (individual or collective) “selfhood” or as a fundamental condition of social being, ‘identity’ is invoked to point to something allegedly deep, basic, abiding, or foundational. This is distinguished from more superficial, accidental, fleeting, or contingent aspects or attributes of the self, and is understood as something to be valued, cultivated supported, recognized, and preserved.... identity as a manifestation of solidarity, in shared dispositions and consciousness.<sup>20</sup>

Again, for this research, I will focus at one aspect: ethnicity, seen as a form of group affiliation that provides a sense of belonging and a shared set of cultural values and consciousness, that just as identity, points to something that appears “deep, basic, abiding, or foundational.”

Implicit in this work is a link between ethnic identification and rural identity. I do not mean to claim that ethnicity and rural villages are fundamentally connected, nor do I want to claim that they are mutually exclusive. I also do not mean to claim that ethnic roots will necessarily be stronger in the village than in the city – as we will see, it is jumbled, complex. Nevertheless, in this paper, I draw a strong connection between village identity and ethnic identity. For most, the village is associated with tradition, whereas the city is linked to modernity – this break between tradition and modernity is manifested in the rupture between rural and urban life. Villages are seen as cultural coffers, where Senegalese tradition is stored and continues to play out today. Traditional culture continues to strongly shape values and personal identities. Village identities therefore tend to represent traditional forms of identification, specifically ethnic identification and caste. In addition, most Senegalese villages are characterized by their inner-ethnic homogeneity, where ethnic ties are incredibly foundational. Therefore, when I refer to rural/village identity, I tend to refer to traditional forms of affiliation.

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<sup>20</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper. “Beyond ‘Identity.’” *Theory and Society*. 29.1 (Feb. 2000). 7.

I attempted to structure each interview so that it offered a different approach to the questions I was asking. Of course, topics and findings often overlapped, and I believe that with more and more interviews, I would have found more and more overlaps. But, in its limited scope, I found that each interview offered a different perspective, a new way of looking at traditional and modern identities, at the experience of being a villager in Dakar, at the power and strength of familial, ethnic, and geographical roots, and at the effects of Dakar's unique multiethnic environment on individual, ethnic identification. To make room for different perspectives, I allowed interview subjects to diverge into the topics they found most compelling and most relevant to my research subject, and my interviews ended up discussing ethnicity, language, caste, discrimination, tradition, music, global trends, and urban life.

This left me in an interesting situation. The interviews left me with dynamic, often paradoxical information. They left me layered, fluid, differing opinions. They fractured any attempt at a concrete thesis, at a cohesive, unified argument about the impact of urbanization on ethnic affiliation and the creation of an urban identity. The impact is, in effect, immeasurable, variant, subjective, and oftentimes, unclear.

These interviews, nevertheless, perfectly captured the dynamism of identity, and ethnicity in particular. Instead of an in depth case study, I decided, rather, to seek to emulate the fluidity of identity within my research (which can be seen most evidently in my section "Wolofization"). I realized ideas move and transform one another; arguments build together and crumble apart under scrutiny; urban affiliation dissolves once we start to question it. I was left with a constellation of ideas and opinions that I, in this work,

attempt to synthesize and pull together, to connect the dots, if you will, and offer an ethnographic interpretation of a topic and theme that is nebulous in itself.

I supplemented my interviews with extensive secondary work to study the history of urbanization in Senegal and, in large part, the nature of Dakar Wolof and its impact on Senegalese identity. In addition, I attempted to release a survey to a group of university students to gather a large quantity of statistical information in an organized, efficient manner; but again, due to time constraints, was unable to receive their results.

My research was based in Dakar, for Dakar has been the principal destination for the rural exodus, thus offering the clearest data regarding migration, urbanization, and conflicting identities, and thus constituting the most important site for the invention and evolution of Senegalese urban society. In addition, because of migration patterns, Dakar offers the most unique and profound look at the effects of an ethnic *mélange* on an individual.

I believe that research conducted outside of Dakar in rural villages would have further strengthened this body of work. It would offer a strong look at the power and spirit of ethnic identification in a non-urban setting, and would provide important background information on the traditional structures and pillars of Senegalese identities.

