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## A Body and Sex Issue? Fashion in Colonial Dakar

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### ABSTRACT

Dressing mode pretends to exist in urban areas at both local and global levels. This cosmopolitanism is based on a mix of aesthetic and symbolic elements that cross borders. This essay analyses how in the colonial period fashion became a means for the girl living in Dakar to contest the established social, political and cultural order and to build up an identity. It examines the dynamic relationship between the body and clothing and raises questions that have been directed previously generally to a Western context. It shows how the body and its adornment have been used to construct and contest social identities during colonial times. Grounded in the insight of history, and influenced by developments of cultural studies, this essay investigates the relations between the woman and the public space, and between ideas of the self and those about the family and gender. It explores the bodily and material creation of the changing identities of women, youths through a consideration of topics such as fashion.

**Keywords:** Woman, fashion, autonomy, hybridization, politics, erotism, identity.

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### 1. Introduction

Work like that of Gaines (1990), Garber (1992) and Wilson (1985) on dress and body have illuminated the relation between social groups and representation in Western industrial society. It is limited, however, by its cultural vantage point. It cannot provide a more general understanding of the human uses of dress and the body in the social, economic, and political life. We need to know how widely concepts like 'patriarchy', the 'masculine gaze' can be applied. They do not adequately describe the spectrum of non Western social realities, and this raises questions about the comprehensiveness when applied to Western case material. Like Roach and Eicher (1965), Cordwell and Schwartz (1979), Appadurai (1986), Weiner and Schneider (1989), Barnes and Eicher (1992), I bring to the discussion of cloth/clothing, fashion, and cultural changes cross-cultural insights from the increasingly intertwined fields of anthropology and history. In this essay, I show that fashion is a primary symbol in the

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performances through which modernity-and therefore history- have been conceived, constructed, and challenged in Africa. I find that both the “modern” and the “traditional” are powerfully and principally constituted in fashion. Clothing matters and dress is political. This essay explores the opportunity to look at colonial African history through the lenses of fashion and political expression, to engage the expression of a distinctive African modernity. It is concerned with the ways in which power is represented, constituted, articulated and contested through dress. It seeks to understand bodily praxis as political praxis, fashion as political language. Dress practice is explored as it is embedded in fields of power-political, gendered- in order to probe the ways in which modifications of the body through clothing have been used both to constitute and challenge power. It foregrounds the power of dress, the power of fashion as an incisive political language capable to unifying, differentiating, contesting, and dominating. If dress is a matter of individual choice, it can also mark larger group identity, it may be “a weapon of the weak”. The Dakar case study deals with a society experiencing substantial change in colonial situation, where African and Western notions of fashion interact and draw on each other for sources of inspiration. The exploration of dress as a political culture challenges me to think through some of the issues of literature, interdisciplinary, comparative, theoretical. The relevance of the topic tells me about the limits of hegemony, about the fluidity of categories. From an historical and ethnographic approach, and by taking African society as its focus in a colonial context, I demonstrate that factors considered integral to Western social development (heterogeneity, urbanization) have existed elsewhere in different configurations and with different outcomes.

The clothing fashion, which reflects intimate evolution of societies, has been proven to be a valuable barometer of the social, cultural and economic transformations that took place in Dakar from 1945 to 1960. The “colonial situation” was a process of systematic dismantling of the local cultural bases. Dressing code became more and more a signage bent. Beyond the necessity of safeguarding decency, it became, in the colonial context, a way of expressing cultural choices: aspiration to appropriate western codes (*Princesse* and *Gigi* dresses), willingness to remain deep-rooted in the traditional culture with dyed fabrics (*cuub*, *xosi*, *bantubale boubous*) or mixed modes with hipsters (including low-waisted dresses and dressing jackets called *tay baas* or *taille basse*) (Ndiaye, 1984). After 1945, the economic context (visible economic recovery through the circulation of bank currencies, dynamism of textile industry), the socio-cultural background (the development of leisure infrastructures: clubs, bars, movie theaters) and even the political setting (the popular enthusiasm around political rivalries with *Bolok* dresses, *Front Populaire* headscarves) were favorable conditions enough to allow blossoming of fashion.

