African Realities

African Realities:
Body, Culture and Social Tensions

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SCHOLARS
P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

THE SOCIAL PRESENTATION OF THE BODY

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"It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible" (Wilde 1993: 32). Oscar Wilde is a mine for thoughts, and speaking about the social presentation of the body I couldn't resist the temptation to begin this book by quoting him. The areas of study in which the anthropology of the body is interested in are very diverse and one of them, specifically, is how people present the body in situations of social interaction. The body could hardly pass unnoticed from Anthropology since its very beginnings, but what marked a before and an after, was the fact of considering the body as a direct product of social and cultural vectors; that is when the body was seen as a problem for anthropological theoretical thinking (Csordas 1999: 172). And among the diverse aspects that have to do with the body as a theoretical problem, one of the most fascinating is the social presentation of the body.

As a social presentation of the body, we understand the fact of placing the body in a situation of social interaction, especially when considering the conscious and voluntary way of displaying the body in view of this interaction; both through all that we do *in* it and all that we do *with* it. On the one hand, therefore, we are talking about the image of the body that we offer through its general care, clothing and ornamentation, and the other an important resource of body modification. On the other hand, the social presentation of the body has to do also with gestures, body techniques and proxemic behaviour.

For the social presentation of the body, those which Goffman understood as fixed or immutable signs, such as sex or phenotype, are as important as the relatively mobile or transitory signs: clothing, facial expressions, etc. (Goffman 1956: 14-15). The mobile signs are relevant because they are a direct result of cultural practices. And the fixed signs

are important because although they are "given", they are also managed, understood and interpreted according to the same dictates of culture.

Therefore, the social presentation of the body has much to do with "body image". I don't use this concept in the restraint way like in psychology, which basically understands it as the representation of one's own body in the mind, but as a sheer visual appearance of bodies to ourselves or to others. But nevertheless, we can associate this visual appearance with the same phenomena as in the psychological body image concept: a *perceptual* experience of the body, a *conceptual* understanding of the body in general and an *emotional* attitude towards this body (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008: 146). However, speaking about "social presentation" expressly puts in evidence the performative character of that, which constitutes our object of study. When we talk about "performance" we understand it as an action done by someone with a particular script in a determined place and time, and that undergoes a process of assessment or appreciation by others. In colloquial language, it is possible to say that someone "has a bad image". On the other hand, though "to have a bad presentation" can also be said, but it is more common to say–and actually it is what this expression implies–that "someone makes a bad presentation". This idea of "makes" is important for the subjects presented in this book.

The social presentation of the body is something that is carried out in the view of interaction. All presentation involves an image–people present an image–but not every image involves a presentation. An image represents something. With the social presentation of the body, then, we *present* a *representation*. Therefore, all presentation implies an "other" in addition to the one who is presenting. That is why we have to speak of "performance" and also of "visibility"; something that goes far beyond the mere reality of an image, something that is a real social process in itself (Brighenti 2007: 325).

As Nick Crossley wrote, human embodiment is central to the constitution of the social world. Social interactions are necessarily sensuous, depending on our capacity to both perceive and be perceived (2001: 20). However, from this theoretical perspective, the body is not considered only as a means of expression or communication, as important as these aspects are, but also as a site of experience, of construction of the self. That is why we also speak of "embodied experience", as something that, far from it, should not be limited to cognitive or linguistic models of meaning (Jackson 1989: 122). It has been demonstrated that posture actually influences affective states of individuals (Lindblom 2007: 110). We also know that one does not feel the same according to how one is

dressed or even according to the objects which one carries with him. Regarding this, I remember a very illustrative anecdote from the time I was studying in Germany. I had an Argentinean acquaintance that was of Arabic origin and he always complained about people looking down on him because of his appearance. But, he found a clever solution so that people would see him in a different manner: He bought a big second-hand book on nuclear physics and he would always walk around with this book in his hands. Objects in their quality of *actants* influence us (Latour 2005: 71). And above all, people do not feel the same depending on the manner they perceive others to see their body. The social presentation of the body *speaks* to others, but it also makes one feel.