### III. Findings and Discussion

Media and technology have greatly dulled the shock of coming to the city; despite rural origins, villagers, thanks to the television and social media, often come with an idea of what urban life entails – the pace, the pollution, the price, etc. There are those who adapt and embrace city life, and there are those who, despite their relocation, hold onto rural lifestyles and strategies of survival. The process of integration and assimilation often conjures ideas about the need for ethnic dilution in order to enter a Wolof-dominated space. This perceived necessity has created a strong binary between those who look to integrate, and those who do not. Village ways of living are thus reproduced throughout the city, as can be seen, most evidently, by the goats roaming through neighborhoods, horse-drawn carts sharing the road with buses, women hand-washing laundry in empty lots, marriages shutting down entire streets, where the voice of the *griot* and the music of traditional instruments can be heard over the hum of car engines and pedestrians.<sup>21</sup>

The fact of adaptation and integration tends to distinguish a villager and an urbanite. Those who consider themselves Dakarais or urban citizens tend to be proud of their ability to constantly adapt, while those who consider themselves villagers tend to be proud of their hold on their roots and traditions. They push against an urban identity, clinging to their traditional identity, perhaps already understanding that “becoming urban

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<sup>21</sup> See 2.

is a process of transformation, in which an old identity is temporarily shed and a new one, more appropriate to the surroundings, is assumed.”<sup>22</sup>

a. Uprooted

I found my greatest challenge in trying to research the effect of city life on one’s connection to his/her roots. Perhaps this comes, as I mentioned in *Methodologies*, from the inherent difficulty of researching identity. Roots, although evoking a concrete image, slip away, dissolve as soon as you try to grab onto them. I wanted to understand if a villager’s identity changes, morphs, upon entering the city – does a villager’s connection to his ethnicity grow stronger, a root fortified by the distance, reified by its integral role as a mode to connect back to his family and his village, and as a compass to orient himself in a new, concrete setting? – or does, on the other hand, his ethnic identity fade away, left at the entrance to the city in order to assimilate, lost in the hustle-bustle of city life, evidenced only by the faint scars on his temples? Separated from the land of his ancestors, what happens to a villager’s conception of where he comes from, of who he is?

But how to ask this?

With my informants, I discussed changes in behavior, in attitude, shifts in systems of values and traditions. I hoped that this would offer insight into shifts in identity, by comparing their introspections in a context where they are in a uni-ethnic environment versus where they are in a multi-ethnic environment. They reflected, saw static behavior, no changes in attitudes, no changes in the conceptions of themselves or of their ethnic

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<sup>22</sup> Fiona McLaughlin. “Dakar Wolof and the Configuration of an Urban Identity.” *Journal of African Cultural studies*. 14.2 (Dec. 2001) : 157.

identification. They continue to identify their homes as their village, to identify themselves as “*venant de X*.”<sup>23</sup> They continue to consider themselves a “villageois à Dakar.”

Nevertheless, it seems to be a back-and-forth. Although Keba Mane maintains that he has not changed, that he is still a Velingeraois at heart,<sup>24</sup> that he has not adopted new city/Westernized values, he states that his friends and family, when he returns home, exclaim, “Now you are too *toubab* in your head!”<sup>25</sup> Although he does not feel different, others consider him to have changed and urbanized in his behavior and values.<sup>26</sup> And as Mame Penda contends, “Older people are used to the city...they have the culture of someone who lives in the city. Once you are used to city life, you won’t return to the village...They return difficultly.”<sup>27</sup> Amadou pushes this even further, “A lot of people, when they leave their village and come to Dakar, after a few years, they change their behavior. They copy the people from Dakar. Certain Haalpulaar, when they come here, they want to become *toubab*, or Wolof.”<sup>28</sup> As mentioned above, there are those that continue to hold fiercely onto their roots; there are those that, maybe without even realizing it, melt into the urban mix; and there are those that, perhaps, adopt a new ethnicity entirely.

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<sup>23</sup> Literally “coming from X,” with “x” serving to indicate their hometown/ancestral village.

<sup>24</sup> Velingera being his town of origin.

<sup>25</sup> “*Tu es trop toubab dans ta tête!*”

*Toubab* refers to foreigner, particularly one of Western origin.