I aim to construct an analytical scheme of evolution of Dakar girls and ladies’ fashion and clothing behavior, based on economic, socio-cultural, gender and political factors, relying on a wide variety of sources (newspapers, novels, private photographs) and ethnographic approach through interviews. First, I analyse fashion as a visible language in the *longue durée* Senegambian history. Then I pay deliberate attention to what people wear and how clothing represents a means for young girls to contest the established political order and the accepted socio-cultural norms, in order to construct a new identity to themselves.

## 2. Methodology

The research methodology is both historical and ethnographic. Primary sources have been consulted and compiled: newspapers from the National Archives of Senegal (*Paris-Dakar*, *Guid'AOF*, *Bingo*), novels (*Karim*, *Maimouna*) and private photographs. From these sources, I collect elements allowing to examine fashion styles of the epoch and their relation with social, political and cultural order, completed with interviews of scarce witnesses of that period. I borrow from literary criticism to further my study. All information are analyzed and criticized to illuminate the past and the present. By focusing on historical questions in the investigation of dress and politics, I aim to challenge the Eurocentrism of much of the broader fashion studies literature and to bring history to bear on the rich ethnographies of African dress.

## 3. Fashion, Women and History

The growing importance of fashion is one of the most remarkable facts of our modern times. Far from being an external accessory of daily life, a superficial phenomenon, fashion appears to be one of the greatest factors of transformation of societies, one of the most important laws of social dynamics. Fashion is defined as a set of habits, behaviors and opinions that induce a temporary interest

in practices of social life. It is a periodic change of dressing style considered more or less obligatory, that disappears and explores other horizons (Davis, 1992, pp.101-120). The main characteristic of fashion is to be always new, always different (König, 1967). Originally, fashion was reserved to upper-class. Under the influence of factors such as democratization of societies and development of tailor-making, it became a mass phenomenon. Another characteristic of fashion is the protective barrier that surrounds a social group in order to distinguish itself from the mass and gain visibility. This function of distinction and distance is obvious, so that when a mode reaches its peak, it becomes vulgar and no longer creates particularity. The precursor group is the first to get rid of it. Fashion allows to realize two aspirations: at first, a dream of identity (Wilson, 2003, pp. 47-66), a compensatory act intended to react against depersonalization of the mass society; and then a dream of otherness, act of identifying with famous characters and taking part of their prestige (Barthes, 1967). At last, the feeling of being in fashion provides security, confidence. Along with psychological predispositions (desire for newness) and social tendencies (rivalry between groups), fashion can be considered as “daughter” of the economy. It finds its vitality in an economic context: the market economy and the consumer culture (Appadurai, 1986).

Women are (naturally?) inclined to follow fashion. Therefore, it is spoken of feminization of fashion (Bourdieu, 1981 & 1998). The male clothing is characterized by a certain fixity (changes concern only accessories); the rhythm of female fashion is accelerating constantly and allows a statement of financial standing of women (and their men by the way), of their economic and social power (Socé, 1948; Sadji, 1953).

What does a dress code have to do with cultural atmosphere of a given date and time? The history of mentalities and sensitivity (*histoire du sensible*) (Corbin & Courtine, 2005), contributes to producing shapes: the erotic fashion reflects the important place that the body occupies in Senegalese society at determined moments in its history and the collapse of decency with the outfits exposing secondary sexual characteristics (chest, buttocks).