The social presentation of the body matters. It matters for several reasons: first, from a structural perspective, the relevance that it has within the parameters of social logics; second for its importance within the situational dynamics; and third, because of its close relationship with the emotional registers of individuals.

If we take into consideration the parameters of the social logic such as identity, social order and the need for exchange, we see that the social presentation of the body has an important role in all of them. These three parameters are consubstantial for the social nature of the human being. Identity–personal and collective–is what defines us within a community and delimits us from others. The fact that we are social beings involves organisation, and one of the aspects of this organisation is social order, understood as structuring forms of social relations, as a set of rules and regulations that governs the relations between different individuals and layers of a given society. And the social logic of the need for exchange has to do with the reality that individuals can only survive if they conveniently articulate relations of exchange with other members of the society; after all, as Simmel said, "a society exists where several individuals enter into interaction" (2009: 22). That is how the networks of relational interdependency are constituted, the "figurations" in the words of N. Elias (1994). And it is also within these terms of exchange where power is exercised. The social logic requires us to know who we are within the community, which place we occupy within the different situations of social and hierarchical order, and with whom and what we exchange things or services. And all this is signalled through the manner in which we present our body to others (Martí 2010a).

We are fully aware of the body, especially in moments of contrast. It is when I am with white people that I become aware of my black skin; when I'm with men that I feel most my femininity; when the virus affects my body or I break a leg that I realise that my body is something more than a

mere "taken-for-granted". And as this occurs in very specific situations, the importance of considering the situation in all aspects that concern the social presentation of the body is of huge importance.

The social presentation of the body acquires all its meaning within the situational dynamics. Hence, the importance of not only decoding an object according to what it is, but according to the significance assumed within the syntagmatic chain where it is inserted; in other words, in the situation in which it is presented. Thus, for example, the body of a naked man does not receive the same lecture if it is seen in a nudist camp, in a collective act of protest along with other naked bodies, or just wandering alone through the streets of a big city. And if the social situation determines how we have to present our body to others, given that the social imprints itself onto the body, then the body also becomes a symbol of the situation (Evans and Lee 2002: 138).

The social presentation of the body occurs in determined situations, in which the face-to-face interactions imply a co-regulation between the people who interact, so that new meanings can emerge from this joint interaction[1]. And the management of the body image by individuals is made according to these situations, either actual or hypothetical. We adopt one or another strategy of body presentation according to different situations in which we must perform. We choose clothing according to occasion. In the West, when individuals become tattooed, one of the criteria for choosing the place on the body where people want to showcase it, is that, when convenient, to have the possibility of hiding it under a piece of clothing. For this reason, face, neck or hands are seldom tattooed. To show a tattoo may not be strategic in whatsoever situations. When a black person is continuously discriminated against on the basis of skin colour, in one situation after another, it is possible to come to the conclusion that undergoing skin whitening treatment is not a bad choice. We are never indifferent to how others look at us. Sartre, understanding the gaze as key for interpersonal relationships, thoroughly captured what it involves:

> Someone 'is looking at me! What does this mean? It means that I am suddenly affected in my being and that essential modifications appear in my structure-modifications which I can apprehend and fix conceptually by means of the reflective cogito. [...] I see myself because somebody sees me. (Sartre 1978: 260; also quoted in Crossley 2001: 158).

Here is not only important the fact that someone is looking at me, but *how* they are looking at me. And we can not forget that, as methodological situationalism states, we can hardly understand large-scale social

phenomena without taking into account current social behaviour in concrete situations (Knorr-Cetina 1988: 22).

With all that concerns face-to-face relationships and social interaction in general, we should bear in mind the great importance that new technologies currently have. This is the question which Ricardo M. Falcão addresses in his article about young Senegalese in this book. He is interested in how the ICTs, understood as devices of a "technicity of relatedness" of body to the self and to society, become instruments of production and representation of their bodies and social relations.

