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# Cosaan to Tostan: The Evolution of Wolof Women's Verbal Art As a Means for Social Empowerment

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*SIT Study Abroad*

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*Cosaan to Tostan: The Evolution of Wolof Women's Verbal Art As a Means for Social Empowerment*

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*Never stop singing.*

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## Abstract

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For Wolof women, verbal art has always been an important tool for negotiating power. In a public context, *griottes* have lent their voices to traditional ceremonies such as marriages and baptisms; in a private context, all women have used songs as accompaniment to daily tasks and as an informal way to comment on the society in which they live. This paper explores the way that certain Wolof songs, sung by and for women, simultaneously challenge and adhere to traditional Wolof culture—that is, the way their texts and performances both contradict and perpetuate traditionally mandated gender codes. In order to achieve this, it first offers a historical survey of the roles and expected behaviors of *griottes* and Wolof women in general. Then, using results of interviews as well as the texts and performance observations of several women's songs as a basis for analysis, it assesses the extent to which such songs correspond to those roles and behaviors. The study examines texts spanning from the traditional to the contemporary, ultimately suggesting that the evolution of Wolof women's songs over time demonstrates a move away from preserving tradition and toward the explicit empowerment of women.

*Keywords:* Music, Cultural Anthropology, Gender Studies, Regional Studies: Africa, Sociology

## Historical and Academic Context

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A major motivation for this study has been the relative lack of pre-existing scholarship that focuses on women in West African music. But for the work of Thomas A. Hale, for example, very little attention has been given to the historic role of the *griotte*, or female *griot*, in West African society. More definitive scholarship has been devoted to traditional Wolof social structures in general, as well as to the place of women and music within those structures.

### *GRIOTS, GRIOTTES, AND THE PLACE OF MUSIC IN TRADITIONAL WOLOF SOCIETY*

Historically, music was not only a cultural tradition among the Wolof but an important social marker. In his groundbreaking text *La société wolof*, Abdoulaye-Bara Diop explains that traditional Wolof society consisted of a caste system based on occupation: *géér*, or nobility, and the inferior *ñeeño*. The *ñeeño* included three sub-castes, one of which was the *sab-lekk*—the griots. The griot caste, which has persisted into current-day Wolof society, is commonly referred to as *géwël*. More specifically, the *géwël* are designated musicians, singers, and praise-givers (Diop 33-39). While they played an invaluable cultural role among the Wolof, griots lived nearly at the bottom of the Wolof social hierarchy; they were believed to be “impure for having originally been in contact with blood” (Leymarie-Ortiz 186). In *Les griots wolof du Sénégal*, Isabelle Leymarie offers one myth of the origin of Wolof griots: the ancestor of the griot caste killed his brother, and after being banished from his family he made amends by playing music with a stick of wood. The subsequent praise he received from his family despite his crime, according to Leymarie, is evidence of “l’ambivalence sociale du griot”—that is, the ambiguous social status of griots (Leymarie 12). Some evidence suggests that they received very little reverence and, at times, were segregated or denied certain respects. For example, they were frequently denied the right to a ceremonial burial and were, instead, interred in the holes of baobab trees (Diop 38). Even so, it was not uncommon for griots to receive favors despite their

low social position. This simultaneous disdain for and praise of griots has made it difficult to know, historically, their perceived status.

The precise role of the *gɛwɛl* has been debated—some consider the caste musicians and dancers nothing more than ceremonial entertainment, while others argue that they played a much more complex part in building interpersonal relationships, promoting and maintaining nobles' status, and facilitating diplomatic discourse. In *Griots and Griottes: Master of Words and Music*, Thomas A. Hale offers an extensive list of terms to explain the role of a griot or griotte, including genealogist, historian, adviser, mediator, interpreter and translator, musician, teacher, praise-singer, and exhorter (Hale 18-58). Judith T. Irvine adds *jottali*, or “transmitter,” to the list, writing: “Mais, selon les personnes avec lesquelles j’ai travaillé, leur créativité est censée s’exercer plus dans la domaine de la rhétorique et de la gestion des relations sociales que dans le contenu”<sup>1</sup> (Irvine 40). Because griots were the transmitters of messages, but not the authors of those messages, they frequently got away with using otherwise vulgar or insulting language. They weren’t held accountable, claims Irvine, because they came from a lower social class and were believed to follow a looser moral code (Irvine 41-42).

While the relative lack of scholarship focused on griottes might suggest that they played, and still play, a lesser role within the *gɛwɛl* caste, some believe this isn’t the case. Hale, whose work deals primarily with the griots of Niger and Mali, claims that male and female griots experience a similar education. Musical training begins early on and is led by elder family members or qualified acquaintances. Hale notes that girls are primarily taught by women, while the training of boys is designated to men (Hale 224). It is significant that women are traditionally trained to sing and dance but are not permitted to play instruments. This doesn’t

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<sup>1</sup> “But, according to the people I’ve worked with, their [griots’] creativity is supposedly demonstrated more in the domain of rhetoric and the management of social relations than in content.” (*My translation; all footnoted English translations are my own*)

necessarily mean that griottes bear a lesser status—in his article “Le griot et le pouvoir: Une relation ambiguë,” Vincent Zanetti writes, “Le fait de jouer d’un instrument apparaît donc comme une « fonction secondaire »...donnant plus de poids à sa fonction sociale première: celle d’intermédiaire, de par la parole qui est son domaine réservé”<sup>2</sup> (Zanetti 164). Women are still responsible for the perceived “primary” role of singing and speaking.

There do exist some gendered differences in terms of oral genre—women, for example, do not partake in the narration of epic poems, but they do provide the sung accompaniment to them (Hale 228). Despite these divides along gender lines, griottes serve as important oral social facilitators, especially at ceremonies (Fall, Rokhaya PhD, Personal interview). According to Isabelle Leymarie’s descriptions of traditional Wolof ceremonies, griottes play a particularly important role during marriages. The bride’s griottes escorts her to her husband’s home, introducing her and reciting her family’s genealogy; they later sing songs celebrating her virginity and the success of the marriage bed. Customarily, the griotte of the first wife facilitates the *xaxar*—that is, sung and chanted insults of the new bride (Leymarie 79-81). The work of the griotte is not exclusive to marriages—she facilitates baptisms, namings, and *lutte* combats, among other ceremonies—but marriage is a primary theme in many of the songs examined later in this study.