Fashion is a visible language. The conditions for its development are linked to political, economic and cultural context in which it unfolds. In pre-colonial Senegal (14<sup>th</sup> century), more precisely in *Wolof* society, prior to monarchy, fashion, which is the result of a need to distinguish from the mass, could not develop in a culture of inter-influence (Mendras, 1981, p. 139) where the social needs of distinction, consideration were met by birth for example. An individual could not change the social position in which he was born. Moreover, the economic system, based on self-consumption, ignores the culture of consumption. The consequent material and moral security made the accumulation of excessive wealth unnecessary (Diop, 1960, p.119). Demonstrative consumption was a marginal phenomenon; fashion could not meet the conditions for its fulfilment in this society in which tradition reduced individual affirmation, personal talents, stereotypes of conduct. A *Wolof* saying underlines this conformism: “*Lu nëpp wax moy dëgg!*” (The truth is what everyone believes in!).

With monarchy and emergence of dominant categories (*garmi* and *jambur*), a rivalry developed that could give birth to fashion. This competition was displayed on the field of the warrior virtues, namely courage, dignity, sense of honour, but also on the field of elegance: Manufacture of fabrics and ornaments (necklaces, bracelets, ankle rings, shoes) for princesses and dignitaries and notables’ wives took on great importance (Diop, 1981; Barry, 1985, pp. 88-89). Crafts developed and became more specialized: *kuude gu nul* (amulets), *kuude gu weex* (ornaments, shoes). The fashion game concerned only a minority, the dominant social categories of the monarchic regime. With establishment and intensification of exchange with Europe, following the installation of trade market places on the coast in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the fashion phenomenon got accelerated. The sovereigns of kingdoms, with the influx of European products (cotton, multicolored necklaces and pearls, glassware), subjected the indigenous clothing to fashion variations: the length of the fabric was proportional to the power of the sovereign; it presupposed an ethic of personality and authority. *Boubous* and pants took on exaggerated dimensions.

Colonization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to a new phase in fashion. In economic terms, the money-market economy took over the subsistence economy: artisans could sell their products on the markets and free themselves from customer relationships and dependency. Thus, appeared a process of liberation of the lower categories (*neeño*) (Ndiaye, 1984). In order to mark their liberation, members of lower classes use fashion. It becomes compensatory of deficit of respectability. Thus appears the *Ndanaan* character,

elegant man, wearing 2 *boubous*, made with 6m of fabrics. On his head, a long and large black turban surrounding a *chechia*. (interview with Fatou Niang Siga, Saint-Louis of Senegal, 15 May, 2015).

The development of urban agglomerations (Saint-Louis, Gorée, Rufisque, Dakar) (Sinou, 1993, pp. 173-195), following the end of the colonial conquest and the development of the colony of Senegal, encouraged the establishment of a French male population living in a common-law relationship with black women (*mariage à la mode du pays*). These unions gave birth to a population of mulattos who constituted a specific social group, especially in Saint-Louis and Gorée. The ladies of this mulatto society, the *Signares* (Brooks, 1976, pp. 29-44 & 2003; Jones, 2013, pp.34-39, pp. 81-95; Kane-Lo, 2014) distinguished themselves by the uniqueness of their Creole clothing. They wore large basket dresses; at their necks, several collars and big earrings. Their wrists had many gold bracelets. On their head, a pine cone shape hat *njumbël*. Their life style was characterized by laziness. It is traditionally said that that they hated housework so much that they grew long nails in order to skip manual tasks (interview with Fatou Niang Siga, Saint-Louis of Senegal, 15 May, 2015).