If from the structural point of view, relationships of the social presentation of the body with the mentioned social logic parameters, can easily be established, and the relevant role that they play within the dynamics of the face-to-face interactions in so many situations is also clear, we must also highlight the importance the social presentation of the body has for the individual because of the emotional values that it entails.

It is clear that we associate certain meanings with the social presentation of the body. But beyond the cognitive level, we also have to take into account the emotional register that these meanings convey, being clear that emotions always respond to a cognitive activity which is linked to the individual's interpretation of the lived situation (Le Breton 2012: 70). Within a specific situation, individuals interact with each other and the presentation of the body can arouse different emotions. As I already wrote on another occasion (Martí 2012), an individual, by the mere fact of being in a public space, by his or her visibility is immersed in the middle of a field of forces of different signs with more or less defined tensions. Through the bodily presentation, the individual is positioned within this set of tensions: man or woman, Christian or Muslim, black or white, rich or poor, agent of authority or mere citizen, rural or urban, etc. And this is especially seen when one enters a space that is characterised by having a different polarity from his own: the woman in a crowded bar of men, a white in an African city, the Muslim woman with a veil in Europe, the rich in a poor neighbourhood. The individual will feel the gazes and will also be exposed to the corresponding emotional flows in the force field of the penetrated spaces: He or she will feel as an object of desire, contempt, admiration, fear, hatred, envy, curiosity, etc. Laura Porzio's chapter of this book on young Equatoguineans in Spain offers very concrete examples of these circumstances on the basis of her interviewees.

In this sense we can speak of "forces" not in a metaphorical way, but of true forces that arouse emotional reactions. For this reason, the social presentation of the body is very important because it not only refers to a set of meanings in the abstract, but also it may be viscerally appealing.

Seeing an individual, one not only realises that it is either a man or a woman, a policeman or a beggar, an acquaintance or a stranger, but also it is his or her body presentation that could easily provoke emotions such as surprise, disgust, fear, attraction or rejection.

The importance of the emotional register in cognitive processes is well known by far. Emotions influence beliefs, and the beliefs "fuelled by emotions stimulate people to action" (Frijda, Manstead and Bem 2000: 1). In the same way that it has been said that "emotions give meaning to life" (Matsumoto 2001: 172), we can also say that they, as essential vectors of interaction (Le Breton 2012: 71), give meaning to everyday situations in which interactions among individuals occur.

We know that all societies exercise great control over how its members present their body to others. In the case of Western society, for example, there are regulations about nudity and the uses of clothing or body modifications. I am of the conviction that a very important element to take into account in order to understand this controlling will is the intimate relationship between arousal of emotions and the social presentation of the body. As in music, the emotional and cognitive registers appear closely linked, and also in the case of music, social systems show the will to control, which is why what Jacques Attali said in relation to music: "[w]ith music is born power and its opposite: subversion" (Attali 1985: 6), can be perfectly applied to the field of the social presentation of the body.

The importance that emotions have in regards to the social presentation of the body is thoroughly reflected in this book in Almudena Marí's chapter who, in her work on the FulBe, addresses the question of how the code of behaviour called *pulaaku* controls not only their bodies but also their emotions and how the social order is maintained through the emotional rhetoric.

Precisely for all these reasons, it is not difficult at all to put "tension" in relation with the social presentation of the body. If we understand "tension" as the dynamic play that occurs between elements that are in conflict due to the discrepancy of norms and values in a given situation, the manner in which people display the body to others can easily be a cause and at the same time a consequence of social tensions. In situations of social interaction, when the body is taken as a focal point, there can be many and very diverse moments of tension generated by social narratives related to ethnicity, gender, age, social class, etc.

Throughout the different chapters of the book clear examples of tensions aroused by the social presentation of body are offered to the reader. Thus, for example, Katrin Bromber tells us how in Ethiopian cities during the second half of the last century, the modern forms of bodily

behaviour clashed not only against the established cultural norms but also came into conflict with progressive social movements, such as the Ethiopian student movement. Tensions arise in the Senegalese society through the youth's disregard for traditions (*coosan*), as seen in the analysed case by Ricardo M. Falcão or, according to Guy Massart's article, in the concrete case of elderly men being stigmatised in a Cabo Verdean society that increasingly values the idea of being young.