#### *DAUGHTERS, BRIDES, MOTHERS: THE TRADITIONAL PLACE OF THE WOLOF WOMAN*

The songs I use as the basis for my analysis in this study deal primarily with women, girls, and their place in Wolof society. Abdoulaye-Bara Diop offers a comprehensive survey of

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<sup>2</sup> “The act of playing an instrument appears, then, a “secondary function”...giving more weight to his primary social function: that of intermediary, of the spoken word that is reserved to him.”



their traditionally mandated roles and behaviors in his book, *La famille wolof*. According to Diop, the Wolof mother is responsible for the education of her children—in particular that of her daughters. “La mère doit les initier aux travaux ménagers, à leur rôle de futures épouses. Elle leur apprend les bonnes mœurs, l’obéissance et la patience devant les hommes, dans cette société fortement dominée par eux”<sup>3</sup> (Diop 52). This summation of the mother’s role emphasizes the requirement that women and girls remain inferior to fathers and husbands. The dynamics between sisters and brothers, even at a young age, indicate the same inferiority. Diop writes, “Dès que celui-ci [le frère] est adolescent, la sœur même si elle est l’aînée, doit lui manifester du respect. La supériorité masculine, toujours incontestable, en est l’explication”<sup>4</sup> (Diop 58). Although the Wolof woman demands tremendous respect and authority, it is clear that her place in the family and in society is, or was traditionally, below that of men.

Within marriages, the dynamics between husband and wife illustrate the same “domination-submission” (Diop 65) relationship. Husbands hold economic power within the family and demand respect and obedience from their wives. This relationship, Diop notes, is underscored by the prevalence of Islam in Wolof society—Islam being a patriarchal system (Diop 64-65). Even before marriage, young girls are expected to maintain reserved and modest behavior toward the men who particularly interest them. Only through an intermediary—a griotte—can a girl express her romantic feelings; she cannot approach a man directly (Leymarie 91). The role of griotte as “intermediary” continues well into the marriage. If there is a dispute

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<sup>3</sup> “The mother must introduce them to housework, to their role as future spouses. She teaches them appropriate moral behavior, obedience, and patience before men, in this society that is undisputedly dominated by them [men].”

<sup>4</sup> “As soon as he [the brother] is an adolescent, the sister, even if she is the eldest, must show him respect. Masculine superiority, always indisputable, is the explanation for this.”

between husband and wife, for example, the wife's griotte may speak to each party separately and "...calmer les esprits et...faire régner l'harmonie dans le couple"<sup>5</sup> (Leymarie 91).

A practice that persisted in traditional Wolof society was forced marriage, or even *mariage précoce*—that is, the marriage of a very young girl to an older man without requirement of the girl's consent (Leymarie 98). For the most part these practices have been abandoned, but early marriages are still prevalent in some of Senegal's more isolated and rural villages. The giving away of a girl at a young age requires her to drop out of school, preventing her from receiving a sufficient education and perpetuating a system of male dominance and female submission. Once married, a woman most often stays home and sees to domestic tasks such as cooking, caring for children, and sometimes farming (Faye, Lamine, Personal interview).

A discussion of the status of women in Wolof society would be incomplete without mention of the institution of polygamy. Traditionally, a Wolof man could take an unlimited number of wives; having multiple wives provided men with socio-political benefits, greater economic stability, and social prestige (Diop 184). The arrival of Islam to Wolof kingdoms limited the permitted number of wives to a maximum of four, but men could still claim women as *taara*, or domestic workers and concubines (Diop 184). Though polygamy is no longer universally practiced among the Wolof, it has persisted and is occasionally met with conflict from within the family. According to Diop, "...la cause profonde de ces conflits, et d'autres plus sérieux, est la mécontente des coépouses s'expliquant par la jalousie des femmes ou le comportement préférentiel du mari"<sup>6</sup> (Diop 194). As the findings of this study will reveal, many co-wives turn to songs as a means of expressing their dissatisfaction or frustration within a polygamous marriage.

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<sup>5</sup> "...calm their spirits and restore harmony between the couple."

<sup>6</sup> "...the deep root of these conflicts, and of other more serious ones, is misunderstanding between co-wives explained by the women's jealousy or by the preferential treatment by the husband."

*LITERATURE REVIEW*

Despite the fact that comparatively little attention has been given to women in studies of West African music, the work of several particular scholars does highlight women's use of songs as a means of challenging traditional norms or of earning social agency. These works, while not all exclusively focused on the songs of Wolof women, provide valuable insight into the experience of West African women and offer an important academic context for this study.

In *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music*, Thomas Hale suggests that certain groups of women in West Africa use song as a way of offering advice or sympathy to a new bride or unhappy wife. Writes Hale:

“In some cases, women's advice can extend to forms of female solidarity representing much social power. Moor women, for example, sometimes hire groups of griots—presumably women, but perhaps also men—to participate in demonstrations of support and sympathy for women who suffer from unfaithful husbands. [...] The songs of advice and solidarity may be part of a larger pool of verbal art shared by women of both griot and nongriot origin. [...] Often the songs are sung in ritual contexts that exclude men.” (Hale 233-234)

Hale's words emphasize the importance of the griotte as a facilitator of women's social discourse. Despite the traditional designation of songs to griottes, however, it seems even non-griottes can take part in this resistant “verbal art.” Hale goes on to say, “The articulation of woman's right to escape from domestic abuse...or to complain about a second wife...reflects in microcosm the larger role of...griottes as people who articulate the models for appropriate social behavior, whether expressed in a song for a bride or an epic for a chief” (Hale 238). This suggests that the role of the griotte, and the songs that they sing, are somewhat complicated; they simultaneously encourage women to “escape” or to “complain” about their place and reinforce codes of behavior that are traditionally considered “appropriate.”

Maram Guèye, author of “*Woyyi Céet: Women's Oral Discourses on Marriage and Womanhood*,” describes the aim of her work as “to look at marriage songs in Senegal as literary

sites that allow Wolof women to negotiate voice and power” (Guèye 66). She admits that while there is a great variety of chants and songs performed by women, her focus is on *woyyi céet*—marriage songs—especially those sung for and about a bride while she is preparing to go to her new husband’s home. Guèye offers the following lyrics as an example:

Built a cupboard,  
 Built a room  
 Marry me.  
 Get me a house, I do not share.  
 (Guèye 71)

She goes on to explain, “More and more women are requiring that their husbands get them a place of their own where they would not have to share with in-laws or co-wives. [...] This alternative shows women’s determination not to let their marriage be influenced or dictated by their family-in-law” (Guèye 71). The song serves as a way for women to express a desire for, or to negotiate, greater social and marital autonomy. Guèye also emphasizes that this song is representative of the traditional belief that marriage is a business transaction rather than an agreement of love. Although it does not explicitly challenge or oppose traditional Wolof systems, this song seems to encourage women to take advantage of such systems from within them. By manipulating traditional customs in a way that benefits them, Wolof women are able to earn agency and power. As does Hale, Guèye demonstrates that women’s songs are sometimes a complicated combination of resistance and adherence to traditional norms.