In addition, colonization and monetarization of the economy gave rise to a social hierarchy based on material factors. The woman, mirror where the social success of the man could read his pecuniary power (*alâl*), was, by his clothing, depositary of the function of signaling the economic status of her husband. The *jeek* (married woman) had a high idea of *sañsé* (the art of dressing well) (Niang Siga, 2006). Her clothing heritage was distinguished by profusion. They wore at least 4 loincloths, on a glass beads belt they gave more volume to the buttocks. The *jeek* wore gold collar around the neck (*sariba*), gold (*ngalam*) or silver (*galbe*) bracelets at wrists and massive silver rings at ankles (*lamu tank*). They wore golden *babouches* (*dallidoré*) made in Morocco (interview with Fatou Niang Siga, Saint-Louis of Senegal, 15 May, 2015). The dress of the married woman was also significant of the place of the body in the system of values. The body, considered as inferior, had to be relegated to second plan by profusion of clothing. The dress was more subject to fashion, in terms of length, size and number of pieces. The most in vogue fashions in the interwar period were the *mbuub bale mbed* (literally the *boubou* that sweeps the street) (1922-1924), excessively long, condition of its elegance and the *rawaatle* (competition), (1925-1927), made up of three loincloths, carried on stairs (Cousturier, 1925, p. 45; Faye, 1995, pp. 76-78; Faye, 2017, pp. 194-204). These two styles appear in a favourable economic situation: satisfactory groundnut sells of the years 1925-1927, importation of consumer goods such as fabrics, transistors, watches, shoes. Among clothes, the most popular were *foy-foy* (onomatopoeia reflecting the light wind noise) and *barastiku* (slide) (interview with Fatou Niang Siga, Saint-Louis of Senegal, 15 May, 2015). The girl's clothing was more functional than signage. As a mean of safeguarding decency, it was revealing of the place given to the girl in the society.

Dressing expressed no economic status and was the least erotic possible in his seduction game. The girl was not the sole owner of her body because the group, through the imposed virginity, exercised a right of sight and control over her body.

#### 4. Women's Society and Fashion in Dakar

After World War II, a slight economic recovery was visible in French

West Africa. The fiduciary circulation increased from 4,851,000,000 CFA francs in January to 6,044,000,000 CFA francs in December 1945 (Guid'AOF, 1947, p. 23). Between 1945 and 1950, the

*Kamisolu Taraab* with fan-shaped sleeves and a headscarf. Pay attention to the hairdress and the golden jewels : *jaaro nopp* or earrings, *lam* or bracelets, *ceen* or necklace and *jaaro loxo* or ring.

Source : Fatou Niang Siga, *Costume saint-louisien sénégalais, d'hier à aujourd'hui*, Imprimerie Midi-Occident, Dakar, 2006, p. 13.



beauty industry experienced a prodigious development: textile industry,<sup>2</sup> luxury stores,<sup>3</sup> tailors<sup>4</sup>. The need to appear was intended to make people forget the "horrors" of clothing during the 1939-1945 war. The intensity of the war effort and its inevitable consequences led to scarcity of some imported goods, namely fabrics. Different strategies were developed to face clothing impoverishment in Dakar. Sisal bags and other animal leather replaced fabrics. In poor families, only one loincloth was used and was devolved to the one who had to step out. An elegant dressing could be suspicious and could even lead to police control for identity verification (Ndao, 2009, pp. 223-232).

The revival of the fashion movement after 1945 was also due to socio-cultural factors. The growth of fashion found support in the development of worldly life (*Guid'AOF*, 1947-1951). The main Dakar's newspaper at the time, *Paris-Dakar*, made a wide publicity at the balls,<sup>5</sup> the chic restaurants, the films shown in movie theaters, since 1946<sup>6</sup>.

The infrastructure of leisure and entertainment was undergoing a real development, linked to the increase of the population (148,000 Africans in 1947 against 60,000 in 1934), especially European (9500 French in 1947 against 5800 in 1934). This urban growth encouraged the practice of anonymity and appearance. *Bingo*, the monthly magazine of the black society, in its first publication (February 1953), devotes 24% of its advertising to clothing. This portion increased to 36% in December of the same year. It should be noted that this periodical had an important educated female readership.