The body can be consciously used in struggles seen in the political arena. It is not at all difficult to find examples in the Western context: the provocative punk attire; the uses of nudity as a protest (Martí 2010b), from the time of the Quakers protests in the middle of the 17th century until the anti-war demonstrations of recent times or the Femen movement; and the use of eroticism against the establishment, as is the case of the popular singer Madonna, and among others. Again in Africa we find examples for this. Especially illustrative is the case of the Kom women in Cameroon dressing in male clothing, painting their faces and showing their naked bodies during their political protests carried out throughout the second part of the 20th century (Nkwi 1985: 185). In all these cases the fact of using a social presentation of the body that inflicts certain standards of morals or beliefs becomes a real weapon for provocation, and thus creates social tension.

Jaume Vallverdú, in the chapter that he has prepared for this book, addresses the problem of the colonised bodies giving the example of Equatorial Guinea. In the case of Africa, the process or relating colonial policies with the social presentation of the body is a relevant issue. There are different ways of colonising bodies. Our history teaches us that one of the ways that has had more relevance, is their underestimation by racial theories that have emerged in the context of coloniality. In this manner, hierarchical relationships were built based on different colours of skin, hair characteristics, or cranial measurements. But besides these aspects that have been so relevant in racism, what we may understand as body colonisation is also manifested through acculturation processes related to the social presentation of the body.

The body occupies a central role in everything that has to do with coloniality, i.e. with all the power patterns, which through the naturalisation of hierarchies as the racial or gender hierarchies enable the "reproduction of territorial domination and epistemic relationships, which not only guarantees the capital exploitation of some human beings by others on the world's level, but also subalternises and obliterates the knowledge, experiences and ways of life of those who are so dominated and exploited" (Restrepo 2007: 292). If it is true–as anthropology teaches

us–that the body is a vehicle for the imposition of social, political and economic forces in individuals and groups, and at the same time is also a vehicle of resistance against these forces (Reischer and Koo 2004: 308), it is clear that the body issue may have much to do with coloniality. It is not strange at all, thus, that Guy Massart in his article in this book states that among the population of Cabo Verde which he studies, colonial and post-colonial constraints structure desires and emotions related to body.

Nudity as well as certain types of body modification has been used by colonial narratives in order to construct the notion of "wild" or "primitive" and therefore to provide the colonised with cultural characteristics, which placed these population in lower stages according to an evolutionary hierarchy, and allowed the justification of social and economic inequalities between the colonised and the colonisers (Heinz 1998: 427). This qualification of uncivilised practices for tattoos, scarification or other types of body modifications is one of the most important reasons for its progressive disappearance throughout the 20th century in Africa. Explicit bans by the colonial authorities were often enacted, but most of these body modification practices disappeared due to the disrepute that the narratives of the colonisers gave to them; as it happened, for instance, in Equatorial Guinea with the tattoos that Fang people had on multiple parts of the body or with the Bubi scarifications which Jaume Vallverdú mentions in his chapter of this book. Undoubtedly, the pigmentocracy that devalues dark skinned against white skinned has much to do with the colonial gaze. Josep Martí's article precisely deals with this problem, something which is also alluded by Guy Massart in his text, when he writes that in his field of study of the Cabo Verdean population, dark skin and curly hair are associated with lower class.