Brian Hogan’s “Gendered Modes of Resistance: Power and Women’s Songs in West Africa” examines the same phenomenon through the songs of women in Niger, Nigeria, and Guinea. Hogan states, “Sometimes illiterate and often relegated to subordinate social status, many women across West Africa engage the challenge of social unification and mobilization through verbal arts that promote social solidarity and political action” (Hogan 1). Hogan’s article presents an analysis of three particular verbal practices: “the oral poetry of Hausa women

in Kano, Nigeria in the 1980s...the verbal art of the Hausa and Songhoy-Zarma Nigerian women in the 1990s...and the political mobilization of women of several ethnicities in Guinea in the 1990s” (Hogan 3). He offers one traditional Songhoy-Zarma performance as an example: the *marchande*, a ritual recitation of mockery and insult, performed by a first wife against her husband and his new bride.<sup>7</sup> Hogan pulls the following excerpt from Aissata Sidikou’s text, *Recreating Words, Reshaping Worlds: The Verbal Art of Women from Niger, Mali, and Senegal*:

*Tobey tobey*, [rabbit]  
 Spray pepper in our eyes  
 By Allah we will spray it back  
*Tobey tobey*,  
 We will rub it on his testicles  
 So he puts it in his new wife’s eyes,  
 So he puts it in his new wife’s vagina,  
 She will not be able to sleep,  
 She will not be able to sit.  
 [June 19, 1994, Niamey, Niger]  
 [Sidikou 2001: 196]  
 (Hogan 6-7)

Hogan argues that the *marchande* is “a form of ritual subversion that creates considerable tension and contestation when inserted into daily life. [...] Men also strongly object to the coarse language that women use in *marchande*...which [is a] serious offense[ ] in their Muslim society” (Hogan 7). Though it focuses on different ethnic and geographic groups of West Africa, Hogan’s study is aligned with my own in its aim to analyze “women’s songs and verbal art in terms of the degrees of empowerment and complicity they project” (Hogan 2).

In *Une société bambara à travers des chants de femmes*, Pascal Baba F. Couloubaly offers a final perspective of women’s songs. Couloubaly presents the songs as being more explicitly concerned with lamenting or challenging patriarchal systems:

“Pour le chant féminin, les cibles sont connues. Le mal radical, c’est avant tout l’homme qui règne sur un empire sentimental et juridique totalitaire et répressif. C’est par lui qu’arrive le désespoir. En fait, le mariage, la polygamie, la stérilité

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<sup>7</sup> The Songhoy-Zarma *marchande* seems to be, culturally, the equivalent of the Wolof *xaxar*.

et l'infécondité, la perte de l'enfant sont des situations qui s'imposent d'elles-mêmes, que l'on peut plaindre, mais non les dénoncer. [...] Ce qui les rend désespérantes, c'est leur gestion par l'homme."<sup>8</sup> (Couloubaly 20-21)

According to Couloubaly, songs and vocal arts are an opportunity for women to directly oppose their inferior status and poor treatment. Unlike Hale and Guèye, who admit that many songs also reinforce traditional codes, Couloubaly claims that women's songs work specifically to challenge masculine ideologies and to deny men the power and legitimacy granted to them by patriarchal social models (Couloubaly 21). This particular argument is relatively radical and does not concern itself with the songs of Wolof women, but it provides a useful context for my study.

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### Methodologies

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The research required for this study was qualitative, rather than quantitative, so my primary methods of research were participant-observation and interviews. These methods allowed me to learn women's songs for myself and to gain a more intimate understanding of the lived experiences of Wolof women. Because songs are meant to be performed and heard, the best way for me to learn was by observing or taking part. My methods also offered a variety of perspectives on both the traditional and contemporary place of women in Wolof society. These methods were, of course, supplemented by a good deal of secondary resources that provided additional insights into the experiences of Wolof women and the content of their songs.

### *LOCATIONS*

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<sup>8</sup> "The targets of women's songs are easily identified. The radical evil is, before all, the man who rules over a totalitarian and repressive legal system and sentimental empire. He is the cause for despair. In fact, marriage, polygamy, sterility, infertility and the loss of a child are situations that impose themselves upon women, that one can lament, but can't denounce. [...] It's being controlled by men that renders them helpless."

### A. Dakar

I chose to conduct my first and last weeks of research in Dakar, because it offered me convenient access to the Université Cheikh Anta Diop, IFAN, and Tostan<sup>9</sup>—an NGO that works with rural villages to promote human rights education. These proved to be invaluable resources in terms of contacting professionals to interview and forming a solid academic foundation for the rest of my research. As Senegal’s bustling capital city, Dakar is an interesting blend of the modern and the traditional. Thus, the city provided me with a variety of perspectives on Wolof women’s songs and the role they play in Wolof society.

### B. Saint-Louis du Senegal

I spent the middle two weeks of my research in Saint-Louis, Senegal. My initial reason for choosing Saint-Louis as a research site was that I had already made contact with a griot family there. It had been hard to find and speak with griot families, so I took advantage of the opportunity when it presented itself and I made plans to return for my study. Saint-Louis, as one of Senegal’s primary cultural centers, proved an ideal location for research on Wolof music tradition. The city frequently hosts musical events, so I was able to attend several concerts in my time there. One of Saint-Louis’ most important annual events is the Fanale, a large celebration and spectacle that takes place each December. While in the city, I was able to interview several members of “Benno,” the musical troupe comprised mostly of women that performs in the Fanale. Finally, Saint-Louis’ Université Gaston Berger was an excellent academic resource that supplemented my research; I was able to visit the campus once and conducted an email interview with a professor of sociology.

## *RESEARCH STRATEGIES*

### A. Participant-Observation

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<sup>9</sup> *Tostan* is a Wolof word that means “breakthrough” and “spreading and sharing” (Gillespie 5).

Perhaps the most substantial part of my field research was a series of four lessons with Jean Ndiaye's griot family in Saint-Louis.<sup>10</sup> The objective of the lessons was to learn a small repertoire of Wolof songs for and about women—to learn to sing them and to understand what their words meant. Jean helped put together a small group of griottes, and he and the women led each lesson.

Though each day varied slightly, the focus of the lessons was learning through repetition. Adja Diop, a non-griotte member of the family, wrote down the Wolof lyrics to three songs: “Jigéen,” “Bisimilaay nungi door,” and “Xaley réew mi.”<sup>11</sup> Adja also offered me her own written French translation of each song so that I could better understand their significance. To learn a new a song, one of the griottes sang a line at a time, and the group repeated that line back. I got the impression that many traditional songs rely on this process of call-and-response anyway, so the experience gave me a good understanding of common musical forms and performance styles. Each lesson ran about three to four hours. Once I had a grasp on the melody, pronunciation, and meaning of each song, the family had me lead the repetitions. By the end of the four lessons, I had spent a total of about twelve hours singing with Jean's family and friends. As a culmination of the experience, we put on a small concert for my friends—I sang lead. The lessons allowed me to integrate into a griot family and to observe its day-to-day routine. They also gave me an understanding of how music is shared in Wolof culture; everybody took part in singing, not only the griots and griottes, and everybody was familiar with the traditional songs.

Once I had completed my lessons, I used the texts provided for me and transcribed the Wolof lyrics into the phonetics with which I was familiar (Adja had written them in French phonetics). The transcription process gave me an opportunity to better understand Wolof as a language and to see where Adja's own interpretations had dictated her translation to French. My

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix A for full list of griot(te) and non-griot(te) teachers.