#### 4.1 Dissemination of european fashion and maintenance of indigenous styles

The supply of European clothing has been a determining factor in the diffusion of Western modes, mainly French. From 1947 Dakar became a leading market for the French apparel industry, due to a strong European presence and the increased importance of a westernized social category (pupils, students, civil servants, shop clerks). The luxury stores displayed French cultural brands (*A la Ville d'Ys*, *Au Pavillon Blanc*, *Au Grand Chic*, *Au Gaspillage*, *Au Petit Bonheur*) or were awarded prestigious labels (*Galleries Lafayette*, *Champs Elysées*). The dynamism of advertising clothes in newspapers (*Paris-Dakar*, *Bingo*) had played an important role in the diffusion of European modes; advertising being one of the psychosociological factors that determine consumption.

The increase in the female population and its schooling have been a decisive factor in the diffusion of European fashion. Westernization was a trend observed in schools (Hauser, 1955, p. 206). The schooling of girls was an essential part of the policy of *déculturation* and assimilation<sup>7</sup>. The wearing of European dress (especially in schools for teachers and midwives), allowed the girl to surround herself with a protective barrier that gave her more visibility.

Dressmakers also played a leading role in the diffusion of European fashion. Fatou Wade is a pioneer with her fashion house *Au Paradis des Dames*. She started in the profession with *Bolok* dresses in 1946, then became interested in European fashion. To set an example, she dressed herself in European style. Gradually, she imposed herself on public opinion: orders flowed in, she settled in a larger premise, organized a salon and her shop took the name of *L'Enfer des Hommes*. Another seamstress, Khady Sarr, had a solid reputation in the early 1950s in the making of *Princesse* dresses.

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<sup>2</sup> The number of textile industries grows from 3 in 1947 to 12 in 1951 (*Guid'AOF*, 1947, pp. 65-69).

<sup>3</sup> 10 in 1947 (*Chez Elle*, *Touche A Tout*, *Gaffajoli*, *Mary-Lou*, *Ghislaine*, *Hercule*, *Maison des cadeaux*, *Soudan Luxe*, *Souchet*, *Frivolités*) to 32 in 1948, all located in the *Plateau* or European neighborhood. The return of French population in Dakar played an important role in diffusion of European fashion (*Guid'AOF*, 1948, p.105).

<sup>4</sup> From 5 tailors in 1947(*Guid'AOF*, 1947, pp. 65-69), among them 2 Senegalese (Lamine Traoré and Amadou Sow), they come up to 15 in 1951 (*Guid'AOF*,1950-1951, p. 155). They all had their shops downtown (William Ponty, Albert Sarraut, Gambetta, Vincens, Ferry, Grammont, Dagorne, Raffanel, Faure avenues...). Because of lack of documentation, I have no information on the tailors established in the *Medina* (indigenous area).

<sup>5</sup> 3 clubs in 1947, *Au Pavillon Chinois*, *Le Ring*, *Le Jockey*; 5 in 1951 (*Guid'AOF*, 1950-1951, p.115).

<sup>6</sup> 14 restaurants, 20 hotels and 7 movie-theaters in 1947 (*Bataclan*, *Palace*, *Vox*, *Rex*, *Rialto*, *Lux*, *Comacico*), (*Guid'AOF*, 1947, p. 53); 14 movie-theaters in 1951, 4 of them (*Pax*, *Rio*, *Medina*, *ABC*) in the *Medina* and another (*Cinépark*) in Thiaroye, in the suburbs of Dakar (*Guid'AOF*, 1950-1951, p. 115).

<sup>7</sup> Girls School of Albert Sarraut Avenue, Girls School of the Medina, Elementary Superior School of Girls, Modern College (for young girls), African Nursery School (1918), Girls Training School of Rufisque (elementary school teachers training, 1939), Typewriting School (1953).

After 1945, the unfavourable prejudice which continued to weigh on European clothing was less strong and less aggressive. It turned into mockery and puns, which, without hurting, isolated the wearer: *Suma Toubab* (My White Man), *Kilifë gi* (Master) (Seck, 2000, pp. 56-88). Some social groups, which had not completely broken with the traditional environment, displayed European dress. This was the case for domestic servants, young Christian girls and especially high school girls (Leques, 1957, pp. 430-445).

