Fall 2011

A Foreigner’s Gaze on the Micro-Culture of the Car-Rapide—Senegalese Values vs. Monetary Lust

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A Foreigner’s Gaze on the Micro-culture of the Car-Rapide—Senegalese Values vs. Monetary Lust

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Senegal: National Identity and the Arts, SIT Study Abroad, Fall 2011
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to the car-rapide and everyone who works for it. Thank you for this experience. I hope to see you in Dakar in thirty years.

Thank you to the entire SIT staff for your guidance in the past three months.

Merci, Oumar Ndao, pour vos conseils.

Merci beaucoup à la famille Camara, pour votre hospitalité et gentillesse.

Merci, Tafa, pour ton assistance. Ce projet n’aurait pas eu possible sans toi.

Leegi leegi, Senegal!
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Abstract

The vibrant, chaotic, and interactive Car Rapide, a poignant micro-culture in Dakar, is a visually communicative entity and social space in Senegal’s transportation system. From an outsider’s gaze, this project addresses the history, artistic and religious significance, inner-workings of the system of employees, and present day implications of the car-rapide. The car-rapide emerges as the embodiment of both valuable and challenging aspects of Senegalese culture.
Introduction

Alhumdulilahi! As an American, first bearing witness to the chaotic activity that is transportation on the roads of Dakar, the car-rapide immediately captured my attention. I stopped dead in my tracks to regard this foreign, vibrant, nostalgic thing simultaneously lumbering and zooming down the street. Question after question sprang into my mind about these visually arresting vans without windows, chalk-full of people, with teenage boys precariously hanging off the back, hissing at me, almost incomprehensibly shouting “Ouakam, Ouakam, Ouakam, Ouakam, Ouakam”.

I quickly learned on my first trip in a car-rapide to reach for the bar on the car’s ceiling when boarding, or you are bound to loose footing, as I did, when the car lurches to a start. One cannot miss the pavement rushing underneath one’s feet beneath the car’s holey floorboards, the broken rearview mirrors pieced together with tape, and the dashboard dials that cease to work. In a car-rapide exists a language without words—hissing, metal on metal tapping, coin shaking. On five occasions I saw the apprenti and several passengers pushing and running behind a car-rapide (three times full of passengers,) either in an effort to start it, or move it after it had broken down. An object uniquely Senegalese, I felt an honest desire to learn everything about these remarkable characters who typify Dakar’s streets day and night.

I formed a relationship with the car-rapide in the past month. We formed a bond through random, nuanced moments. One of my trips to le Village des Arts, I serendipitously took the same car-rapide both ways. When two car-rapides are stopped next to each other in traffic, they become one shared space. The absence of windows easily facilitates dialogue between the chauffeurs, passengers, and apprenti. I remember
one trip from HLM to Point E, a pedestrian traveling the same route matched our speed in the car-rapide. Another time, a man who works at the ENDA library who was taking a car-rapide, recognized me on the sidewalk and invited me to climb on. We had a five-minute conversation en route to nowhere in particular. All in all, the car-rapide’s radiant designs and bold phrases inspired me to begin a project to reveal the true car-rapide.

*Rationale*

I am a Communication Studies Major. I am intrigued by the ability of objects and artifacts to communicate cultural identities and ideologies. The car-rapide is an object embedded in Senegalese culture with a rich and dynamic history. But as all cultural entities undergo perpetual change, the car-rapide today is not what it was ten or thirty years ago. The intention of my ISP was to research and discover what I see as the car-rapide’s present day role in Dakar.

*Ethical Considerations*

In researching the car-rapide, I had to consider the ethics of studying an environment that is a necessity in many Dakarois’ lives. I had to use caution to avoid offending anyone on the basis of socio-economic status—to make anyone feel less than for taking the car-rapide, the cheapest form of public transportation in Dakar. Car-rapides also present safety issues on Dakar’s roads. So, when interviewing anyone who works for the car-rapide, I assuredly abstained from implying any sense of blame or condescension on their field of work. Due to my ISP’s budget, I faced the ethical consideration of negotiating or refusing to compensate others for their services, walking the line between necessary and unnecessary information.

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1 Two neighborhoods in Dakar
Methodology

Because I approached my topic from many angles, I used several different methodologies, listed below, so as not to limit my findings in any realm of research.

Participant Observation

I conducted twenty hours of strict participant observation in car-rapides—the object of my study. It was imperative to me to spend ample time in my target environment. Sometimes I would take notes, sometimes I would just watch, listen, and feel what was happening around me. I observed who takes the car; who talks to each other and why; how conversations start; interactions and communication between passengers and apprenti, apprenti and the chauffeur; money exchange; how seating etiquette works; stopping and starting patterns; and boarding and descending patterns. While I was a novice car-rapide user at first, I soon learned how to make sure the car-rapide was heading toward my destination. I slowly learned how to verify the fares. I felt my role as the researcher automatically emphasized because toubabs are a true minority on car-rapides. My presence in a car-rapide generated many looks and comments, especially when I was taking notes. When I asked fellow passengers questions, some were very helpful, some very unfriendly, and some didn’t speak French.

Interviewing

Throughout the past month, I conducted ten formal interviews with nine different people, and six informal interviews or conversations about the car-rapide (see Appendix: Figure 1: Interviews). The people I chose to interview span the entire scope of points of view on the car-rapide. I constantly networked and asserted myself as a student studying
the car-rapide. While I always prepared questions before hand for the formal interviews, I rarely followed the exact sequence. I let our conversations flow naturally to allow my interviewees to speak on their area of expertise related to the car-rapide. When the conditions were well suited to record the interview, i.e. inside with minimal background noise, I recorded the interview on my computer or tape recorder. I always went to my interviewee’s place of work, usually because it was during a work-day, but also because I believe people are most comfortable in their own environment. During my interviews, I felt simultaneously like the researcher, a student, and a colleague. By asking the artists questions about the business side of the car-rapide, and the business people about the artistic side, I sparked many thoughtful discussions.

**Archival Research**

I researched the car-rapide in the volumes of books and articles at the National Archives, ENDA (Environnement et développement du tiers mondes), and CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa). My aim was to explore the history of the car-rapide from its earliest beginnings. The employees at each venue were helpful and insightful, directing me toward everything related to urban transport. When possible, I photocopied articles and sections of books.

**Mapping**

I utilized mapping to diagram the routes of the car-rapide in Dakar, an important component in understanding the car-rapide. A visual aid, the car-rapide’s domain becomes perceivable on a map. Papis, a frequent car-rapide user, imparted his knowledge on me and informed me about all of the routes.

**Advantages and Disadvantages**
My greatest advantage was the ease with which I could conduct participant observation given the physical space of the car-rapide. Anyone who takes a car-rapide is a participant observer. Note taking while participant observing was both an advantage and disadvantage. While it insured documentation, it changed the dynamic in the car because I sensed other passengers feeling watched, altering the atmosphere to a less genuine form. My archival research yielded many articles from the 1990s and early 2000s which I consider a disadvantage because I studied the present day significance of the car-rapide.