<sup>11</sup> The traditional songs were untitled, but I have titled them for the organization of this paper.



advisor, Keba Mané, helped me with these transcriptions and explained the meaning of each phrase to aid in translating. Using the newly-transcribed Wolof lyrics, I translated each song into English and used these texts as the basis for my analysis. Mimicking the content and forms of the songs I had learned, I also wrote my own Wolof song as an exercise to synthesize my findings in a way that was personal to me and to my experience in Senegal.

In addition to my lessons, I observed one video-taped performance of a song written by a group of women from a rural village that has worked with Tostan. The video provided English subtitles, which I use as the basis for my analysis later in this paper.

## B. Interviews

I conducted a total of nine interviews over the course of my research, with the goal of gaining a greater historical context as well as varied contemporary perspectives. Three were extended, more formal interviews, and the remaining six were informal. For my three formal interviews, I spoke with one sociologist, one professor of history, and one representative of an NGO, Tostan. My informal interviews were conducted with one family member, one griot, one griotte, one of my non-griotte teachers, and two non-griot musical performers.

I began each interview with an explanation of who I was and what I was researching. Before asking any questions, I let participants know that they had the right to not respond if they didn't want to. I also made it clear that my research would culminate in a written paper, and I asked their permission to publish their names with my findings. For some interviews, I was able to follow a list of questions I had written to keep the conversation closely focused on my research. Other interviews required me to stray from the script; these interviews often provided me with a new and valuable perspective I had not anticipated.

## *CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS*

Early on in my research, I realized that one of my greatest challenges would be finding human subjects or people to interview. I knew the best way to learn Wolof songs would be to work with a group of griots. The problem, however, was that very little information about contemporary griots exists online or in books; if I wanted to make any contacts, I would have to find them by word of mouth. I found Jean Ndiaye's family completely by chance, but they were more than willing to help with my research. Our lessons, however, posed certain difficulties. I arrived to each lesson on time, but I usually had to wait at least an hour for people to be ready to begin. It was not a professional environment; our lessons took place in a small room in Jean's house, and family members and young children frequently came and went, curious as to what was going on. Many of these family members ended up taking part in the lessons, which was interesting to observe but quickly became distracting.

One challenge I had not foreseen was a French-Wolof language barrier. Adja, who is not a griotte herself, attends school each day and can speak French very well. Jean speaks some French, but he understood very little and had trouble communicating his thoughts. The rest of the family, including the griottes who instructed me, spoke only Wolof. This meant that Adja had to interpret during each lesson. It also meant that I could only conduct meaningful interviews with two people, Adja and Jean, which limited the range of perspectives I had hoped to hear. After my four days of lessons, I wasn't entirely convinced that everyone in the family understood my reasons for being there. I paid Jean the professional sum we had agreed upon, but the family interpreted that money as a gift and began requesting more money and more gifts. I also found it difficult being a young, white woman in that environment. Jean's brother repeatedly referred to me as his second wife, and the family was under the impression that my relationship with Jean was romantic, not professional.

A final factor I had not anticipated was how difficult it was to contact women directly. This study focuses specifically on women, so I had hoped to meet and speak with many of them. I discovered, however, that I had to go through at least one man to reach most of the women I worked with. I could not organize lessons with a group of griottes without first speaking to Jean. I could not find the members of “Benno” without first meeting with Golbert Diagne, a radio journalist at Saint-Louis’ Teranga FM. My primary informant from Tostan, with whom I discussed the role of songs in women’s rights and education efforts, was a man. I had certainly wanted to include some men in my research, but I had not expected them to account for the larger part of my informants.

### **Findings and Analysis**

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#### *CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES*

The first results of my research and interviews are a variety of contemporary perspectives on the role of Wolof women in music. The people I spoke with all seem to agree that the earliest popular singers began as griottes. According to Saliou Ndour PhD, “Les musiciennes se recrutèrent traditionnellement dans la caste des griots. Elles étaient de très grande cantatrices dont le talent le disputait au charme”<sup>12</sup> (Ndour 1). Jean Ndiaye, a griot, also pointed to the significance of being a caste musician: “Griot...c’est la sang”<sup>13</sup> (Ndiaye, Jean. Personal interview). Although griottes continue to play an essential role at traditional cultural events such as baptisms and marriages, their importance has diminished in recent years with what Ndour calls “décastification”—that is, the breakdown of social castes (Ndour, Saliou. E-mail interview). This breakdown has led to the rise of many non-griot musicians and performers.

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<sup>12</sup> “Women musicians were traditionally recruited from the griot cast. They were great singers whose talent was rivaled only by their charm.”

<sup>13</sup> “To be a griot...it’s in your blood.”

Not everyone I interviewed was opposed to this phenomenon; several people, in fact, expressed happiness about it. Adja Mbaye, a retired member of the Saint-Louis troupe Benno, is a griotte herself. She explained that many members of Benno are not griottes, but she also said that it is a very good thing for all women, both griottes and non-griottes, to share songs. Said Mbaye: “On est très fière de chanter”<sup>14</sup> (Mbaye, Adja. Personal interview). Gamou Dieng, the troupe’s lead singer, is not a griotte. Dieng explained that she learned to sing in much the same way a griotte might—her mother and grandmother taught her. According to Dieng, “On est dans un moment où ce n’est pas les griottes qui chantent seules”<sup>15</sup> (Dieng, Gamou. Personal interview).

One of the most interesting perspectives I heard was that of Adja Diop with regards to women singing to gain social agency. According to Diop, women no longer sing to gain power or to legitimize themselves—though they used to. Now, she says, women have “beaucoup de pouvoir”<sup>16</sup>; they work for themselves, some even filling the roles of men (Diop, Adja. Personal interview). The results of my interview with Birima Fall, a representative of Tostan, dispute this view. Fall believes that the traditional songs of griottes don’t really challenge social norms. In fact, griottes aren’t the ones who want social change—this could render them obsolete or irrelevant (as some believe has already happened). He does feel, however, that songs are an effective way of promoting awareness of human rights and of changing harmful social norms. Tostan encourages the women it works with to write and perform songs that address these issues and to use them as an educative tool in their villages (Fall, Birima. Personal interview).

One last finding that I had not expected was the relationship between a woman’s age and her ability to continue singing. Jean Ndiaye revealed to me that for griottes, “C’est toujours la

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<sup>14</sup> “We are very proud to sing.”

<sup>15</sup> “We live in a moment in which it’s not only griottes who sing.”

<sup>16</sup> “a lot of power”

famille.”<sup>17</sup> That is to say, regardless of their professional responsibilities, griottes must concern themselves first and foremost with their families and children. Ndiaye added, “Les femmes griots...tu es mariée, tu arrêtes”<sup>18</sup> (Ndiaye, Jean. Personal interview). Once a woman gets married and has children, she no longer has time to keep up a career as a performer. Adja Mbaye has had a similar experience. She told me that since her husband died, she hasn’t continued singing as it would be inappropriate. She rehearses with the troupe and takes part in teaching new members, such as her daughter, but she no longer performs (Mbaye, Adja. Personal interview).

### *Analysis*

Some of the results of my interviews were consistent with the background literature I had read prior to conducting the study; others, however, surprised me. Any disagreements or contradictions I found in participants’ responses suggested to me that the relationship of Wolof women to music and to the songs they sing is not static. That is, individuals’ ideas of how and why women sing are the products of their own experiences and interests. My results do, however, indicate a trend: it seems that the songs of Wolof women have served and continue to serve as markers of women’s status and social agency at a particular historical moment. My interview findings suggest that the status and opportunities of women have improved over time, and that their songs reflect that evolution.

I was most surprised to hear Adja Diop’s opinion that women no longer use songs as a means of earning power or social agency and that they don’t need to—I wouldn’t have expected that perspective from a woman. Her claim that women used to sing songs to forget the difficulties of their work and to gain a sense of fulfillment, however, suggests an evolution of the place of women in Wolof society. While life used to be harder for women, and while they were

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<sup>17</sup> “It’s always family.”

<sup>18</sup> “Female griots...when they get married, they stop working.”

traditionally afforded fewer social and economic opportunities, things have improved. This does not necessarily mean that the songs themselves were responsible for such improvements. Rather, they may have been momentary attempts to challenge, but not to change, the status quo.

Women's songs have been a reflection of change over time but not an agent of this change.

The belief that things have improved for women, however, is the result of an urban and relatively modern perspective. What Birima Fall told me about Tostan and its work indicates that in many rural, more isolated environments in Senegal, progress for women has been slower. Just as women once sang songs to lament the challenges of everyday life, they now sing songs with the explicit goal of enacting change. Here we see more clearly a causal relationship between the status of women and the songs they sing. Because they seek greater legitimacy and social power, women have adopted songs as tools for promoting such changes.

My findings also suggest that the role of the griotte has actually been diminished over time, complicating the too-general hypothesis that all Wolof women now benefit from an improved social and economic status. Both griots and non-griots alike expressed that the traditional oral historians and musicians are losing their relevance in a contemporary Wolof society. While ceremonies such as marriages, baptisms, and namings still provide griottes with meaningful work, it seems they've been forced to find alternative employment if they hope to make a living. Several of my informants mentioned that contemporary griottes are now more interested in earning money than they are in preserving tradition. While this may be true, my observation was that griottes remain, in a way, trapped by such tradition. Adja Diop—herself not a griotte—was the only adult member of Jean's family who appeared to have received a secondary education. This may explain her perspective that women now benefit from an improved quality of life and greater social agency. My interview with Jean, however, suggests that griottes are not afforded the same opportunities. If you are born a griotte you must work as

one, and when you get married and start a family you must stop working and take up your place in the home. These expectations correspond with those that Abdoulaye-Bara Diop outlines in *La famille wolof* and that I presented earlier in this paper. The lives of griottes, it seems, remain dictated by traditions that are becoming or have already become obsolete for other Wolof women.

A final interpretation of my findings, then, is that the use of songs by women to promote change and abandon inequitable social traditions may not be benefitting all women. While general trends suggest improvements to the status of Wolof women, these improvements may come at the expense of griottes, who depend on tradition to remain relevant.

### *THE SONGS*

Perhaps the most significant part of my findings are six Wolof songs: the three *cosaan*<sup>19</sup> songs I learned through repetition; one example of the *kada*<sup>20</sup> from A. Raphaël Ndiaye's *La place de la femmes dans les rite au Sénégal*; and two contemporary songs that advocate development and education. The first was written by Lamine Faye, a French teacher in Ndiané, Thiès, and the final song was written and performed by a group of women working with Tostan.

#### A. *Cosaan*<sup>21</sup>

The following three texts are traditional Wolof songs sung by and for women, usually performed during celebrations and ceremonies. It should be noted that the first song, “Jigéen,” is heard less commonly. As they have been passed down through a long tradition of oral history, none of the songs has a known author or title—I have given them titles for the sake of clarity in

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<sup>19</sup> As a musical genre, the Wolof word *cosaan* means “tradition.”

<sup>20</sup> *Kada*, according to Ndiaye, refers to ritual chants performed by women while working at a mortar and pestle (Ndiaye 119).

<sup>21</sup> Original Wolof texts and French translations, as provided by Adja Diop, are listed in Appendix B. The transcriptions and English translations in this text are my own.

this study. While my teachers emphasized that these songs are sung exclusively by women and never by men—“pas ce genre de chanson” (Diop, Adja. Personal interview)—I observed that most of the men and boys who participated in my lessons knew the songs well and took part in singing them. Each bearing a slightly different message, the three songs call on the citizens of Senegal to venerate its women and mothers and to work together for the advancement of the country.

### I. “Jigéen”

Jigéen mooy sunu yaay,  
Li la war mooy taxawu sa njaboot.  
Képp ku baax, jigéen moo la jur,

Kon war nanu sellal say jëf  
Te roy sunu Mame Diarra Bousso.  
Gát tank te gát lammiñ,

Te’ di wey sa ndigal Seriiñ.

Yow yaay yaakaaru Askan yi.

Waa Sénégal nanu teral jigéen.  
Réew mu nara baax faw mu sargal jigéen  
Kon jokal ligéey natal sa réew.

The women is our mother,  
She must care for her children.  
The woman is the mother of all important  
people,  
So we must respect her actions  
And do as our Grandmother Diarra Bousso.  
A woman should neither move around too  
much nor speak too much,  
And must respect the recommendations of her  
husband.  
It’s you [women] who are the spirit of the  
people.  
People of Senegal, let us serve our women.  
If a country hopes to develop and prosper,  
It must honor its women.

### II. “Bisimilaay nungi door”

Bisimilaay nungi door,  
Taagu yaay, taagu baay,  
Te fas-yeene andandoo  
Di ligéey sunu réew.  
Nun jigéen ñi, dañuy xeex ndax réew mi  
naat.  
Nanu andandoo di ligéey sunu réew, jëm  
kanam.  
Baayi xiiroo, baayi ngaayoo,  
Baayi xuloo, baayi xeex.  
Te fas-yeene andandoo  
Di ligéey sunu réew.

In the name of God let us begin,  
By taking leave of mother and father,  
Then let us go as companions  
To work for our country.  
We, women, we will fight for the abundance  
and prosperity of our country.  
As companions, we work to lead our country  
forward.  
Put an end to the conflict,  
Put an end to the disputes.  
And let us go as companions  
To work for our country.



## III. “Xaley réew mi”

Xaley réew mi, nanu andandoo,  
Di ligéey sunu réew Sénégal jëm kanam.

Nanu booloo ubbi xel yi di xalaat,  
Di xalaat bu rafet Sénégal jëm kanam.

Nanu xool sunu jambari maam yi fi newoon.

Dañu daan jog di xare ngir sunu réew jëm  
kanam.

Children of the country, let us be together  
In working for our country Senegal.

Let us open our minds to thought and  
reflection,

Positive reflection for the advancement of  
our country Senegal.