Given that everything that has to do with the social presentation of the body is closely related to the issue of identities, it is not surprising at all that in Africa people recur to it when it comes to assert the own identity facing the West. This has happened, for instance, even with such stigmatised practices as genital mutilation[2], however it is much more common with clothing issues. Much talked about, for example, was when Mobutu Sese Seko, President of Zaire–now Democratic Republic of the Congo–in the decade of the 1970s prohibited the men of Kinshasa, the capital of the country, to wear the suits with ties according to the Western-style, imposing the *abacost* (i.e. *à bas le costume*) in order to demonstrate the overcoming of their colonial past. There are many examples that we could add in this respect, such as the refusal to wear hats in Accra in the 1950s as an act of identity assertion and of opposition to the colonial power and the anglophile of some urban elites (Allman 2004: 1); the

rejection of Victorian costume among Yoruba nationalist movements in the end of the 20th century (Byfield 2004: 31); the movement of the Creoles in Sierra Leone in the end of 1880 that advocated the creation of their own clothing that differentiated them from both Europeans and indigenous communities (Byfield 2004: 34); and the native clothing understood as resistance to Italian and British colonial rulers in Somalia in the end of the 19th century (Akou 2004: 50). And all this apart from other regulations, which, concerning the idea of public decency, also prohibit the use of certain kinds of Western considered clothing, as, for example, trousers for women, cases that occur today in Sudan or Swaziland. Also Katrin Bromber's chapter in this book mentions this issue, for example, when she comments on the rejection by some sectors of the Ethiopian society of the miniskirt, which was understood as a powerful and negative imperialist influence from the West.

In the particular case of Africa and in the words of Hildi Hendrickson, "clothing and other treatments of the body surface are primary symbols in the performances through which modernity–and therefore history–have been conceived, constructed and challenged in Africa" (1996: 13). Undoubtedly, the concept of "modernity" remains today somehow controversial and confusing. And if this is so, when we apply it to the African case–especially within the traditional-modernity dichotomy–it is still more problematic, especially because of the colonial experience. Having served this dichotomy in the beginning as a powerful ideological framework in favour of colonisation (Brodnicka 2003), the dichotomy began to be seen critically at the end of the 1960s (Gusfield 1967), even to the extent of denying any heuristic value to it. But beside the fact that it is necessary to know how to differentiate between "modernity" and "colonialism" as far as Africa is concerned (Táíwò 2010: 4), the difficulties which are implicit to the concept of "modernity" do not exempt us from having to resort to it. And this is so for two very concrete reasons. First, because doing field work in an African context (as well as in any other society in general) we must continually confront the local discourses on tradition-modernity. People speak about what the ancestors did, about the new tastes of today's youth which are different from what was typical of the elders; people criticise the new values of today or do it with respect to the old-fashioned values of older generations. People often talk about "tradition", and we know very well that the concept of "tradition" is also an ideological product of modernity (Sanders 2003: 343). What leads us directly to the social perception of modernity is precisely the idea of breaking away from tradition (Foucault in Rabinow 1984: 39). And secondly, because despite the discomfort of the term "modernity" and its

elusive semantic field, if it is true, as the philosopher Olúfémi Táíwò clearly stated, that much of the key problems affecting Africa today can be conceptualised in relation to how its population experience and are involved with modernity (Táíwò 2010: 3), then the question of dealing with the problem of the tradition-modernity dichotomy is unavoidable. And this is despite all the problems that entails the use of the concept (Geschiere, Meyer and Pels 2008: 1). In fact, as Couze Venn wrote "[i]t is impossible today to pose any question about the postcolonial without presupposing the history, the discourse and process of modernity and modernisation" (2006: 41).

The third part of the book is closely related to this issue as evidenced in the articles of Katrin Bromber and Virgínia Fons. But apart from these articles where tradition plays an important role, like in other chapters in this book, in a one way or another, this contrast between tradition and modernity, easily appears. As for the work on young Senegalese, Ricardo M. Falcão takes into consideration how the relationship that the youth have with their bodies reflects a negotiation with the idealised tradition of *cooaan*; how a dialectic game is established between *coosan*, modernity and *dund toubab*, a concept that refers to living like the Westerners. The men interviewed by Guy Massart complained that young women in Cabo Verde today are exposing their bodies more in public spaces and have lost their modesty, which was characteristic of the former times. And, if among these men, the increase of the size of a man's belly was seen in former times as a sign of success, today, is understood as a bad sign. Almudena Marí describes the important ritual of the *saangol* of the FulBe, a ritual for first-time mothers, and that many young women, especially those who have already gone to school, refuse to follow. Regarding the birth preparation, most choose modernity and are likely to use state health care institutions. In Josep Martí's article it also becomes clear that the practice of skin whitening is understood–among others–as one of the new body technologies that modernity offers.