<sup>26</sup> “*Je ne sens pas différent, mais ces les gens qui pensent que j’ai change.*”

<sup>27</sup> “*Les gens plus agés sont habitués à la ville. Quand ils sont agés et ils sont en ville, ils ont la culture de quelqu’un qui habite en ville, disant...maintenant, quand tu te sent habitué en ville, ils ne retournent pas au village – rarement. Ils retournent au village difficilement.*”

<sup>28</sup> “*Beaucoup des gens quand ils quittent le village et ils viennent a Dakar, après quelque année, ils changent de comportement. Ils copient beaucoup sur les gens de Dakar. Certains Haalpulaars, quand ils viennent ici, ils veulent devenir toubab ou bien Wolof.*”

As Mame Penda further explained, villagers tend to have stronger roots than people born in Dakar.<sup>29</sup> They have a remarkably deep sense of solidarity, within their lineages and within their extended families. They maintain connections with their village, sending money home periodically, traveling home each year for Tabaski,<sup>30</sup> returning to their village to find a wife/husband and marry.

These roots are maintained and fortified within the city as well, as villagers and people from shared ethnic backgrounds form networks of social relationships and associations. Groups of migrants, coming from the same village, tend to travel together to the city, and here, maintain their bonds, often live together, like my informant Fatou, who lived among Serer women from her village. At Université Cheikh Anta Diop, one can spot banners advertising “*Resortissants de X*,” associations of students coming from the same village/town. Newly-arrived migrants rely on their village counterparts who have already installed themselves in the city for contact and support, to find housing, a job, and for access into the urban economy. Villagers emulate traditional solidarities, social networks, and modes of social organization that mirror those found in rural areas.

Success in the informal economy is dependent on these networks, and on networks created within the religious associations that were, as well, born out of the villages and adapted for an urban environment, the *dahiras*.<sup>31</sup> The informal market is modeled after traditional village interactions – “they are based on the traditional values of

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<sup>29</sup> “*Ils sont tress, tress enracinés, les racines sont fortes, plus fortes que celles des gens qui sont nés à Dakar.*”

<sup>30</sup> Tabaski is one of the largest Muslim holidays in Senegal. Families join together and each father in the family slaughters a lamb, or equivalent animal.

<sup>31</sup> Beth Buggenhagen. “The Promise of Paradise.” *Muslim Families in Global Senegal: Money Takes Care of Shame*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 2012.

A *dahira* is a relatively small religious association (ranging from 50-300 people), very popular in Senegal among the various different brotherhoods.

solidarity and reciprocity existing in rural areas, which were transplanted to African cities by rural migrants, and which took on new forms and functions as they adapted to the specificities of the urban environment.”<sup>32</sup>

b. Wolofization

It seems that no matter the length of time spent living in Dakar, most villagers will continue to identify with their home village and their place of birth. While they might identify as a *Boy Dakar*, signaling their integration into urban life, they will, most often, never identify as Dakarois. Papa Bouna Fall explained, “I’m very attached to my roots. I’m very proud of my hometown...I identify myself as a Meckois (even though I left when I was two years old). I’m a Mecke-native-born, but a *Boy Dakar* in real life.”<sup>33</sup> He explained that saying you are a Dakarois “means that you reject your roots...It means that you are assimilated, that you are not attached to your culture, that [you are] culturally not attached to [your] land.”<sup>34</sup> This echoes a common trope in the discussion of modernity in Africa, where ‘modern’ people are said to be ‘assimilated,’ as opposed to ‘traditional’ citizens who lay claim to ‘authenticity.’

Children, born in Dakar to parents originating from rural villages, may choose to identify as Dakarois or, rejecting the Dakarois identity, identify with the village of their parents. To choose Dakarois acknowledges place of birth, but also, as Keyti says, “it has

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<sup>32</sup> Ioana Liane Georgescu. “Rural-urban migration, the solidarity-based economy and informal governance in Dakar, Senegal” (Mount Holyoke College Senior Thesis). Spring 2012. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Bouna Fall. Personal Interview. 3 May 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

to do with a certain way of thinking.” While to choose the village of one’s parents similarly is, as Ndeye says, “a matter of the heart.” Although Ndeye grew up completely in Dakar and has little memory of her parents’ village, she was born there during the month of Tabaski, and remarks, “A part of myself was born there, so I consider myself a bit of villager, even though I grew up here, even though all my friends are Dakarois, I don’t consider myself Dakarois in my head; you see, it’s a matter of the heart.”<sup>35</sup> It is a delicate back and forth.