Let us look to our brave grand-mothers who  
were once here,

They rose up and fought wars for the  
prosperity of our country

*Analysis*

The first song of the set, “Jigéen,” begins in emphasizing the woman’s role as a mother; just as Wolof tradition mandates, her primary job is to “care for her children.” At the same time, the song praises “the woman” by claiming that she is “the mother of all important people.” This means that any great leader—a president, warrior, marabout, or priest, for example—has a mother behind him. It also suggests that while men may be the ones in positions of power, they derive that power from a woman. The speaker reinforces a woman’s authority—“we must respect her actions”—but only within the context of her being a mother. The song’s message is complicated, somewhat, by its mention of Mame Diarra Bousso. As the mother of Cheikh Amadou Bamba<sup>22</sup>, she is an important model of wisdom and religious piety. The story for which she is most famous, however, characterizes her by her steadfast obedience and submission to her husband<sup>23</sup>. This complicates the song’s message because it takes power away from the woman and puts in the hands of her husband—in the hands of a man. The line, “A woman should neither move around too much nor speak too much,” strongly reinforces the traditional notions

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<sup>22</sup> The foremost prophet of the Mouride brotherhood of Islam

<sup>23</sup> In the story, Mame Diarra Bousso’s husband one day orders her to wait outside the house until his return. She waits all through the night, even when it begins to rain (Faye, Lamine. Personal interview).

that a woman's place is at home and that she shouldn't have too powerful a voice, notions published by Abdoulaye-Bara Diop in *La famille wolof* and outlined previously in this paper.

The French translation that Adja Diop provided indicates a different interpretation. Although the original Wolof text does connote obedience to one's husband, and although my griotte instructors confirmed this reading, Adja's translation is that a woman must respect her religious leader. Piety and reverence toward religious leaders is certainly a traditional expectation of both women and men, but I'm interested in the way Adja's translation omits the message of women submitting themselves to men. Whether or not she realized it, I think the young woman performed a small act of resistance through her translation. Her text allows us to read that women are deserving of praise and respect without being designated to an inferior status.

"Bisimilaay nungi door" makes women themselves the agents of change; the speaker is a woman, and she is calling on other women to join her. The song begins with the women "taking leave of mother and father." The Wolof word *taagu* signifies both "to take leave of" and "to ask permission from." This indicates a twofold relationship between the women and their parents: they show appropriate respect for their parents' authority, but they are also making a move toward independence. The last four lines demonstrate authority, as the woman orders her "companions" and fellow Senegalese to end their disputes in the name of progress. Compared to "Jigéen," this song places more power in the hands of women and grants them a higher status.

In the first line of "Xaley réew mi," the speaker refers to herself and to her companions as "children of the country." This situates them in a status inferior to that of a mother, or a woman. The end of the song is the most striking, as it characterizes Senegal's female ancestors as warriors; this was certainly a role traditionally granted to men. As does "Bisimilaay nungi door," this song presents women as being the primary agents of positive change. Even though all

three of these songs venerate women and highlight them as the backbone of Senegal, they adhere to traditional norms of women's behavior and status. They all have the common goal of working together to advance the country, but they don't seem to actively promote a change of the status quo—that is, a change of the place of women in traditional Wolof society. In fact, their texts reinforce and perpetuate this social position.

### B. *Kanda*<sup>24</sup>

The following is an example of *kanda*, a somewhat ritualistic chant performed by women to the rhythm of the *mortier-pilon*<sup>25</sup>. The chant offers women an opportunity to express frustration toward an unjust husband or the difficulties of a polygamous marriage. In this song, a wife threatens to leave her husband if he doesn't give her the ration she is owed, claiming to be a victim of his trap. In the last few lines of the song, the wife convinces herself to show appreciation despite her unhappiness (Ndiaye 118-122).

Wóóy Simbam	Wôy Simbam
Wóóy Simbam	Wôy Simbam
Meysa Joor Ngóóne bayima	Meissa Dior Ngoné leave me
Maa ngi lay yuuxu wororor	I so despise you!
Joxma njël mbaa nga fase ma	Give me my normal share or else let's get a divorce,
Mbaa ma dem Mbirkelaan xaban kër	If not I'll run to the home of Ndiogou Ndiaye in Mbirkelane ;
Njoogu Njaay	To Thiombologne with Mister Ann ;
Comboloñ kër muse Aan	To Mandaguir with Amar Wâdj ;
Mandagiri kër Amar Waaj	To Tassette with the Peuls !
Taseeti Pël yaa ko moom	I've gotten blisters from spending all day gathering food
Rocim cëxët mbul laa ci am	And my skirt itches.
Sër buy cuxx ndaatukaan	You have the spiritual power and the material power,
Am ngeen saaiir am ngeen baatin	I'm the victim who has fallen into your trap.
Fir gi japp na njambaxabraan	Whether each one accepts her condition, it's better to be ugly than dead!
Ku nekk ak na nga mel ñaaw a gën dee	

<sup>24</sup> Original Wolof text and French translation, as published by Ndiaye, are listed in Appendix B. The English translation in this text is my own.

<sup>25</sup> The large, wooden mortar and pestle that women use to pound millet, peanuts, or vegetables

Ñeteel a gën bañ sëy

War mbaam a gën war jaat

Taal sondeel a gën këm.

To be the third wife is better than not being married at all,

A voyage on the back of a donkey is better than one in a casket,

The faint light of a candle is better than complete darkness!

### *Analysis*

The first interesting thing to note is that this chant is, by its definition, performed while working at the *mortier-pilon*. This means that even though the woman's words may challenge or critique traditional systems, she is physically engaged in a domestic activity that was assigned to her by these systems.

The speaker is immediately aggressive toward her husband: "I so despise you!" Such an exclamation directly challenges what Diop explains as a "domination-submission" relationship within marriage (*La famille* 65). It is a bold moment of disrespect and resistance. The chant goes on to highlight the financial, and not romantic, motivations for the marriage—"give me my normal share or else let's get a divorce." Expressing her discontent as a co-wife, the speaker offers a scathing critique of one of the primary institutions of traditional Wolof society: polygamy. She goes on to lament the difficulty of her day-to-day responsibilities, and she even refers to the discomfort caused by her skirt. Perhaps this reference is meant to indicate the discomfort she feels as a result of her gender-designated roles and status.

While the first half of the chant is a clear rejection of traditional values and codes of behavior, the second half suggests a change in attitude. The woman reestablishes her husband as superior and herself as inferior ("You have the spiritual power and the material power, I'm the victim who has fallen into your trap"), and she proceeds to accept this dynamic. I'm curious as to why the speaker makes such an abrupt shift from resistance to acceptance. The beginning of the chant is a blatant challenge of traditional systems. It is, however, an "invisible" one—that is, the chant is performed only because the wife is in a private space and her husband is not present.

For this reason, I believe the chant's objective may not be to actually enact external change but to serve as a temporary relief from the difficulties of everyday life.

### C. Development and Education

I received the following song from Lamine Faye, a French teacher in the rural village of Ndiané, Thiès<sup>26</sup>. As an educator, Faye has observed *mariages précoces*—early marriages—to be a leading cause of young girls dropping out of school before finishing their studies. Faye wrote and performed this song with some of his students, hoping to encourage parents to allow their daughters to remain in school. In the song, a young girl thanks her mother and father for having sent her to school. She appeals to her parents to let her continue her studies so that she can one day provide for them.

Yaay boy gërëma,  
Baay boy gërëma,  
Yéenangi ma duggal école.  
Yaay boy gërëma.  
Góor baaxna yaay boy!  
Jigéen baaxna baay boy!  
Fexel bama yaaga école  
Bés di na niew ma njëriñ.

Thank you, dear Mother,  
Thank you, dear Father,  
You who sent me to school.  
Thank you, dear Mother.  
A boy is good, Maman!  
A girl is good, Papa!  
Try and find a way to let me stay in school,  
So that one day in the future I will be useful  
to you.

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<sup>26</sup> Original Wolof text and French translation, as provided by Faye, are listed in Appendix B. The English translation in this text is my own.

### *Analysis*

The first contemporary song of my findings, this text is set apart from the previous four by its explicit objective of changing a traditional practice that is perceived to be unjust and harmful to girls or women. While the *cosaan* songs ultimately adhere to tradition and the *kanda*• offers only momentary resistance to traditional systems, Faye’s song directly addresses *mariage précoce* and works to discourage it. Written in the voice of a young girl, the text still demonstrates appropriate respect toward her mother and father, as did “Bisimilaay nungi door.” This continuity between past and current-day songs indicates that, despite changing contemporary attitudes toward certain traditional practices such as early marriage, respect towards one’s parents has remained an important cultural value to the Wolof. The performance context of this song must also be taken into consideration. Whereas the *kanda*• is chanted in private, this piece was performed for parents with the intention of persuading them to support their daughters’ educations. When considered alongside the previous four texts, this song indicates a shift over time from ambivalence toward traditional norms to an express desire to change them.

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This final song was written by a group of women from a rural village that has worked with Tostan. Tostan encourages women to write songs as a way of transmitting knowledge about human rights and the value of education to the rest of their villages. The text takes the same call-and-response form of the *cosaan* songs I learned: one woman sings each verse, while a group of women and girls repeats the refrain behind her. In this song, the women explain some of the progress their village has made as a result of its work with Tostan and its efforts to improve education.

“Dañu daan reeroo ci suñu biir dundu”

We did not understand each other in the way we used to live.  
 Tostan has shown us the way to better educate our children.  
 Stop using violence and insults.  
 Tostan has shown us the way to better educate our children.  
 Our facilitators have given us knowledge.  
 Tostan has shown us the way to better educate our children.  
 Dear facilitators we have knowledge.  
 Tostan has shown us the way to better educate our children.  
 Garbage has been removed from the village.  
 Tostan has shown us the way to better educate our children.  
 We did not know how to talk to our young children.  
 Now we know. Tostan has shown us the way.  
 (Tostan 2014)

### *Analysis*

From my observation, much of this song's power comes from the manner in which it was performed. As aforementioned, it shares the style and form of a traditional song: one woman sings each verse, while the rest of the group repeats a refrain. The performance was put on by a large group of women and girls of all ages. The song picked up in intensity as it progressed; it started out slower and softer, but several women eventually started drumming on buckets and bowls or clapping. The most striking observation was the group of men and boys standing behind the women—they looked on in silence but did not participate in the singing. The women were clearly the voices of authority.

As opposed to the previous songs, which either comment on particular traditions or serve as a call to change them, this song is the result and celebration of positive change that has already been accomplished. The first line of the song is a denunciation of the village's archaic practices, which have been abandoned or improved as a result of meaningful education. This text also offers an interesting moment of continuity between *cosaan* and contemporary: the line "Stop using violence and insults" is similar in structure and intent to "Put an end to the conflict, put an end to the disputes," in "Bisimilaay nungi door." Though the songs' historical contexts are different, they share the same message of peace and progress.

These last two songs, which concern themselves with development and education, seem to be representative of a new genre of Wolof women's songs: those used explicitly as tools for change and for women's acquisition of social agency, rather than simply as a contained critique of traditional norms.

### **Conclusion**

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The objective of this study was to assess the extent to which Wolof women have used and continue to use certain songs or vocal practices as a means of challenging traditional values and of earning social agency. My findings have indicated that the attitudes of Wolof women toward the social codes that determine their status and functions are ambivalent—that is, women neither exclusively embrace nor challenge them. As a result, the songs women sing demonstrate a similar ambivalence; they simultaneously oppose and adhere to Wolof traditions.

Contemporary perspectives on the social progress of women are varied, but the predominant opinion is that women today exercise a greater level of power and have far more social and economic autonomy than they once did. As a result, some believe that it is no longer necessary to use songs as tools for promoting social change. Others, such as the NGO Tostan and the rural villages it works with, believe that work still needs to be done and that songs are a practical way of encouraging social discourse. Regardless of any such disagreements, the trend away from certain traditional values and practices has not benefitted all women. Griottes, whose careers rely on such practices and the songs that preserve them, are losing the social relevance and influence they once had.

My examination of several texts and performances, from the traditional to the contemporary, has revealed an evolution of Wolof women's songs over time. This evolution indicates a declined interest in preserving certain traditional customs or systems and an increased



concern with the empowerment of women. The songs themselves have evolved from artifacts of tradition to instruments with the explicit purpose of earning women greater social agency.

The results of this study could be supplemented by further research into the prevalence and effectiveness of current development efforts—not only those of Tostan—that encourage women to use their voices. Additionally, I would suggest further inquiry of the contemporary circumstances of griots and griottes and how, if at all, they are adapting to a more modern society. Finally, I strongly encourage any continued academic interest in the women of West Africa and the ways in which they negotiate power with their voices. The spoken word, and not only the written, should be more frequently recognized as a legitimate mode of social discourse within academia.

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## Appendices

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### Appendix A: Griot(te) and Non-Griot(te) Instructors

Diop, Adja. *Non-griotte*.

Ndiaye, Awa. *Griotte*.

Ndiaye, Jean. *Griot*.

Ndiaye, Khady. *Griotte*.

Seck, Awa. *Griotte*.

Thiam, Kora. *Griotte*.

### Appendix B: Original Transcriptions/Translations of Songs

*[As provided by Adja Diop]*

“Bismilaye niongui dor”

Bismilaye niongui dor  
 Tagou yaye tagou baye  
 Ta fasiyé Andando  
 Di liguéye sounou réw.  
 Nioun djiguéne yi da nioye khiekh nakh rewni  
 nate  
 Nanou Andando di liguéye sounou réw Dieme  
 Kaname.  
 Ba yi khiro, ba yi guayo,  
 Ba yi khoulou, bayi khekh  
 Te Fasyéné andando  
 Di liguéye sounou réw.