The book is divided into four parts. The first one "Youth's bodies" is composed of the articles written by Ricardo M. Falcão and Laura Porzio. Falcão centres his article on the Senegalese youth and how ICTs can be considered as instruments of production and representation of their bodies and social relations. It is precisely through the appropriation of ICTs that the relationship young people have with their body is changing. According to Falcão, today we can speak about a new "technicity of relationality" regarding the Senegalese youth. Laura Porzio, through her fieldwork carried out with young Equatoguineans living in Spain, addresses the question of identity through the social presentation of the body. She

highlights–among others–the great importance that is given to the skin colour in identity matters. Possible identifications such as with the native Spanish society, with Equatoguinean society or even with Africa in general, very often appear with a certain ambiguity and fluidity.

The second part of the book is focused on the very important issue of gender. In Guy Massart's work, based on his fieldwork in Cabo Verde and starting from the basis that transformations in body presentation are central to the transformations of gender relations and interactions, he writes about aging processes and gender performances among men in their late 40s. Begonya Enguix, through her article "Male Bodies and the Black Male Gaze: is there a Cultural Interpretation of Masculinities?" explores the relationships between bodies and masculinities analysing how the discourses on particular bodies are constructed in everyday life. Her research work is focused on Equatoguinean men who express their ideas on bodies and gender through the use, that the author of the photography makes, as an elicitation technique. And the article written by Almudena Marí shows how the uses and meanings related to corporality in the specific case of FulBe women in the region of Nikki (Benin) are closely connected with the ideal of the *pulaaku*, and in a very special way with two of its main features, courage or *munyal* and shame or *senteene*, which are evidenced in the reproductive process.

In the third part of this book, "Tradition-modernity dialectics", Katrin Bromber in her chapter addresses the modernity issue regarding Ethiopia in the second half of the last century. She highlights the value given to tradition through clothing, speaks about public disputes about the appearance of modern dress and hairstyle that have provided reasons for discussion about progressive female bodies, and deals with the ideas about acceptable bodies within the field of institutionalised modern sports. The article of Virgínia Fons focuses on the *Ivanga*, a female dance considered as an important aspect of the Ndowe tradition that is still practised today, but that should not be interpreted in the simplistic way as the Westerners did during the colonial times: simply as an aesthetic dimension associated with the highly valued sensuality ascribed to black women.

And lastly, the issue of bodies as strategies in the social arena is essential for the theme of this book. Within this interdependency network, which characterises human existence, if we assume that the presentation of our body affects our relationships with others, it is inevitable to speak in terms of strategies. All those aspects that have to do with the social presentation of the body such as, dress, ornamentation, or body modification are important, not only because they may serve as identity markers, but also because they enable people to increase their power to

act. In this way, all these actions can be understood as both a manifestation and instrument of power, and moreover as a form of resistance. In this last part of the book, Jaume Vallverdú, working on documentary material from the archives in Catalonia, gives an account about the will of the Claretian Missionaries to "civilise" and "modernise" the bodies of the Bubi of Bioko, in present Equatorial Guinea. We can speak here thus of "colonised bodies" as an additional strategy to integrate the Bubi population in a social system which is characterised by the inequalities between colonial administrators and autochthonous people. Josep Martí addresses the question of skin bleaching based on a fieldwork carried out in Equatorial Guinea. In this kind of practice both visions and values, related to the dimension of gender as those that have to do with the notion of social presentation of the body and corporeal capital, converge. The body modification practice of skin whitening can be understood as a strategic resource for coping with social tensions arising from colourism, the ideology that gives privilege to light-skinned people over their dark skin counterparts.

     All the different chapters of this volume then address a diversity of issues related to African realities but all of them have as a common denominator the importance people give to the body and, more concretely, to the manner with which people present it to others.