Limitations

Conducting the vast majority of my project in French, which is not my first language, was a limitation. Despite it’s merits as a learning experience, I limited my findings when I was unable to say exactly what I wanted to say due to the language barrier. Also, most of the people who work for the car-rapide only speak Wolof, so my Senegalese friend Tafa verbally translated all of my questions and my interviewee’s responses. There is a sense of community based around the Wolof language in the car-rapide, so I was never included in conversations that occurred. Another limitation was the difficulty of taking photos. Many people yelled at me, or asked for money, so I was forced to stop or if even start at all. Money was a limitation—some of the people I met only wanted money from me, which hindered my research when I refused to pay them for their time. If I could conduct this ISP again, I would have purchased an electronic tape-recorder, I would have conducted more background research, and informally interviewed more people.
Research Findings

History and Evolution

Car-rapides first appeared in Senegal in 1947. Built in France by Renault and shipped overseas, the traditionally blue vehicles came to Senegal to transport merchandise in urban and interurban Dakar due to “l’extension spatiale de la ville après la deuxième guerre mondiale” (Diouf 45, 2002).2 The name car-rapide simply came to be because the first car-rapides were the only alternative to charettes3, thus aptly named “rapide parce que c’était plus rapide qu’un chaval”4 (Ndao 2011). As Dakar’s population continued to grow, toliers5 created windows and built bench seats, to transform “les fourgonnettes SG2”6 into vehicles that could transport passengers. At the same time, caligraphs painted the top section of the car-rapides yellow, like taxis, to render them more visible. The original grand transporteurs, like Ndiaga Ndiaye and Mbaye Mané Mboup, developed the roles of workers to run a compatible transport sector (see next section, Hierarchy of the System) and each hired a caligraph to paint either “Transport en Commun”, “Transport Urbaine”, or “Transport Interurbaine”, and “Alhumdulilahi” and the propriétaire’s name on the car to distinguish the car-rapides by propriétaire. In the 70s, the car-rapide fare was 15 CFA from centre ville to Colobane7. Today, the price of a car-rapide trip ranges from 75 CFA to 125 CFA, based on distance.

Internationally renowned artist Moussa Tine was the first to paint designs on car-rapides in the 1970s. He was a frequent passenger aboard car-rapides as a young man, 

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2 “the spatial extension of the city after WWII
3 single horse drawn carts
4 “rapide because it was faster than a horse”
5 metal-worker
6 SG2 vans
7 A neighborhood in the center of the Cap Vert peninsula
hanging off the back and sitting up front. One day he sketched an image of the Bamba inside the car. The chauffeur believed his car to be blessed, and soon other drivers wanted Tine to embellish their cars. Tine saw the car-rapide as “un bijoux qui n’avait pas d’identification, comme tous les autres véhicules, une opportunité pour moi d’apporter des décorations.” He wanted people to marvel at the car-rapides and have a desire to enter them. Tine decided to keep the original blue base color to ensure the car-rapide would be noticeable. The car-rapide was literally and figuratively Tine’s vehicle to become a future artist.

In 1972, propriétaire Lobatt Fall hired Tine to embellish his fleet of car-rapides. To get inspired, Moussa “penetrait sa culture.” Fall was the member of a toubalo family, in other words, crocodile chasers. Thus, Tine designed a crocodile on each of Fall’s car-rapides, giving it instant recognition. As a result, many more passengers began taking Fall’s cars. Griot and traditional singer Assan Ndjay sang a song about the image of Fall’s car-rapides. Subsequently, numerous other propriétaires sought out Tine’s work as the best way to increase revenue, and indeed, car-rapides garnished with figures and phrases attracts more clients. From Tine’s questioning about propriétaires’ faith came the presence of Muslim confréries on car-rapides. Tine explicates, “j’ai fait quelque chose qui te plairait.” He created the eyes, horse head, eagle, soccer ball, and Lamp Fall motifs that have come to define the car-rapide’s aesthetic that still exists today (see Visual Symbolism).

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8 “A jewel that didn’t have identification, like all the other vehicles, it was an opportunity for me to bring some decoration.”
9 “penetrated his culture.”
10 brotherhood
11 “I made something that pleased you.”
The car-rapide entered a new époque after Tine stopped painting in 1994 to reinvent his career. Bill (see Hierarchy of System) became the painter to define the car-rapide’s next époque when he created the fruit, flower, plant, diamond design, flag themes and heart-shaped face images in 2002 (see Figure 2). He claims his only influence was his desire to make the car-rapides more vibrant and visible. “Les Senegalese aiment le couleur. C’est naturel.” Moussa Tine, however, thinks these designs are too simple, no longer original.

Paralleling the car-rapide’s artistic evolution have been the external economic factors affecting the car-rapide. In 2000, the World Bank loaned the equivalent of U.S. $70 Million Equivalent to the Republic of Senegal for an Urban Mobility Improvement Project. Known as UMIP,

The objective of this Adaptable Program Lending (APL) operation is to contribute to the improvement of the safety, efficiency, and environmental quality of urban mobility in the Dakar metropolitan area, especially for the urban poor, and improve road safety in Thiès and Kaolack. It will do this by (i) promoting public transport services and (ii) ensuring the safe movement of pedestrians and road users (UMIP 2000, 3).

With Dakar as the pilot city, UMIP was the first project of its kind in Sub-Saharan Africa. Oumar Gaye of CETUD believes it is the best project ever for the sous region of Senegal, Mail, Burkina Fasso, and Cote d’Ivoire. The first phase of the project in 1997 created the Conseil Exécutif des Transports Urbains de Dakar (CETUD), responsible for the program’s financial management. As Mademba Ndiaye, Senior Communications Officer at the World Bank, sums up, the goal of UMIP is “la destruction du car-rapide.”

12 time period
13 “The Senegalese love color. It’s naturel.”
14 subregion
15 “The destruction of the car-rapide.”
Many alarming factors spurred this project. Dakar’s population grew from 18,000 in 1902 to 2.2 million in 1998, and was estimated at 2,680,852 in 2009 (GeoHive). In 2000 the World Bank estimated two million trips a day into Dakar by public transport. A study in 1998 estimated the annual cost of externalities caused by public urban transport, such as traffic accidents, air pollution, traffic congestion, and noise, at 108 billion CFA (U.S. $180 million). The following table (Agouna 2005, 54) shows the pollutant emissions of Transport en Commun vehicles—accounting for 24.8 percent of total pollution by transportation in Dakar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pollutant</th>
<th>Ensemble du parc en circulation dans la region de Dakar(^\text{16})</th>
<th>Part des transports en commun(^\text{17})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>38 tonnes</td>
<td>12.5 tonnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composés organiques volatiles (COV)</td>
<td>4.6 tonnes</td>
<td>1.5 tonnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOx</td>
<td>8.7 tonnes</td>
<td>2.9 tonnes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Dakar’s the public transport fleet, 80 percent of the vehicles are over 10 years old, and 50 percent more than 15 years old with some car-rapides up to 35 years old. In 1995, 2,320 traffic accidents were reported in Dakar, resulting in 379 deaths and 2,100 injuries (UMIP 2011, 10).

UMIP’s urban transport leasing scheme has greatly affected the car-rapide. In other words, a new fleet of Tata busses will incrementally replace the car-rapides.

“Leasing contracts to enable Car Rapides’ operators to upgrade their fleet by purchasing either new vehicles (about 300 vehicles) or rehabilitated and refurbished vehicles (approximately 600) which meet safety and toxic emissions standards” (UMIP 2011, 37).

\(^{16}\) Entire fleet circulating the region of Dakar
\(^{17}\) Part of Transport en Commun vehicles
To be eligible to participate, proprietors must join the cooperative, headed by a professional private manager. The initial down payment equals 25 percent of the vehicle’s total cost (32 million CFA for a new Tata and 14 million CFA for a rehabilitated Tata), and operators will be required to pay three monthly lease payments, totaling about 550,000 CFA per month (UMIP 2011, 24).