What is most fascinating perhaps, is that, although a Senegalese in Dakar will not shed his physical origin (his place of birth), he might shed his ethnic one. This has led older generations to claim that the younger generations in the city have strayed, modernized, turned away from tradition, and given less and less importance to their ethnic heritage. As Amadou explained, “My elders are deeply rooted in their culture – now the young people who come to Dakar aren’t rooted; they don’t really care about their culture.”<sup>36</sup>

Villagers in the city, and their city-born children, may choose to identify as Wolof, even if they are Serer, Peul, Diola, etc. One informant claimed, “I guess technically my parents are Peul and I was born and raised in Saint Louis, but I have been here for more than 40 years. I speak Wolof. I am Wolof.”<sup>37</sup> And another, “My family name is Serer, but I would say that I am Wolof because that is the only language I am

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<sup>35</sup> “J’ai une partie de moi qui est née la-bas, alors je me considère un peu villageoise, bien que j’ai grandi ici, j’ai tout fait ici, mais je ne me considère pas Dakaroise, dans ma tête. Tout mes amis sont Dakarois, mais tu vois, c’est une affaire de coeur.”

<sup>36</sup> “*Mes années sont plus enracinés dans leur culture – les jeunes qui viennent maintenant ici a Dakar ne sont pas tellement enracinés. Ils ne s’occupent pas tellement de la culture.*”

<sup>37</sup> Abdoulaye. Personal Interview. 18 April 2016.

speaking.”<sup>38</sup> Generally speaking, the reasons for this ethnic switch seem to be two-fold: first, as inter-ethnic marriages are becoming more and more widespread, and as tracing out ethnic heritages is becoming more and more complex, young people who see themselves as ethnic mutts will default to a Wolof ethnicity, because of language; second, the loss of maternal languages has also led young people to default on a Wolof ethnicity, again because of language.

To address the second reason for Wolof identification, I have found, just as Donal O’Brien noted in his research, that “a certain ambivalence, however, marks the attitudes of these newly Wolofized urbanites who often express a sense of regret that they do not speak the language of their parents and go back and forth, sometimes in a seemingly contradictory manner, in declaring their ethnicity.”<sup>39</sup> Thanks to Wolofization, informants displayed a vagueness and a back-and-forth regarding their identification patterns. I noticed that often, after having been asked his/her ethnicity, my informant would hesitate, say the ethnicity of his/her parents or of his/her last name, and then remark that he/she only speaks Wolof. Wolof’s linguistic ubiquitousness in Dakar has had a profound effect on Senegalese ethnicity. In this sense, it seems as if Wolof has become a default ethnicity, although it is treated as a language. Here, although they recognize that ethnicity is related, but not limited, to ancestry, land, values, traditions, food, and language, my informants, perhaps without even realizing, come to fixedly define ethnicity in terms of language use, only. These two meanings (language and ethnicity) thus converge, coming to define one another.

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<sup>38</sup> Cheikh (Keyti) Sene. Personal Interview. 5 May 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Fiona McLaughlin. “Haalpulaar Identity as a Response to Wolofization.” *African Languages and Cultures*. 8.2 (1995) : 155.

Rural migrants in Dakar tend to hold onto their ethnic languages while their children tend to let go. These children are called *x-gallé* (*Peul-gallé*, *Serer-gallé*, etc.), meaning that they do not speak their maternal language.<sup>40</sup> This poses a sort of identity conflict, where the individual finds difficulty connecting with his/her ethnic community, and where the community finds difficulty accepting the individual. This can be seen in the following statements : “If you don’t speak your maternal language, they [your ethnic group] will say you are not a real Peul or a real Serer” ; “I feel Serer even if I don’t speak the language, but it is difficult to say that you are Serer while you do not speak Serer, to represent your ethnicity when you don’t speak the language.”<sup>41</sup> Wolofization, increasing communication possibilities and community solidarity, can be seen as a unifying factor, accepted happily by some, and rejected by others, typically older generations who cling to tradition.

While loss of language does not necessitate loss of ethnic identity, the effects of urbanization on language use and the hegemonic influence of Urban Wolof in Dakar can most clearly be seen in ethnic identification. In addition, the nature of Urban Wolof comes to characterize and indicate the nature of urban identity. Urban Wolof, a linguistic creole with a distinctive mix of Wolof and French words and phrasings, rising out of sustained contact between Wolof and French, mirrors Dakar urban identity, a cultural creole molded by both tradition and modernity, connected to cultural roots but overlaid

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<sup>40</sup> *Gallé* literally means home in Wolof.

<sup>41</sup> “*Ils disent qu’on n’est pas de vrai Pulaar ou de vrai Serer.*”

“*Je me sens Serer même si je parle pas la langue, mais c’est difficile de se dire que tu es Serer alors que tu ne parles pas Serer...de représenter ton ethnie sans parler la langue.*”

with international tastes and values, and based locally while simultaneously linked in to global networks.