Notes

[1] About this see the dance metaphor the way it was formulated by Shanker and King (2002); Lindblom 2007: 166-171.
[2] Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, who studied anthropology with Bronislaw Malinowski in London, defended the practice of genital mutilation against the prohibitions of the colonial authorities since it was seen as a cultural identity sign of the Kikuyu (Kenyatta 1971). In the year 2003 a revivalist movement in Kenya, called Mungiki, which understood female circumcision as one of its values appeared (Njambi 2004: 298). Likewise, Michelle Johnson points out the value identity that female genital mutilation have become today among the Mandinka people of Guinea-Bissau (Johnson 2000).

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PART I

YOUTH'S BODIES

CHAPTER ONE

SENEGALESE YOUTH AT THE CROSSROADS BETWEEN *COOSAN* (TRADITION) AND THE APPROPRIATION OF ICTS– TECHNOLOGY, BODY, AND AUTONOMY

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Abstract. *Senegalese youth have a negative status and are accused of being prone to a scandalous sexualised behaviour. This negative status surpasses simple contextual meanings. This status is a consequence of a long-standing historical questioning of social values in Senegal. At the heart of this negative status of youth is the "body", in more than one dimension, through its sexuality, through patterns of consumption, and through its mediatisation. What I will consider in this article is the appropriation by Senegalese youth of their bodies, and especially of their erotic dimensions. I will try to explore how this appropriation is also materialised through and with ITCs, which represent for this youth a new "technicity of relationality" and a mirror, where their self-reflection can be scrutinised and fashioned. The eruption of youth sexuality in the public sphere has brought concerns to a society in which open talks on sexuality are a taboo. Society insistently denounces its malaise with many of the practices of the body claimed by youth as their modern identity, without seemingly being able to counter them, neither materially nor ideologically, stressing a visible social tension between generations. These practices are clearly antagonistic to a rhetoric of a legitimate "tradition" (coosan), embedded in religious Islamic ethos, and presented by my interlocutors as: a) an expectation on the regulation of behaviours; b) a substitute for problematic parenting; c) a pillar against individualisation; d) the fixation of values against Western influence; and also for some, especially to youth, as e) a constraint.*

Introduction

In today's Senegal, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are widely used, mostly due to the increased use of mobile phones. The debate in Senegalese society about the "benefits and dangers" of technology focuses on the way instruments of communication have changed patterns of sociability. People young and old, traditional media like television and radio, and newer media like the Web, all reflect these changes. However,

> what the Internet [and ICTs] produces cannot be understood in terms of the liberation of new and fluid identities. Not only were older identities, such as religion, nation, and family, embraced online, but the Internet could be seen by many as primarily a means of repairing those allegiances. This requires special attention to the ways in which freedom and normative are linked rather than sundered in these newer media of social interaction. (Miller and Slater 2000: 18)

I won't be addressing "nation", "religion" or "family" directly, but all three ideas are important to consider when discussing the Senegalese youth's appropriations of both their bodies and ICTs, and how these are at the crossroads of change between sociability, relatedness, and the dimensions of bodily life, such as sexuality. These appropriations stress a social tension between generations and are also connected to larger social questions found in contemporary African societies.

Senegalese youth are trapped in what Alcinda Honwana[1] called "waithood": a youth trying to create new strategies for life, through the hardships and social pressure of becoming adults. Honwana remarks how "waithood" is not simply a failed transition from one status to another, but rather a sign of wider social issues, namely "a breakdown in the social economic system [that is] supposed to provide" (Honwana 2012: 3) for the lack of basic needs and deteriorating livelihoods, caused by Senegal's increased instability since the 1970s.

In the face of limited opportunities to fulfill the desire for success and the need to survive (Fall 2007) in social spaces where consumption and value are supposed to be materialised and displayed (Buggenhagen 2011), bodies are assets and technologies, instruments of action.

On the other hand, bodily life in Senegal is viewed negatively through the lens of ideology. Youth are faced with a negation of their bodies and their sexualities outside the institution of marriage. The renewal of traditions (*coosan)* has become, as we will see, an aspiration for some people (Fall 2010), in the pursuit for a renewed, and seemingly impossible, regulation of bodies.