Before the first wave of replacement, there were 3,500 car-rapides in Dakar providing 1.85 million rides a day—a source of livelihood for more than 35,000 people, generating annual revenue of $121 million (UMIP 2011, 24). When the first 600 car-rapides were phased out, President Wade stated it was “une révolution qu’il espère opérer dans le transport dakarois (Ndiaye 2005, 3).”

Today, there are about 1,500 car-rapides on Dakar’s streets, which means 65 percent have already been replaced, and 500 more will be phased out in February 2012 (Gaye 2011).

Car-rapides operate in all urbanized zones in Dakar. There are semi-permanent stops on every route, but generally one can board and descend at any time by tapping a coin or ring on the carrosserie, or telling the apprenti who will do the same. The last stop on the route dictates the route’s “name”, like Ouakam (Ndao 2011). Several symbolic car-rapide stops exist, “nommés de personnes célèbres dans le quartier où ils sont situés, par example la chanteuse Dial Mbaye, ou par une infrastructure, par example Robinet Lansana, un gardien de la boutique Diallo (Ndao 2011).”

Also, there are five car-rapide ateliers all over the city which augments its presence in the city. Car-rapides were built

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18 “A revolution he hopes will operate in Dakarois transport.”
19 “Named after famous people in the quartier, for example singer Dial Mbaye, or by an infrastructure, for example Robinet Lansana, shopkeeper of the Diallo boutique.”
20 workshops
to transport twenty-five passengers maximum at a time, plus the chauffeur and apprenti (see Figure 8). I observed as any passenger can, and Moussa Tine confirmed, this regulation has never been strictly observed or enforced. The car-rapides have also stopped posting the once mandatory signage: Vitesse Limité 70 km/h; Défense de cracher et de parler au chauffeur; and Ne fumez pas\textsuperscript{21} because chauffeurs and apprenti were breaking the rules. I observed old people, young people, men, women, children (with parents), students, professionals, individuals, couples, and small groups of friends take the car-rapide. 64% of Dakarois take the car-rapide (Ndiaye 2011). From my time in the field, I observed that everyone besides the very wealthy take the car-rapide. My friend Tafa, a regular car-rapide rider, believes that it is a matter of convenience. For example, if a car-rapide travels the route between one’s home and place of work, one will take the car-rapide. The same applies for Ndiaga Ndiaye and Tatas because if public transportation is a feasible option, it can be easier than bargaining with a taxi. One man I informally interviewed while waiting for a car-rapide in Hann lists the car-rapide as his favorite mode of transportation because it is the cheapest, even through Tata buses are faster, more direct, and their routes are known and indicated by numbers on the buses’ exterior.

**Hierarchy of the System**

Informal and unorganized, the system of workers employed by the car-rapide has a distinct hierarchy of positions. The car-rapide employs only men. The outline of positions from top to bottom, most power to lease power, highest to lowest paying, follows below. Everyone I interviewed in the system claims to have good relationships

\textsuperscript{21} Speed limit 70km/h, don’t spit or talk to chauffeur, don’t smoke
with workers in all other positions. Not all salaries are stated because they vary greatly among each profession

- **Transporteur (Transporter):** Transporteurs own multiple vehicles that operate in the public and private sectors of transportation. There are about 100,000 transporteurs in Dakar, most of whom own a combination of car-rapides, Ndiaga Ndiayes, Tatas, and taxis (Gaye 2011). There are no transporteurs specific to car-rapides.

- **Propriétaire (Owner):** Propriétaires can own multiple vehicles of different kinds, like transporteurs, or single vehicles of a single form. They are responsible for hiring chauffeurs and finding toliers, mechanics, electricians, and painters. A car-rapide propriétaire also chooses the designs to appear on his car-rapide, specifically the phrases related to Muslim conféries. I interviewed two car-rapide propriétaires.

   Ibra Faye owns four car-rapides and two taxis, and leases one Tata bus. He prefers his car-rapides because they make the most money. He entered the car-rapide hierarchy as a mechanic. Once he proved he could fix everything and had enough money, he bought his first car-rapide. Ibra’s biggest frustration is when his car-rapides stop running because they do not produce revenue when they are out of commission. Car-rapides “tombe en panne” more frequently today because the cars only continue to get older, and Renault stopped making and shipping new parts in 1986. Ibra sends each of his cars is in the garage at some point every week because they break down. His business is also hard right now because gas is expensive. At the height of the car-rapide’s prosperity, each of Ibra’s cars made 32,000 CFA everyday on average. Today he is satisfied if one car makes 15,000 CFA in a day. Ibra says he did not witness any change affecting the car-rapide system following UMIP. Ibra explained he only fixes his
car-rapides when they stop running. He only has relationships with his chauffeurs, all of whom were his friends whom he hired when they obtained driving permits. Ibra’s goal everyday is to make money by keeping his car-rapides out on the roads. Mademba of the World Bank describes “la mafia des propriétaires” as only concerned about making money; they have no regard for safety. To Ibra, the car-rapide is only a mode for cheap transportation, not a symbolic entity. It serves the Senegalese people well, running from 5am-1am. The Tata only runs from 6am-9pm. He knows the car-rapide is slowly diminishing in Dakar, and he claims he would become a Tata propriétaire exclusively if it is proven to be a better financial decision. Right now, he is not inspired to switch.

Mayacine is a propriétaire of one car-rapide and one Ndiaga Ndiaye. He is also the chauffeur of his car-rapide. Mayacine started working as an apprenti for his father, the chauffeur, and his grandfather, the propriétaire. In 2003, his grandfather bought, repaired, rebuilt, and repainted the car-rapide Mayacine now drives. Mayacine’s father slowly allowed Mayacine to start driving the car, and when he obtained his permit de transport, he became a chauffeur. Mayacine attributes his easy advancement from apprenti to propriétaire to his family connection—not a normal reality in the car-rapide system. He prefers the car-rapide because it takes less gas, it is cheap to repair, and it is easier to fill with passengers. A typical work-day for Mayacine begins at 5am and ends at 11pm, but he will work later if he is still filling his car. On average, Mayacine gives 15,000 CFA to his grandfather (still alive and in charge of finances) everyday, after paying for gas and the apprenti’s wages (see explanation of versement in Chauffeur section). The rising cost of gas presents financial difficulties for Mayacine. In the past,

22 “The mafia of propriétaires”
23 driving permit
he was able to pocket the extra money that is now spent on gas. Mayacine believes that even though “car-rapide dafa raffete”\textsuperscript{24}, people are curious and want to try new things like the Tata buses. Like Ibra, Mayacine does not believe the car-rapide is a Dakarois symbol; only a cheap mode of transport. For these reasons, Mayacine has seen the car-rapide decline in the recent past, and he thinks the car-rapide might totally stop in five years. He wants to keep his car forever, but he knows that one day he will have to find a new job.

- Chauffeur (Driver): Chauffeurs drive car-rapides. They are not supposed to interact with clients in the rear salon so as to stay focused on the road. I only witnessed a chauffeur turn around to speak to clients on three occasions. Mayacine hesitantly spoke to Tafa and I when we sat in the front seat explaining I was studying the car-rapide. Chauffeurs are responsible for finding apprenti, and settling disputes between apprenti and clients. I witnessed six intense verbal disputes between apprenti and clients. Four times the chauffeur intervened. If an apprenti injures a client, which happens very often (the day of our rendez-vous), the chauffeur pays for all costs of the injury, including police tickets and medical fees. One time, a young boy miss-stepped when boarding the car and was pulled under the moving car. He was not badly hurt, but Mayacine paid his mother 4,200 CFA for the hospital costs.