Fashion in Dakar, from 1945 to 1960, was exposed to European influence. Even though women remained faithful to the long-ruffled camisole, worn with a muslin *boubou* or basin embroidered around the collar, the girls adopted a compromise style between the classic European dress and the camisole. This dress squeezed the chest, tightened the waist and fell heavily on the heel. As for the school girls, they dressed in European style: The *Bolok* dress, first break with the old fashions, met the conditions of urban life while respecting the decency that forced women to hide their legs (interview with Fatou Niang Siga, Saint-Louis of Senegal, 15 May, 2015). It was a long dress in basket, made from fabrics with bright colors (red, blue, green, yellow).

From 1945 to the first half of the 1950s, the dress worn by the evolved Africans is long (*Gigi*), with some variants (straight, pleated, round neck), indigo, brown or purple (*Bingo*, 1958). The neckline dresses (*Princesse*) were rare until 1955 and skirts always long. The dress, the most popular European outfit for young African girls, sought its fashion renewals in fabrics and decorative patterns (small flowers, arabesques, stripes, tiles).

In the second half of the 1950s, the dress settled once and for all in the dress habits of young girls, due to factors such as the development of sewing and cutting schools<sup>8</sup>, the visit of great European dressmakers<sup>9</sup>, the infatuation around the phenomenon of open-air dance (*bal poussière*). The educated girls even promoted them for the still recalcitrant girls. A reader of *Bingo* even argued that :

the dress is more practical and leaves more freedom of movement; even for domestic work, one must wear dress instead of loincloth” (*Bingo*, November 1954, p. 15).

The dress, detached from the socio-professional category which was its pioneer (educated and working women), was no longer, in the second half of the 1950s, creating. It had popularized itself to the level of some servants. The same phenomenon was observed later, in the 60's, with the appearance of prêt-à-porter which, even if at first popularizes the French high fashion (namely in the US), will be adopted by the great majority of western countries people so that social differences when it comes to dressing will fade away. Modesty condemned the woman to hide her legs; renewal took place in the form of cleavage (*Bingo*, January and November 1957, pp. 13, 15, 18; March 1958, pp. 20-21). Young girls considered models of social success, beauty and emancipation, dressed in a low-cut dress (with or without sleeves) to give themselves a certain visibility. It is true that the price of certain models was inaccessible to all. Some models cost up to 3.000 francs CFA (*Bingo*, July 1958). As for comparison, the average wage of government employees varied between 10.000- and 15.000-francs CFA (*Paris-Dakar* January 4<sup>th</sup> 1960, p.4). The cleavage inaugurated a process of reconciliation with the body; the exposed parts (neck, chest, shoulders, and arms) were increasingly unloaded of necklaces and jewelry as if they wished to be enhanced and monopolize attention.

The process of westernization of dress behavior among young girls of the late 1950s was also perceptible in the advent of certain professions of beauty, like the model and the young girls' loving behavior. *Le Courrier du Coeur*, opened in *Bingo* in 1957 was soon filled with letters of young girls sharing their heartbreaks or desire to choose their fiancés without parents' interference (*Bingo*, March 1957, p.3). Despite this diffusion of European fashion, indigenous and *métis* styles (creolized fashion) were present on the fashion scene.

The socio-cultural function of native fashion was to display a being rooted in its culture. The maintenance of indigenous fashion was due to men approval, in a context marked by masculinity. Educated girls referred to the critical spirit, the asserted independence and above all the non-submission to men. The local fashion recruited from the female population who did not operate a

<sup>8</sup> A French lady named Buisson opened a sewing school in Dakar in 1955; a Dahomean, Théodore Adjawon Ayayi did likewise with the Federal School of Tailors in July 1956. *Singer*, a French label of electric household appliances, offered classes of cutting and sewing in its school and workshops opened in 1957 (*Bingo*, September 1957, p. 38).

<sup>9</sup> The French Christian Dior and the British Norman Hartnell, the Queen's dressmaker in 1957 (*Bingo*, January 1957, p. 29).

mechanism of “anticipatory socialization” towards the westernized group (educated girls, domestic workers). It was especially young girls who were not educated, imbued with the values of *kersa* (modesty), *muñ* (patience) and who found pride in the accomplishment of household tasks. However, European fashion fans did not completely turn their backs to indigenous clothing. Family ceremonies and religious events (*Tabaski*, *Korité*) gave them the opportunity to reconnect with tradition. The *boubou* or *mbuub*, symbol of resistance to westernization, highlighted elegance. It was accompanied by a loincloth (*sër*) and a headscarf (*musoor*) that matched either the *boubou* or the loincloth. In addition to fabrics, the *boubou* sought its renewals in the indigos colors (*cuub*): azure blue or *baxa*, light blue or *rombal mband*, night blue or *palmaan*. Patterns determined names such as *boubou xosi*, *bantu bale*, *yume* (Ndiaye, 1984, p. 86). At the end of the 1950s, the *mbubu bale mbed* (*boubou* that sweeps the street) of the interwar period was very popular and reflected the elegance (6 to 8 meters of fabric were used for its confection!). The *boubou* which seemed to match with married women status was predominant in the age group 30 and over because of the low number of women in school. As for the loincloth, it occupied an important place in marriage ceremonies.

The native garment was increasingly marked by European characters, giving rise to a compromise, to creole fashions (dress and loincloth). Their spreading was due to the influence of major French fashion magazines (*Marie-Claire*, *Vogue*, *Marie-France*, *Elle*, *Le Jardin des Modes*) on local designers. Female consumers of *métis* fashion met in all walks of life (working women, domestic workers, girls in or out of school). The fashions most in vogue and visible on all occasions<sup>10</sup> were:

- The coat and loincloth underneath;
- Dress worn with local shoes;
- The camisole, garment of European inspiration composed of a corsage in straps and a long skirt. Chest and arms are bare;
- And especially the hipsters (*xit mbal*, *tiim taat*) that ends at the waist and associated either with a loincloth or with a skirt (usually both pieces are made of the same fabric). Its appearance dates back to the late 1920s, at the time of the economic crisis that hit Dakar resulting in despair and pauperization. To adapt to this new economic climate (a decline in the tonnage of imported goods, especially fabrics), the indigenous population is returning to a diminishing proportion of clothing size and length (Faye, 2017, pp. 205-207). The hipsters had the power to give a young silhouette and were therefore worn by young girls. The hipsters’ top, in the late 1950s, is extravagantly decollated in front and back (interview with Fatou Niang Siga, Saint-Louis of Senegal, 15 May, 2015).

The attitude of politicians had contributed to weakening the cultural resistance of people in the field of clothing. Moreover, fashion interfered in the political field.

#### 4.2 Fashion and politics<sup>11</sup>

At the end of Second World War, with the resumption of political activity, the passion of the population for the political life was strengthened all the more since the electoral body had been enlarged. Meetings looked like entertainment because of the festive; and could inspire young girls in fashion styles. In the 1930s, a type of headscarf was called *foroon popileer* (Front Populaire). This desire to pay tribute to a political party or leader by making a fabric that bears his name became very important within the *Bloc Africain*, a gathering of various political forces, led by Lamine Gueye. This party had successfully led the campaign for the right to vote for Senegalese women, during and after the war (April-July 1945). In recognition, the women made the *Bolok* dress, a long, bright, basket-shaped dress (Seck 2000, pp. 89-93; Konaté 2009)<sup>12</sup>.

As an expression of belonging to the *laministe* party (of Lamine Gueye), it was worn at all political demonstrations from 1945 to 1950 and



*Bolok* dress.  
Source : *Bingo*, n°8,  
September 1953, p. 15

<sup>10</sup> Ball, *sabar and ndawrabin*, (drumming and traditional dance events).

<sup>11</sup> Allman, 2005, pp. 1-10.

<sup>12</sup> For an illustration in colonial Nigeria or Sri Lanka, see Bylfield, 2004, pp.31-49 and Wickramasinghe, 2006.

functioned as a kind of barometer of the popularity of the mayor of Dakar.

The choice of a European outfit to pay tribute to Lamine Gueye was not meaningless. He was elegant, imbued with French culture, often dressed in European style, used it as an electoral trade fund. In songs composed in his honour, the refrains of *First Black Lawyer*, *First Doctor in Law* occupied a prominent place. An outfit made to his credit could only be European to be in tune with the character. In 1948, at the SFIO-Senegal breakdown (*Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière*) following the differences between Lamine Gueye and Léopold Senghor, clothing as a means of reporting political affiliation played a major role. The novelty lay in the very strong investment in colours. Women supporters of Senghor's BDS (*Bloc Démocratique Sénégalais*) dressed in green, colour of the party; SFIO activists wore red (hipsters, loincloth, large *boubou*, headscarves, toothpick at the end of which was attached a piece of fabric to the color of the party) (Thiam, 1950). This ostentatious manifestation of political belonging by means of led to resurgence of political violence. Every time the «green» and «red» processions crossed each other in electoral times, violent fights occurred (Zuccarelli, 1988, pp. 32-42). With the establishment of the unitary political formation, the UPS (*Union Progressiste Sénégalaise*, 1958), bringing together the supporters of Lamine Gueye and Senghor, the place of clothing in political belonging became less important. The other parties such as the PAI (*Parti Africain de l'Indépendance*) and the PRA-Senegal (*Parti du Regroupement Africain*) did not have much influence on the Dakar population, even though the PAI will launch *Mom Sa Rew*, related to the *hausa boubou* that symbolized the independence claim (Ly 1992). The interference of politics into fashion weakened its function of translating financial standing and/or cultural choices. Political affiliation was more prominent than others, especially religious brotherhoods (*murid* or *tijaan*). In this “folklorization” of political action, women played a role of facilitator and voice provider during elections. Already in the second half of the 1950s, with the audacious cleavage of dresses and hipsters, the girl's clothing was engaged in a body-centering operation (neck, chest, shoulders, arms) with erotic intent. This erotic game continued in the 1960s and 1970s.

## 5. Conclusion

The social anticipation function of the garment, that is to create models that, once imitated and reproduced, dictate the behaviours and changes, this function was exercised on the major structures of the society in Dakar. The resistance triggered against the érotisation of young women's clothing in Dakar ended in failure because of ignorance of the profound transformations at work. The young Dakar-girl wanted to be in charge of her own body: to appropriate her body and reduce to its mere expression the right of scrutiny and control that the group exercised. Fashion was the way by which the post-colonial girl could challenge the established social, political and cultural order and build her own identity. But the masculinization of women's clothing, the tendency to uniformization of sexes opened on a contradiction, to highlight the body and the modesty to the shelter, and on a crisis of gender identity. While Western-style may have been “foreign” in origin, its gendered, social, and political meanings were constructed locally, in local circumstances, in local fields of power. In short, fashion may be a language spoken everywhere; but it is never a universal language. It was, and remains, profoundly local, deeply vernacular. Local and historical examinations of dress contribute enormously to our understanding of the political and material ties that bind struggles for independence in Africa. Such work can and must serve as a collective challenge to Eurocentric scholarship, which not only continues to write Africa out of global histories by ignoring its rich and complex past, but persists in reinscribing colonial notions of static and timeless tradition upon African Peoples.

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