Dakar's young citizens, whether feeling land-less or speech-less, lose their grounding, find traditional, ancestral pillars crumbling beneath their feet, and scabble to construct and conceive of their identity in light of their concrete environment. Born in the city, children of modernization, they can no longer mold their identities according to their ancestors'. They either reach out, clinging to the remnants of traditional identity structures (i.e., ethnicity, birth place, and language), or abandon those strings entirely, seeking to create an identity that is completely new, completely their own.

c. A New Identity?

Out of the reshuffling of ethnic identities emerges a unique urban identity – an identity that is being created, constructed, reimagined at the present moment. Not necessarily Dakarois, perhaps something different entirely, this distinct identity, born in a multi-ethnic environment, is forming itself on different pillars – it is no longer as deeply tied to ethnicity and ancestry, as it was before – but now to new aspects and functions : the shared reality of urban daily life, Urban Wolof as a shared language, the creation of a new home within the contours of urban space, a shared urban culture, chaotic, constantly moving, constantly changing.

Artist Cheikh Ndiaye explained:

“I live with a Serer, a Diola, and a Bambara...there is little difference among us. We have the same reality, we all speak the same language, we don't speak the language of our ancestors...we are all preoccupied by the problems of Dakar...unemployment, deteriorated infrastructures, and the water shortage. What we live is what unites us. My generation is cut off from ethnicity but we have a different reality, that of daily life in the city.

Art born from urban Africa is an art without ethnic connotation, an art expressing the concerns, anxieties, and hopes of everyday urban life.”<sup>42</sup>

This de-ethnicized urban identity, while formed on the streets of Dakar, connects city citizens to urban centers across the world; Dakar's urban community participates in a larger network – a global urban community. As Joanna Grabski stated, urbanites are “not just residents of Dakar, but citizens of the city.”<sup>43</sup> As an informant explained, “Urban identity, I carry it with me whether I am in Dakar or in Paris or in New York.”<sup>44</sup> This urban identity is still emerging; it is in a constant process of adaptation. In fact, what most clearly characterizes this identity, apart from its global nature, is the identifier's ability to adapt, to be in a state of constant emergence, creation, redefinition, change.

It embraces Dakar's distinctive mix of local and global, traditional and modern. As Keyti explained, adopting a new urban identity “doesn't mean that we are not being ourselves anymore; it doesn't mean that we are throwing away our traditions...we can keep some of them, but we can also [borrow] from other people and make a mix which at

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<sup>42</sup> Joanna L Grabski. “Dakar's Urban Landscapes: Locating Modern Art and Artists in the City.” *African Arts*. 36.4 (Winter 2003) : 35.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>44</sup> Cheikh (Keyti) Sene. Personal Interview. 5 May 2016.

the end will be ours.” It is the process of identity creation, which we researchers can witness at its birth, and track its progression through time.

This identity has emerged naturally with the rural exodus, and thus the influence of traditions from across the country, and with modernization, and thus the influence of technology and values from across the globe. However, specific movements like Set-Setal and the growth of Senegalese hip hop and rap have greatly contributed to the development of an urban identity. They, most basically, introduced the idea of the existence of an urban identity in general.

Set-Setal grew out of the political disenchantment and social unrest among Senegalese youth of the 1990s. Young people took to the city, cleaning trash, covering the streets with art that exalted urban culture, and creating a new Dakar in their image. “By redefining public space, [they] fashioned a new historical memory, one which is quintessentially urban.”<sup>45</sup> While rap and hip hop introduced the idea of an urban identity, Set-Setal offered the possibility for Senegalese to legitimize that urban identity, to construct and configure a self-conscious urban culture within the space of the city.

The movement brought Senegalese from a variety of backgrounds and traditions together. From this mix, citizens realized that together they could create a new community, a new identity, at once separate and inclusive of their differing backgrounds. As Keyti explained, “Set-Setal brought this idea that we could be a community, even in a

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<sup>45</sup> Fiona McLaughlin. “Dakar Wolof and the Configuration of an Urban Identity.” *Journal of African Cultural studies*. 14.2 (Dec. 2001) : 154.

city, even if it's changing, even if our identities and our personalities are changing, we could still be a community."<sup>46</sup>

Set-Setal is also responsible for the creation of the nomenclatures *Boy Grand-Dakar*, *Boy Sicap*, etc.,<sup>47</sup> and the pride that urban residents began to feel for their neighborhoods. According to Keyti, these affiliations “helped build and reinforce this urban identity, that not only am I from Dakar, but also I am coming from a special place in Dakar.”<sup>48</sup>

#### d. Growing New Roots

Through neighborhood affiliations, urban citizens build new roots and new ties. Whereas villagers define their roots according to their ethnic heritage and their ancestral land (most probably their village of birth), Dakarais develop special relationships with their neighborhood land and community. They claim new land, and thus, claim a new heritage – a new lineage and system of social interactions that is based on the neighborhood relationships. The neighborhood comes to model an urban-based village. It offers a sense of belonging, a community with a shared name – the *Ouakamois*, the *Yoffois*, etc. It offers a claim to space in Dakar, a space where they can grow new roots, where they can localize in a globalized environment, and a way to express the mutually constitutive relationship between a people and their environment, once so present in the village, and now rediscovered in the city. These networks and prides can be seen in the

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<sup>46</sup> Cheikh (Keyti) Sene. Personal Interview. 5 May 2016.

<sup>47</sup> The same as *Boy Dakar*, but referring to a specific neighborhood within the city.

<sup>48</sup> Cheikh (Keyti) Sene. Personal Interview. 5 May 2016.

dizzying amount of artificially created neighborhood youth associations, tontines,<sup>49</sup> dahiras, local governments, etc. These new community networks support Erin Augis' description of "the experience of being urban – with its inherent dislocations but also multitudinous possibilities for new forms of affiliation"<sup>50</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

This research leaves us with interesting conclusions. It shows us that, in Dakar, the break between rural and urban identity is stark and visible in the differences between ethnic affiliation. It is manifested in the split between a local, ethnic identity and a global, non-ethnic identity. But what about all those citizens who are stuck in the middle – who are Dakarois yet hold tight to their ethnic heritage, who adopt a Wolof ethnicity in an urban environment? They exemplify the process of ethnic evolution : how complex, subjective, and messy it can be; how, in spite of land and language, some continue to cling on to ethnic heritage while others let go, instead crafting a new, urban identity.

We have seen how most migrants maintain incredibly strong ethnic ties by sustaining relationships with their village; how Dakar-born determine their identity by place of birth and spirit, and how their loss of maternal language complicates their ethnic identification, sometimes leading them to claim Wolof ethnicity; and finally how, simultaneously, as ethnic identity is evolving and being reshuffled, out of the multi-ethnic

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<sup>49</sup> A *tontine* is a small rotating-credit association, popular among Senegalese women. Tontines tend to group according to neighborhood or profession.

<sup>50</sup> Erin Augis. "Dakar's Sunnite Women : The Dialectic of Submission and Defiance in a Globalizing City." *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. 74.

environment, a new, forward-looking, de-ethnicized, de-localized urban identity emerges. We have seen that the friction between rural and urban has produced movement, effect – the evolution of traditional identity structures and the creation of a new identity entirely. These three groups offer clear steps, 1-2-3, in urbanization’s process of de-ethnicization.

For this research to move forward and evolve as well, much more data must be gathered from a. young, newly-arrived villagers in the city, and b. citizens who are stuck in phase 2, in that grey space between rural and urban, ethnic and non-ethnic, to better understand the complexity and nuances of that stage of identity transformation.

In addition, my final section, “Growing New Roots,” offers fascinating insight into the ways in which the development of urban neighborhood affiliations and associations may come to replace traditional, village-inspired social organization recreated by rural inhabitants. The expansion and exploration of this topic is key to understanding what may come to take over ethnic affiliations – will quick exchanges, regarding social associations, be built into first greetings, like the ‘joking cousins,’ instead? “Growing New Roots” opens up a large gap in this research that needs to be filled.

This work provides a framework for the identity building and evolution processes, mapping out how environment and language come to affect one’s relation to self and others. It has demonstrated that ethnic identification rests in a precarious position, that it is evolving quickly and unevenly. As Dakar continues to expand, this research hopes to map out where ethnic, rural, and urban identification stand at the present moment, so that

researchers can continue to trace where Senegalese identity is heading in the present future. The space of the city is changing rapidly, and as Keyti warns, “Whether we want it or not, we are caught in something which is going really fast. We’ve got to make decisions and adapt.”

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