There exists an association of chauffeurs. In 1999, the municipality made an effort to end the chauffeurs’ association, only to be met with the chauffeurs’ fierce opposition—how else are chauffeurs supposed to pay the 4,500 CFA per month parking fee (Thiam 1999, 11)? Also, after the chauffeur uses each morning’s earnings to buy the

\textsuperscript{24} “The car-rapide is more beautiful.”
day’s carburant, the chauffeur is responsible for the versément: “l’argent versé par le chauffeur au propriétairé (Ndao 2011)” from the afternoon’s earnings. The night’s earnings constitute the frais généraux, such as the chauffeur and apprentis’ meals. At the end of each month, the chauffeur receives his salary from the propriétaire.

While chauffeurs are not restricted to particular routes, most chauffeurs have a route of preference. For example, propriétaire and chauffeur Mayacine prefers the section of the Ouakam-en ville route between Ouakam and Mermoz because he believes it consistently has the most clients which means he can make the most money.

Chauffeurs always want to have a full car. As my advisor Oumar Ndao explains, “l’argent, c’est une guerre.” When pulling into a stop, some chauffeurs will cut each other off to win clients. According to one article, “Les car rapides, à la recherche du gain créent ‘l’anarchie’ sur les routes avec un parc age qui tarde a se renouveler et à s’adapter aux exigences d’un transport moderne (Samb 1997, 4).” Others, like Mayacine, will guard a good spot at the end of a route where he will wait to fill his car before driving in the opposite direction. Further, competition heightens at certain times of the day, for example between 7 and 8 am when school starts.

Mayacine has noticed many changes in his field of work in the past eight years. The rising cost of gas presents financial difficulties for Mayacine. In the past, he was

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25 gas  
26 “The money paid by the chauffeur to the propriétairé.”  
27 Overhead costs  
28 neighborhoods in Dakar  
29 “Money, it’s a war.”  
30 “The car-rapides, in search of profit create ‘anarchy’ on the road with a fleet age that is slow to renew itself and adapt to the demands of a modern transportation.”
able to pocket the extra money that is now spent on gas. Also, the newer Ndiaga Ndiaye and Tata busses take away business from the car-rapide. For these reasons, Mayacine has seen the car-rapide decline in the recent past, and he thinks the car-rapide might totally stop in five years. He wants to keep his car forever, but he knows that one day he will have to find a new job.

Mayacine has never had a collision with another vehicle. He says the majority of accidents of the road are pedestrians who are not paying attention and get hit by cars. He firmly stated that accidents do not occur because car-rapides are too old and unsafe. After heavy contemplation, Mayacine states his favorite aspect of the car-rapide is its carrosserie\(^{31}\) because it’s easy to decorate. From Mayacine, I learned that the car-rapide cares about its clients. If someone doesn’t have money one day, they can ride for free and pay the next time. Mayacine also let’s his friends and family ride for free. One day after my friend Tafa helped me interview Mayacine, Tafa happened to board Mayacine’s car-rapide, and he and his two friends rode for free.

**Painteur (Painter):** A new or revamped car-rapide goes to a painteur after seeing the tolier, mechanicien, and electricien. Some painters work at Lat Dior, but the most prolific car-rapide painter today is Bill\(^*\), who works at his own painter’s garage near Difoncé. Bill started painting car-rapides in 1999, taking on his father’s profession. His dad worked alongside Moussa Tine beginning in 1975. Bill used to paint car-rapides on weekends when he was in school. To this day, Bill says he still has “l’amour de faire ce travail. Ça me donne grand plaisir.”\(^{32}\) First, new car-rapides are constructed by toliers

\(^{31}\) Body; metal frame  
\(^*\) Bill will only be referred to by his first name.  
\(^{32}\) “The love to do my job. It gives me great pleasure.”
from assorted scraps of various carrosseries, mechanics install the motor and inner workings, electricians wire the cars, then they come to Bill to be painted. The chauffeurs pay Bill: 20,000 CFA for simplistic designs, 50,000 CFA for complex designs (Bill 2011). In general, the chauffeur tells Bill which confrérie the proprietaire associates with. For Mourides, Bill will chose TOUBA, Lamp Fall, Baye Fall, etc; and for Tidjaines, Bill paints Talibe Cheikh. Besides these phrases, Bill ultimately decides what will appear on any given car-rapide. Usually proprietaires just tell Bill to make it look like other car-rapides. While most car-rapides are yellow on top and blue on bottom, some proprietors choose green, orange, or red on top, or in race cases, blue on top and yellow on bottom. “Ça fait parti de notre vie, la vie Senegalaïse.”33 One can say where one is going, and it’s always running, and it’s always cheap. To Bill, other vehicles, such as the Tatas, can never replace the car-rapide. They are not as strong. The car-rapide will last forever. “Les propriétaires veulent garder leurs car-rapides. Ce sera très difficile à enlever les car-rapides.”34

• Tolier (Metal Worker): Toliers work on the car-rapide’s carrosserie at Difoncé.35 They fix, strengthen, and enforce the resilience of the car-rapides exterior form. They construct new car-rapides from various parts of old car-rapides. As Babacar Ndiaye, Directeur des Archives du Senegal explains, Renault does not build car-rapides anymore, so the toliers work exclusively with used parts. They continue to have new work as car-rapides continue to age. Some car-rapides are noticeably longer than others because the

33 “It’s part of our lives, the Senegalese life.”
34 “The propriétaires want to keep their car-rapides. It will be very hard to remove the car-rapides.”
35 The car-rapide garage near the Grand Mosque downtown. The name is a hybrid of Credit Foncé,
toliers have literally taken the front of one car and the back of another to create a functional minibus. “Ils n’ont pas de scolarité, sans éducation, sans formation, et leur travail est aussi bon que les ingénieurs de BWM ou Mercedes en Europe.”36 One learns the trade through observation overtime. Toliers are valued resources and make a respectable wage in the car-rapide system. Babacar believes the car-rapide sustains itself solely due to the tolier’s work. Propriétor Ibra Faye also said “toliers dafay défe liggéeyumé bu baax.”37 The fact that there are 35 year old car-rapides still on the roads today is a testament to the tolier’s work.

- **Mechanicien (Mechanic):** Mechaniciens install and repair everything under a car-rapide’s hood. Most mechaniciens, like Mayacine’s mechanicien Youssou, work at le garage Lat Dior, near le marché Sandaga. Youssou stopped going to school and began working as a mechanic ten years ago at the age of fifteen. He learned the trade by observing a patron, an older mechanic who taught him everything he knows. Only interested in being a mechanic, he loves his job because it is good for making money. Proprietors and chauffeurs have confidence in Youssou because he has ten years of experience and does good work. A proprietor will come to Youssou when his car ceases to work and will ask Youssou to diagnose the problem. Youssou says he always thinks of and examines the car’s “security”. Sometimes, a proprietor will request a total verification of the car. While many mechanics he knows take shortcuts in their work, Youssou, “goor bu baax”38 does not. It is a proprietor’s decision if a car-rapide is too old to work. If he has the money to keep repairing it, the car-rapide will continue to run. A

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36 “They don’t have any schooling, no education, no training, and their work is as good as the engineers at BWM or Mercedes in Europe.”
37 “The toliers do the best work.”
38 “A good man”
car will never stop if there is money to fix everything. Youssou is pleased with his job, although it is hard work, because as the car-rapides get older, they need more repairs and he will make more money. He aspires to be a “big transporteur” one day because they make the most money. Youssou believes that it depends on the president’s safety assessment if the car-rapide will continue in the future. It is a necessity for the people of Dakar because it is cheap.

• Electricien (Electrician): Electricians wire new car-rapides at Lat Dior. There are fewer car-rapide electriciens compared to the other workers. Electrical issues are not a propriétaire’s major concern.

• Coxeurs (Client Gatherers): Coxeurs are responsible for filling car-rapide’s with passengers at the beginning and end of routes. Coxeurs are usually “retired” chauffeurs who cannot become proprietaires (Papis 2011). Sometimes, a coxeur will pretend to pay an apprenti to encourage passengers to board the car. “Au moment du départ, une petite commission proportionnelle au nombre de clients charges lui est versée par l’apprenti (Kandji 1999, 2).”39 One day I was switching car-rapide routes at le marché HLM, a point of convergence. I was walking over to three parked car-rapides when a coxeur asked me where I was going. When I responded “Mermoz”, he put his hand behind my shoulders and started leading me toward one car, until another man coxeurs grabbed my by the arm and pulled me in the opposite direction toward another car. The coxeur who intercepted me first “won”, and I boarded his car. I then realized that both cars were already seemingly full.

39 “Upon the moment of departure, the apprenti pays the coxeur a small amount proportional to the number of passengers.”
• **Apprenti (Apprentice):** Apprenti are usually teenage boys. In the car-rapide’s past, apprenti’s came from villages, but today most apprenti are city boys. Ablaye, an apprenti, speaks proudly of his job. He is starting to learn to drive so he can obtain his permit so he can become a chauffeur because chauffeurs make more money. They are responsible for collecting fares from clients, and signaling to the chauffeur when to stop the car and start it again. The signaling consists of tapping a coin or ring on the carrosserie when someone needs to get off, and again once they have descended. Oumar Ndao explains of an apprenti, “il est gentil quand il voit le client, mais un voyou quand le client est dans le car.”

Apprenti also communicate vulgar slang and use rude vocabulary. “Hé nieuwewul pass yaw,“ is how they impolitely ask for the fare.

In one article about apprenti, a dissuaded car-rapide passenger calls apprentis inhuman. “Il faut chaque jour débourser le double du tariff normal et ça n’empêche pas d’arrive au boulot en retard (Tall 2000, 6)”. Today, apprenti cause the most problems on car-rapides. Mayacine explains, when he was an apprenti, they worked well and honestly handled the money. Today, many more apprenti steal money both from clients, by not returning the correct change, and from the chauffeur, by keeping some of the day’s profits for himself. While I was conducting field work, on three occasions I had to remind the apprenti to give me change. Mayacine has a good idea of what he should be making everyday based on the pace of work, so if he suspects his apprenti give him less, he will ask them to hand over what they took, and if they refuse, he will fire them. An apprenti usually makes 1,300 CFA every day. Another arena in which apprenti create

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40 “He is nice when he sees the client, but a thug when the client is in the car.”
41 The equivalent of, “Give me the change.”
42 “One spends twice the normal tariff everyday, and one doesn’t arrive at work on time.”
problems are verbal and physical altercations with clients. While I did not witness any
physical exchanges, I heard and saw six verbal standoffs in a car-rapide—the cause of
which was always an apprenti not giving the correct change. My neighbor Khumba who
was a frequent car-rapide passenger, got in an argument with an apprenti in the 1970s
about incorrect change, and the apprenti proceeded to head-butt her.

- *Laveurs (Washers):* Typically teenage boys, they clean very dirty car-rapides at Lat Dior
or Difoncé for a small fee when a propriétaire wants to afford it.

**Visual Symbolism**

As previously discussed (see History and Evolution) artist Moussa Tine first
decorated car-rapides in the 1970s with images of “la vie des senegalaise, par example les
marabouts, les cheveaux. Je vais representer toute la culture Senegalaise sur la car-rapide
(Tine).” Tine’s most profound creations, all of which are still painted on car-rapides
today, are explained below.

- **Eagle (see Figure 3):** First painted in 1976, the particular chauffeur wanted very original
design “tout le monde a ecouté, quelque chose precious.” Tine was inspired by a song
by Pape Seck in which he sings of losing a rose, losing love, and searching for where he
can get it back. Tine adapted the song and painted in gold a lost eagle on one side of the
car-rapide, replaced and “found” by a pie on the car’s other side. The original eagle had
“Sama Theily Nawna” painted above it, and “Fou maye Djélé Bakhogne” above the
original pie. The saying from the song means “mon épervier s’est envolé ou est ce je vais

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43 “the life of Senegalese people, for example, marabouts, horses. I’m going to
represent all of Senegalese culture on the car-rapide.”
44 “everyone heard, something precious.”
45 A bird native to Senegal
trouver une pie pour le remplacer”, or my eagle has flown away, where will I find a pie to replace it?

- Soccer ball (see Figure 4): Football clubs emerged in Senegal in the late 70s and early 80s, and everyone was into it. The biggest equipe was Jarraf, so Tine painted “Allez Jarraf” above an eagle carrying soccer ball on the car-rapide of a propriétaire who was a Jarraf fan. Today, soccer balls with team names are often painted on car-rapides as a method of support and prayer the team’s success.

- Cheval (see Figure 5): Moussa Tine chose to paint a horse’s head on car-rapides as tribute to Senegal’s past époche. When horses were the only “moyen pour se déplacer”, car-rapides have now replaced the horse drawn charettes, “mais la culture va rester.” Charettes still exist in Dakar, and horse tails appear on the back of car-rapides, even taxis. Tine believes they serve as a “rapprochement du passé et présent, un symbo qui determine le passé et le présent.” For Tine, the saddest thing is the unlikelihood that future modes of transport will pay tribute to the car-rapide. With globalism, everything that exists in the west will come to exist here (Tine). This unification of the world, “c’est pas bon, il y a plus de diversité culturel.” “Le monde était vraiment meilleure que nous devions inspire. Pour que le monde soit beau il faut conserve le valeur culture (Tine).”

46 team
47 Go Jarraf!
48 horse
49 “means of moving”
50 “the culture will stay.”
51 “reconciliation of past and present, a symbol that determines the past and the present.”
52 “It’s not good. There is so much cultural diversity.”
53 “The world was much better when we were inspired. For the world to be beautiful, we must conserve the value of culture.”
• Car-car (see Figure 6): First appearing between the forward gazing eyes, Tine painted “car-car”, a superstitious Senegalese phrase. In the case of the car-rapide it means, “que dieu me protégé du regard que tu porte sur mon vehicule.”

When the car’s eyes (see Commitment to Islam) return a look, the car says “car-car” and rules out the possibility of unfortunate events. The car-rapide is always watching what happens in the streets.

The baby shoes suspended from the bar in a car-rapide’s cabin are symbolic as well. As Oumar describes, the shoes “porte de bonheure.” Infants only walk in safe places, protected by their families. It is believed that if a car-rapide contains an infant’s shoe, it will only travel safe routes to safe places.

Commitment to Islam

95 percent of the Senegalese population identifies as Muslim (Ndao 2011). Alan and Mary Roberts discuss in their book A Saint in the City, how Dakar is a very visual city. Visual stimulants pervade everyday life, just as painted figures and words saturate the car-rapide. However in Senegal, a predominantly Muslim country, images represent the “transcolonial cosmopolitanism” (Roberts 2003, 28) that exists here.

The conglomeration of paintings on the exterior of the car-rapides, and the photographs, stickers, and plaques inside, render the car-rapide “an altar on wheels” (Roberts 2003, 31). A frequent image displayed on car-rapide windshields is a photograph or painting of the mystical face of Amadou Bamba. This “transformative potent” image, which was taken of Bamba in 1913, is ubiquitous in Dakar as a whole (Roberts 2003, 9).

54 “may God protect me from the look you put on my vehicle.”
55 “wear in good health.”
Sheikh Amadou Bamba (1853-1927) founded the Mouride Muslim brotherhood, or *confrérie*, in 1883 in Senegal. The son of a marabout, Bamba’s name in Wolof it is translated as Sériñ Tuubaa, or "Holy Man of Touba". Bamba became an ascetic marabout, abstaining from worldly pleasures to pursue spiritual goals, and wrote extensively on the merits of meditation, work, and Koranic study. Over half of the population in Senegal identifies as Mouride. The greatest act of religious commitment in Mouridism is a yearly pilgrimage to Touba, the holy city, to visit the grave of Bamba. Outlined by the Roberts’, the Mourides are a religious community seeking to convey beliefs, practices, histories, myths, fears, phantasms, and readings of Bamba (Roberts 2003, 12).

According to the Roberts’, “sacred images ‘work’ for people as powerful acts of devotion and prayer” (Roberts 2003, 9). In researching the car-rapide, I witnessed just how people insert sacred images into one’s life—in the case of the car-rapide, into one’s work environment. The photographs of lutteurs, soccer players, marabouts, and the iconic masked portrait of Bamba appear in car-rapides at the chauffeur’s discretion. An image of Bamba on a windshield looking out at the road, rather than in toward the passengers, protects the path and travel of the car-rapide (Roberts 2003, 55). If the chauffeur is Mouride, he will decorate his car, which is his space for the extent of the long work days, with images of Mouridism. In an effort to sanctify the physical space within the car, the images are pleasing to his eyes and spiritual loyalty. Propriétaires believe that if the Bamba’s present is in the car-rapide, people will feel comfortable entering the car.
I had the honor of interviewing car-rapide painter Bill who has worked painting car-rapides, Ndaaga Ndiayes, and taxis since 1999. He explained to me why the words and phrases differ from car to car. It depends on which confrérie the proprietor associates with. If the proprietor tells Bill he is Mouride, Bill will adorn the car with TOUBA, Lamp Fall, Baye Fall, BEGUE BAMBA, and/or MBACKE SENE (see list of phrases below). If the proprietor is Tidiane, Bill will paint TALIBE CHEIKH on the car. I observed that the majority of car-rapides on Dakar’s streets denote Mouridism.

Mohammad, an artist at le Village Artisinal, says he, like most Senegalese people who practice prayer and mission, have “le courage de gerent les epreuves”\(^\text{56}\). He continues to say that for car-rapide proprietors, one way to manage God’s tests is to assert their commitment to their faith, their marabout, their mother, their heritage on the car’s exterior, for all to see.

Perhaps the most profound evidence of Mouridism on the car-rapides are the eyes painted above the headlights (see previous section: Visual Symbolism). Many believe that they are “the eyes of Bamba”. These eyes see that no accident befalls the vehicle (55). Further, as Moussa Tine described, the eyes gaze at all onlookers in return.

Baye Falls who wear *tubeey bu són*\(^\text{57}\) (“pants of fortune” in Wolof), prayer beads, a talismanic photograph of his marabout, and pouch around his neck, and a wooden begging bowl in hand, live by the example of Sheikh Ibra Fall (1858-1930), the first disciple of Amadou Bamba. Fondly referred to as “Lamp” Fall, he is the “light” of the

\(^{56}\) “the courage to manage life’s events”  
\(^{57}\) Also known as patchwork, Lamp Fall created this style of clothing “pour sauver le monde” (to save the world). He collected scraps of fabric from the tailor and made pants to represent all “les couleurs du monde. Il assemblait le monde autour lui (Tine).”
Mouride movement (109). The central minaret of the Great Mosque of Touba is named after him: a play on words, for the word minaret derives from the Arabic manarah, which means lamp.

Lamp Fall would be classified today as a workaholic (bourreau de travail). He was also literate in Arabic, an intellectual feat in his day. An astonishing capitalist, he was one of the wealthiest men in Senegal. In 1913 he owned thirteen properties, from which he made 50,000 FCFA, the equivalent of the annual salary of the governor general of French West Africa (112). He subsequently offered his entire fortune to the Saint. The Lamp Fall insignia (see Figure 7), a figure of a Baye Fall, and the tall minaret of Touba (see Figure 7) symbolize Baye Fallism on car-rapides. Moussa Time created the recognizable Lamp Fall emblem in the 1970s to signify the mosque at toubab and the disciples of Touba, the Baye Falls.

The car-rapide’s written exhortations are a melange of roman letters, Arabic script, Wolof phrases, and French orthography (Roberts 2003, 28). For example, “thank you” in Wolof is jëre-jëf, but is written on the cars as Dieuredieuf: Dieu is the French word for God. The following list translates the most common phrases seen on car-rapides.

- ALHAMDOULILAH- Thank God, Praise God
- BONNE CHANCE- Good luck
- BONNE MÈRE- Good mother
- BON PATRON- Good propriétaire, transporteur
- BON PÈRE- Good father
- CTC- Commun du Transport de Cap Vert, the peninsula Dakar sits on.
- BAKH YAYE- Good mother
- BEGUE BAMBA- Love Bamba
- DIEUREDIEUF SERIGNE TOUBA- Thank you, Master of Touba
- FALLOU- a Mouride spiritual guide, the son of Serigne Touba

58 mix
LAWLA THIAT- Faire attention aux mauvais sorts
MBACKE SENE- Mbacké: the village Bamba was born in; Sene, or Sëññ means Holy man, thus, Holy man of Mbacké
MOURIDOULAHI- God Bless the Mourides
RTYE- Regroupement des Transporteurs de Yoff et l’Environnement. Derives from first proprietor who lived in Yoff. Now it’s a unifying factor amongst all car-rapides.
SOCITE MUSULMAN- to communicate with all the believers without distinction by confrérie. Moon and star appear on minarettes.
SOPE NABY- Love the Prophet, Mohammad. Naby is an age-old nickname for the Prophet.
TALIBE CHEIKH- Talibe is the Wolof word for croyant or believer, the name Cheikh is the spiritual guide for Tidijane
TOUBA- the sacred city where Chiekh Amadou Bamba is buried
WAKEUR BAYE NIASS- the family Baye Niass, a spiritual guide
YALLA YANA- God is good (Yalla is synonymous for Allah)

Analysis

I started my ISP journey with the intention of discovering what the car-rapide means to Dakar in 2011. As I gained knowledge of the car-rapide’s system, and listened to many Senegalese opinions of the car-rapide, I slowly became disheartened. I found that most people are surprised and confused as to why I have chosen to research the car-rapide. What most Senegalese like about the car-rapide is its affordability—and their positive sentiments stop there. They find it dangerous. My question to everyone I talked to was “what do you think of the car-rapide?” No Senegalese person referred to the car-rapide’s aesthetic—the basis of my interest in and attraction to this societal object. In an attempt to refocus my ISP, I began to think about what the car-rapide means to me. What its micro-culture conjures in my mind. It’s unique, conspicuous, and foreign, yes, but why do I like it so much?

It was not until I met up with Monica S., a contact of one of my high school teacher. Monica works at the U.S. Embassy, and was nice enough to invite me to dinner with her and her American friends, all of whom work in Dakar. In talking about my time
in Senegal and my current research on the car-rapide, I sparked a telling discussion about
the object of my study. To them, Americans who have lived in Dakar for anywhere
between one and three years, intermediaries between foreigners and locals, the car-rapide
is a thrilling, scary, and dodgy way to get around Dakar’s already perilous streets. One
woman who was visiting for three weeks admitted she hadn’t taken the car-rapide yet.
Everyone responded exuberantly. She absolutely had to before she left—it’s fun,
exhilarating, and a truly Dakarian experience. They are perplexed as to how the system
works without set prices, stops, and destinations, and how the cars function in their state
of disrepair. As most of them commute to work by car, they provide another perspective
on the car-rapide. Moving obstacles that are always surrounded by people, the car-rapide
causes these drivers to pay more attention to avoid any mishaps. One woman told the
story of when she collided with a car rapide. It side-swiped her in a rondpoint\(^59\), and
while her car was only scratched, she described how the side of the car-rapide literally
fell off, leaving the passengers sitting in a metal skeleton.

These people were excited by the car-rapide, curious to know more. I had a
moment of contemplation about the concept of being foreign. I am riveted by the car-
rapide because I am a foreigner. I have an outsider’s perspective, and only from this
perspective can I see how central, how distinctive the car-rapide is in Dakar. As soon as I
accepted that I was not going to share opinions on the car-rapide with Senegalese, I was
able to begin forming my thesis on the car-rapide, from my point of view.

My research, interviews, and observations began to fall into one of two
categories: art or business. Aesthetics or money. But it was more than that. It was the

\(^{59}\) rotary
tangible aspects of the car-rapide, the phrases and designs, the atmosphere within the car, in contrast to the motives of the men who work for the car-rapide, the uncontrollable external factors shaping the car-rapide existence in 2011. Each time I took a car-rapide, I felt more and more like the car’s physical form, inside and out, embodies everything I love about Senegal. Simultaneously, every time I interviewed someone employed by the car-rapide or working to destroy the car, their money prerogative exemplifies what dissuades me about Senegal. In this light, the car-rapide emerges as a mirror, a point of intersection, a point of unification, for the two dominant and contradictory avenues of la vie Senegalaise60. Both contradictory and complementary, the car-rapide is nonetheless an illuminating social space. I feel I have become so well-versed in Dakarois and Senegalese life by studying the car-rapide, I see it as a loss if the car-rapide disappears completely. Not only would foreigners like me lose an outlet to understanding Senegal, the Senegalese would lose a certain degree of originality in everyday life.

Avenue A—The Physical Car Rapide

The car rapide’s beautiful, colorful, busy external image encompasses several tenets of Senegalese life. As car-rapide painter Bill said, the Senegalese love color. The everpresent fabric and clothes, the graffiti on every highway overpass—color pervades the climate in everyday Senegal. The calamity of images and words also parallels the disorder that often occurs on Dakar’s streets. Further, numerous Islamic words and phrases the car-rapide showcases the profound dedication Islamic Senegalese have to their faith.

60 Senegalese life
I believe the physical internal space of the car-rapide is a profound element of the car’s aura. I believe the car-rapide is an extension of the Senegalese home. The fluidity of operation in the car-rapide resembles the flow of life in a Senegalese household—when the Senegalese started moving around by car-rapide, they “transferred what they were doing at home to the car-rapide (Deme 2011).” The seating lay-out is an organic, communal arena for discussion (see Figure 8), like the Senegalese home. As Mademba Ndiaye and I discussed, the configuration of the car-rapide is starkly different from the Tata buses. Similar to a roundtable, one cannot be anonymous in the car-rapide. As opposed to a Tata bus when most passengers are standing and cut-off from one another, a car-rapide has a dynamic of exchange.61 As Mademba said, “un car-rapide lance la conversation”62, however he believes that it is the people, not the type of car that create language, space, exchange, etc. I strongly disagree. From my experience taking Tata and Ndiaga Ndiaye busses, there lacks any form of communal exchange. The physical space within a Tata or Ndiaga Ndiaye bus hinders social interaction. Conversation in a Ndiaga Ndiaye are restricted to specific seats. Like any bus, train, or plane, passengers do not talk to other passengers more than one row in front or back. In a Tata bus, there are too many standing bodies blocking all avenues for dialogue.

Seats in a car-rapide always appear out of nowhere. It is an unspoken cooperation to make a space for passengers who have just boarded. I learned that the etiquette for finding a seat on a car-rapide is to fill the seats closest to the chauffeur first. There is one special folding seat on the front facing bench. My advisor Oumar Ndao explains, “le

61 Car-rapides seat 25 passengers, with standing room for two or three. Tatas seat about 35 and up to 35 more passengers can squeeze into the standing room between the rows.
62 “a car-rapide launches conversation.”
salon est ouvert par un petit banc on appelle Versailles (see Figure 8), comme le palais Versailles en France, pour se manquer de l’influence français du Renault. Aussi, Versailles est un term en bijouterix, comme une plaque\textsuperscript{63}, which combine the two pieces like bracelet or necklace. Oumar, a playwrite, was so inspired by the interior of the car-rapide, it was the basis for \textit{Grand Usine Dakar}, a piece preformed on a round stage. “Le car-rapide permetter de metteur en scene le parole, penses Senegalese.”\textsuperscript{64}

This round formation is the central force of the car-rapide’s exchange forum. A form of public transportation somewhat similar to the car-rapide is South Africa’s combi. So, Alassane’s business partner who lived in South Africa for eight years, explains what’s interesting about the combi’s social aspect which is how one pays. “There are five rows. Everyone on the same row gives money to one person who makes change, and gives it to the next row, they do the same, then in the front row, one person makes change and gives it to the driver.” However, So claims there is only limited interpersonal dialogue that occurs in a combi. So also has an interesting perspective on the car-rapide. “I don’t speak Wolof. When something happens in a car-rapide the person sitting next to you will always try to exchange, and when they learn you’re not Senegalese, you’re an outcast.” I feel the same, but most people assume I don’t speak Wolof, and don’t try to exchange. I wish the Senegalese could appreciate the sense of community garnered in a car-rapide.

I interviewed Alassane Deme, creator of agendakar.com, “a website with everything happening in Dakar in terms of culture, entertainment, art, exhibits, cinema,\textsuperscript{63} “the salon is opened by a small bench called Verseilles, like the palace in France. Also Verseilles is a term for jewelry, like a plate”\textsuperscript{64} “The car-rapide allows the director’s word, Senegalese thoughts.”
concerts (Deme).” The motif of agandakar.com, a socially geared website, is the car-rapide, which demonstrates the predominant social characteristic of the car-rapide.

Alassane explains, “I don’t glamorize the car-rapide. I like it as an item that is really representative of our society, but as a local I don’t think people love car-rapides, you’re not happy when taking it. It’s here. It’s on our post cards. It’s representative of our way of life and that’s it.” I glamorize the car-rapide because for me, it is a new and foreign experience to see them, to take them, and to study them.

Avenue B—The Influential Systems Involved with the Car Rapide

One day during ISP, I visited the Lat Dior garage to interview Youssou. I was pointed at and yelled at by everyone who saw me taking pictures. Some approached me and demanded money. What was most revealing of the culture at Lat Dior was my interaction with two car-rapide painters. After my Senegalese friend Tafa translated my objective and intention to the painters in Wolof, they asked me how many questions I had and how long it would take. I said five questions, ten minutes, and they subsequently demanded 15,000 CFA from me. I refused and asked if I could simply watch them work, but that would cost me 5,000 CFA. When I refused again and walked away, they became mad and yelled at me until I was out of sight.

Even more startling was one discussion I had with Moussa Tine. When I first met him, I explained the intent of my ISP, and we arranged to have three two-hour meetings. Before I started asking him questions in the first meeting, he asked me how I would compensate him. I deferred the situation and said I would talk to Souleye and return with compensation the next reunion. A week later I returned with 10,000 CFA, a large amount
for an interview that should be free of charge. He laughed at my offering. “10,000 could buy me a notebook, a new calculator. I am an artist! I’ve displayed my work in San Francisco! 10,000 is not good.” I felt scared during his rant. He suggested 50,000 CFA for six hours of conversation. I explained I was a student on a budget—50,000 was out of the question. In the end I ended up paying him 25,000 CFA for four hours.

I felt like Moussa Tine took advantage of me. Going into those interviews with a keen interest in his brainchild, I thought he, the creator of the famous, picturesque aesthetic that is the car-rapide, would want to impart all of his knowledge and expertise on me. The opposite was true. He hasn’t painted a car-rapide in sixteen years, and still he wants to make money off it. As soon as the car-rapide became popular for its designs, it’s employees realized it was a source of profit, and the rest is history. This mentality is shared by everyone in the chain of command. Alassane states, “They don’t love their car rapides, there is no bond.” I thought it might have been because I am a toubab, but Alassane told me when he tried to rent a car-rapide for a party, they exorbitantly augmented the price as well.

Another influential system affecting the car-rapide right now is the World Bank. This capitalist enterprise is monopolizing Transport en Commun in Senegal in an effort to promote public safety, but also in an effort to institute Western methods in a non-Western setting because it is easier for them to regulate. What I find interesting is the relationship between the financially obsessed car-rapide propriétaires and the World Bank. While both parties are coming from a business standpoint, they refuse to see eye to eye. If all the propriétaires care about is money, joining forces with the World Bank is in their best interest.
Conclusion

My favorite moment of ISP was one of my car-rapide voyages. There were only four passengers in the car when we stopped to fill up with gas. The music playing at the gas pump spurred one passenger to get up and dance in the middle of the empty car, which caused me and the three other passengers to watch and smile. The apprentis descended the car and began to assemble numerous piles of change on the ground. The two men pumping the gas started vigorously shaking the car-rapide by the carrosserie. Confused as to what was happening (shaking the car allows the gas to fill the tank faster), I poked my head out of the “window”. One of them said something to me in Wolof, and when I responded “deguma”65, another passenger translated for me (he had said “I think you’re my future wife”). Without even trying, we were all engaged in conversation—inside and outside the car.

While the car-rapide is not the safest way to get around Dakar, one time a car-rapide hit one of my friends, it connects Senegal’s past and it’s values and downfalls. When a passenger doesn’t have change one day, he or she can ride for free and pay the next time. This notion of generosity and reciprocity is apparent in Senegalese life. The history and superstitions of the designs, paired with the visually asserted commitment car-rapide propriétaires have to Islam, renders the car-rapide a symbol of its homeland.

Senegal is the country of teranga, yet people in Senegal steal, another contradiction and compliment. It happens everyday. And, Senegalese people cheat each other out of money, at the market, at the tailor, in taxis. It is entirely possible to cheat the

65 “I don’t understand”
car-rapide but staying on a few stops longer. Money is at the forefront the Senegalese conscience. I think of how many times a day my host family in Dakar asks me how much every little things costs. In the U.S. business people and artists do not usually share values. My interactions with the car-rapide’s personnel, people who make a living off on an artistic object, suggest the complete opposite is true in Senegal. Money is the object of all desire.

In light of the World Bank’s 2000 UMIP project, and the slow yet noticeable declination of car-rapides in Dakar, I often think what the future holds for the car-rapide. Chauffeur Mayacine thinks it will be gone in five years. Mademba at the World Bank gives it ten. Painter Bill is confident the car-rapide will last forever. Me, I think the car-rapide will be resilient and continue to be a presence in Senegal, in some capacity, for eternity.

The American adage, “time is money” does not describe Senegalese intentions. Time passes slowly and effortlessly in Senegal. Frustrating to some passengers, the car-rapide is never pressed to be on time. The car-rapide is only pressed to fill up with clients. Tata busses cannot follow this leisurly business plan, in which case, what’s stopping Senegal from becoming like the U.S. and other countries in the Occident? One day will time be money in Senegal? I hope not. Without car-rapides on the roads, Senegal will start to look like any other modern country, losing a layer of it’s charm and authenticity. No one visiting Senegal will write home saying “Today I rode a Njaaga Njaay!” Oumar agrees, it would be sad to lose “l’habillage du car-rapide.”

While there are countless other cultural entities that communicate Senegalese ideology, to lose the

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66 “the dressing of the car-rapide”
car-rapide would mean losing that intersection, that point of unification of Senegalese values and monetary hunger that when seen together, provide a complete and true understanding of Senegal.
Appendix

Figure 1: Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date (in 2011)</th>
<th>Formal or informal</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moussa Tine</td>
<td>11/11, 11/15</td>
<td>Formal (x2)</td>
<td>1st car-rapide painter</td>
<td>His studio, Village des Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayacine</td>
<td>11/11</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Propriétaire &amp; chauffeur</td>
<td>Overnight lot, Ouakam, in his car-rapide</td>
</tr>
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<td>Mademba Ndiaye</td>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sambagor Gueye</td>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youssou</td>
<td>11/21</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>Lat Dior garage</td>
</tr>
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<td>Alassane Deme</td>
<td>11/25</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Agendakar office</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ibra Faye</td>
<td>11/28</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Propriétaire/Transporteur</td>
<td>Difoncé</td>
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<td>Bill</td>
<td>11/28</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Painter</td>
<td>Painter’s garage</td>
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<td>Oumar Gaye</td>
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<td>Formal</td>
<td>Urban Transport</td>
<td>CETUD</td>
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<td>Informal</td>
<td>Director of Archives</td>
<td>National Archives</td>
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<td>11/17</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>Office assistant</td>
<td>SIT</td>
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<tr>
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<td>11/17</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>U.S. Embassy</td>
<td>L’Institut Français</td>
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<td>Alassane Deme &amp; So</td>
<td>11/25</td>
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<td>Agendakar creators</td>
<td>Agendakar office</td>
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<td>Miriama</td>
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<td>Journalist at Agendakar</td>
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<td>Artist</td>
<td>Sandaga</td>
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<td>Souleymane Ngom</td>
<td>11/22</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor</td>
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Figure 2: Some designs Bill created to make the car-rapides more colorful. The block of color are flag representations, shown here are France and Senegal.
Figure 3: Eagle design

Figure 4: Eagle and soccer ball design

Figure 5: Horse design
Figure 6: car-car implied through the eyes of Bamba.

Figure 7: Moussa Tine’s sketch of his original drawings that still appear on car-rapides today.
Figure 8: the car-rapide’s interior

Versailles: This seat lifts to allow passengers to enter the “salon”
Works Cited