“Djiguéne”

Djiguéne moye sunu yaye  
 Li la war moy taxawu sa jaboot  
 Kepp ku bakh Djiguéne mola Djour  
  
 Kone war nanu sélal say Dieuf  
 Te’roy sunu Mame Diarra Bousso.  
  
 Gatt tonk te’gatt laamine  
  
 Te’ di wey se ndigalu Serigne  
  
 Yaw yaye yakarou Askani  
 Wa Sénégal nanu teral djiguéne.

Rew mou nara bakh fow mou sargal Djiguéne  
 Kone diogal ligeey natal sa rew.

“Bismilaye niongui dor”

On commence  
 Par prévenir notre père et mère  
 Nous voulons être ensemble  
 Et de travailler pour notre pays  
 Nous les femmes, nous travaillons pour le  
 développement de notre pays  
 On doit être ensemble  
 Pour le bien-être de notre pays  
 Arrêtons la discussion et la lutte  
 L’ignorance et l’infidélité  
 On doit faire un blocage  
 Pour le développement de notre pays.

“Femme”

La femme est notre mère  
 Elle doit s’occuper de ses enfants  
 La femme est la mère de toutes les bonnes  
 personnes  
 On leurs doivent du respect  
 Elle doit faire comme notre grand-mère Mame  
 Diarra Bousso  
 La femme ne doit pas être une trainet ni une  
 menteuse  
 Elles doivent respecter les recommandations de  
 leurs guides religieux.  
 La société se repose sur les épaules de la femme.  
 Les Sénégalais aiment beaucoup les femmes

Si un pays veut développer il doit forcément  
 respecter les femmes.

“Khaléye réw mi”

Khaléye réw mi, nanou Andando,  
Di liguéye sounou réw Sénégal dieme kaname.  
Nanou bolo oubi khel yi di khalate,  
Di khalate bou rafete Sénégal dieme kaname  
Nanou khole sounou diambari mame yifi néwone,  
Danou dane diouke di kharé guire  
Sounou réw dieme kaname.

*[As provided by Lamine Faye]*

Yaye boy diárama  
Bay boy diárama  
Yen gnima duggal école  
Yaye boy diàrama  
Gor baaxna yaye boy  
Jiggën baaxna bay boy  
Fexel bama yagg école  
Bess din a niew ma dieurig

*[As published by A. Raphaël Ndiaye in La place  
de la femme dans les rites au Sénégal, 118-122]*

Wóóy Simbam  
Wóóy Simbam  
Meysa Joor Ngóóne bayima  
Maa ngi lay yuuxu wororor  
Joxma njël mbaa nga fase ma  
  
Mbaa ma dem Mbirkelaan xaban kër  
Njoogu Njaay  
Comboloñ kër muse Aan  
Mandagiri kër Amar Waaj  
Taseeti Pël yaa ko moom  
Rocim cëxët mbul laa ci am  
  
Sër buy cuxx ndaatukaan  
Am ngeen saaiir am ngeen baatin  
  
Fiir gi japp na njambaxabraan  
Ku nekk ak na nga mel ñaaw a gën dee

“Khaléye réw mi”

Les enfants soyant ensembles  
Pour le travail de notre pays.  
Mettons nous à réfléchir  
A réfléchir sur le travail de notre pays.  
Faisons référence sur nos ancêtres  
Ils faisaient des guerres pour  
Le développement de notre pays.

Merci maman  
Merci Papa  
Vous qui m’avez envoyé à l’école

L’homme est utile maman !  
La femme est utile Papa !  
Laisse-moi durer à l’école  
Un jour viendra, je te serai utile.

Wôy Simbam  
Wôy Simbam  
Meissa Dior Ngoné laisse-moi  
Je te méprise à l’extrême !  
Donne-moi ma ration quotidienne ou bien  
passons au divorce,  
Sinon je me rendrais chez Ndiogou Ndiaye à  
Mbirkelane ;  
A Thiombologne chez monsieur Ann ;  
A Mandagiri chez Amar Wâdj ;  
A Tassette chez les Peul !  
A toujours collecter de l’herbe, j’ai attrapé des  
ampoules  
Avec un pagne qui démange.  
Vous avez le pouvoir spirituel et le pouvoir  
matériel,  
Je suis la victime tombée dans votre piège.  
Que chacun accepte sa condition d’existence, la

Ñeteel a gën bañ sëy

War mbaam a gën war jaat

Taal sondeel a gën këm.

laideur est préférable à la mort !

Être troisième épouse vaut mieux que ne point se marier,

Un voyage à dos d'âne vaut mieux qu'un voyage dans un cercueil,

Mieux vaut la lueur d'une bougie qu'une obscurité totale !

### Appendix C: My Original Song

#### “Jigéen, mooy boot”

Jigéen, mooy boot.  
Lan la boot?

It's the woman who carries.  
What does she carry?

Ndox la yenu; di tuuri.  
Dugub la yenu; di daanu.  
Ay xaley la boot; jooyuñu .  
Jëkkër la gaddu; daanuwul.

She carries water; it does not spill.  
She carries millet; it does not fall.  
She carries her children; they do not cry.  
She carries her husband; he does not fall.

Dakar la boot, fi dundin bi gaaw.  
Ibel la boot, ci kaw tundd xeer.  
Djilor la boot, ci biir sardiñam.  
Ndiané la boot, mungi woy di fecc.  
Ndar la boot, ak yoonu dex.

She carries Dakar, where life is hurried.  
She carries Ibel, from her granite mountain.  
She carries Djilor, from within her garden.  
She carries Ndiané, when she dances and sings.  
She carries Saint-Louis, with the fleuve's current.

Jigéen, Sénégal la gaddu.  
Man la gaddu; yow la gaddu.  
Jigéen, Senegal la yenu.  
Jigéen, mooy boot; dunu daanu.

Senegal rests on the shoulders of a woman.  
She carries me; she carries you.  
Senegal is poised on the head of a woman.  
It's the woman who carries; we will not fall.

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. Comment appelez-vous ?
2. Quel âge avez-vous ?
3. Où habitez-vous ?
4. Vous travaillez comme *griot/griotte* depuis combien d'années ?
5. Comment avez-vous appris d'être griot(te) ?
6. Avez-vous d'autre travail ?
7. Qu'est-ce que vous faites comme griot(te) ?
8. Êtes-vous content d'être griot(te) ?
9. Quelle est la différence entre le rôle d'un griot et d'une griotte ?
10. Quelles sont quelques chansons des femmes wolofs, et quand est-ce qu'on les chante ?
11. Est-ce que vous jamais utilisez les chansons pour exprimer des mécontentements ?
12. Connaissez-vous des manières dont, actuellement, les femmes utilisent les chansons pour s'habiller ?
13. Comment pensez-vous que les chansons des femmes ont changé ?
14. Pensez-vous que les chansons traditionnelles sont encore importantes aux wolofs ?
15. Pensez-vous que le rôle de la musique a changé depuis les années plus traditionnelles ?
16. Connaissez-vous d'autres contacts qui seraient utiles pour moi ?