1. Theoretical considerations

This article is based on research done for a PhD in African Studies on the appropriation of ICTs in Senegal, a country where I have done over 36 months of fieldwork since 2007. Extensive fieldwork, knowledge and practice of the Wolof language (the lingua franca in Senegal) have helped to form the views I hold here. My fieldwork was conducted in both urban and rural settings, in Saint Louis du Senegal and in the area surrounding the village of Keur Momar Sarr, in the Bas Ferlo (region of Louga). In addition, I have also had the opportunity to make several short-term trips to Dakar during my stay.

The interviews that have mostly shaped my perspective have taken place in the city of Saint Louis, where I interviewed around thirty girls between the ages of 15 and 23 (although there were some outside this interval), from two different areas in Senegal. One group were students in Lycée Ameth Fall, a lycée for girls in the "Sud" neighbourhood of the main island of Saint Louis (near the IFAN). The other group lived in the popular neighbourhood of Hydrobase and Guét Ndár; however, they either didn't go to school or only went to Koranic school. The interviews lasted for three months after having spent seven months living in the same city, and were conducted in Wolof without the presence of an interpreter.

These interviews contrasted strongly with the fifty conducted in a rural setting during the year of 2011 with local social actors of all statuses and ages, from dignitaries to development agents and youth, both men and women alike.

These interviews were accompanied with different stories from the local media, print press and online, which I had been collecting since 2009. Each concern diverse yet correlated subjects, from which I will be taking examples. As Miller and Slater state

> An ethnography is much more than fieldwork. Just as Miller's (1998a) previous ethnography of shopping turned largely into a study of love, and not as might be expected, one of spending, so Slater found a study of internet pornography led on to the study of normative morality and not, as might have been expected, just libertarian freedom. In most ethnographic reportage […] the length and breadth of the study allows one topic to become understood as also an idiom form of something else. (Miller and Slater 2000: 22)

1.1. A short consideration on technology studies in Africa

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have recently been generalised in African countries. The first decade of the 21st century has seen an increasing appropriation of technologies such as the mobile phone, and to a lesser extent the Internet, throughout the majority of African countries. Appropriation here means both incorporation and subjectivisation, showcasing its meaningful uses with important ontological consequences and not just the mere dissemination of objects.

The generalisation of these technologies has often been accompanied by a rhetoric excessively concerned with the common trope of Africa being an underdeveloped continent (Guignard 2007). States and civil societies alike have insisted in bridging the "digital divide", believing that ICTs could play a fundamental role in accelerating the shortening of distances. International institutions have funded programs, and there has been much discussion on the benefits of such technologies for economic and social development. However, there is also much concern about Africans falling behind (Cheneau-Loquay 2007) in the new digital-informational economy (Castells 2007). This patronising discourse is a follow up to development studies (Alzouma 2005), and the benefits of ICTs for Africa are widely discussed and asserted. A "rise" of the continent is in order so the narrative goes.

There are very few works that consider ICTs as they are when being domesticated by Africans (Hahn and Kibora 2008; Nyamba 2000), although there are some examples of how innovative uses have had an impact on long-standing problems in the African continent in areas such as health, civil services, market information, banking (Cheneau-Loquay 2010; Molony 2008), and political participation (Sylla 2012). And despite the optimistic view on the potential of innovative uses of ICTs in Africa, the majority of them represent very small and concentrated versions of what is actually a large-scale everyday use by the majority of the population.

Without trying to play down the dynamics of digitalisation in Africa, I would like to consider a different approach by looking at the relationship of people and technology and between different people through the use of ICTs. I will focus on the tense social representations that emerge around the widespread use of mobile phones and social media among youth.

Technology is as important for those who possess it as for those who don't. It brings about important material mediation to social relationships that shouldn't be disregarded by playing an active role in the shaping of sociability. The best way to consider how technology affects society is widely debated. According to Brey: